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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

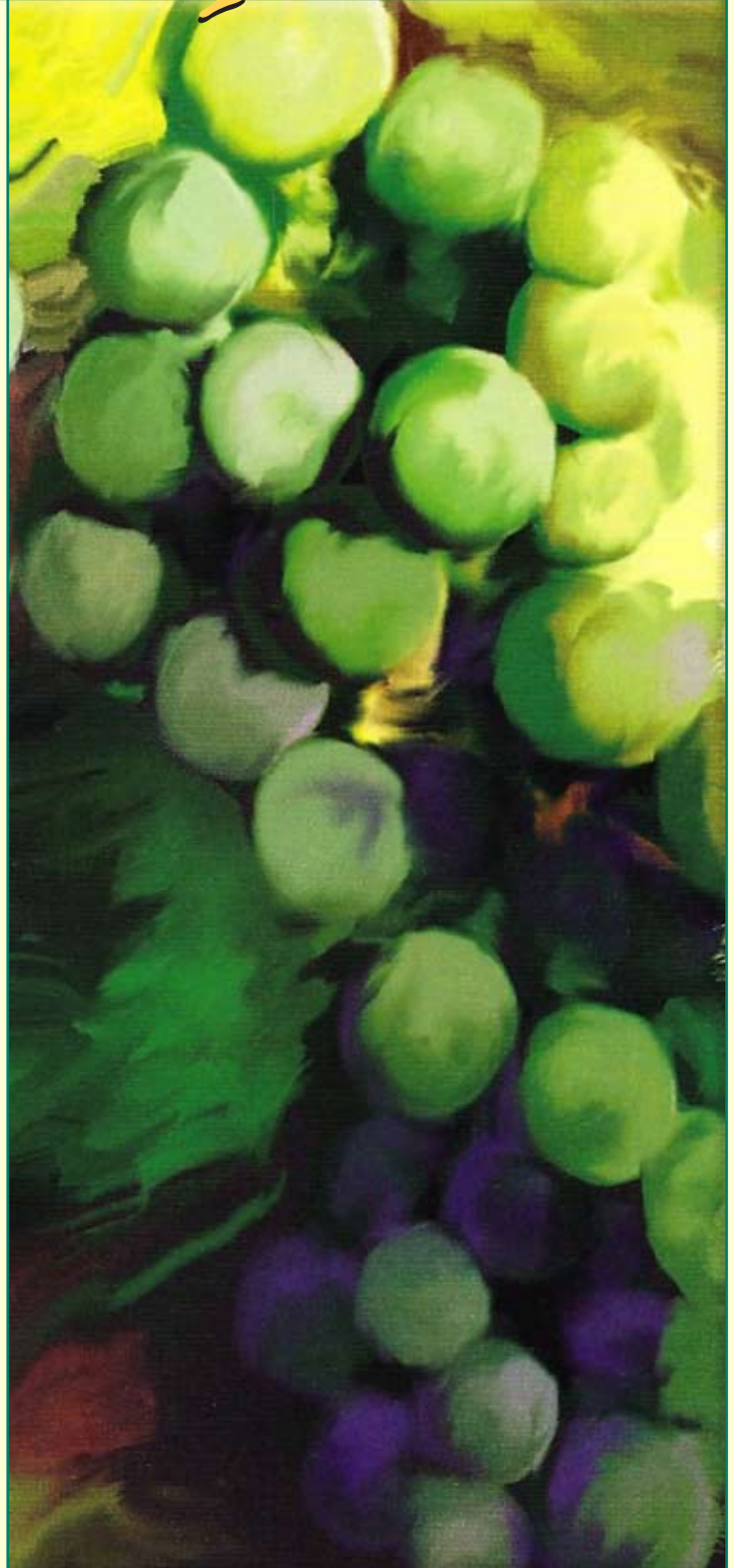
**Language of the Label:  
What Those Words  
Mean... and Don't Mean**

**South Africa: Soccer's  
World Cup Host Is an  
Emerging Wine Hotbed**

**Got \$1.5 Million? The  
Wine Lifestyle Could  
Be Yours in California**

**A Comprehensive Guide  
to Creating Pizza and  
Wine Pairing Memories**

***PLUS: What Makes Stark  
Wine Special... Sonoma's  
Rockpile AVA... Test Your  
Wine Knowledge... Make  
Fabulous Fish Tacos...  
and MORE!***



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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

### The Language of the Label

By Robert Johnson

*You can learn a lot from reading a wine label. You also can learn nothing at all.*

Let me explain.

Among the important pieces of information you can glean from perusing a label are the winery that made the wine, the region in which the grapes were grown, what year those grapes were grown, and the variety of the grapes.

Federal law also requires that the alcohol level be listed, along with other specific information (generally appearing in fine print) regarding where the wine was bottled and, if it's a non-domestic wine, who imported it.

But some of the language found on wine labels has little real meaning. It may be indicative of some sort of special treatment in the cellar or unusual source of the grapes used in making the wine... but then again, it may not.

In many cases, this type of verbiage is used primarily to market the wine — words or phrases that catch the eye and to which the brain reacts either favorably or with a desire to learn more. In essence, a wine label is like a tiny billboard; its main purpose is not to inform, but rather to sell.

And that's okay, as long as the end user — in this case, the wine drinker — has a clear understanding of the words and phrases used.

With an assist from veteran wine critic and writer Glen Frederiksen, I've compiled a list of words and phrases that you may encounter on a wine label, but which have no "legal" meaning. In no case are we asserting that wineries using these phrases are engaged in "bait-and-switch" tactics."

Rather, we're simply encouraging a "buyer beware" approach...

- **Reserve.** Infers that the wine received special treatment, either in the selection of the grapes or the use of oak barrels.

- **Cellar Select.** See: "Reserve."

- **Oak Aged.** Infers that the wine was aged in oak barrels; the truth could be that oak chips were used.

- **Unoaked.** Infers

that no oak barrels were used for aging.

- **Old Vine.** Infers that the wine was made from grapes grown on very old vines, but there is no accepted definition of "old."

- **Late Harvest.** Infers that the grapes used to make the wine were picked long after the "regular" harvest was completed, thus possessing high sugar levels.





## Test Your Wine Knowledge

**T**hink you know a lot about wine? Test your knowledge — and perhaps learn something new — with this quick quiz...

1. The ancient Romans were the first to identify grape varieties and understand that exposure to air could harm wine and hasten its aging. What did they add to their containers of wine to protect the liquid from air?
2. Who was the “father of California wine”?
3. What is a “Meritage” wine?
4. What do Brunello di Montalcino, Chianti Classico Riserva and Montepulciano d’Abruzzo all have in common — aside from being wines of Italy?
5. What is a commonly used name for Sauvignon Blanc?

To view the answers in Adobe Acrobat without turning your monitor upside-down, just rotate this page by

pressing (Control-Shift-+) or (Control-Shift-R).  
Mac users: (Command-Shift-+) or (Command-Shift-R).

1. Olive oil, which would float to the top of the container, forming a protective layer.  
2. Franciscan monk Junipero Serra, who established missions — and planted grapevines — up and down the California coast during the 1770s.  
3. It’s a Bordeaux-style blend crafted mainly by California vintners. By the way, the word often is mispronounced in a French-sounding way: mare-ih-TAJ. It actually rhymes with heritage, and was invented as a melding of the words merit and heritage.  
4. All are made from the Sangiovese grape. (To read more about Sangiovese, turn to this issue’s “Food & Wine Pairing” feature on page 11.)  
5. Fume Blanc, christened by Napa Valley wine pioneer Robert Mondavi to distinguish his then-new dry-style bottling from a sweet style of Sauvignon Blanc he already was making. Today, some vintners use the Fume Blanc name to designate a Sauvignon Blanc wine that has been aged in oak barrels, but there is no ‘legal’ definition of Fume Blanc.



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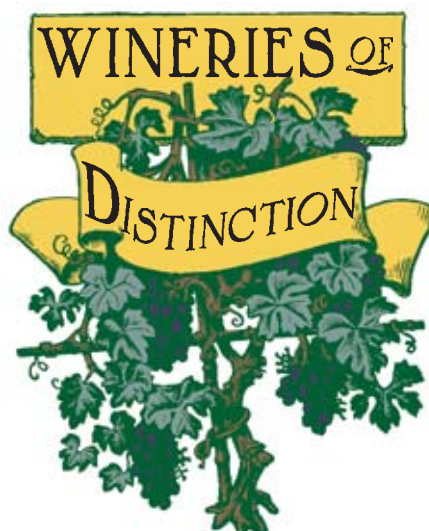
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## Stark: Making Wine for All the Right Reasons

***H**ow many vintners see their wines make it all the way to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.? You can count Christian Stark among the few.*

Stark's family tree is populated by numerous artisans and merchants, so it seemed to be in the cards that he would end up doing something creative

with his hands. While attending the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, it became quite apparent to him that where one found good food, one also found good wine.

After graduation, he spent time as a musician, a carpenter and a graphic designer. But the lure of the wine world was strong, and Stark also became a bit of a cellar rat, learning all aspects of the wine business from making the wine to selling it. In 2000, he moved to Sonoma County.



Dry Creek Valley

David Georges, the winemaker for Davis Bynum, soon became a mentor in the cellar. Stark supplemented that practical experience with viticultural classes at the University of California at Davis. Ultimately, however, he says nothing beats “grape-stained, hands-on experience.”

Stark began making his own wine in 2003. The first bottling bearing the Stark Wine label was a 2003 vintage Syrah, crafted from grapes grown in Sonoma County’s Dry Creek Valley.

To this day, he concentrates on Rhone varietals — Syrah and Viognier — and always manages to create something that is fresh and exciting. As Stark puts it, “We produce and sell ultra-premium wine made with grapes grown by reputable farmers with proven track records for growing fruit of exceptional quality.”

Currently in release are two bottlings of Syrah and one of Viognier.

One Syrah is made from fruit grown in Dry Creek’s Teldeschi and Unti Vineyards, while the other — a “Reserve”-style wine — is a blend of the best vineyards from the Teldeschi Vineyard.

The Viognier comes from another acclaimed Dry Creek vineyard — Damiano — and is a wonderful warm weather wine that pairs perfectly with lighter seafood dishes and salads.

Stark lives in the town of Geyserville with his wife Jen and their son Julian. The Starks love to cook for friends and family, and it’s not unusual for

their regular Saturday evening get-togethers to morph into late-night jam sessions. It’s a way that Christian can perpetuate his musical talent.

But it’s his talent in the cellar that pays the bills, and come June 10-12, Stark’s wines will be featured, along with those of 16 other “Rhone Rangers,” at the Smithsonian

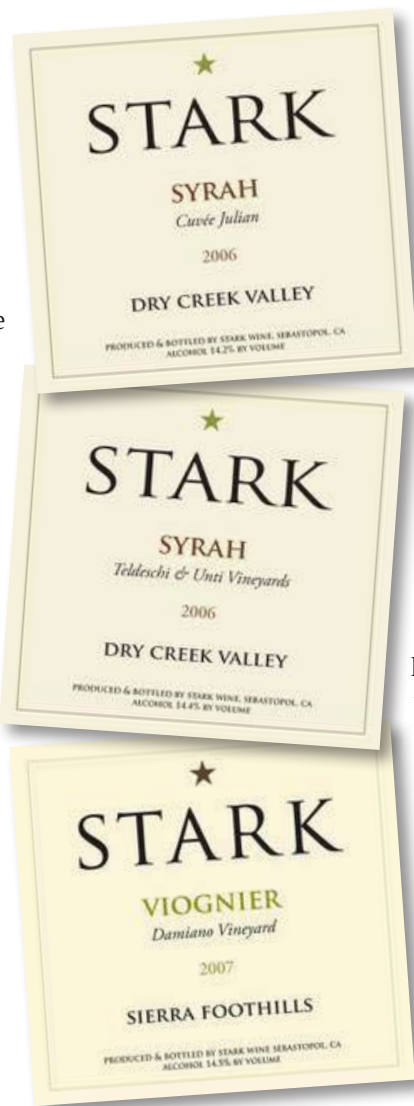
Sustainable Seafood Culinary Weekend in our nation’s capital. The event will take place at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History.

The highlight of the event promises to be the Friday reception at which the “Rhone Rangers” will pour more than 60 wines, and seafood specialties will be prepared by more than 30 noted chefs.

It’s one of those high-profile events that should bring more attention to some of California’s under-appreciated wine varieties and wine estates. It will be worthy acclaim for Christian Stark, who is pursuing his passion for winemaking for all the right reasons.

“Stark Wine reflects our passion for family, community, art and sustainability,” he explains. “We strive to create an environment that develops and supports relationships among family, friends and our greater community.”

Toward those ends, Stark uses “green” materials whenever practical, works with growers who employ sustainable farming practices, and donates 5 percent of profits to art education.



## Four Seasons



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# SOUTH AFRICAN WINE: THE CURE FOR WORLD CUP FEVER



**A**t the southern tip of Africa, where two mighty oceans meet in the shadow of Table Mountain, lies what South Africans call “the fairest cape in the world.”

Known locally as the Mother City, Cape Town is the gateway to the South African winelands and one of the great wine capitals of the world. There, the cultures of Africa, Europe and the East have met and mingled for more than 350 years, shaping a city both ancient and modern, rich in colorful history and culturally diverse.

And come June 11, much of the world will be introduced to Cape Town and other South Africa locales as the country plays host to soccer’s World Cup. Many Africans hope the exposure will help combat the continent’s stereotypes.

The Cape has witnessed many momentous events in South Africa’s history, including the landing of the Dutch settlers in 1652, the British invasion during the Napoleonic Wars, and the rebellion into the interior

known as the Groot Trek. This was where, in 1990, Nelson Mandela took his first historic walk to freedom. And it is where, four years later, Archbishop Tutu described the new South African nation as “the rainbow people of God,” and the “rainbow nation” was born.

Today, South Africa is a peaceful democracy, a vibrant and exciting country of enormous diversity. And this variety is reflected in the country’s wines.

With a winemaking history dating back some 350 years, the industry reflects the classicism of the Old World but also is influenced by the fruit-driven style of the New World. This rare combination makes for wines which are complex yet accessible, refined yet powerful, eloquently expressing the unique terroir and people of the Cape.

White varieties account for 56 percent of the winegrape plantings in South Africa, with Chenin Blanc being the most popular. A “style” of South African Chenin Blanc is impossible to identify, however, because the variety takes on a different personality in each region it’s grown.



## TOURING TIPS

That’s one of the reasons the wine industry adopted the slogan, “Variety is in our nature.”

Among red varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon has taken the lead in grapevine acreage, followed by Syrah and Merlot. Ranked fourth is South Africa’s “signature” wine, a cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsault known as Pinotage.

You’re likely to see the names “Chenin Blanc” and “Pinotage” on bottles shipped to the United States, but in South Africa, these varieties typically are referred to as “Steen” and “Hermitage,” respectively.

In the last few years, a dynamic new vision has given momentum to changes within an industry which is

innovation driven, market directed and globally competitive. This new ethos has seen the wine industry emerge as a global enterprise with strong cultural roots and a sense of social responsibility.

With the advent of democracy, the opening of new markets and exposure to international trends, South Africa now competes with confidence on the world wine stage. A new generation of passionate winemakers, many possessing experience with harvests around the globe, are keen to learn, experiment and consolidate.

There also has been a focused shift from grape farming to winegrowing. Rather than striving for maximum tonnage at harvest time, growers are concentrating on the quality of the fruit, and thus are able to command deserved higher prices from the wineries.

The Cape wine-growing areas, situated in the narrow viticultural zone of the Southern Hemisphere, mainly have a Mediterranean climate. The mountain slopes and valleys form the ideal habitat for the *Vitis vinifera* grapes, the products of which have given pleasure to man for many centuries. Long, sun-drenched

summers and mild, wet winters contribute to the ideal conditions for viticulture at the Cape.

The country takes the industry very seriously, recognizing that wine can help break down barriers of communication and alter long-held perceptions. The South African wine industry is backed by a state research body, the Nietvoorbij Institute for Viticulture and Oenology, employing some 250 people. Also, the departments of viniculture and viticulture at the University of Stellenbosch and at Elsenburg Agricultural College offer cellar technology.

South Africa has done an excellent job of developing a series of “wine routes” that are useful to visitors in planning vacations. See the accompanying box for a list of the wine areas and trade groups, along with contact information.

As you watch the World Cup on television over the next month or so, keep in mind that virtually anywhere a game is being played, a “wine route” is not far away, and that the wines being made in South Africa are world-class in every way.

# VINESSE

## Hot LIST

**1 Hot New Wine Label.** The latest addition to Ledson Winery’s “Harmony Collection” of wines is “Baby Bull” Zinfandel, named in honor of baseball hall of famer Orlando Cepeda. The 1958 National League Rookie of the Year was one of the first Latino players to break through in the major leagues, and his 17-year career included an MVP season in 1967. Cepeda’s nickname was “Baby Bull,” and proceeds from the sale of “Baby Bull” Zinfandel will benefit the Harmony Foundation for Children and the San Francisco Junior Giants Program.  
707-537-3829

**2 Hot Winery Tour.** There’s nothing like drinking wine in the place where it’s made, and when it comes to sparkling wine, that calls for a trip to the Champagne region of France. Once of the best Champagne house tours is offered by Mumm in Rheims. The price: about \$13 U.S.  
[www.mumm.com](http://www.mumm.com)

**3 Hot Summer Read.** For 20 years, Sutter Home Winery has sponsored the “Build a Better Burger Contest,” which this year will award a \$100,000 prize. To mark the anniversary of the contest, contest judge James McNair and Sutter Home executive chef Jeffrey Starr have written a wonderful book called *Burger Parties* (Ten Speed Press). It’s packed with recipes that are perfect for summertime grilling.  
[www.sutterhome.com](http://www.sutterhome.com)

### The Wine Routes of South Africa

<b>Breedekloof Wine and Tourism</b> info@breedekloof.com	<b>Little Karoo Wine Route</b> info@kleinkarooowines.co.za	<b>Swartland Wine Route</b> swartlandinfo@westc.co.za
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<b>Helderberg Wine Route</b> hwr@mweb.co.za	<b>Stellenbosch Wine Route</b> info@wineroute.co.za	



**Woody.** Indicates a perception of tainted wood in a wine. This is not a synonym for “oaky,” which generally is considered a positive trait. The best vintners use oak as a flavor highlight, not the defining flavor, of a wine.

**XIV.** The King Louis for whom regular consumption of Burgundy was recommended by his doctor to maintain his health.

**Yountville.** One of the small towns... and restaurant hubs... of California’s Napa Valley.

**Zaca Mesa.** Santa Barbara County winery that has provided a training ground for some of the top winemakers in California’s Central Coast region.



**Appellation.** An official geographic location in which winegrapes are grown. In the U.S., these are known as American Viticultural Areas.

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acre lots. Anyone who antes \$1.499 million will become the owner of a 5,624-square-foot French country estate (including attached and detached

Over the past 18 years, Anderson has developed commercial, residential and resort projects from Shell Beach, Calif., to Kona, Hawaii, and from Los Cabos, Mexico, to Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica. And now, he’s developing a seven-lot subdivision in the Central Coast’s Arroyo Grande Mesa.

Teaming with a local custom home builder and vineyard professionals, Anderson is offering “turnkey vineyard estates” on five-

garages), along with four acres of planted Chardonnay or Pinot Noir vines.

“We decided to commission an artist’s rendering of the French country estate home to help clients visualize the lifestyle we are able to create,” Anderson says. “This particular home has a very classical style and a well-thought-out floor plan that is universally appealing.”

Dee Anna Shrefler (805-473-3182) is the sales agent.



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## APPELLATION SHOWCASE



**W**hile *Rockpile* is one of the newest appellations in California, receiving American Viticultural Area status on April 29, 2002, the area has been referred to as *Rockpile* since the 1850s.

Located in northern Sonoma County, at the northwest corner of Dry Creek Valley, the Rockpile AVA encompasses nearly 15,000 acres, of which fewer than 160 are planted to vineyards. This makes Rockpile one of the smallest AVAs in the United States in terms of acreage planted.

Approximately 2,500 acres of the Rockpile AVA overlap the Dry Creek Valley viticultural area to the southeast. The vineyards range in elevation from 800 feet to nearly 2,100 feet.

There are many geographic and geologic features that separate Rockpile from its neighboring appellations. The combination of an elevation requirement, extreme terrain, and a unique climate make the vineyards and resulting wines unlike anything from Sonoma County.

The predominant geographic highlight is that all vineyards must be at 800 feet elevation or above to qualify.

Though elevation falls into the geographic category, it also greatly affects the geology and climate. There are certain aspects that are true of all elevation-delineated AVAs, including poor soils, steep slopes, little water retention and great sun and wind exposures. With Rockpile, these aspects are exaggerated due to the lack of fog.

The lack of fog increases the amount of sun exposure, but decreases the amount of moisture available to the vines. The lack of moisture leads to smaller berries, loose bunches, little to no bunch rot or botrytis, and overall higher quality fruit.

The soils in the Rockpile AVA are very different from those of its neighboring viticultural areas. The primary differences are the extreme shallowness of the soils, the relative absence of silt or sand, higher oxidized iron properties, and the clay subsoil.

One of the under-appreciated characteristics is the wind. Rockpile receives the full force of the coastal breezes that typically sweep over the neighboring valleys.

The winds stress the vines by further drying out what little water retention there may be in the soil, and they insure that there will be little or no rot in Rockpile fruit. This has the added bonus of limiting the need for herbicide and pesticide use.

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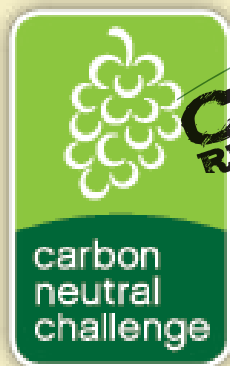
**Q** Everyone says that wine is made to age, but is an older vintage always better than a younger one?

**A** Absolutely not. How well a wine ages depends on a number of factors, including the variety, the weather conditions during the growing season and, to some degree, the techniques used in the cellar when making the wine. A few generalities: Red wines have the potential to age gracefully for longer periods of time than white wines. Wines age according to a curve; they will reach a peak at a certain point, but still be enjoyable for a certain period of time thereafter. They are not like milk, which turns sour and becomes undrinkable. And finally, the vintage can play a big role in how long a wine will age; that's why some 2002 Cabernet Sauvignons are drinking beautifully now, while some 2004s are not.

“ I get to make wine for a living. How cool is that? I get all the wine I can drink, and I get paid. I feel like a kid in the candy store. ”



— *Food & Wine* magazine's 2009 Winemaker of the Year, Charles Smith, of Washington's K Vintners and Charles Smith Wines



**N**o state takes the “green movement” more seriously than Oregon, and that certainly goes for Oregon's grape growers and wine estates.

When the governor of the state put forth the Carbon Neutral Challenge Initiative, more than two dozen wineries got involved right away, embracing everything from solar energy to biodiesel, and hydroelectricity to compact fluorescent lighting. At Willamette Valley Vineyards, one of Oregon's largest producers, corks are now being sourced from cork grown in Rainforest Alliance-certified forests.



251,941

Number of acres (at last count) planted to winegrapes in South Africa, which is hosting soccer's 2010 World Cup beginning June 11. (See “Wine Touring Tips” in this issue for more on South African wines and travel.)

**W**ords of wisdom: Any glass can be a wine glass. While long-stemmed glasses are stylish and attractive, and can help a wine “show” well, they are not absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of fine wine. Keep in mind that for generations, Italian families drank their wine out of simple tumblers.



VINESSE



**W**hen you read about new labels, restaurants, destinations, spas, etc. described on the monthly “Vinesse Hot List” (see page 7), you can be confident that those are “good” things. But when a wine itself is described as “hot,” that's not so good. That hot impression typically is caused by the alcohol being out of balance with the rest of the wine. Bottlings with 14 percent alcohol are pushing the limits. When a wine's alcohol reaches 15 or 16 percent, all of that wonderful fruitfulness can be overshadowed by a hot impression. In the best wines, the alcohol exists in the background, not in the forefront.

## FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

# PIZZA, REVISITED AND RECONSTRUCTED

*It's a Friday, and you know what that means: It's pizza night!*



But that doesn't mean pizza-and-beer.

We're talking pizza-and-wine. The question is: What kind of wine?

The answer can be either very simple or a bit complicated.

Let's start with the simple...

The go-to variety for virtually any type of pizza is Sangiovese, the grape from which Italy's iconic wine, Chianti, is

made. Why Sangiovese? Because, unlike

many red varieties, it possesses zesty acidity that can simultaneously cut through that rich layer of cheese(s) and complement tangy tomato sauce.

But what if there's someone in the family who doesn't drink red wine — someone who prefers white varieties? No problem. For them, Sauvignon Blanc is the answer, particularly the more “zippy” style embraced by vintners in New Zealand.

Again, the variety's lively acidity is the key, but its flavor spectrum — grassy and herbal — deliciously complements the typical pizza components of tomato sauce, bell peppers and oregano.

Obviously, when toppings are added to a pizza, wine pairing becomes a bit more involved, and should be based on the strongest flavor of the dish. (That's why,

when pairing wine with pasta, the pairing partner is the sauce.)

With that in mind, we've put together the following list of common pizza toppings, along with a wine pairing suggestion for each.

- **Pepperoni** — Zinfandel.
- **Spicy Italian Sausage** — Zinfandel or Sangiovese.
- **Canadian Ham** — Sparkling wine.
- **Lean Ground Beef** — Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.
- **Smoked Bacon** — Sparkling wine or Syrah.
- **Grilled Chicken Strips** — “Unoaked” Chardonnay.
- **Baby Shrimp** — Sauvignon Blanc.
- **Meatballs** — Sangiovese or Argentine Malbec.
- **Black Olives** — Syrah.
- **Mushrooms** — “Unoaked” Chardonnay or Pinot Noir.
- **Roasted Garlic** — Cabernet Sauvignon.
- **Pineapple** — Viognier.
- **Onions** — Zinfandel.
- **Barbecued Chicken** — A dry Rosé of Sangiovese or Pinot Noir.

Pinot Noir.

Counting calories? Prepare a side salad, loaded with veggies, and substitute it for a slice or two of the pizza. A glass of Sauvignon Blanc would pair nicely with the salad, and also would match up with certain pizza toppings, as the list above illustrates.

It's so easy to fall into the “same-old same-old” syndrome when it comes to pizza and wine. If you're willing to be adventurous, you just may discover some new pairings that will add sizzle to your Friday nights.

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## FISH TACOS

We love fish tacos, particularly during the summertime. But instead of a *cerveza*, we suggest serving them with a well-chilled glass of Sauvignon Blanc or a Rosé-style wine. This recipe makes 4 servings.

### Ingredients

- 5 tablespoons Wondra flour
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 lb. tilapia fillets, cut into 1- by 2-inch strips
- 1 ½ tablespoons canola oil
- Canola oil cooking spray
- 8 soft corn tortillas, warmed
- Avocado-mango salsa (see next recipe)

### Preparation

1. In a medium bowl, combine the Wondra flour, cayenne, cumin and salt.
2. Place tilapia pieces in flour mixture, then toss to coat well. Shake fillets gently to remove excess flour.
3. Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fish, placing each piece in a bit of the oil. Cook until the bottom side is crispy and golden, 2 to 4 minutes.
4. Turn and cook until crispy, another 2 to 4 minutes.
5. Serve immediately with warm corn tortillas and avocado-mango salsa.

## AVOCADO-MANGO SALSA

This salsa is intended to accompany the recipe for fish tacos on this page. It also goes well with grilled chicken breasts.

### Ingredients

- ¼ teaspoon ground chipotle chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground coriander

- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 small Hass avocado, peeled, pitted and cut into ½-inch dice
- 1 small, ripe mango, peeled, pitted and cut into ½-inch dice
- 3 tablespoons lime juice

### Preparation

1. In a small dish, stir together chipotle, coriander and salt. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, combine avocado, mango and lime juice. Toss lightly. Add reserved spice blend and toss to coat.

## TAPENADE

It's always good to have some tapenade on hand to add flavor to dishes or to spread on crackers when unexpected guests arrive. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah all are good wine matches.

### Ingredients

- 12 oz. pitted black olives
- 4 oz. capers
- 4 to 8 oz. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 oz. anchovies
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 4 oz. canned tuna (optional)
- 1 ½ teaspoons dried thyme or herbes de Provence (optional)
- 1 ½ teaspoons Dijon mustard (optional)
- 1 oz. brandy (optional)

### Preparation

Place all ingredients in a food processor and pulse to desired consistency.

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