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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS FOR THE WINE LOVER IN YOUR LIFE

**The Grinch Who Stole
Christmas Strikes
Again**

**The Hidden Secrets
of Hidden Ridge**

**The Magnificent
Artistry of Bella Vino
Bottles**

**Top 10 North
American Wine
Destinations**

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Holiday Wine Gift Ideas

By Robert Johnson

We've all become accustomed to an extended holiday season, but this year takes the cake. I encountered a number of retail stores that were fully decked out in Christmas decorations two weeks before Halloween.

No doubt it's a make-or-break couple of months for many retailers, but it still was a little unsettling to realize I'd be hearing holiday classics such as "Silent Night," "Jingle Bells" and "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" for a full 10 weeks.

That said, I can't deny that it got my male shopping gene, dormant until that pre-Halloween encounter, up and running. It also motivated me to jot down a few gift ideas for the wine lover in your life.

Besides the usual suspects — wine glass sets, decanters, bottle toppers, et al — allow me to recommend...

• **A gift basket.** Fill it with a bottle of wine, a box of gourmet crackers, a container of assorted nuts, an assortment of sampler-sized cheeses and a small box of chocolates, and you have a gift that will be greatly appreciated. Best of all, if there are any individual items

in the basket that the recipient really doesn't like, those items could easily be "re-gifted." You know... like a fruit cake.

• **A book.** My favorite wine book this year is *What to Drink With What You Eat*, which leaves no food-and-wine pairing possibility unexplored. If you can think of a food category, it's in this book, along with drink suggestions covering not only wine, but also beer, juice and tea. And when a food suggestion involves cheese, it's much more specific. In fact, more than a hundred types of cheese are covered by authors

Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg.

• **Online shopping made easy.** What would a holiday gift idea column be without at least one shameless plug? But the fact remains that some unusual and sure-to-

please suggestions can be found on our Web site. So pour a glass of wine, go to the Vinesse.com homepage, and start shopping.





Artist Series: 31 and Still Going Strong

Some things get better with age — like fine wine.

That's certainly true of the Artist Series Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma County's Kenwood Vineyards. The 2005 vintage marks the 31st Artist Series release.

While the wine is always quite good, it must share the spotlight with the label that adorns the bottle.

Kenwood Vineyards initiated the Artist Series in 1975 with a simple idea: handcraft the best possible Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon and bottle each vintage with a unique label showcasing a work of fine art.

The debut vintage featured a work created expressly for the label by famed poster artist David Lance Gaines. In subsequent years, the Artist Series has presented works by such famous artists as Joan Miro, Alexander Calder, Pablo Picasso, Sam Francis, Vincent van Gogh and Wayne Thiebaud.

The 2005 label features "Highway and Byways," a

groundbreaking 1929 painting by artist Paul Klee (1879-1940).

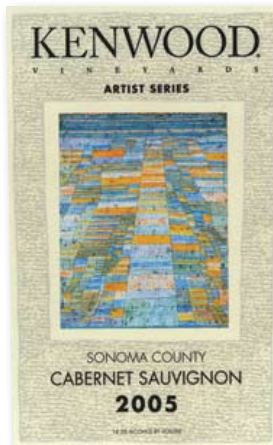
Swiss-born but based in Germany for much of his life, Klee was a major contributor to 20th century art not only through his paintings, but also through his theories, teachings and writings. He taught at the Bauhaus, the

German school created to unite the arts and industry, from 1921 until 1931. After the Bauhaus was closed by the Nazis in 1933, Klee returned to Switzerland, where he continued to paint until his death at age 60.

Klee was a natural draftsman with an extraordinary mastery of color, tonality and light. This work — an interpretation of landscape divided by vertical and horizontal networks — illustrates his ability to experiment with and invent new ways of expression.

To complement the label, the capsule on the 2005 Kenwood Artist Series Cabernet bears a drawn adaptation of "Highways and Byways"

and — on top, covering the cork — a modified version of the Bauhaus curriculum diagram.



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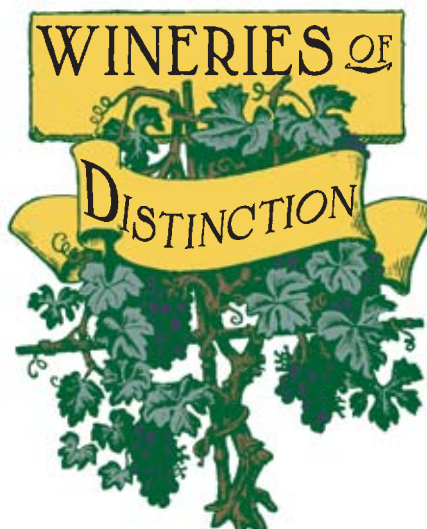
FREQUENCY:

Approximately Monthly

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Hidden Ridge Takes 'Mountain Wines' to New Heights

Surrounded by gnarled oak and Manzanita forests on the south and western slopes of Spring Mountain in the Mayacamas mountain range, there is a vineyard so remote it can be reached only by heavy-duty four-wheel-drive vehicles, on foot, or by helicopter.

This is Hidden Ridge Vineyard, developed and planted by husband-and-wife team Casidy Ward and Lynn Hofacket to grow stellar mountain Cabernet Sauvignon. Made by

winemaking team Marco DiGiulio and Timothy Milos, the Cabernet sings loudly (yodels?) of its mountainous origins on slopes as steep as 55%. When Ward and Hofacket purchased



the Hidden Ridge property in 1991, they envisioned it as the perfect location for a home in the country, truly away from it all. What they didn't realize, however, was just how difficult it would be to develop such a rural property for residential use.

Ultimately, it proved a better home for grapes than for people, and they found that their Cabernet Sauvignon thrived on the otherwise inhospitable mountain slopes at elevations ranging from 900 to 1,700 feet.

Early on, making wine was not part of the plan. "We wanted to grow great grapes, and sell them to someone else," Ward recalls.

While Hofacket was reaching out to viticulturists and vineyard managers to seek advice on planting mountain vineyards, Ward was calling on some of the most-lauded Cabernet winemakers in the region to see if they would be interested in buying grapes someday.

A few were intrigued enough to make the trek up to the site to see the vineyard in person. Marco DiGiulio was one of them. When the vines began to bear fruit, DiGiulio was one of the first in line to purchase grapes.

Other top winemakers in the Napa Valley also were interested in purchasing fruit from Hidden Ridge, but they could only take limited amounts in order to keep the "Napa Valley" designation on their bottles because Hidden Ridge Vineyard is located within the Sonoma County political boundary. (Federal law requires that wines

Winery 4-1-1

Hidden Ridge Vineyard

Proprietors:

Casidy Ward & Lynn Hofacket

Winemakers:

Marco DiGiulio & Timothy Milos

No Winery Facility
Available to Visit

Inquiries:

707-481-7021

www.hiddenridgevineyard.com

bearing the name of a specific winemaking region must be made from at least 85% grapes grown in that region.)

Hofacket and Ward thought they'd try to build the vineyard's reputation by bottling some of the wine for themselves, and Hidden Ridge Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon was born, beginning with a small, "experimental" batch in 2001. Production is now up to 3,600 cases, with Ward and Hofacket keeping all of the fruit for the Hidden Ridge Vineyard label.

"The way I see it," says Hofacket, "I spent the better part of six years of my life developing this vineyard and planting the grapes."

He then adds with a smile: "Now it's her job to market and sell the wine."



Four Seasons



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TOURING TIPS

It all began when the online “Trip Advisor” posted a list of the top 10 wine destinations in North America, based on polling of about 1,000 people. We took a look at it and, with all due respect to those who took part in the poll, it wasn’t exactly groundbreaking. As an example, topping the list was the Napa Valley. Gee, now there’s a surprise. The yawn-inducing exercise motivated us to come up with our own top 10 — featuring some not-so-obvious choices, and using our own definition of “wine destination.” Let the countdown begin!

10 Bern’s Steak House — What a place. First of all, it’s huge. Yet despite its size, and the size of its staff, each customer is made to feel welcome. That’s no small accomplishment.

Of course, the steaks are marvelous. They’re dry-aged, hand-cut to order, and then charcoal-broiled. Order medium-rare, and you’ll get medium-rare. Bern’s also takes cheese seriously, which explains



Trey Christy, Sommelier at Bern’s Steak House in Tampa, Florida

The Top 10 Wine Destinations in North America

why there are *two* temperature- and humidity-controlled cheese caves on the premises. There’s even a separate dessert room where guests can adjourn and enjoy a more subdued atmosphere — not to mention handmade sweet treats.

But the star of the show is Bern’s wine list. Here are the numbers: 6,800 unique labels... 5,500 red wines... 1,000 white wines... 200 sparkling wines... 300 Madeiras, Ports and Sherries by the glass... 200 table wines by the glass.

And the most impressive, awe-inspiring... and slightly intimidating... statistic of all: more than 500,000 bottles.

These are people who take food and wine seriously.

9 Finger Lakes — This is New York’s largest winegrowing region, but it can easily be experienced in a series of weekend getaways focused on the Keuka, Seneca and Cayuga “wine trails.”

Part of the fun of exploring the region is tasting and learning about grape varieties you won’t find in the more famous West Coast appellations. Hybrids, developed to thrive in the Finger Lakes climate, dominate most of the estate’s cellars. Among vinifera varieties, Riesling is the star. It’s made in a range of styles, from bone dry to very sweet. And speaking of sweet, you’ll find some delectable dessert wines, as well as bottlings made from fruit other than grapes.

Two restaurants to check out are the Pleasant Valley Inn & Restaurant in Hammondsport, and the Hill Top Inn in Elmira. The Pleasant Valley



Inn has an extensive wine list to complement its romantic candlelight dinners. The Hill Top Inn has great food and the friendliest staff in the area, and affords breathtaking views of Chemung County.

8 Texas Hill Country — Head out from Austin to the Hill Country, and you’ll find two dozen wineries interspersed among the Indian paintbrush and bluebonnets.

Perhaps the most honored of all the wineries is Becker Vineyards in Stonewall. Becker focuses on the classic varieties with historic roots in Bordeaux, Burgundy and the Rhone, and some of its bottlings have been served at the White House.



Mandola Estate Winery

If you like Italian wines, check out Mandola Estate Winery in Driftwood, which specializes in Italian varieties. Do you enjoy being pampered?

Then head for Woodrose Winery in Stonewall, where guests enjoy table service while sampling wine and cheese. And if you're looking for wine with a view, visit Driftwood Estate Winery, which sits on a hilltop overlooking its vineyard. A picnic area provides the perfect setting for a leisurely wine-tasting adventure.

Lodging in Hill Country is just as diverse as the mix of wineries. The Antlers Hotel on Lake LBJ in Kingsland, for instance, has a half-dozen antique-appointed suites as well as cabins and even train car accommodations.

One word of caution: If you're a wine snob, take a pass on Texas Hill Country. Reason: The winery owners, vintners and tasting room personnel are the least pretentious folks we've ever met. Yes, they take pride in their wines, but their collective goal is to provide guests with the kind of hospitality for which Texas is famous... y'all.



7 **Canada's Niagara Peninsula** — For those who love sweet wines, this is the place to get a vinous sugar fix. There are more than 60 wineries in the area, and a vast majority craft yummy dessert wines (a.k.a. ice wines) that are world-class in every way.

Plan your visit in late September, and you'll be able to savor magnificent fall colors as you drive from tasting room to tasting room. And be sure to save time for a visit to one of the "Seven Wonders of the New World" — Niagara Falls. The views are sensational on the Canadian side.



6 **Paso Robles, California** — Smack-dab between Los Angeles and San Francisco in California's Central Coast winegrowing region, Paso Robles places you in a Norman Rockwell painting one minute, and in the lap of luxury the next. And everywhere you turn, it seems, there is wine.

Any visit to Paso (as the locals call it) should begin with a walk around downtown's City Park. On its perimeter, you'll find inviting bistros offering tantalizing wine country cuisine, satellite tasting rooms where numerous local bottlings can be sampled, and eclectic boutiques packed with clothing and giftware.

If it's a "total immersion" wine country experience you seek, be aware that several local wineries have B&B-style inns adjacent to their vineyards. Among our favorites: the Wild Coyote Winery B&B, the Inn at Opolo, the Summerwood Winery & Inn, and Justin Vineyards' aptly named JUST Inn.

The region also hosts two big wine festivals each year, as well as numerous concerts featuring various music genres. Castoro Cellars hosts a number of intimate concerts in the "SLOFolks" series.

(Editor's Note: In our first issue of 2010, we'll conclude the countdown with the top five wine destinations in North America.)

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 **Hot Napa Wine Tasting.** Artesa Winery offers four different tasting programs, priced from \$40 to \$50, one of which includes selections of cheese. Reservations are suggested. 888-679-WINE.

2 **Hot Wine Country Inn.** The Napa Valley can feel a bit crowded, particularly on the weekends. To get away from the hustle and bustle of the down-valley towns, head north to Calistoga and book a room at The Pink Mansion, the former home of William F. Fisher, who established the first stage coach line in the town during the 1870s. Each room features unique antiques, a private bath (some with claw-foot or Jacuzzi tubs), plush robes, 600-thread-count sheets, down comforters and hidden flat-screen TVs. In the morning, a gourmet breakfast awaits. In the afternoon, guests enjoy wine and hors d'oeuvres. 707-942-0558

3 **Hot Touring Guide.** California's Redwood Highway runs right through Sonoma Country wine country. Now, for the first time, a single map details all corridors of the highway, enabling visitors to California's North Coast to easily plan a trip that includes both winery visits and up-close looks at the world's tallest trees. You'll never think of U.S. 101 the same way again. Copies of the new map are available online. www.northcoastca.com



Nero d’Avola. A grape variety from southern Italy known for delivering “big” flavors of cherry, plum, raspberry and spice.

Ostertag. A domaine in Alsace, France, and one of the top makers of Gewurztraminer in the world.

Plonk. Slang for a cheap, unexciting bottle of wine.

Quady North. An offshoot of the original Quady winery in Madera, Calif. While “Quady South” specializes in sweet, fortified wines, the “North” operation in Oregon concentrates on still table wines.

Rémueurs. French word for Riddlers, who are the people charged with turning the bottles of Champagne that are being aged in French chateaux cellars. A single rémueur may turn between 30,000 and 40,000 bottles per day.

Split. Bottle size, holding 187-ml., typically served on airplanes... in coach.

VINESSE STYLE

WINE SCULPTURES IN GLASS

“My passion is to create an original glass sculpture that takes your mind on a journey inside of it, just like the brilliance and scintillation of a diamond.”

So says Jack Storms, a brilliant art glass sculptor whose works can be found at a dozen galleries around the United States, including RASgalleries in the Napa Valley town of Yountville.

Storms’ pieces are meticulously hand-sculpted using a cold glass process known by only a handful of artists around the world, and can take as long as six weeks to create.

“Many people see cold worked glass as being very technical and distant from the human experience,” Storms says. “I try to overcome that and seek to make a bridge

from myself to the work. I strive to bring a sense of organic nature to all of my pieces.”

Storms creates glass sculptures in numerous shapes, but at the RASgalleries, it’s the Bella Vino bottles (shown here) and wine glass sculptures that invariably catch the eye of visiting wine tourists.

To learn more about Storms’ art, visit his Web site at jackstorms.com. There, you’ll also find a list of other galleries that sell his pieces. For more information on the gallery in Yountville, go to rasgalleries.com.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

Santa Rita Hills



The official name of the Santa Rita Hills growing area is "Sta. Rita Hills."

The Grinch who stole Christmas must have come up with that idea, since "Sta." looks much more like an abbreviation for "Station" than "Santa." But we're not here to argue about abbreviations; we're here to tell you about this eight-year-old appellation in California's Santa Barbara County.

The flavor, intensity and complexity of Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir and Chardonnay come from a combination of unique east-west coastal valleys, passionate winegrowers and modern winegrowing techniques. Cool weather, fog, wind and soils limit vine vigor and crop yield, and intensify the flavors of the resulting wines.

The two east-west oriented valleys are formed by the Purisima Hills to the north, the Santa Rosa Hills to the south, and the Santa Ynez River flowing between them to the nearby Pacific Ocean. The valleys and

hillsides represent some of the most incredible soils and unique climatic influences in the world.

Although the appellation contains a few of the more revered older Pinot Noir vineyards in the state, many of the vineyards are distinct from those older winegrowing areas. Because most of the vineyards have been planted in the last two decades, growers have been able to use modern trellising and newly available "cultivars" or clones of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The Sta. Rita Hills appellation encompasses 30,720 acres, of which around 1,900 presently are planted to grapevines. Of that acreage, 81.4% is devoted to Pinot Noir and 16.8% to Chardonnay. Just about all of the rest is devoted to Syrah.

In Oregon's Willamette Valley, one of the world's great Pinot Noir regions, the wines exude earthy and tobacco-like qualities. In Sta. Rita Hills, dark berry and spice flavors dominate.

Expect to hear a great deal about this emerging appellation. Just remember that "Sta." is short for "Santa."

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“Great people talk about ideas, average people talk about things, and small people talk about wine.”

— Author Fran Lebowitz, who obviously needs to get a life

Is global warming going to have any impact on wines from England? I have a friend who lives there, and she says the wines are getting better and better.

She’s right. As parts of the country get more days of sunshine, growing winegrapes becomes a possibility. Right now, we’re seeing a big improvement in the sparkling wines, and don’t be surprised if you start hearing about table wines made from the Madeline Angevine variety. It’s widely planted in England, and recent vintages have been quite good because the grapes finally are getting enough sunshine to ripen fully.

The Zinfandel Advocates & Producers in Nevada County, Calif., has established a \$500,000 scholarship endowment for the Sonoma State University Wine Business Institute’s MBA program to honor the organization’s founder, Donn Reisen. “By providing a worthy and needy student with funds to pursue an MBA degree from the SSU Wine Business Institute, the Donn P. Reisen Scholarship seeks to memorialize the contributions Donn made to the advancement of the California wine industry and to the enhancement of people’s understanding and appreciation for fine wine the world over,” said Julie Ann Kodmur, spokeswoman for Zinfandel Advocates & Producers.



Did you buy too much Pinot Noir for Thanksgiving? First of all, you can never buy too much Pinot Noir. But if you do have some left over following the big holiday feast, take solace in the fact that the variety is among the most versatile when it comes to pairing with food. Try it with grilled salmon, roast chicken, roast beef sandwiches, roasted duck, grilled pork tenderloin, or mustard-coated chicken thighs.



Sonoma County’s Ferrari-Carano winery has long practiced sustainable farming techniques to help protect the land. Don and Rhonda Carano realized that to achieve their goal of producing memorable wines of outstanding quality, they needed to start in the vineyards and not focus solely on the winemaking. Inspired to meet their present goals while preserving the land for future generations, they made the commitment to implement sustainable farming techniques from vineyard to bottle. Among numerous initiatives, Ferrari-Carano ensures natural crop nutrition by recycling organic matter (such as discarded and collected grape stems) for use as mulch in the vineyards, and planting cover crops such as mustard, herbs, wildflowers and olive tree orchards. These practices add back desirable, rich, moist and long-lasting nutrients to the soil and help prevent soil erosion, and also attract advantageous insects which help to naturally resist pest and disease attacks from undesirable species.

80

Weight, in pounds, of a typical French oak barrel when it’s empty. When filled with wine, it will weigh approximately 600 pounds.

1,699

Number of cases of 2005 Kenwood Artist Series Cabernet Sauvignon produced. For details on this year’s featured artist, turn to “Cellarmaster” on page 3.

The Stags Leap Winegrowers Association in the Napa Valley has released its 13th annual “Appellation Collection,” consisting of 17 bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon — one from each member of the association, crafted from grapes harvested in 2005. The 2005 vintage was described as “beautiful” by Shafer Vineyards winemaker Elias Fernandez. “It served up what I see as the true, delicious hallmarks of Stags Leap District wines in spades — a sweet, juicy core of fruit and ripe, velvety tannins,” he said. “The wines are classic Stags Leap District.” Just 200 sets of the wines, some made in extremely small quantities, were offered through November 30. The price: \$1,375.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

ECLECTIC HOLIDAY FARE

When it comes to selecting wines to serve with those multi-dish holiday meals, many wine writers take the easy way out and suggest: “Drink what you like.”

Gee, thanks for *that* advice!

Truthfully, there is some merit to that approach. After all, drinking wine should be about enjoyment, not a complicated academic endeavor. However, with just a little advance planning, the “pig-out” can be elevated to a “culinary feast.”

Following are a few general guidelines. Each one that you choose to embrace will enhance the meal and make it more memorable... in a good way.

- **Talking turkey.** Let’s face it: Most turkey meat is dry, and it gets drier with each succeeding day in the refrigerator. So, when turkey is on the plate, a juicy, mouth-watering wine should be in the glass. Good options include Zinfandel, Beaujolais Nouveau and Pinot Noir.

- **Butter beware.** We’re not talking about a Butterball turkey, but rather that delicious dairy product that finds its way into (or onto) so many holiday dishes (mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, dinner rolls). If you throw cholesterol caution to the wind during the holidays, a rich, buttery Chardonnay is called for.

- **Compare and contrast.** If a creamy wine next to a cream sauce or creamy dressing is just too much... cream... for you, take an alternate approach: Serve a

wine with a contrasting crisp-and-clean quality. Examples: Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and Gewurztraminer.

- **Sugar and spice and everything nice.** Some holiday dishes are on the sweet side, and that’s even before dessert. Wines with a touch of sweetness make wonderful pairing partners, so look for “off-dry” or “semi-sweet” bottlings of the aforementioned Riesling or Gewurztraminer. Another

tasty option: sparkling Muscat Canelli, otherwise known as Asti Spumante.

The holidays are special times. The meals we share with loved ones should never be taken for granted. That goes for the food... and for the wine.



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CREATE-YOUR-OWN RISOTTO

Risotto is one of those dishes that you can make your own by choosing ingredients to complement the basic recipe. These “add-ons” can include everything from sausage to shrimp, and from prosciutto to mushrooms. The recipe that follows is delicious as is, and matches beautifully with Chardonnay. It makes 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 cup minced onion
- 2 cups Arborio rice
- 3/4 cup Chardonnay
- 6 cups chicken stock (keep heated)
- 6 Tbs. butter
- 1/2 tsp. saffron threads, crumbled
- 1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Zest of 1 lemon

Preparation

1. In a heavy saucepan over medium heat, cook onion in half of the butter, stirring occasionally for about 4 minutes.
2. Add the rice and stir to coat with butter. Add the Chardonnay and simmer, stirring until reduced by half. Add 1/2 cup of heated stock and simmer until almost all of the liquid is absorbed.
3. Stirring constantly, add about 5 cups of the stock, 1/2 cup at a time, waiting until the rice has absorbed all of the liquid before adding the next portion. (Note: This will take about 25 minutes.) The risotto should be creamy but still al dente.
4. In a small bowl, combine the saffron with 1/4 cup of stock, then stir into hot rice. Add remaining butter, Parmesan cheese and lemon zest, and stir gently to combine. Serve immediately.

GARGANELLI WITH ITALIAN SAUSAGE & BLACK TRUFFLE

This recipe, which makes 6 servings, is courtesy of Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery in Sonoma County. The dish matches perfectly with Zinfandel.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. Garganelli pasta, cooked al dente
- 4 Italian sausages, not in casings
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/3 cup white wine
- 1 cup cream
- 2 preserved black truffles
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- Salt and white pepper, to taste
- Parmesan cheese, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preparation

1. In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat.
2. Add sausage, garlic, onions and bay leaves, and cook for 15 minutes.
3. Add white wine and reduce.
4. Stir in cream, truffles and butter. Add salt and white pepper.
5. Add pasta to skillet and toss. Stir in Parmesan cheese and ground pepper.

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