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Dueling Castles

Ledson Winery & Vineyards vs.
Castello di Amorosa

Pairing Wine With Paella & Other Spanish Delicacies

Picnic Time Nears; Make Yours Perfect

Oak in Wine: Less Is More





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

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Picnics, Paella and New Pairing Possibilities

By Robert Johnson

As a particularly brutal winter for much of our nation finally begins to morph into spring, I'm already anticipating my first opportunity to partake in one of the great pleasures in life: a picnic.

Some very good friends of mine are what I would call pseudo picnickers. They own motorhomes, and travel as a group to nearby campgrounds about once per month for long weekends of "roughing it."

Of course, their well-appointed homes-on-wheels may stretch the definition of "roughing it" just a bit. They're not exactly out in the wild, sleeping in tents and worrying about bears invading their space and stealing their food.

But they do enjoy the great outdoors — whether it's in the middle of a forest, out in the desert, or next to the Pacific Ocean — and eat most of their meals on picnic tables. I don't know why, but food just seems to taste better when one dines *al fresco*.

Of course, one requirement of a successful picnic is a good bottle of wine, and in this issue, our "Vinesse Style" department is devoted to that very topic. Which varieties and styles of wine make the best picnic companions? What type of glassware works best? You'll find the answers to those and other questions on page 8.

About as far removed as one could get from a simple picnic would be a visit to a castle. On page 6, in our "Wine Touring Tips" feature, we'll take you to not one, but two wine country castles — one in the Napa Valley, the other in Sonoma County. Yes, both are open to the public, and yes, both are worth seeing. Just two words of advice: bring money.

Also in this issue, our "Cellarmaster" department on page 3 takes a look at the ever-evolving role of oak in winemaking.



Today, it would seem, less is more when it comes to oak barrel aging.

Increasing interest in all-things-culinary is one reason behind the current "less oak" trend, and the flavors found in paella and other Spanish fare serve as good examples of why, in some cases, oak is "out." Be sure to check out this edition's "Food & Wine Pairings" department on page 11 for tips on selecting wines to savor with Spanish food.

I hope you'll find all of the features and departments in this issue informative and interesting. I've found that the more one knows about wine, the more one enjoys drinking it. So... enjoy!



Oak and the Ever-Evolving Palate

Everything, it seems, goes in cycles, and so it is with the use of oak barrels in making wine.

Toward the end of the 20th century, wines lovingly referred to by their makers as "big oaky monsters" were all the rage. The more oak flavors one could infuse into a wine — whether it was Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon — the better. Many vintners even began to age their bright and refreshing Sauvignon Blanc wines in oak barrels and labeled them "Fumé Blanc."

The problem, some would assert, is that a good number of vintners overdid it. In a good number of cases, the aromas and flavors imparted by the oak overwhelmed the fruit, earth and other impressions of the wine. Lots of flavors could be identified by wine experts, but those flavors seemed to exist as individual components rather than as parts of a well-balanced whole.

Inexperienced judges at various wine competitions didn't

help matters. After tasting a group of, say, a hundred Cabernets over the course of a few hours, palate fatigue would set in, many of the wines would seem to taste the same, and the only ones that stood out were those "big oaky monsters." And those wines, because they stood out in the crowd, began getting the gold medals and "Best of Class" awards.

Americans, in a sense, were being trained to expect a lot of oak influence — aromas and flavors of vanilla, butter and baking spices — in their wines. The variety that skyrocketed in popularity as a result of this trend was Chardonnay.

Over time, however, public perceptions began to change. Those big, oaky, buttery, spicy wines were great for sipping and socializing, but virtually impossible to successfully pair with food. As the ranks of "foodies" grew, the desire for more food-friendly styles of wine grew with it.

Today, some would say, we have returned to the 1970s — a time when most wines were defined by their fruit flavors. The "big oaky monsters" are still out there for those who embrace that style, but the present stage of the ever-evolving cycle is defined by fruitforward, food-friendly wines.





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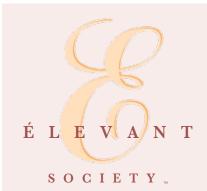
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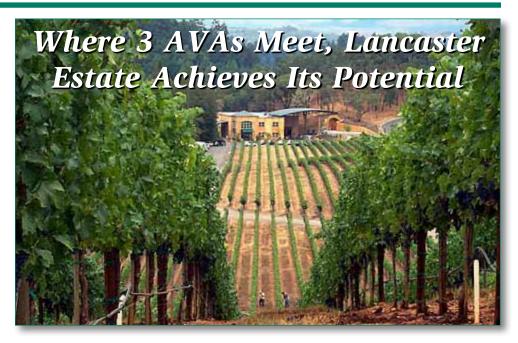
FREQUENCY:

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Winegrowing appellations — or American Viticultural Areas, as they're known in the United States — are defined by their geography, geology and climate. It's a concept that the French embody in a single word: terroir.

Few AVAs are known for more than a handful of grape varieties. That's because a specific variety requires a specific type of climate in which to thrive. All types of winegrapes have certain minimum requirements, but each does better in a specific type of setting.

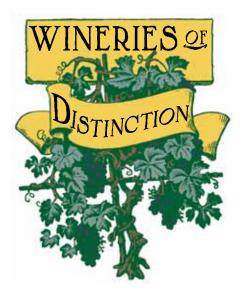
That's why in California's North Coast region, the Napa Valley is known primarily for Cabernet Sauvignon, the Russian River Valley for Pinot Noir, and the Dry Creek Valley for Zinfandel. Several other varieties are grown in all three regions, but each region has its own "star" variety.

Some of the best wines in the world are crafted by wineries whose vineyards are situated adjacent to AVA borders — particularly if the AVAs involved share certain similarities. Take Lancaster Estate, as an example.

Lancaster is located at the southernmost tip of Sonoma County's Alexander Valley, and near the confluence of two other acclaimed AVAs: Knights Valley and Chalk Hill. The climate and soils are ideal for growing classic Bordeaux varietals, and because of the diversity of the soils, there are specific spots that are just

about perfect for specific varietals.

The Lancaster Estate has 53 hillside acres planted to grapevines. Those vines have been divided into 24 blocks that, in turn, have been sub-divided



into 27 distinct sub-blocks. All told, 65.5% of the vines are devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon, 26.6% to Merlot, 3.7% to Cabernet Franc, 3.4% to Malbec and .7% to Petit Verdot.

"When I first walked this property in the summer of 1994, I knew this was a special place," says Ted Simpkins, who would purchase the estate from Maacama Creek Winery the following year. "It wasn't just the landscape's beauty that spoke to me — it was the soil, the climate and the southeasternfacing hillsides. That was the day I committed to making wines that reflect the true beauty and essence of this rare place."

Winemaker Jesse Katz understands that he is fortunate to have a special job in a special place.

"Lancaster is that rare thing among wineries," Katz says.
"Every decision we make — from growing and harvesting the grapes to winemaking, barrel aging and bottling — cultivates the character of our wines.

"All of our grapes are grown here on the estate, which means I spend lots of time walking in the vineyard, developing an understanding of every row

in every block. It's this understanding and an integrated approach to winegrowing that allows us to make wines that consistently honor and reflect the essence of the estate."

That integrated approach required a special type of winery. Eugene Silva, an architect who specializes in buildings that blend organically into their surrounding landscape, was hired to execute the family's vision.

The contemporary style reflects the rustic elegance of the estate, with natural building materials that promise

Winery 4-1-1

Lancaster Estate

15001 Chalk Hill Road Healdsburg, CA 95448 707-433-8178 to weather attractively over time.

The winery includes more than 9,000 square feet of caves, carved deep into the heart of the ironically named No Name Hill. With the cave system, wine aging takes place under naturally

regulated temperatures and humidity.

A niche was subsequently carved out of the cave's northern wall to create a unique underground tasting room.

Outside, the family embraces sustainable practices, and not just because it's the "fashionable" thing to do in today's world.

LANCASTER

Estate

"Sustainable farming techniques maintain the integrity of our wines' origins," Katz explains.
"We employ permanent cover crops to improve drainage, replenish the soil nutrients and reduce erosion. We also encourage natural predators, such as colonies

of raptors and beneficial insects, to eliminate vine pests."

And to produce grapes with concentrated flavors, each vine's yield is carefully managed.

"We actively manage vine vigor and encourage low yields by employing classic viticultural practices such as cluster thinning and deficit irrigation," Katz says. Our hillside orientation, higher-density vine spacing and low-nutrient soil compositions also control vine vigor and reduce yields," all of which helps maintain the purity of the estate's expression and character.

Combine attention to detail in the vineyard with a nearly perfect climate, and you have the potential to make stunning wines. And as more and more wine critics and wine drinkers are realizing, Lancaster Estate definitely is living up to its potential.





WINES THAT MATCH THE SEASON

Summer — wines for barbecues, picnics or just for sipping. Fall — wines for hearty, harvest-time dishes. You get the idea. All wines are selected by our Tasting Panel to pair beautifully with the foods you love.

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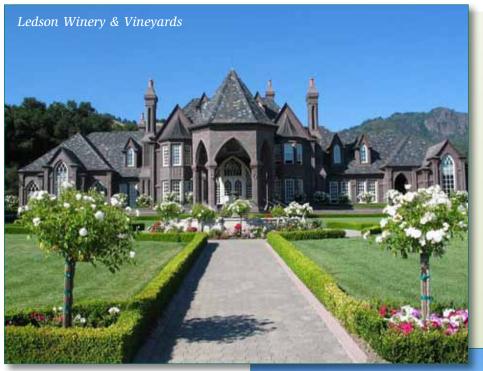
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Dueling Castles

Ledson Winery & Vineyards

Castello di Amorosa

Castello di Amorosa

Il kids love castles. And why not? That's where princes and princesses live, and where dragons get slayed. What's not to like?

As adults, we love to tour castles - perhaps to see how "the other half" lives, perhaps to get some decorating ideas for our own "castles." Europe is home to dozens of tour-worthy castles, and in California, Hearst Castle towers majestically over the blue Pacific along the Central Coast.

A bit farther north, in California wine country, two relatively new castles double as wine estates - one in the Napa Valley, the other in the Sonoma Valley. For any castle-loving wine drinker, both are worth a visit.

On the Napa side, Castello di Amorosa produces primarily Italian-style wines while reflecting California's unique climate, soil and growing conditions. All of its red grapes are grown in the Napa Valley around the castle, while white grapes are grown in the Carneros district of the Napa Valley or in Mendocino County's bucolic Anderson Valley. Some grapes also

are purchased from select growers.

more than 30 years, presides over all winemaking production. His goal is to make delicious, classically structured, intensely flavored, well-balanced, elegant wines that showcase the "terroir" of each unique vineyard site. In this way, the flavors and aromas of the vinevards themselves can be experienced.

Castello di Amorosa combines traditional winemaking methods with



TOURING

technologically advanced equipment and techniques. As a result, the wines show intense flavors that are elegantly balanced — similar to the hand-crafted wines produced in the Tuscany and Umbria regions of Italy, the homeland of owner Dario Sattui, a fourth-generation Italian.

Tours of the 14th century-style, 107-room castle and winery are led by a castle guide. All tours feature a barrel tasting, as well as a tasting of the estate's current releases.

Tours are approximately 90 minutes in length. The walking portion of the tour is approximately 60 minutes, followed by a 30- to 45-minute private tasting of the winery's Italian-style bottlings.

Whereas Castello di Amorosa was envisioned as a winery from the very beginning, the castle built by the Ledson family in the Sonoma Valley originally was to have been a private residence.

Construction began in 1989, when 19 acres of Merlot vines were planted and work commmenced on the castle.

As the months passed, the turrets, slate roofs, balconies and fountains took shape, and passers-by started to take notice — some going so far as to climb the fences to get a better look. The family eventually realized that it was time to rethink the plan.

Given the intense public interest in the building and the quality of the Merlot harvested from the estate vineyard (which had been sold to nearby wineries), they decided to turn the home into a winery and tasting room.

In 1997, the family released their first wine, the 1994 Ledson Estate Merlot. In 1999, after two years of reconstruction, the winery opened its doors to the public.

An instant landmark, Ledson Winery, known simply as "The Castle" in the valley, is an architectural showpiece. The 16,000-square-foot French Normandy structure was designed entirely by Steve Ledson, and features sweeping staircases, marble fireplaces,

cathedral-style windows, coffered ceilings, several tasting bars, luxuriously appointed bridal suites and more than five miles of ornate wood inlays and mosaics, which were hand cut and installed by Steve's son, Mike.

"The Castle" provides a stunning setting for wine tasting weekends, romantic getaways and executive retreats.

In addition to the 17-acre estate Merlot vineyard, Ledson Winery owns 21 acres of "old-vine" Zinfandel in the town of Sonoma and 5,500 acres of property in Mendocino County, a small portion of which is planned for Pinot Noir, Syrah and Chardonnay.

Ledson also sources grapes from a select group of vineyards throughout California's North Coast and Central Coast growing regions. The family works closely with its grower partners to maximize the varietal character and site signature of all premium Ledson wines.

Visitors to "The Castle" can enjoy picnic areas shaded by 100-year-old majestic oak trees, a fully stocked gourmet market, as well as a tasteful clothing and gift boutique.

And for those who would like to visit both Ledson and Castello di Amorosa in one day, there's good news: The drive from one to the other takes less than an hour. You could spend the morning at one castle and the afternoon at the other, and have a truly regal experience.

For Further Information

Castello di Amorosa 4045 N. St. Helena Hwy. Calistoga, CA 94515 707-967-6272

Ledson Winery & Vineyards

7335 Highway 12 Kenwood, CA 95409 707-537-3810

VINESSE



LIST

1 Hot Kiwi Wine Destination. You can eat, drink and sleep in style at the Herzog Winery, Restaurant and Cottage in Blenheim on New Zealand's south island. Each night, a five-course meal is paired with Herzog wines, and the meal is guaranteed to impress; Hans and Therese Herzog formerly owned a Michelin-starred restaurant in their native Switzerland. Room rates start at just under \$300. www.herzog.co.nz

2 Hot Wine Accessory. One would think that sommeliers at the world's greatest restaurants would carry high-priced corkscrews and other gear for opening wine bottles. Some do, but most don't. The go-to corkscrew for most is the Pulltex, which retails for around \$10. The Pulltex employs a double-lever system that, when used properly, helps prevent corks from breaking while being removed from the bottle. www.pulltex.com

Grant Achatz is a busy man these days, preparing to open two new restaurants in Chicago. The one generating the greatest buzz is called Next, which will feature a rotating menu that focuses on a specific place and time (as an example, Paris in 1912). It's a great way to learn about the evolution of dining out and specific types of cuisine. A single price will cover everything, and the price will vary based on the day of the week and time of day.

www.nextrestaurant.com



Tastevin. A shallow silver cup used for tasting wine. Seldom seen today, but in the past, used primarily by restaurant sommeliers.

Abbreviation found on some French wine bottles, denoting a regional or local cooperative. The initials stand for Union Coopérative.

Vendange Tardive. A French term denoting a late harvest wine, such as Sauternes.

Weissherbst. A German roséstyle wine made from black grapes such as Pinot Noir.

Winery. A winery located in the heart of historic downtown Napa, near the renovated Uptown Theatre.

Yield. The amount of grapes (typically measured in tons per acre) produced in a vineyard in any given vintage. Lower yields often equate with high quality wines since the grapes produced are more concentrated in flavor.

VINESSE STYLE

THE PERFECT PICNIC

Depending on where you live, picnic season either has arrived or will arrive soon. We owe it to ourselves to make the first picnic of 2011 a special occasion.

How do we transform an ordinary picnic into a memorable one? One word: wine. That means your first order of business is to find a picnic location where wine is allowed. Lots of public parks prohibit BYOB, so be sure to inquire before heading out.

The next thing to consider is glassware, and the first decision one should make is to avoid glass. A picnic is no place for your finest stemware because table surfaces rarely are flat, meaning spills — and breakage — are tough to avoid. Opt for the stainless steel glasses described here last month, or the indestructible polycarbonate barware that can be found at Crate and Barrel and Williams-Sonoma stores.

Another good investment is a wine tote, which will carry one or two bottles of wine so you don't have to worry about those bottles



slipping out of your hand. (And if you're not worried about looking "stylish," a backpack works just as well.)

The type of food and the type of wine you bring along are personal decisions. But if you happen to have bottles on hand that are topped with screw caps, they're very convenient... and you can leave your corkscrew at home.

Watch out, ants — here we come!

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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



When the fog rolls off the ocean and into the Napa Valley, the weather on Howell Mountain is generally sunny and cool.

This special appellation owes its distinctive climate to the fact that it is positioned well above the valley floor. Because of its altitude, evening temperatures generally are warmer and daytime temperatures are much cooler, leveling out spikes in heat that tend to be more exaggerated at lower elevations.

Although it gets nearly twice as much rainfall as the valley below, the soil tends to be dry because rocky, porous soil conditions allow for adequate drainage and less accumulation.

Seasonally, cooler spring temperatures cause buds to break later than average, and warm summer nights produce fruit that demonstrates a great balance between acidity and sugar — all of which translates into a rich diversity of complexity and flavor in the glass.

From the ground up, soil can have as much of an effect on the variety and intensity of grapes as the weather. This is clearly evident on Howell Mountain, where there are two main soil types.

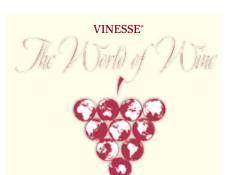
The first consists of decomposed

volcanic ash, called "tufa," and the second is red clay that is high in iron. Because both are nutrient poor, they stress the vines, producing intense wines from small clusters and berries. In the end, the altitude, and thin, rocky and dry soil conditions create wines with firm structure, incredible varietal intensity and excellent aging properties.

Chief among those moving early onto the mountain to establish vineyards were Jean Adolph Brun and Jean V. Chaix, two experienced vintners who planted hundreds of acres of vineyards. Because they also owned an Oakville operation on the valley floor, they were among the most successful local wine businesses during the boom of the 1880s.

Today, among the more than 50 land owners who operate wineries and/or farm vineyards on Howell Mountain are such famous names as Beringer, Cakebread, Charles Krug, Duckhorn, La Jota, St. Clement and White Cottage Ranch.

You may recognize that last name, as several of its bottlings have been featured by the wine clubs of Vinesse.



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What are the differences among sustainable, organic and Biodynamic farming?

Sustainable farming is a widely used term but has no legal definition — so it can mean just about anything. It's typically used by wineries that are just beginning to embrace concepts that protect and perpetuate the land, rather than stripping it. Organic farming feeds the plants without the use of synthetic insecticides, fungicides and fertilizers. Biodynamic farming feeds the soil, keeping it alive and healthy through the use of organic materials. It also uses Earth's natural cycles and preparations to produce balance in the soil and plants. To put it another way, organic farming is concerned primarily with substances, whereas Biodynamics is concerned with forces.



Each year, paint maker Benjamin Moore names a "color of the year," tapping into trends in lifestyles and home decorating. For 2011, the honor goes to a chocolatey purple mix that the company calls "Vintage Wine." Don't worry about confusing it for wine that can be consumed; it's packaged in a standard paint can, not a wine bottle.

100

Number of wineries now operating in North Carolina after the opening of Cauble Creek Vineyard in Salisbury, N.C., southwest of Greensboro.

One should always be careful when drinking bubbly because, by the law of averages, one is much more likely to be killed by a flying Champagne cork than by a poisonous spider. That said, you may want to think twice about taking a bottle of Champagne on a picnic.



All 366 acres of the Grgich Hills Estate in the Napa Valley are certified Biodynamic by the Demeter Assn. Although the estate had used pesticides sparingly in the past, it began farming organically in 2000. In 2002, Vice President of Vineyards and Production Ivo Jeramaz became interested in Biodynamics after attending a lecture by French Biodynamics pioneer Nicolas Jay. The next year, Grgich

Hills faced a crisis: Cabernet Sauvignon vines planted in 1959 had contracted red leaf virus. Experts recommended pulling them out and starting over. Instead, Grgich Hills switched to Biodynamic farming, and the vines were saved. Today, the grapes grown on those vines produce richer fruit flavors in the resulting wines, and Grgich Hills has converted its entire vineyard to Biodynamic farming.

The Uptown Theatre brings a diverse mix of music acts to the town of Napa. Visits to the wineries up valley are sure to spawn many pleasant memories during the daytime hours, and the Uptown is doing its part to extend the pleasure with a special called "A Napa Night to Remember." The theater has teamed up with nearby hotels and restaurants to offer great packages that include VIP seating for shows. Among those appearing in March are Lily Tomlin, Gretchen Wilson, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, Taj Mahal and George Thorogood. For details, visit: www.uptowntheatrenapa.com





It was intended to be a small thing, an interesting project.

— Patty Bogle, quoted in 2009 by the Sacramento Bee, about Bogle Vineyards in California's Delta region. Today, Bogle Vineyards is America's 14th-largest winery. Sadly, Patty Bogle died on Feb. 11 of complications from leukemia. She was 59.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

Spanish Cuisine

Spice is sometimes thought of as an enemy of wine, but that's largely a misnomer. While extremely hot spices and sauces will mute the flavors of wine, rendering them almost undrinkable, less assertive spices can actually help bring out certain flavors in certain wines.

This is particularly noticeable in Spanish cooking which, unlike some Asian cuisine, uses spices to complement a dish rather than define it. Let's take a look at a few aspects of Spanish cuisine, and suggest some food-friendly wines...

A standard Spanish soup, especially in and around Madrid, is *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup), made with water, oil, garlic,

paprika, bread and cured ham. Even though there's ham in the mix, garlic is the overriding flavor, which means either Syrah or, for those who prefer white wine, Sauvignon Blanc would make a good pairing partner.

Fish and seafood are prepared in countless ways in Spain, but the Basques and the Andalusians are particular masters of the art. The Basque country is known for *txangurro* (stuffed king crab) and, especially, *bacalao al pil-pil* (cod cooked in oil and garlic at a low temperature, generating a sauce of juice from the fish itself). Sauvignon Blanc is always a good choice with shellfish, and with the cod, a rich, buttery Chardonnay works wonders; it's almost like you're creating a rich sauce with the wine and garlic.

Spanish ham and sausage products are renowned, particularly those derived from the *cerdo ibérico*, a remarkable breed of free-range



pig that produces *jamón serrano* (roughly translatable as "ham from the sierra or mountains"). With ham, try Gewurztraminer or Riesling, preferably with just a touch of residual sugar. With sausage, a roséstyle wine or Zinfandel (red, not "white") is recommended.

Spain's most sophisticated poultry dishes are prepared in the Catalan province of Girona. These include pollastre amb llangosta (chicken with lobster), gall dindi amb panses, pinyones, i botifarra (turkey stuffed with raisins, pine nuts and sausage), and oca (anec) amb naps (goose, or duck, with turnips).

White wines such as Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio and (dry) Riesling are recommended with these dishes.

Of course, the vast array of wines produced in Spain also should be on your radar, just as there's something special about drinking Italian wine with Italian fare.



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PRICE:

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PAELLA

This easy-to-make recipe provides a taste of Spanish cuisine, and serves 6 to 8. Try it with Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio, or Syrah.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- 2 lbs. skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 cups uncooked short-grain white rice
- 1 pinch saffron threads
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 bunch Italian flat leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 quart chicken stock
- 2 lemons, zested
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 Spanish onion, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, coarsely chopped
- 1 lb. chorizo sausage, casings removed and crumbled
- 1 lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined

Preparation

- 1. In a medium bowl, mix 2 tablespoons olive oil, paprika, oregano, salt and pepper. Stir in chicken pieces to coat. Cover and refrigerate.
- 2. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet or paella pan over medium heat. Stir in garlic, red pepper flakes and rice. Cook, stirring, to coat rice with oil, about 3 minutes.
- 3. Stir in saffron threads, bay leaf, parsley, chicken stock and lemon zest. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce

heat to medium low. Simmer 20 minutes.

- 4. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a separate skillet over medium heat. Stir in marinated chicken and onion; cook 5 minutes.
- 5. Stir in bell pepper and sausage; cook 5 minutes.
- 6. Stir in shrimp and cook, turning the shrimp until both sides are pink.
- 7. Spread rice mixture onto a serving tray. Top with meat and seafood mixture.

LIME-GLAZED PORK CHOPS

Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay would be solid wine companions to this dish, which serves 4. Feeling adventurous? Try it with Zinfandel.

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup orange marmalade
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger root
- 4 (8-oz.) bone-in pork loin chops
- 4 teaspoons minced fresh cilantro leaves
- Lime wedges

Preparation

- 1. For glaze, in a small saucepan, combine the marmalade, jalapeno, lime juice and ginger. Cook and stir over medium heat for 5 minutes or until marmalade is melted. Remove from the heat; set aside.
- 2. Coat grill rack with nonstick cooking spray before starting the grill. Grill pork chops, covered, over medium heat for 6-7 minutes on each side or until juices run clear.
- 3. During the last 5 minutes of grilling, brush the pork chops with glaze.
- 4. Sprinkle the chops with cilantro and serve with lime wedges.

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