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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



**Visiting the Wine
Areas of Argentina**

**Food and Wine
Pairings: Ceviche**

**‘MLF’: The Key to
Creamy Chardonnay**

**When Dining Out,
You Are the Boss**

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To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

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Martin Stewart

Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):
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Editor:
Robert Johnson









Wine Steward:
Katie Montgomery

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Restaurant Rule No. 1: You're the Boss

By Robert Johnson

Too many people are intimidated when they dine out.

Intimidated by the menu. Intimidated by the wine list. Intimidated by the server. But it shouldn't be that way. Without customers, restaurants would be out of business. So, we need to take control of the dining-out experience, and toward that end, we offer four restaurant rules.

(Note: If you can remember only one of these rules, make it No. 1.)

1. You're the boss. You are paying for a service that should include good food served in a timely manner by friendly people. This does not give you a free pass to send back a dish or a bottle just because it's not to your taste or to abuse the wait staff, but it does entitle you to be treated courteously and to be served a well-prepared meal. So, be assertive... but be polite.

2. Ask for help. The right wine can transform a nice meal into a memorable culinary experience. The sommelier or wine steward should be trained to suggest wines that complement the dishes.

3. Be specific. Don't be shy about giving the sommelier a price range for the wine being selected. It's not a crime to watch your nickels and dimes. If you want to spend no more

than \$50 on a bottle, let that be known.

4. Be brave. It would be the easiest thing in the world to cocoon yourself in your comfort zone, ordering Chardonnay with the chicken breast and Cabernet with the steak. But dining out provides opportunities to widen your horizons and to discover new food-and-wine pairing possibilities. Thai or Tex-Mex? Try Riesling or Gewurztraminer. Seafood? Try Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio. And never be afraid to simply match country with cuisine — an Italian wine with Italian fare, for example.

Dining out should be fun. You can assure that it is by taking control of the experience.





All About Malolactic Fermentation

Did you ever wonder where that creamy characteristic in so many bottlings of California Chardonnay comes from?

In two words: malolactic fermentation.

Scientifically speaking, malolactic fermentation (often referred to by vintners simply by the initials “MLF”) is the conversion by bacteria of malic acid into CO₂ and lactic acid.

The primary reason for using this procedure is to reduce the acid in a wine by organic rather than chemical means. This is beneficial for red wines that are destined for aging, as well as white wines that are not noted for their aromatic qualities — primarily Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc

and Pinot Gris.

When malic acid is converted to lactic acid, the wine morphs from tart and snappy to soft and creamy. Concurrently, a buttery-flavored compound called diacetyl also is

‘MLF’ is what gives Chardonnay its creamy and buttery characteristics.

produced. Diacetyl is often added to margarine in an effort to make the margarine taste more like butter.

That’s why Chardonnay that has undergone malolactic fermentation will be both creamy and buttery.

Winemakers today fall into one

of two camps: 1) those who seek to make the best wines possible, using whatever technology, scientific advances and other methods are available to them; and 2) those who prefer to let the grapes “speak” for themselves, and for the characteristics of the specific vintage to define the wine.

Those who count themselves in the second category are likely to use “neutral” stainless steel tanks for fermenting and aging their wines, and to eschew techniques such as malolactic fermentation.

Those in the first category are more likely to embrace MLF and to use seasoned oak barrels to lend further nuance to their wines.

Which is right? When it comes to the use of malolactic fermentation, there is no right or wrong; there is only a winemaker’s preference.



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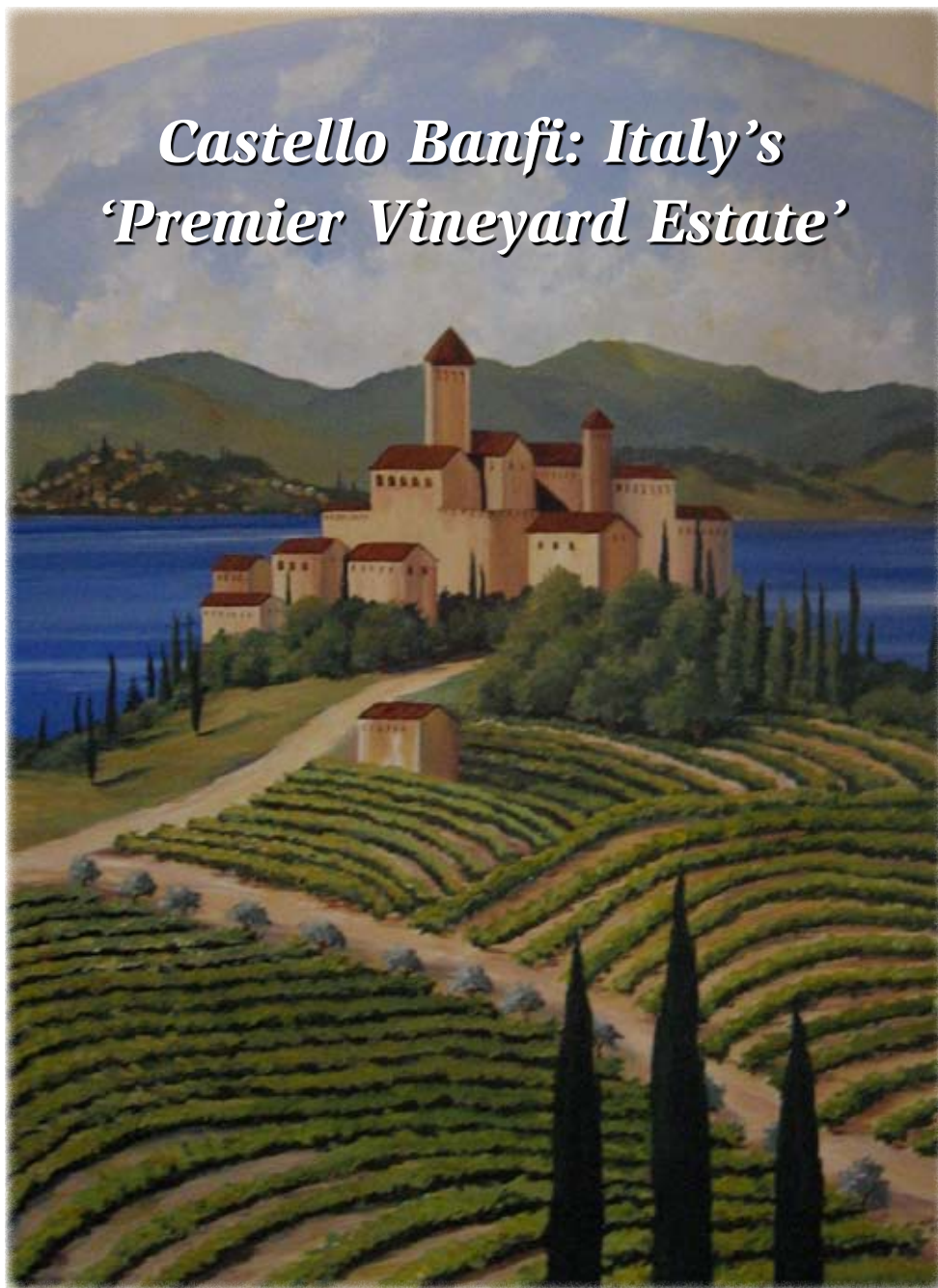
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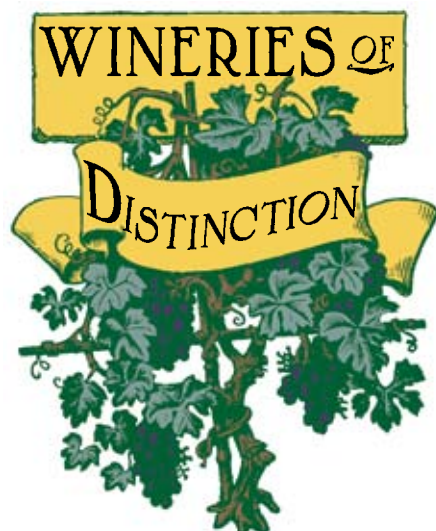
PRICE:

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*Castello Banfi: Italy's
'Premier Vineyard Estate'*



Castello Banfi is a family-owned vineyard estate and winery in the Brunello region of Tuscany. Together with its sister estates in Piedmont, Vigne Regali and Principessa Gavi, it has become recognized the world over for its dedication to excellence and sparking a renaissance in the art of Italian winemaking.



Castello Banfi

The Mariani family proprietors credit education, dedication and discipline for the 11 consecutive years of being named Italy's "Premier Vineyard Estate" at the VinItaly wine fair. Castello Banfi also is the first winery anywhere to be recognized for exceptional environmental, ethical and social responsibility.

The 7,100-acre estate is situated on gentle western slopes facing the Mediterranean. One-third is cultivated in noble vines, with the balance devoted to olive groves, wheat, truffles, plums, and forests filled with deer, wild boar and pheasants.

Forty million years ago, the Banfi estate lay beneath the sea, so fossilized shells nourish the vines. Grapes grown in these maritime soils produce wines of elegant and subtle character, unique to southern Tuscany.

Overlooking the vineyards is the estate's showpiece, a medieval fortress now known as Castello Banfi. Meticulously restored as a hospitality center, it boasts a glass museum, enoteca and two restaurants: the informal *Taverna Banfi*, serving traditional dishes of the region, and *Ristorante Castello Banfi*, serving Mediterranean-inspired Tuscan cuisine in a fine-dining atmosphere.

Within a year of opening, *Ristorante Castello Banfi* was recognized for its excellence with a prestigious Michelin star.

The latest jewel in the crown of estate hospitality is *Castello Banfi — Il Borgo*, featuring 14 luxury guest

rooms nestled in the hamlet that grew alongside the castle walls in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Signature wines of the Castello Banfi estate, available in 50 countries around the world, include the single-vineyard Reserve Poggio all'Oro and unfiltered cru Poggio alle Mura Brunellos, as well as three proprietary cuvees, ExcelsuS, SummuS and Cum Laude. Other single-vineyard bottlings include Tavernelle Cabernet Sauvignon, Colvecchio Syrah and San Angelo Pinot Grigio.

"Our wines express the purest and most natural Tuscan character," says family proprietor Cristina Mariani-May. "My family invites everyone to visit us and enjoy an extraordinary Tuscan experience."

Winery 4-1-1

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Cristina Mariani-May

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Four Seasons



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Tango to Techno: Touring Argentina

From mountain treks to close encounters with penguins, and from historic winery tours to boutique hotels in colonial cities, Argentina has transformed luxury travel with one-of-a-kind experiences.

Add to these unique adventures Argentina's convenient location, its proximity to other South American countries and a favorable exchange rate, and travelers can expect nothing short of a dream vacation, complete with a warm welcome from the Argentinean people.

Let's do a little exploring... region by region...



TOURING TIPS

BUENOS AIRES

With more than a hundred museums, some of the best shopping in South America, and numerous fine restaurants, it's no wonder that this charismatic capital — the birthplace of the tango — is often referred to as "The Paris of South America."

Sports is a national passion, and Buenos Aires is where you'll find weekend soccer games, polo matches and horseracing, all of which draw huge crowds. The city also is home to some of the most exquisite golf courses on the continent.

Nightlife is rich and varied. One can attend a cultural performance at Teatro Colon, or dance the night away at a tango salon or techno club.

Seeking serenity? Many of the city's five-star hotels have world-class spas that lavish guests with soothing treatments.

CENTRO

Gauchos once roamed the pampas (or grassland) of Central Argentina. Today, the grand *estancias* (cattle



ranches) have been transformed into luxurious getaways with horseback riding and other rustic activities.

Picturesque Cordoba, Argentina's colonial capital, has magnificent architectural landmarks from the Jesuit era, as well as plenty of world-class resorts where travelers can relax and enjoy the view.

Villa Allende, La Cumbre and Las Delicias all have lush golf greens and a full menu of outdoor adventures — hiking, fishing, paragliding, etc.

Near Ascochinga, on the colonial Camino Real, historic sights include Santa Catalina, once a splendid Jesuit mission.

PATAGONIA

Jaw-dropping scenery provides the backdrop for extraordinary adventures in Patagonia, which stretches a thousand miles from La Pampa province to Tierra del Fuego.

In the glacier-domed Andes, where herds of wild horses still roam, visitors can go skiing, ice climbing, fly fishing, horseback riding, scuba diving and white-water rafting, thanks to the extreme variations in terrain and altitude.

On the Atlantic coast, visitors can see whales, sea lions, elephant seals, dolphins and Magelian penguins in their natural habitats — and balance all of that outdoor activity with a relaxing stay at one of the area's premier hotels or lodges.

Visit Ushuaia, the world's southernmost city, and take a ride on The End of the World Train.

CUYO

Home to Aconcagua, the highest peak in the Americas, and surrounded by rivers, Cuyo is ideal for every imaginable outdoor adventure, including snow skiing, trekking, horseback riding, paragliding and rafting.

Hikers will delight in crossing the *Puente del Inca* — the Bridge of the Incas.

Agro-tours take visitors behind the scenes of historic wineries and feature

exclusive tastings of Argentina's wines — including the country's signature Malbec, a specialty of the Mendoza region.

In Mendoza, ultra-modern lodges treat travelers to sumptuous amenities. San Juan boasts Ischigualasto Provincial Park, one of the most important paleontological sites in the world.

NORTE

In colonial times, this region thrived while Buenos Aires was still a rural outpost. Today, travelers can stay in elegant boutique hotels while exploring beautifully preserved colonial cities such as Salta, San Salvador de Jujuy and Santiago del Estero. Or, they can take in the mystical landscapes and immerse themselves in the cultural heritage of the villages of Quebranda de Humahuaca, a UNESCO site.

Luxury hotels offer sophisticated retreats in Argentina's famous wine country, known for exceptional grapes grown at the highest altitude in the world. Along with Malbec, sought-after varieties include Cabernet Sauvignon and Torrontes, among many others.

For Further Information

Teatro Colon

teatrocolon.org.ar

Villa Allende

enjoy-argentina.org

La Cumbre

argentinaturistica.com

Santa Catalina

enjoy-argentina.org

The End of the World Train

trendelfindelmundo.com.ar

Ischigualasto Provincial Park

welcomeargentina.com

Quebrada de Humahuaca

whc.unesco.org/en/list/1116

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Vancouver Restaurant.

Specializing in the cuisine of Italy's Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont regions, Campagnolo is wowing patrons in inner-city Vancouver, B.C. A must-have dish: the tesa-spiked carnaroli risotto. While the food is wonderful, we couldn't help but fall in love with Campagnolo's 25-seat wine room, offering numerous selections by the glass. 604-484-6018

2 Hot Wine Country Photography Exhibit.

Through August 21, visitors to Mumm Napa, located along Napa Valley's Silverado Trail, can enjoy more than 100 celebrity portraits in an exhibit titled, "Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Other Perversities." The pictures were taken by renowned photo-journalist George Rose, who has been a public relations professional in California's North Coast wine country for years. 707-967-7700

3 Hot Wine Festival.

Special events galore are offered as part of the Grape to Glass Weekend in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley, August 14-16. At MacMurray Ranch, "Sip 'N' Cinema" will be a sensory experience where Hollywood meets wine country. The "Hog in the Fog Winegrower Barbecue" at Richard's Grove and Saralee's Vineyard will feature food, wine and an auction. Plus, wineries all over the valley will offer special programs. Registration is required for some events. rrvw.org



Grassy. Descriptive term for aromas and flavors that are reminiscent of just-cut grass or fields of hay. Most often used in describing Sauvignon Blanc.

Herbal. Descriptive term for aromas and flavors that are reminiscent of herbs. When the impression is mild, this is considered a positive. When the impression is strong, it's considered a negative and the word "herbaceous" typically is invoked.

Itata. A valley in the southern part of Chile that produces mainly simple jug wines.

Jujuy. A minor winegrowing district in Argentina, near Salta.

Keller. The German term for cellar.

Late Harvest. A style of wine made from grapes that are picked well after the "normal" harvest is concluded. These grapes have great concentration of sugar, and thus make very sweet wines.

VINESSE STYLE

CHOCOLATE AS AN ART FORM

The "Chocolate Research Facility" may sound a bit too academic to be enjoyable... until you realize that you are the one doing the "research."

The CRF is located in Singapore, which may be home to more foodies per capita than any other country on the planet. That makes it the perfect spot for a specialty shop that carries 100 flavors of chocolate treats.

Just like at ice cream king Baskin Robbins, some of the flavors — such as Cognac (for the adventurous) and strawberry yogurt (for the kids) — are on the menu year-round; others appear only seasonally.



This summer, for instance, one of the specials is honey melon with cassia. Another is cardamom with almond.

The combination boutique and café is designed much like a laboratory. It's so unusual that it acts like a magnet to passersby.

The pre-boxed chocolates also are hard to resist, due in no small part to their packaging. The boxes

that house the CRF's exotic series have animal skin graphics; those holding the alcoholic flavors have a neon lights design.

"We wanted to give the chocolates a half-serious, half-crazy personality," says box designer Christopher Lee.

A modest assessment for a man who has helped elevate candy to an art form.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

Hudson Valley

People are surprised to learn that New York ranks third among all states in wine production. It trails California and Washington, but is ahead of Oregon.

And New York may finally start getting noticed now that the Hudson Valley Wine & Grape Association has a “benchmark white” wine to promote. The organization selected Seyval Blanc — blended with a choice of Vignoles, Vidal or Cayuga White — for that designation because it consistently makes a well-balanced and enjoyable wine.

Seyval Blanc in a French-American hybrid that fares well in the Hudson Valley’s climate, with good sugar and acid balance. Vintners can make it in an array of styles, from completely dry to sweet, although the best renditions tend to be off-dry (i.e., with just a bit of sweetness).

Some of the country’s oldest vineyards can be found in the Hudson Valley. The French Huguenots planted the first vines in New Paltz (now part of Ulster County) in 1677, a century before vines were planted in what today is California.

The Huguenots discovered a unique combination of soil, climate and sun that together makes for ideal grape-growing conditions. They planted their vines on the hillsides of the Hudson Highlands and started a tradition of grapes and wine that continues to this day.

The broad expanse of the Hudson River serves a dual purpose. The flowing water helps keep the climate temperate, and the valley serves as a conduit for maritime breezes from the south. The gently sloping hills provide ideal sites for vineyards, some of which — like those around the Benmarl estate — have been planted for centuries.

In 1976, thanks in part to testimony from Benmarl’s Mark Miller, New York passed the Farm Winery Bill, paving the way for the rapid growth of the Hudson Valley as a wine region.



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Q I opened a bottle of wine last night and the cork had some white crystals on it. We were afraid to drink the wine because of this. What's the deal with the crystals?

A First of all... drink that wine! There's no reason to be concerned about the crystals, which are made out of potassium



bitartrate. They have no flavor, and they offer no health risk. They occasionally separate out of a wine, typically prompted by a big drop in temperature.

Sometimes they'll attach themselves to the cork, and other times they'll simply float around in the bottle. Either way, they're harmless.



ReadyMade magazine recently recommended using old mailing tubes and an old milk crate to create a low-cost yet useful wine rack. Be sure to store the crate in a cool, dry area.

THE LIEFF CONSERVATION AGREEMENT preserves more than 17 acres of native oak forest in the hills above the Napa Valley town of Rutherford in its relatively natural state. Running in a north-south direction, the property also boasts several small vineyards from which the Lieffs produce their Lieff Auberge Road Cabernet Sauvignon. Conservation agreements are legal agreements between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limit the use of the land to protect its conservation values. They allow landowners to continue to own, live on and work on their land while also being able to sell it or pass it on to heirs. Because development rights are given up in the conservation agreement, these documents provide flexibility according to the needs of the landowners. In the Napa area, more than 21,000 acres of land has been protected by conservation agreements with The Land Trust of Napa County.

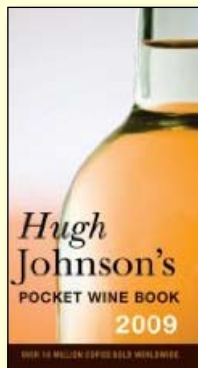


HALF A GLASS OF WINE PER DAY may add five years to your life, according to a Dutch study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. Light alcohol intake was linked to lower cardiovascular disease and lower overall mortality. In the study, 70 percent of the wine consumed was red.



WINE PRESERVA OFFERS A SIMPLE WAY to preserve wine that its manufacturer says protects both aroma and flavor. The patented disc, when inserted into an opened bottle, acts as a barrier against oxidation by floating on the surface of the wine. To learn more, visit winehardware.com.

DINING AT MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PARKS used to consist of hot dogs, peanuts, Cracker Jack and watered-down beer. You can still get all those, uh, delicacies at the ballpark, but in recent years, most stadiums have upped the culinary ante. This year, for instance, U.S. Cellular Field in Chicago (home of the White Sox) has opened a wine bar on the lower level. Okay, it's not actually a bar, but rather a free-standing cart. It offers wines by the glass for \$7.50 or \$9.50, which the general manager of the stadium's food purveyor describes as "a bit of an upgrade to the normal splits we already serve."



“Wine is like sex in that few men will admit not knowing all about it.”

— Wine book author Hugh Johnson

3,400,000

The number of tons of winegrapes crushed in California in 2008. The United States total was 4.2 million. Washington was a distant second among states with 145,000 tons, followed by New York with 45,000 tons and Oregon with 40,600 tons.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

The Ceviche Situation: Seek Out Zippy

No two restaurant renditions of ceviche are exactly the same, so recommending an ideal wine pairing partner is problematic.

That said, we *can* offer a basic definition of this Latin American specialty, and offer some vinous generalizations.

First and foremost, ceviche is raw, making it the equivalent of sushi in Japan. In some cases, chefs will blanch it lightly.

It can be made from either fish or shellfish, and it's prepared in an acidic citrus juice — typically lemon or lime. Spices usually are added, but the key component when it comes to wine pairing is the juice — specifically, the juice's acidity.

So, if you were to pair ceviche with a wine possessing little or no noticeable acidity, that wine would come across as flat and almost flavorless. On the other hand, a wine brimming with lemon and lime flavors, such as a French Sancerre, could cause a severe case of PS — pucker syndrome. All of that acidity and tartness would be a bit much for one's palate.

The key, then, is to find a wine that is acidic but not overly so. And that

means being willing to embrace varieties other than the “usual suspects.”

Two Spanish whites can make very good pairing partners: Albarino and Verdejo.

Pinot Gris, known for its citrus backbone and zippy personality, is another inspired choice.

Fragrant wines such as Gruner Veltliner and Gewurztraminer also match well. Gewurztraminer's varietal spice also melds nicely with well-seasoned ceviche.

A bone-dry Riesling, given its minerality, may not work, but an off-dry or semi-sweet rendition could be a heavenly match.

Sauvignon Blanc is among the more common varieties that can work, and a refreshing rosé would add a nice fruit component to the overall flavor experience.

Experts we spoke with offered two other possibilities, one a bit surprising, the other not so.

The unexpected pick: Chardonnay — but only if it's from the high-altitude vineyards of Argentina, where all of the wines tend to be more acidic.

The “go-to” selection: sparkling wine. Given its high acidity and fairly neutral flavor spectrum, it goes well with a wide array of dishes — including ceviche.



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& Sweet

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SUMMER GREENS WITH GOAT CHEESE CROSTINI

With the salad, this makes a wonderful light meal. Without, the crostini make great a great appetizer. Either way, a chilled bottle of Sauvignon Blanc is called for. This recipe makes 4 meal-size salads, or 8 appetizer salads.

Crostini Ingredients

- 5 1/2-oz. fresh goat cheese (2/3 cup)
- 4 teaspoons plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 4 teaspoons Sauvignon Blanc
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs (mix and match parsley, chives, tarragon and dill)
- 1 1/2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
- 8 baguette slices, cut diagonally 1/2-inch

Crostini Preparation

1. In a food processor, place goat cheese, 4 teaspoons olive oil and Sauvignon Blanc. Pulse one or two short pulses just to blend; the mixture should be spreadable. Transfer mixture to a bowl, and stir in salt and pepper to taste, the herbs and lemon zest. Chill for 30 minutes.
2. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place baguette slices on a large baking sheet and brush lightly on both sides with the remaining olive oil. Bake for 5 minutes on one side, then turn and bake 3 minutes on other side. Set aside.

Salad Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 5-oz. mixed summer greens (10 cups)

Salad Preparation

1. In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper to taste, and whisk to blend.
2. Slowly whisk in the olive oil.

Final Preparation

1. Just before serving, add dressing to mixed greens and toss gently. Divide among 4 salad plates.
2. Spread a nice schmear of the herbed cheese on the toasted baguette slices, and place 2 slices on each plate on top of the salads. Serve immediately.

BAKED PEARS WITH GINGER-CUSTARD SAUCE

Try this dish (without the custard) with pork tenderloin, or (with the custard) as a stand-alone dessert. If a dessert, serve it with an off-dry Muscat Canelli or sparkling Moscato. This recipe makes 2 servings.

Baked Pear Ingredients

- 1 large Bartlett or Anjou pear, halved lengthwise, cored and peeled
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 cup pear juice

Baked Pear Preparation

1. Place pear halves in a small baking dish. Place half the butter in each pear cavity. Combine sugar and cinnamon. Sprinkle over butter in each pear cavity. Pour pear juice into dish.
 2. Bake pears in pre-heated 350-degree oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until tender, basting once or twice with pear juice.
- Note: While pear is baking, prepare ginger-custard sauce.

Sauce Ingredients

- 1/4 cup half-and-half
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 eggs

Sauce Preparation

1. Combine half-and-half, milk, sugar and ginger in a small pot. Bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally to dissolve sugar. Beat eggs together in a small heat-proof bowl. Slowly pour about 1/4-cup milk mixture into eggs, stirring constantly.
2. Pour egg mixture back into pot. Cook over low-medium heat, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens to the consistency of cake batter. Pour sauce through a strainer into a serving bowl. Serve warm or refrigerate and serve cold.

Final Preparation

Place each pear half in a bowl. Drizzle on juices from the pear's baking dish. Spoon on ginger-custard sauce, and serve.

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