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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



SPARKLING CONVERSATION 5 FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT CHAMPAGNE

- **Washington's Olympic Peninsula**
 - **Napa's Chimney Rock**
 - **The Russian River Valley**
 - **Pairing Wine With Shellfish**

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Re-thinking the Ever-So Humble 'Spaghetti Wine'

By Robert Johnson

If it were up to me, I would ban, delete and otherwise eliminate the phrase "spaghetti wine" from the English language.

I'd also extract it from the Italian lexicon and any other tongue prone to uttering it.

Reason: It is not a complimentary term. Just as the "spaghetti western" was known as a lesser genre of motion picture, and thus frowned upon by cinematic snobs, the "spaghetti wine" was thought of as a bland, simple wine worthy of no dish nobler than spaghetti and meatballs.

Well, it's my studied (and humble) opinion that those who look down upon spaghetti and meatballs are missing out on one of humankind's finest comfort foods. Furthermore, there are plenty of anything-but-simple wines that would pair beautifully with such a main course.

Look at it this way: You didn't get John Wayne in a "spaghetti western," but you did get Clint Eastwood.

Likewise, while you may want to save that pricy bottle of Brunello

di Montalcino for a more important occasion, there's nothing wrong with cracking open a bottle of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo or Chianti Classico or a spicy Barbera.

Other good pairing partners from other places: a Grenache/Syrah/Mourvedre blend from France's Rhone region, a spicy and fruity Shiraz from Australia, or a (red) Zinfandel from California. Of course, there's nothing wrong with a simple bottle of Chianti, either.

The dominant flavor of a traditional spaghetti-and-meatballs dinner will be tomato sauce, so that's the ingredient on which to focus when selecting the wine to serve. Tomato sauce, with its tanginess and herbaceous quality, needs a wine with a solid acidic backbone and a nice spice kick.

In the era of celebrity chefs and the Food Network, simple pleasures such as spaghetti-and-meatballs may lack cache, but they still can make wonderful meals.

In my opinion (still humble), except on very special occasions, we'd be much better served by choosing comfort over cache.





Sparkling Conversation: Become a Champagne Expert

Commit the following information to memory, and you'll be able to engage in sparkling conversation on demand.

1. Most sparkling wine in the marketplace is described as “non-vintage,” but a more accurate label would be “multiple-vintage.” On average, “vintage years” — those in which a specific harvest year is placed on the bottle label — are declared only three times per decade. In non-vintage years, cuvees are crafted using wines fermented and cellared from two or more vintages.

2. There are six categories of Champagne based on sweetness level. From the driest to the sweetest, they are: Extra Brut, Brut, Extra Dry, Sec, Demi-Sec and Doux. The most confusing of the designations is Extra Dry, which actually is somewhat sweet, with a residual sugar level of 1.2 to 2 percent.

3. There are 56 million bubbles in a bottle of Champagne. Plus or minus. We never actually counted them ourselves, but the folks at

Champagne house Bollinger did, and that's the number they came up with after presumably extensive study... not to mention imbibing. It's generally agreed that smaller bubbles equate with a sparkling wine of higher quality.

4. A trip to a Champagne house makes for a fun and informational day trip from Paris. The Champagne region is an easy drive or a 90-minute train ride away, and most of the houses provide detail-oriented tours that include step-by-step descriptions of the Champagne-making process and sampling of the various cuvees. Advance reservations are suggested — and required at some of the houses.

5. Sparkling wine is one of the more versatile food pairing partners. That's why it's a favorite at smorgasbord-style Sunday brunches. Among its more sublime partners in culinary crime is sushi. It has been paired with caviar for generations. And if you select a somewhat sweet sparkler (look for “demi-sec” on the label), it's one of the few wines that matches well with ham. Yes, sweetness and saltiness can be simpatico.



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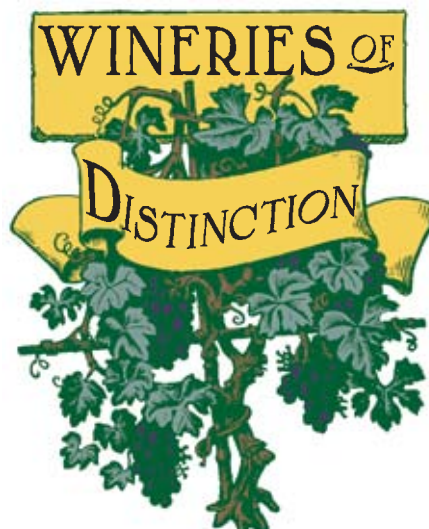
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Chimney Rock: A Star of Napa's Stags Leap District

Growing grapes and making wine in the Stags Leap District of the Napa Valley is the vinous equivalent of being granted a license to print money.

It's not quite that simple, of course, but nobody would say that Stags Leap is a challenging place to farm exceptional grapes. Obviously, Mother Nature gets the final word each harvest season, but it's no mere coincidence that many of California's greatest wines come from this area — the home of Chimney Rock Winery.

The district's name is derived from the legend of a nimble stag, said to have escaped a hunter by making a fantastic leap from one of the towering rock outcroppings to another.

Although grape growing goes back to the 1880s, it wasn't until 1961, when Nathan Fay planted the district's first Cabernet Sauvignon vines,

that other growers and winemakers were drawn to the area. One by one, they discovered the "magic" in this narrow pocket of land.

The Stags Leap District, barely a mile wide and three miles long, today is planted with 1,350 acres of vineyards. Beginning seven miles north of the

town of Napa and embracing Chimney Rock Winery at its southern end, the appellation is bounded by rocky hillsides on the east and the Napa River on the west.

The natural environmental mechanics of warm sun and cool breezes mesh perfectly with coarse, gravelly soils. The distinctive Stags Leap Palisades,



with its massive rocks, store the sun's energy and nurture the fruit through leisurely ripening and maturation.

In 1976, long before the government designated the district as an official American Viticultural Area, a 1973 vintage Stags Leap District Cabernet Sauvignon swept the famous Paris tasting, besting the likes of First Growths Mouton-Rothschild and Haut-Brion.

Today, wineries such as Chimney Rock continue to produce Cabernets that compare favorably with the world's greatest wines.



The Wilson and Terlot families, co-owners of Chimney Rock, work with veteran vintner Doug Fletcher and University of California-Davis graduate (with a Master's in enology) Elizabeth Vianna to produce wines that are unique and true to their place of origin.

Two primary Cabernets are crafted each year, one that focuses squarely on the variety, and one that embraces Bordeaux blending methodology, known as "Elevage." The 2006 "Elevage" is Cabernet-based and also includes portions of Merlot and Petit Verdot.

Beginning with the 2006 vintage, Chimney Rock began making a sister wine to the "Elevage" called "Elevage Blanc." It consists of Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignon Gris, and is built to last. The French equivalent would be Haut-Brion Blanc — a white wine that's not as famous as its red sibling, but is every bit as "noble."

Chimney Rock also crafts a tasty Fume Blanc, made entirely from Sauvignon Blanc grapes, and a sophisticated Cabernet Franc Rosé that may well change your opinion (for the better) about blush wines.

Situated on the eastern side of Napa Valley's Silverado Trail, the Chimney Rock tasting room is open seven days per week, and reservations are not

required to sample the daily wine flights.

The estate offers four tour programs, and reservations are suggested for those excursions.

The "Estate Tour and Tasting" (\$35) provides a behind-the-scenes look at the inner workings of the winery, both in the vineyards and the cellar.

The "Ganymede Tasting" (\$50) is named after one of the estate's blocks of Cabernet Sauvignon and includes an interactive tasting of Reserve and single-block wines that are sold only at the winery. A selection of cheeses is also included.

The "Elevage Tour and Tasting" (\$70) includes an exploration of the vineyards, samples pulled straight from the barrels, and a seated tasting that includes hors d'oeuvres to complement each selection.

And finally, the "Vineyard Tour and Tasting" (\$90) includes a more extensive vineyard tour (covering a full mile), an alfresco lunch among the vines and a selection of wines.

A visit to Chimney Rock is a great way to gain a clear understanding of what a special place the Stags Leap District is.

Winery 4-1-1

Chimney Rock Winery

5350 Silverado Trail
Napa, CA 94558
707-257-2641

Winemakers:

Doug Fletcher & Elizabeth Vianna

Tasting Room Hours:

Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Directions/Questions:

www.chimneyrock.com

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In Search of Gold Medal Wines on Washington's Olympic Peninsula



Memorable wine touring experiences in the state of Washington are by no means limited to the Willamette Valley and Walla Walla.

Not far from Seattle, but still a bit off the beaten path, you can explore the wineries of the Olympic Peninsula. And it truly will be an exploration because chances are you've never even heard of any of the wineries.

The reason: Most of them churn out fewer than 2,000 cases of wine per year. With such limited production, combined with strong local demand, it's rare to encounter an Olympic Peninsula wine anywhere except on the Olympic Peninsula. Translation: In order to sample and enjoy these wines, one must go to the source.

With six wineries welcoming visitors, one can comfortably explore the peninsula's vinous treasures over a couple of days. Keep in mind, however, that hours may vary by the season, so it's best to call ahead

or check winery Web sites when planning your trip.

Also be aware that in addition to traditional table wines, some of the wineries also offer fruit wines and/or mead, which is a wine made from honey. This means that even one who doesn't appreciate "regular" wine — and every family seems to have at least one such outcast — may find something they'll like.

For instance, the aptly named Harbinger Winery offers an array of good things in a bottle, ranging from a big red Bordeaux-style blend to a fruit wine known as Blackberry Bliss. Harbinger is the most northwest winery not only in the Pacific Northwest, but in the entire United States, and it's housed in a building that formerly was a supply and

repair shop for logging trucks — very Northwest, indeed.

Co-owner Sara Gagnon describes Harbinger's offerings as "wines that cry out with their own unique and uncompromising style."

You can expect a warm welcome at Camaraderie Cellars where, in addition to fine wines, the estate offers great views and a beautiful garden setting that evolves with the seasons. Camaraderie is one of the few Olympic Peninsula wineries with significant distribution outside the region.

Black Diamond Winery, overlooking Tumwater Creek, is situated on 20 rolling, picturesque acres. The land surrounding the winery is planted both to grapevines and orchards, so there's always an array of tasty wines to sample.

Sorensen Cellars sources most of its grapes from Eastern Washington, but gives them a unique personality through tender, loving care in the

cellar. If you love red wines, Sorensen is a must stop.

The “something for everyone” description certainly fits FairWinds Winery, which boasts the most eclectic “menu” on the peninsula. The estate produces Cabernet Sauvignon, Lemberger, a Cabernet/Merlot blend, Gewurztraminer and Aliogote, as well as mead, a blush wine, and a unique bottling known as “Port O’ Call.”

No tour of the Olympic Peninsula is complete without a visit to historic Olympic Cellars, the first winery to locate on the peninsula and one of Washington state’s original 15 wineries. In 2001, the winery made history again when it became the first in the North Sound area to be owned by a woman.

The tasting room is decorated in what’s best described as “barn nouveau,” and the wines are crafted by French vintner Benoit Murat, who embraces both French and American techniques in the cellar to create cuvees of great distinction.

Olympic Cellars is extremely guest-focused, offering numerous activities throughout the year, including a series of concerts.

After visiting three or four of the estates, finish your day of touring at one of the peninsula’s excellent restaurants. Here’s the “A-to-T” on five of our favorites:

- **Alder Wood Bistro.** Specializes in local, organic and seasonal cuisine.
- **Cedar Creek.** Situated in the historic McGeorge House, this restaurant has an excellent wine list to complement its regional Italian cuisine.
- **Fins Coastal Cuisine.** Pacific Northwest wines... fabulous seafood... unparalleled views of Puget Sound. What more do you need?
- **Joy’s Wine Bistro.** Wine isn’t just part of this bistro’s name; it’s the heart and soul of the restaurant. A great place to experiment with food-and-wine pairings you may not find anywhere else.
- **T’s Restaurant.** We pity the fool who misses this establishment, which

offers Northwest cuisine and more than 100 wine choices.

The Willamette Valley and Walla Walla regions can be a bit daunting for any wine lover with limited time because both are home to so many estates. The Olympic Peninsula, on the other hand, provides plenty of wine-drinking pleasure in a much more compact area. For a fabulous weekend wine getaway, the Olympic Peninsula garners a gold medal.



For Further Information

- 1. Harbinger Winery**
Port Angeles
360-452-4262
 - 2. Camaraderie Cellars**
Port Angeles
360-417-3564
 - 3. Black Diamond Winery**
Port Angeles
360-457-0748
 - 4. Olympic Cellars**
Port Angeles
360-452-0160
 - 5. Sorensen Cellars**
Port Townsend
360-379-6416
 - 6. FairWinds Winery**
Port Townsend
360-385-6899
- Alder Wood Bistro**
Sequim
360-683-4321
- Cedar Creek**
Sequim
360-683-3983
- Fins Coastal Cuisine**
Port Townsend
360-379-3474
- Joy’s Wine Bistro**
Port Angeles
360-452-9449
- T’s Restaurant**
Port Townsend
360-385-0700

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Romantic Wine Country Date. If you’ve ever taken an evening horse-and-carriage ride through New York’s Central Park or the side streets of downtown Chicago, you know it can be a romantic adventure. That holds true in wine country, even if the ride begins just a half-hour past noon. Flying Horse Carriage Company offers four-hour excursions through vineyards of northern Sonoma County. The itinerary includes a picnic lunch with gourmet cheeses, chocolate and strawberries, plus stops at four wineries.
www.flyinghorse.org

2 Hot Sicily Restaurant. For those who appreciate the never-ending search for sublime food-and-wine experiences, Sicily’s Osteria Nero d’Avola is Ground Zero. The local wine list is extensive, and the menu is brimming with local ingredients that chef-owner Salvatore Siligato transforms into culinary masterpieces. 39-0-94-262-8874

3 Hot Mud Bath for Two. Okay, the mud bath itself isn’t hot, but the experience certainly is. Golden Haven Hot Springs at the top of the Napa Valley, in Calistoga, offers mud baths for two in private treatment rooms, along with a refreshing mineral pool. Overnight guests also may enjoy a whirlpool spa and sauna in their room. Mud baths and hot springs represent a century-old tradition in Calistoga, and Golden Haven offers attractive and affordable get-away packages.
www.goldenhaven.com



Insignia. The signature bottling of Joseph Phelps Vineyards. The 2006 vintage — Insignia’s 33rd — is a blend of 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petit Verdot, and retails for around \$200 per bottle.

Judd’s Hill. The most southerly winery on Napa Valley’s Silverado Trail. It specializes in Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Petite Sirah, and also offers an educational and fun “bottle blending day camp.”

Luna Vineyards. Another winery located along the Silverado Trail. The trail is known as Napa’s “road less traveled.”

Mount Veeder. An appellation high in the Mayacamas Mountains that overlooks the Napa Valley. Known for its steep slopes, thin soil and labor-intensive viticulture, the area produces some of the most intense wines in all of California. Some vineyard elevations top out at 2,600 feet.

VINESSE STYLE

NAPA VALLEY LODGING

Looking for stylish accommodations in the Napa Valley? You’ve come to the right place. Here’s a sampling of what’s available, from the town of Napa in the south to Calistoga in the north...

■ **Napa — Candlelight Inn.** This B&B has been voted Napa Valley’s “most romantic inn.” It was built in 1929, and offers in-room fireplaces and whirlpools. A daily gourmet breakfast is included. 1045 Easum Dr., Napa, CA 94558; 707-257-3717

■ **Yountville — Villagio Inn & Spa.** The rooms in this French country-style inn include fireplaces and whirlpool bathtubs. The grounds are home to breathtaking gardens, and each morning begins with a Champagne breakfast buffet. 6481 Washington St., Yountville, CA 94599; 707-944-8877

■ **St. Helena — Wine Country Inn.** This inn is perched on a knoll

with wonderful views of manicured vineyards and nearby hills. There are 24 individually decorated guest rooms, but if you really want to travel in style, opt for one of the five luxury cottages. 1152 Lodi Lane, St. Helena, CA 94574; 707-963-7077



■ **Calistoga — The Pink Mansion.** A Napa Valley landmark since 1875, this elegant inn has an indoor heated pool, Jacuzzis and fireplaces. The king-size beds offer plenty of comfort for the in-room massages and facials that are offered, and guests enjoy a full breakfast in the morning along with wine and hors d’oeuvres in the afternoon. 1415 Foothill Blvd., Calistoga, CA 94515; 707-942-0558



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



Russian River Valley

If there is one winegrowing area in California that most closely emulates the Burgundy region of France, it's the Russian River Valley of Sonoma County.

Just as in Burgundy, the two varieties that reign supreme in the Russian River are Pinot Noir among reds and Chardonnay among whites. So many wineries — most still family-owned and relatively small — are congregated in the area today than an organization has been formed to help visitors plan their excursions and navigate the terrain: the Russian River Wine Road.

From a humble beginning with nine member wineries, the Wine Road now encompasses more than a hundred wineries and 50 lodging locations.

The wineries and lodgings are well known for their friendly hospitality and relaxed atmosphere. The wine estates vary from Italian-style villas and French-style chateaux to small *garagiste* wineries (a French term coined because many of these people started off making wine in their garages).

Wine Road lodgings can also be found to suit any taste, from quaint cottages and Victorian bed-and-breakfast inns to luxurious hotels

and spas.

The Russian River, which defines the region, meanders through the town of Cloverdale to Santa Rosa and out to the Sonoma Coast. Northwest Sonoma County is arguably the most picturesque grape-growing region in California, and stands out as one of the ultra-premium growing regions of the world.

The association has produced a myriad of programs, events and services, all of which can be accessed at wineroad.com.



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Q During a recent vacation in the Napa Valley, we purchased a number of what one winery called “half-bottles” because the regular-sized bottles were so expensive — and we usually drink only about half a bottle at a time anyway. Should we store these “half-bottles” the same way we store our regular bottles?

A Yes. The same storage guidelines apply: in a cool, dark place with the bottles either upside down or on their sides so that the wine is in contact with the cork (this keeps the cork from drying out and allowing oxygen to slip into the bottle). One caveat: Just as wine ages more slowly in larger bottles, such as magnums, it will age more quickly in smaller bottles. For instance, a Cabernet Sauvignon that figures to reach its prime in about 10 years probably should be opened after about five or six years if stored in a (375-ml.) half-bottle.



You’ve probably been told that it’s a good idea to swirl the wine in your glass before drinking it. This is true for most wines — particularly reds — but it is not true for sparkling wines. The main purpose of swirling is to propel the aroma of the wine upward so we may enjoy the aroma; with sparkling wine, the bubbles provide that “service.” Fortified wines, such as Port, should be swirled very gently because of their higher alcohol level, which can be quite noticeable and sometimes overpowering in the nose.

Several Napa Valley restaurants have been drawing rave reviews and are worth checking out the next time you visit wine country. Among them are Ad Hoc in Yountville (707-944-2487), Farm in Napa (707-299-4880), and Restaurant at Meadowood in St. Helena (707-967-1200). Ad Hoc serves a different prix-fixe menu each night, Farm offers well-executed California cuisine, and Restaurant at Meadowood specializes in multi-course tasting menus.



The California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance has released a report funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation revealing that 101 winegrowers surveyed throughout California have a remarkably high level of adoption of sustainable vineyard management practices. About 60 percent of the 101 surveyed winegrowers reported using 10 or more of the 16 environmentally friendly farming practices included in the study. The six most-used practices, adopted by 80 percent or more of the growers, are: 1) regular monitoring of pest insects and/or diseases; 2) use of reduced-risk pesticides; 3) reduced tillage or no-till approaches; 4) conservation of natural vegetation on vineyard property; 5) leaf pulling; and 6) planting cover crops in the vineyard. Winegrowers offered a variety of reasons for adopting these vineyard practices, with the most common being concern about the environmental impact of their farming operations, including conservation of natural resources such as soil.



“I can only suggest that you do your best to banish anxiety, possibly with a glass of Champagne, and lay yourself open to the moment when happiness becomes irresistible.”

— John Mortimer, in *Where There’s a Will: Thoughts on the Good Life*

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

SHELLFISH

Not all shellfish are created Nequal — particularly when it comes to selecting a complementary wine.

Some pairings are classic and easy to understand. Others aren't so obvious, but reward the adventurous seafood and vino lover with culinary "Wow!" moments.

Let's begin with the classic pairing: lobster with California Chardonnay. Here, both the weight of the food and the flavor of the wine come into play and marry to create a meal that borders on hedonistic.

The weight and texture of the lobster — the most "meaty" of all shellfish — provides the perfect foil for a rich white wine... and there is none richer (at least among dry whites) than Chardonnay.

When the wine has a buttery quality — as so many California Chardonnays do — and the lobster is served with melted butter, the combination is so sublime that one forgets about the calories.

So what type of wine should be served with the textural opposite of lobster — silky seared scallops? A

much lighter wine, such as an Albarino from Spain or a Pinot Gris with a bright, refreshing mouthfeel.

Pinot Gris also is an excellent match for steamed mussels. The wine can have a mineral-like flavor that echoes the briny quality of the mussels.

If the shellfish is prepared in a manner that results in plenty of crunchiness (think: battered and deep-fried shrimp or any shellfish prepared tempura-style), bubbly can be blissful. Again, it's the texture of the food and

wine that makes the pairing work.

We know that some red wines match very nicely with fish. But is the same true of shellfish?

You bet — although, admittedly, the recommended pairings are based more on the preparation than the shellfish itself.

For instance, when prawns are wrapped in bacon and grilled, an earthy Pinot Noir works beautifully. With

cioppino, the herbs that give the broth its flavor are complemented by the "juiciness" and dark fruit flavors of Barbera.

If you're a shellfish lover, your "Wow!" moments await.



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LOBSTER BISQUE

This dish provides a classy prelude to any dinner, particularly on a cold winter night. Serve it with a well-chilled glass of Viognier, Chardonnay or Gewurztraminer. This recipe yields 4 cups.

Ingredients

- 1 to 2 cups cooked lobster meat (about 1 small lobster)
- 1/3 cup dry Sherry
- 1/4 cup butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 3 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon steak sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Seasoned salt to taste

Preparation

1. In a small bowl, combine lobster and Sherry; set aside.
2. In a medium saucepan over low heat, melt butter. Blend in flour and cook, stirring constantly, until smooth and bubbly.
3. Gradually add milk, stirring constantly. Continue cooking and stirring until mixture is thickened.
4. Stir in steak sauce and salt, pepper and seasoned salt to taste.
5. Add lobster and Sherry. Cover and simmer lobster bisque for 5 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

LAMB SHANKS

Here's a dish that matches beautifully with Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, or Syrah-based blends. This recipe makes 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 6 lamb shanks
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 3 large carrots, cut into 1/4-inch rounds
- 10 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bottle red wine (we recommend Syrah or Shiraz)
- 1 can (28-oz.) whole peeled tomatoes with juice
- 1 can (10.5-oz.) condensed chicken broth
- 1 can (10.5-oz.) beef broth
- 5 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme

Preparation

1. Sprinkle shanks with salt and pepper.
2. Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat.
3. Working in batches, cook shanks until brown on all sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer shanks to plate.
4. Add onions, carrots and garlic to pot and saute until golden brown, about 10 minutes.
5. Stir in wine, tomatoes, chicken broth and beef broth. Season with rosemary and thyme. Return shanks to pot, pressing down to submerge.
6. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low. Cover, and simmer until meat is tender, about 2 hours.
7. Remove cover from pot. Simmer about 20 minutes longer. Transfer shanks to platter, and place in a warm oven.
8. Boil juices in pot until thickened, about 15 minutes. Spoon juices over shanks and serve.

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