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Volume 18

Number 5

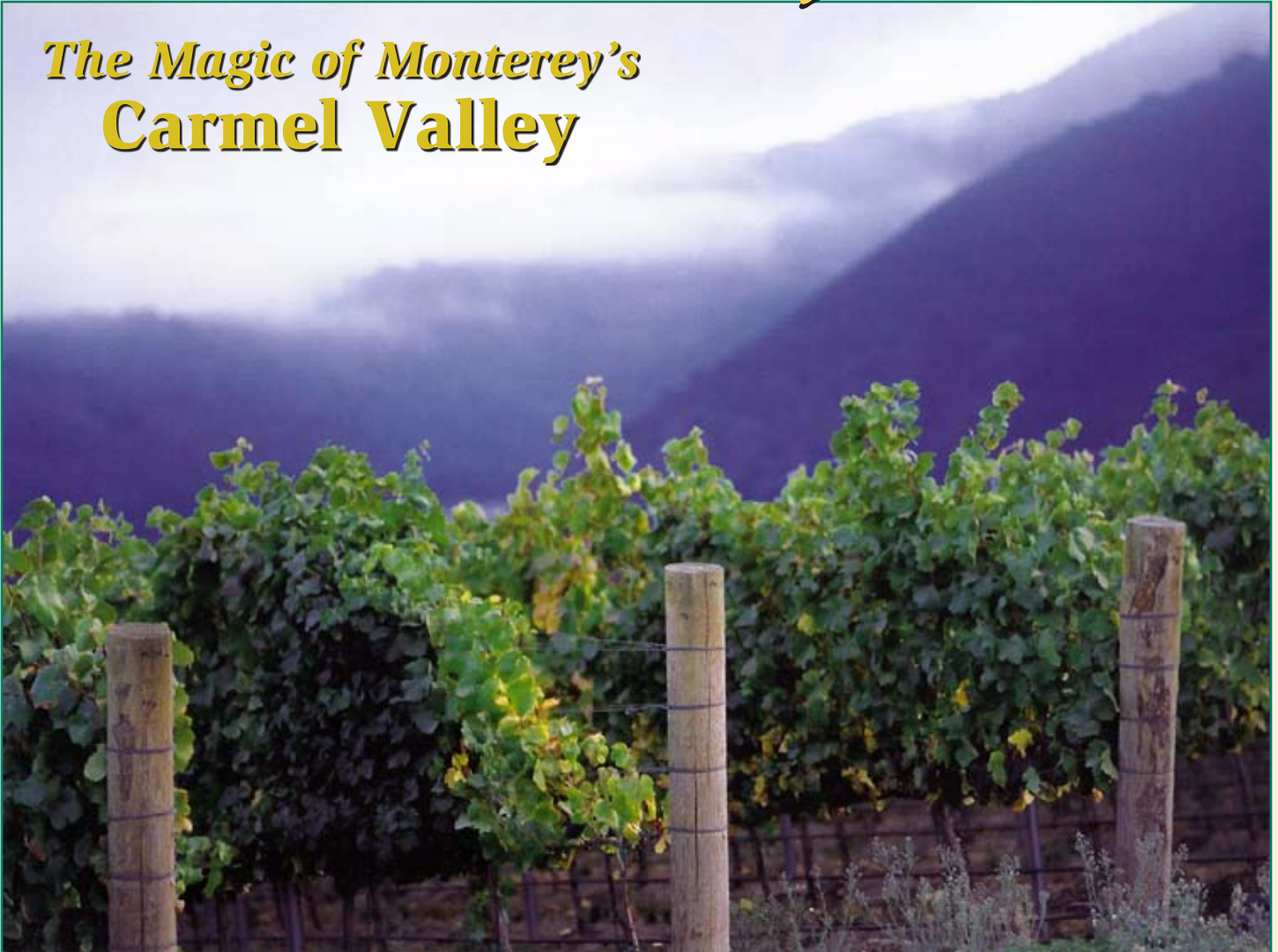
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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

The Magic of Monterey's Carmel Valley



*Where to Plan a Memorable
Wine Country Wedding*

*Spa Treatments That
Specialize in Bubbly Bliss*

*Uncovering the Vinous
Secrets of Suisun Valley*

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Intrepid Wine Enthusiast, Chief Taster and Winehound:
Martin Stewart

Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):
Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:
Robert Johnson









Wine Steward:
Katie Montgomery

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

In Praise of Zinfandel

By Robert Johnson

Is there any winegrape that is more versatile than the variety that California claims as its own — Zinfandel?

No. Thanks for reading, and we'll see you next month...

What's that? We have some more space to fill? Okay...

Simply stated, no other grape is used to make as many different styles of wine as can (and does!) Zinfandel.

Consider the smorgasbord of possibilities...

• **Dry, red wine** — Zinfandel is a full-bodied, jammy, spicy wine that matches well with summer barbecue fare, Asian cuisine and various smoked meats.

• **Dry or off-dry rosé-style wine** — In recent years, more and more vintners have used Zinfandel grapes to make thirst-quenching rosé wines: wines that fall somewhere between red and white on the vinous color spectrum. Even wine snobs agree that such wines, especially when chilled, make refreshing hot weather quaffers. They also match amazingly well with a wide spectrum of food, from simple party fare like hot dogs and hamburgers to more sophisticated

Mediterranean cuisine.

• **Sweet blush wine** — White Zinfandel and Chardonnay run a neck-and-neck race year after year in bar/lounge popularity contests. Pioneered by California's Sutter Home Winery, White Zin endures askance glances from wine snobs, yet inarguably has introduced millions of people to the world of fine wines — people who never would have ventured beyond Bartles and Jaymes otherwise.

• **Sweet dessert wine** — Late Harvest Zinfandel is a lush, almost syrupy wine that sticks to one's teeth and satisfies one's sweet tooth. It's a sumptuous after-dinner sipper.

• **Sweet Port-style wine** — Some vintners take the sweetness quotient one step further and use Zinfandel grapes to produce slick, smooth and seductive Port-style bottlings with lush layers of raisiny, dark fruit flavors. (We suggest you throw a couple logs in the fireplace and pour a couple glasses of Zinfandel Port... but we won't be responsible for what happens next!)

Zinfandel's heritage is in dispute. Long thought to be native to California, there was conjecture at one time that it was brought to the Golden State from the East Coast. More recently, DNA fingerprinting has identified it as being almost identical to Italy's Primitivo grape.

We may not know where it came from, but there is no denying Zinfandel's versatility, drinkability or popularity.





3 Tips for Aspiring Wine Collectors

People collect wine for one of two reasons: as an investment, or to have some truly memorable drinking experiences.

Given how the recession has changed the marketplace, investing is an iffy proposition today. There's no guarantee that big-ticket wines will appreciate in value to the degree that they're worth the investment in storage space, temperature-control cooling, etc.

But if your goal is to have an array of top-quality wines on hand for special occasions, the following tips should help...

1. Figure out what you like. It makes no sense to collect wines that have received big ratings from Robert Parker or *Wine Spectator* if you, personally, don't like them. A lot of wine gets purchased based on the idea that the purchaser *should* like them. When you think about it, that's a silly approach.

2. Network. Being a member of a wine club is a great idea because it exposes you to varieties and blends you may otherwise not encounter. Ask like-minded friends



what they're drinking. Engage sommeliers in conversation when you go out to eat. All of these sources can help you select wines that may be flying under the radar, which means you can secure them at decent prices.

3. Buy smart. In many cases, when you buy wine by the case, the seller will provide a 5 to 15 percent discount. If you want to stock up on a specific wine, it makes sense to take advantage of whatever discounts may be offered.



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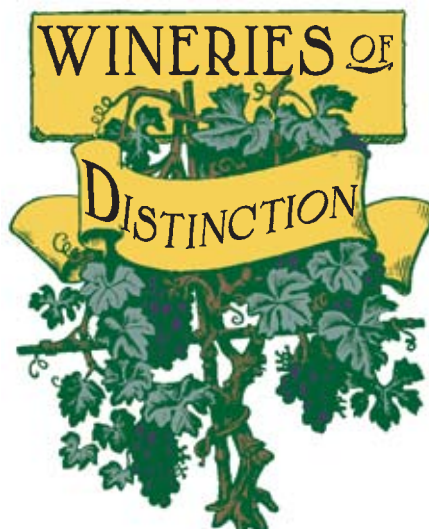
FREQUENCY:

Approximately Monthly

PRICE:

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You May Not Know Snowden, But You May Know Its Grapes

If you'd like to try a bottle of the highly acclaimed Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from Snowden Vineyards, be prepared to pay the price.

The winery already was rated among Napa Valley's elite by *Wine Spectator* magazine, but when "Wine Advocate" Robert Parker tasted a barrel sample of the 2007 vintage and gave it a rating in the 94-96 range, the wine suddenly



Scott Snowden



went from popular to highly allocated.

The Snowden Ranch has been growing winegrapes since at least the 1870s. There is no known record of the original extent of the vineyards, but there are several spots in what now are deep woods where the hillside rows of forgotten vineyards and orchards can be seen among massive tree trunks.

Prohibition resulted in most Napa Valley vineyards being replanted to “traveling” varieties of grapes that were durable enough to be shipped to other parts of the country, where people could legally make them into wine in their homes. At Snowden Ranch, the vineyards moved from Zinfandel to Palomino, Petite Sirah and Carignane.

When Wayne and Virginia Snowden acquired the property in 1955, there were fewer than seven acres of vineyards, along with about six acres of prunes, walnuts, plums and peaches. The grapes were sold to local cooperative wineries, where they went into the two great cuvees of the day: “mixed white” and “mixed black.”

The Snowdens began to expand the vineyards in 1962. Cabernet Sauvignon was first planted on the property at that time, using cuttings from the Fay Vineyard in what later would become the Stags Leap District. The new plantings were “dry farmed,”

except for a small amount of water transported up the hill in garbage cans tied into the backseat of a 1952 Oldsmobile two-door convertible.

Wayne Snowden died in 1977, and grape production was minimal for the next few years. Scott and Randy Snowden — Wayne and Virginia’s sons — assumed responsibility for the vineyards in 1981. At that time, the vineyards and orchards were replanted to Cabernet Sauvignon. That vineyard is now called The Brothers Vineyard and was the first to acquire budwood from the new Jordan Vineyard near Healdsburg.

For almost a decade, all of Snowden’s grapes were sold to Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars. During that period, the family worked closely with Warren Winiarski, owner of Stag’s Leap, and his viticultural consultant Danny Schuester on the trellising, training and cropping of the vineyard — tracking cultural variables and correlating them to wine quality.

The family produced its first vintage of Snowden-branded wine in 1993. Since then, they’ve continued to sell a portion of their grapes to Silver Oak Wine Cellars, Frank Family Vineyard, Viader, and most recently, to David Ramey, all of which produce wines that are highly allocated.

Just like Snowden’s own Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.

Four Seasons



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25 Minutes from Napa, a Wine Area Less Traveled



TOURING TIPS

It's located just minutes off one of northern California's busiest thoroughfares, yet it has managed to hang on to its agricultural roots and emerge as a hidden gem of North Coast wine country.

The Suisun Valley is just north of Interstate 80, the road that connects the Bay Area with Reno and beyond, basically between the towns of Cordelia and Fairfield. It is bounded on three sides by roads that lead to the Napa Valley, 25 minutes away, and offers its own style of wine-

tasting adventure. With its country roads and low traffic volume, you won't even think about the super-highway just minutes to the south.

The majority of wineries in Suisun Valley are family and/or locally owned. It's quite common to encounter a proprietor or winemaker during a visit, and it's this kind of one-on-one interaction — which is becoming increasingly rare in Napa — that makes a visit to Suisun Valley enjoyable and memorable.

There currently are five locations open for wine tasting in the valley: LedgeWood Creek Winery, Vezer Family Vineyard Tasting Room, Wooden Valley Winery, Blue Victorian Vineyards, and the Suisun Valley Wine Cooperative. All are staffed by friendly people who are knowledgeable and genuinely interested in the valley and the wines they serve.

Tasting at most locations is complimentary, and if a fee is

charged, it's generally applied to a purchase.

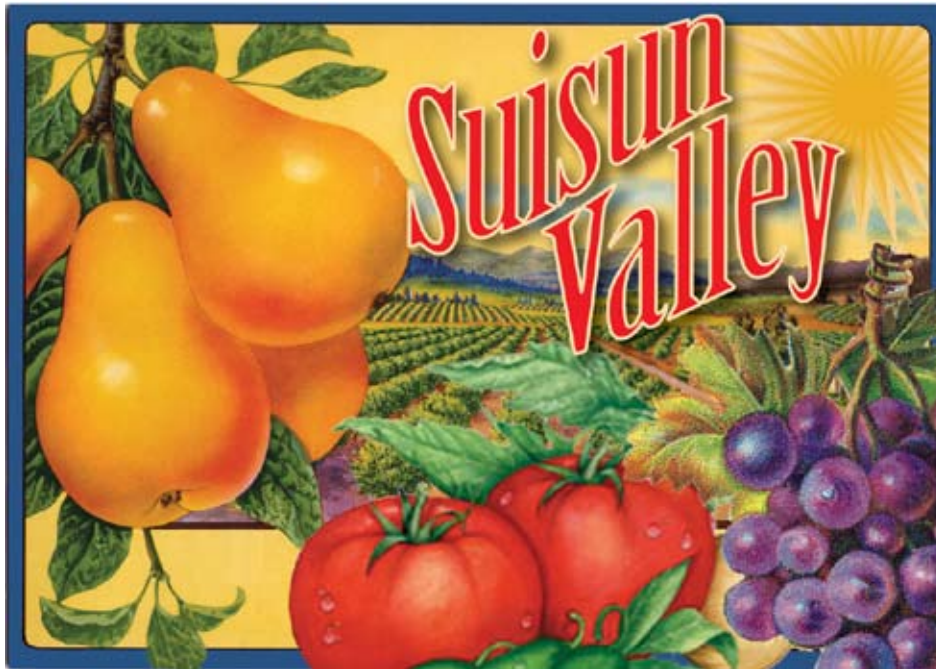
LedgeWood Creek Winery has an inviting picnic area and three wines crafted specifically for outdoor enjoyment: PicniQue Red, PicniQue Chardonnay and PicniQue Sauvignon Blanc. Among its other bottlings is a tasty Viognier.

The Vezer Family Vineyard offers handcrafted wines in a family setting with beautiful gardens and a European Deli on-site. The speciality of the house is a wine known as "La Salette," a red wine that the *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition described as being "in a class of its own."

The family also operates nearby Blue Victorian Vineyards, providing a unique setting for a wine-tasting expedition, amidst the vineyards.

Wooden Valley Winery is celebrating its 75th year, and the tasting room offers a range of varietal wines to sample, along with gourmet food and

VINESSE

Hot
LIST

wine accessories. The vine-covered picnic area is popular with visitors during the warm seasons.

For three generations, the Lanza family has worked the vineyards of Wooden Valley Winery to bring forward wines that showcase the varied microclimates of Suisun Valley. The winery's unusual tasting bar is crafted from very large, old redwood casks — an attraction in itself.

The Suisun Valley Wine Cooperative offers an enjoyable, relaxed wine-tasting experience, with wines poured by winemakers and growers from five distinct, family-owned wineries: Blacksmith Cellars, King Andrews Vineyards, Mangels Vineyards, Sunset Cellars and Winterhawk.

A great time to visit the Suisun Valley is during the annual Art on the Vine festival, which this year will be held June 5-6. In addition to the art, there will be food, wine tasting and live music.

On the 4th of July, Wooden Valley Winery will host an event dubbed Reds, Whites and Blues, offering plenty of wine, barrel samples, food and music.

The driving time from either San Francisco or Sacramento to the Suisun Valley is approximately 45 minutes, and there are dozens of nearby hotels and motels along I-80. Exit onto

Suisun Valley Road or Abernathy Road, and this under-the-radar wine region will be mere minutes away.

For Further Information

Ledgewood Creek Winery
4589 Abernathy Rd.
707-426-4424
Open Daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
www.ledgewoodcreek.com

Blue Victorian Vineyards
5071 Suisun Valley Rd.
707-422-8025
Open Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
www.bluevictorian.com

Vezer Family Vineyard
2522 Mankas Corner Rd., Suite V
707-429-3958
Open Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
www.vezerfamilyvineyard.com

Wooden Valley Winery
4756 Suisun Valley Rd.
707-864-0730
Open Weekends, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
www.woodenvalley.com

Suisun Valley Wine Cooperative
4495 Suisun Valley Rd.
707-864-3135
Open Thursday-Sunday,
12 noon-5 p.m.,
or By Appointment
www.svwincoop.com

Art on the Vine Festival
June 5-6
www.fairfieldvisualarts.org/events/aov

1 Hot Alsatian Wine List. There may be no restaurant in the United States with a better selection of Alsatian wines than Everest in Chicago. The restaurant is aptly named, since it's perched on the 40th floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange tower. Refined French classics are the specialty of Alsatian-born chef Jean Joho, and the wine list complements the menu beautifully.

www.everestrestaurant.com

2 Hot Spa Treatments. You have to love spas that utilize our favorite beverage in their special treatments. At the Ritz-Carlton's Eau Spa in Palm Beach, Fla., the 60-minute Champagne Shimmer Body Luster is an exfoliation process that combines bubbly with brown sugar crystals. And at the new Allison Spa in Newberg, Oregon, the Mimosa Massage utilizes silky sparkling wine oil — and guests can sip a mimosa during the treatment.

www.eauspa.com

www.theallison.com/spa.php

3 Hot Hotel Bar. Sotano — Spanish for “cellar” — is a wonderful lounge at the Hilton South Wharf in Melbourne, Australia. This isn't your typical Hilton lobby bar with a wine list consisting of 10 or 12 “usual suspects.” This lofty space has a climate-controlled “cage” over the bar, housing 2,000 bottles of wine. The Catalan snacks, a.k.a. tapas, provide some fabulous food-and-wine pairing possibilities.

www.sotano.com.au/



Quinta. A wine-producing estate or vineyard in Portugal.

Residual sugar. Unfermented sugars in a finished wine, which add sweetness to the flavor. Among wines known for possessing residual sugar are White Zinfandel, dessert-style wines, ice wines and Port.

Stainless steel. A material, like oak, used for aging wine. Unlike oak barrels, however, stainless steel tanks add no aroma or flavor components to the wine; they are said to be “neutral.”

Terroir. A French term which describes the total environment (soil, weather, etc.) associated with any grape-growing site or region.

Ull de Llebre. The Catalan name for the Tempranillo grape, used in Spain to make an array of red table wines.

Vigna. The Italian word for vineyard.

VINESSE STYLE

BRIDE'S CHOICE AWARDS

Two long-time Sonoma County wine country destinations have been selected to receive 2010 Bride's Choice Awards by WeddingWire and Martha Stewart Weddings.

The awards recognize the top 5 percent all-inclusive wedding venues, defined as demonstrating excellence in quality, service and professionalism. And making this year's list are the Vintners Inn and John Ash & Co. Restaurant in the Sonoma County town of Healdsburg.

Surrounded by the scenic northern California landscape, lush vineyards and beautifully landscaped grounds with courtyards and fountains, Vintners Inn is home to 44 luxurious rooms and suites, along with a state-of-the-art event center.

It's also the long-time home of one of wine country's most acclaimed restaurants, John Ash & Co., as well as The Front Room Bar & Lounge.

“We are particularly proud of the hospitality team here at Vintners Inn,” says General Manager Percy Brandon. “We would not have received this coveted award without the help and cooperation of many of our employees,



especially Cathy Reynolds, our wedding specialist.

To learn more about the Vintners Inn and its wedding packages, go online to www.vintnersinn.com.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

Carmel Valley



With vineyards dating back to the 1800s, Carmel Valley is a rugged, rustic California winegrowing region west of Monterey and Pebble Beach.

Carmel Valley received its designation as an American Viticultural Area in 1983 and encompasses more than 19,000 acres, with about 300 of those acres of winegrapes under cultivation. The vineyards are predominantly within Carmel Valley proper and the Cachagua Valley.

Cachagua Valley's unique mountainous setting sits high above the fog line along the coast, and exposes the grapes to a warmer overall climate. Average summer temperatures can reach into the 100s, with cool evenings often seeing the low 30s and 40s.

This dramatic swing in temperature extends the ripening time and growing season, allowing the grapes a slow maturation process that accommodates complexity in the fruit

and the wine.

The vineyards in the Carmel Valley AVA are planted mostly on mountainous terrain, with the highly prized San Andreas Fine Sandy Loam and the Arroyo Seco Gravelly Sandy Loam soils being predominant. These soil types provide ideal drainage and allow for optimal airflow through

the root system. They require minimal amounts of supplemental irrigation by the grower, and the results are healthy, vibrant grapes.

The Carmel Valley's terrain and climate are ideal for creating rich, full-bodied wines. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot comprise more than 70 percent of the grapes grown in the district. In addition, new vineyards in the valley are utilizing various microclimates within the AVA to plant Burgundian varietals such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot comprise more than 70% of the grapes planted.

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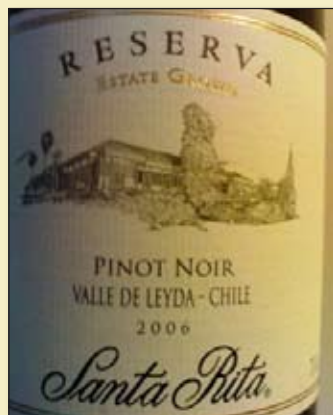
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Q We are new to wine, and find some of the red wines to be quite bitter. But we want to learn more, and were wondering what types of wine aren't so harsh.

A The bitterness you're experiencing comes from the tannin (or tannic acid) found in grape skins and oak barrels. When making red wines, it's traditional to leave the grape juice in contact with the skins, and most red wines are aged in oak barrels. Conversely, most white wines — with the exception of some Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc — have no skin contact during fermentation, and many are aged in stainless steel tanks. So, as you begin your wine journey, you would be well advised to concentrate on white varieties such as Riesling, Muscat Canelli, Gewurztraminer, Viognier and Chenin Blanc.

Growing numbers of California wineries are going green, and most have used the Sustainable Winegrowing Project as a model for their efforts. The vision of the SWP — as developed by the Wine Institute and California Association of Winegrape Growers — is long-term sustainability in the California wine community. To place the concept of sustainability into the context of winegrowing, the project defines sustainable winegrowing as growing and winemaking practices that are sensitive to the environment, responsive to the needs and interests of society at large, and economically feasible to implement and maintain.



We recently reported that the Santa Rita Hills sub-appellation in California's Central Coast region had adopted the use of the abbreviation "Sta. Rita Hills" for use on bottle labels. Here's the rest of the story: The decision to embrace the admittedly strange abbreviation was the result of an objection made by Chile's largest winery — Vina Santa Rita — whose owners felt that the name infringed on its trademark. According to *Wine Spectator*, the agreement to use the "Sta." abbreviation was brokered by veteran vintner Richard Sanford.

8-lbs., 2-oz.

Weight listed on the birth announcement for Anthony Riboli, born on May 9, 1974. Riboli is the winemaker for San Antonio Winery, located — believe it or not — in downtown Los Angeles, the only winery in the area that survived Prohibition. On the announcement, Riboli's length was listed as "slightly shorter than two Burgundy bottles."

Know your wine region: Can you name the five major growing areas of Burgundy? They are:

- Chablis
- Cote d'Or
- Cote Chalonnaise
- Maconnais
- Beaujolais

The Cote d'Or has two well-known sections of its own: Cote de Beaune in the south, and Cote de Nuits in the north. Burgundy's dominant grape varieties are Pinot Noir, Gamay (primarily in Beaujolais) and Chardonnay.

“Where and how a grapevine grows has a direct impact on the way a wine tastes. Everything that touches a vineyard contributes to a sense of place, beginning with the soil and climate and including the people involved and everything they do.”



— Napa Valley winemaker Cathy Corison, quoted in Bill Daley's "Uncorked" column in the *Chicago Tribune*

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

MEXICAN CUISINE

When Mexican fare is on the menu, most people automatically reach for an ice-cold *cerveza* (that's beer for those who dropped out of Spanish class before learning the really useful words).

And you know what? For a great many Mexican dishes — particularly those defined by their chili heat — beer is a good choice. Lighter-style beers, in particular, help put out the fire without compromising the flavor of the dish.

Be aware, however, that you also can enjoy wine with Mexican food. The pairings require a certain degree of precision, but the results are worth the effort.

It's not just the heat that needs to be addressed.

Mexican food — and Tex-Mex fare as well — may have assertive flavors that need a lively, rich wine to beat that chili heat while simultaneously complementing the twist of lime and matching the richness and body of cheese and avocado.

Sauvignon Blanc to the rescue! Rich and racy — a rare combination in winedom — the variety typically possesses



a solid acid backbone (think: refreshing) while exhibiting a nice cilantro-like herbaceousness. Renditions aged in oak barrels also are rich in texture, which further serves to enhance the wining-and-dining experience.

For red wine fans, Syrah can be a marvelous choice, as its meaty quality complements the rich brown sauces used in making enchiladas and other dishes.

And perhaps the most inspired choice of all: a dry rosé, which offers the lively acidity (and refreshing mouthfeel) of Sauvignon Blanc, and the fruit intensity and spice common to red varieties.

Wineries are making rosés out of any number of varieties these days, but particularly satisfying with Mexican food are rosés of Sangiovese, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel.

There's one more go-to wine when enjoying Mexican

fare or other dishes that possess a kick: sparkling wine. The flavors of bubbly are fairly neutral, but its effervescence makes it extremely refreshing.

It's an especially good choice with sizzling chicken fajitas or spicy fish tacos.

The next time you have Mexican food, consider saying no to *cerveza* and *si* to wine.

Light
& Sweet

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PRICE:

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STEAK IN MERLOT SAUCE

This classic dish from *The Grapevine* archives serves 2 and pairs beautifully with — what else? — Merlot.

Ingredients

- 2 filets mignon, about 1 inch thick
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/2 cup Merlot
- 3 tablespoons butter, divided

Preparation

1. Season the steaks on both sides with salt and pepper.
2. Put 2 tablespoons of butter in a small skillet. Turn heat to high. When the butter sizzles, lay the steaks in the skillet. Wait for the skillet to get hot again, then turn down heat to medium.
3. Sauté the steaks, moving them slightly with tongs so they don't stick, for 5 to 6 minutes per side. When steaks are crusty-charred and done to your liking, remove them from the pan with tongs and place them on dinner plates.
4. Immediately add the wine to the skillet. When the liquid boils, use a wooden spatula to un-stick any pieces of steak remaining, and stir them with the emerging sauce. Let the liquid boil until about 1/3 cup remains.
5. Take pan off heat. Add the last tablespoon of butter and mix it in by swirling the pan. Pour the sauce over the meat, and enjoy.



AVOCADO DIP

With the weather warming up, this dip — served with your favorite type of crackers — makes a tasty snack or before-dinner treat. Sparkling wine or a crisp Sauvignon Blanc make great pairing partners.

Ingredients

- 2 medium avocados, fully ripened, peeled and pitted
- 1 tomato, seeded and chopped
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat or light sour cream
- 2 tsp. lime juice
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 cup Mexican-style shredded Cheddar-Jack cheese (2% milk)
- Crackers

Preparation

1. Mash avocados with a fork in a medium bowl.
2. Add tomatoes, sour cream, lime juice and garlic powder, and mix well.
3. Spread mixture in a pie plate, sprinkle with cheese and cover.
4. Refrigerate several hours, or until chilled.
5. Serve with crackers.

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