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Volume 20

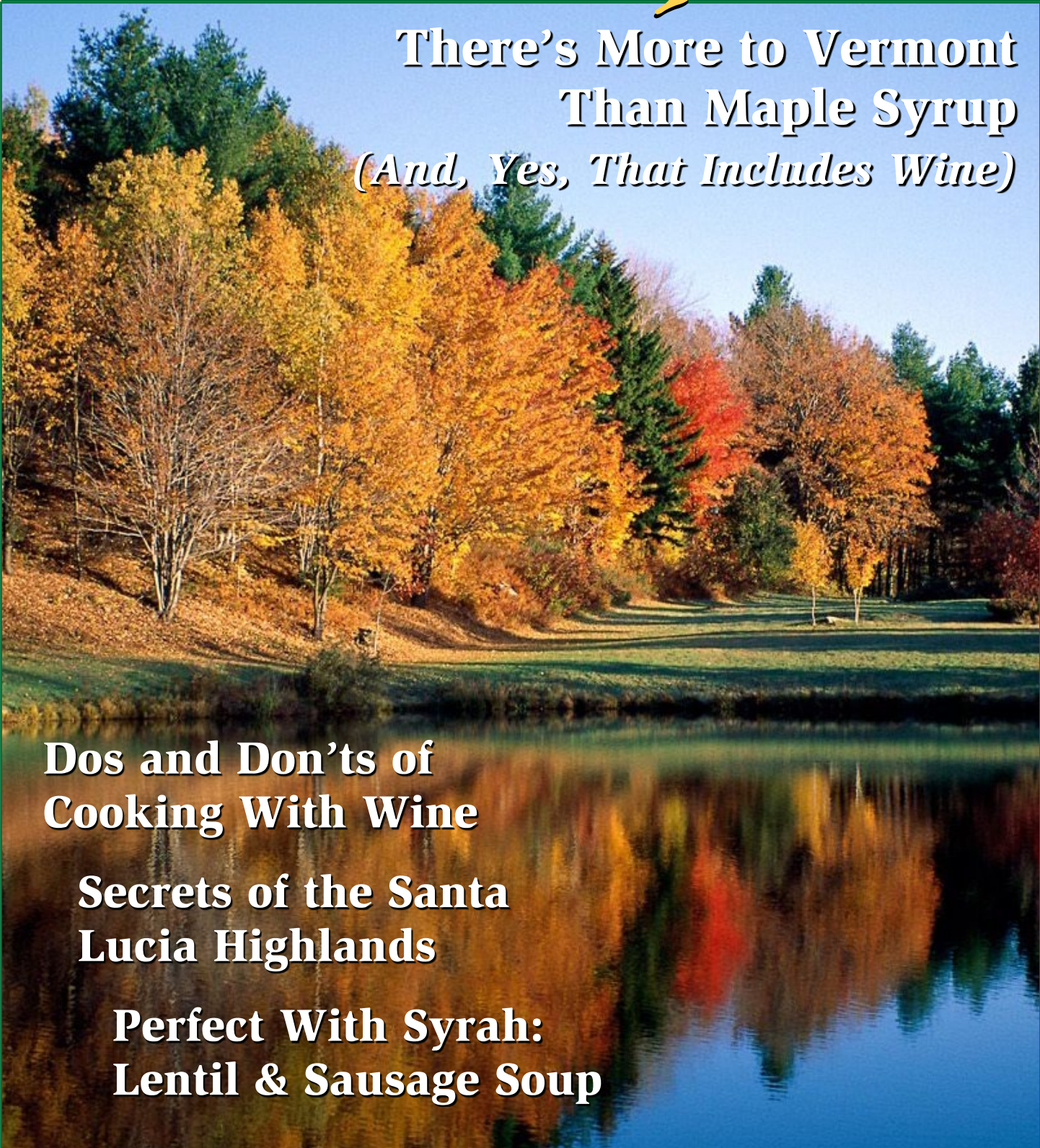
Number 1

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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



**There's More to Vermont
Than Maple Syrup
*(And, Yes, That Includes Wine)***

**Dos and Don'ts of
Cooking With Wine**

**Secrets of the Santa
Lucia Highlands**

**Perfect With Syrah:
Lentil & Sausage Soup**

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Would Carry Nation Have Seen the Light By Now?

By Robert Johnson

And you thought Prohibition ended in 1933. For most Americans, it did. But in certain pockets of the country, remnants of Prohibition can be encountered to this day.

This came to mind following two recent events: first, the airing of Ken Burns' latest documentary on PBS, and second, the green-lighting of liquor sales on Sundays in Medicine Lodge, Kan.

If you didn't see Burns' "Prohibition," keep your eyes and ears open during your local PBS station's next pledge drive, or simply buy the five-and-a-half-hour series, which is now available on DVD. If you don't know the full story of America's "dry" years that weren't really all that "dry," you will after watching Burns' documentary.

Meanwhile, back in Kansas, the good citizens of Medicine Lodge recently voted 157-142 to allow package liquor stores to sell alcoholic beverages on all Sundays except Easter.

What's the big deal about that, considering there still are other "dry" towns of varying degrees around the country? Well, Medicine Lodge was the home of Carry Nation, the most outspoken crusader against the

sale and consumption of alcohol. It was the work of Nation and others involved in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union that led to the enactment of Prohibition.



One can only wonder whether Nation would have seen the light by now. After all, as Burns' documentary pointed out, Prohibition failed to eliminate Americans' imbibing inclinations, and actually provided a platform for organized crime to flourish.

Reuters apparently was mind-melding with your intrepid reporter, because it put the Carry

Nation question to Medicine Lodge Mayor Robert Stutler. His Honor pointed to how Prohibition hurt the local economy and tourism, and then opined: "Carry probably would have seen the light by now."

Particularly if she'd ever been introduced to the wonders of a good glass of wine alongside a tender Kansas steak.



Giving Wine Time to Breathe... and Shine

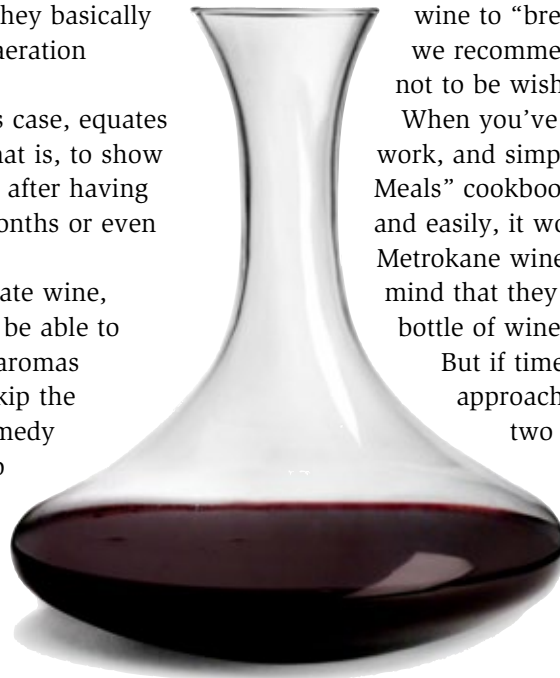
There are a number of gizmos, gadgets and thingamajigs on the market that claim to “aerate” wine.

We have tried several of them, and they basically do what they claim to do: hasten the aeration process, particularly in red wines.

“Aerate” is a fancy word that, in this case, equates with helping a wine to “breathe” — that is, to show off all of its aroma and flavor nuances after having been bottled up, away from air, for months or even years.

In most cases, it’s a good idea to aerate wine, because it’s really the only way you’ll be able to experience and enjoy its full range of aromas and flavors — its entire personality. Skip the process, and it’s akin to going to a comedy club to hear someone sing songs, or to a concert hall to hear someone tell jokes. No harm done, but no great joy experienced.

Now, just because there are certain products out there that help



wine to “breathe” more quickly, does that mean we recommend going out and buying one? Well, not to be wishy-washy, but yes and no.

When you’ve come home after a long day at work, and simply want to use your “Ten-Minute Meals” cookbook to prepare something quickly and easily, it would be good to have a Vinturi or Metrokane wine aerator on hand. (Just keep in mind that they cost about the same as a very good bottle of wine — \$40 and \$30, respectively.)

But if time is on your side, a much simpler approach is to open the bottle an hour or two before you intend to drink it, and pour the wine into a pitcher — allowing it to aerate naturally.

Then use what you would have spent on one of those gizmos to buy another bottle or two of wine.



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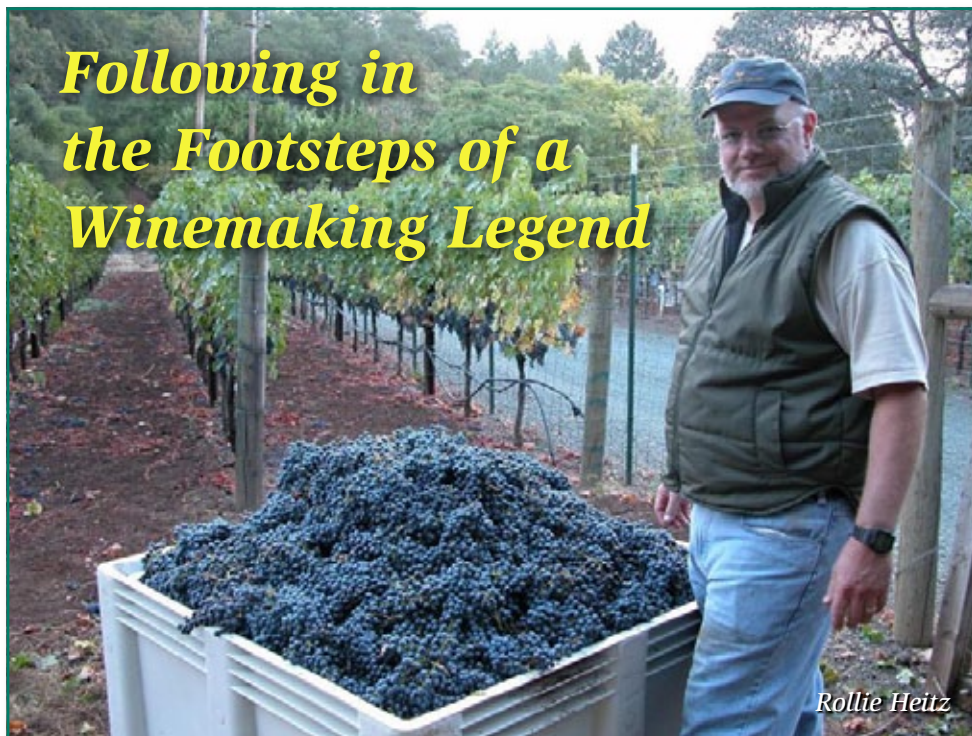
FREQUENCY:

Approximately Monthly

PRICE:

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Trying to follow Joe Heitz in the wine business is a bit like trying to follow Babe Ruth in the Yankees' lineup. Lou Gehrig managed to pull it off, but there aren't many Lou Gehrigs out there.

For many years, the Heitz Cellars Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon bottling known far and wide as “Martha’s Vineyard” was among the top-ranked Cabs in the country. It was a big, bold, easily identifiable wine with a unique personality and, because of the demand for it, an ever-rising price tag. It was a “cult wine” long before that phrase came into widespread use.

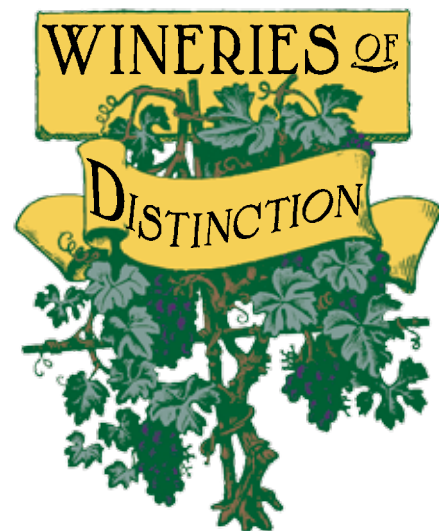
In 1997, France Champagne house Louis Roederer hosted a gathering to honor the Martha’s Vineyard Cab as one of the “World’s 30 Greatest Wines” — high praise in any context, but particularly so when coming from a French winery.

While making wine and building their business, Joe and Alice Heitz also were raising kids. They always welcomed the idea of their children joining the family business, but they also encouraged the kids to spread their wings before deciding to do so. Kathleen Heitz Myers and David Heitz ultimately returned, and have kept Heitz Cellars at the forefront of

Cabernet Sauvignon makers in the valley.

But their brother, Rollie, decided to go out on his own — in essence, to assume the role of Lou Gehrig. In 2000, he and wife Sally founded Midsummer Cellars with the goal of making small-lot, handcrafted wines of distinction that reflect the terroir and individuality of their vineyard sources.

Today, Midsummer Cellars produces only vineyard-designated Cabernet





Don Fowler, and is located in the upper watershed of Knights Valley, just a stone's throw from the Napa County line, in the hills between the towns of Calistoga and Santa Rosa.

The soils are composed of Forward and Bressa Dribble complexes, and the vineyard has the steepest slopes of the three utilized by Midsummer Cellars. Because of its location,

the vineyard is exposed to strong afternoon breezes that result in thicker grape skins. Those skins help produce wines of intense color and tannin structure. The vineyard is planted exclusively with Clone 337, and its elevation is about 1,100 feet above sea level.

the vineyard is exposed to strong afternoon breezes that result in thicker grape skins. Those skins help produce wines of intense color and tannin structure. The vineyard is planted exclusively with Clone 337, and its elevation is about 1,100 feet above sea level.

Rollie Heitz, as you might imagine, possesses a lifetime of winemaking experience. He learned how to make fine wines while working alongside his famous father. Today, he works in a very small space — Midsummer Cellars occupies less than 550 square feet — but to Rollie, small is beautiful.

“Within this small space,” he says, “we are able to produce true wines of distinction that we hope everyone will enjoy.”

Visitors are welcome at the winery by appointment, and they can expect Rollie Heitz to serve as their tour guide. “We usually offer a barrel sample as well as a couple of our current releases,” Rollie adds.

And here's the best part of all: Midsummer Cellars does not charge for tasting. That makes it a true rarity in today's Napa Valley.

The Tomasson Vineyard is owned by Helgi and Marlene Tomasson. Helgi is the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Ballet. This vineyard is, by far, the smallest vineyard in Midsummer's portfolio, producing just three barrels of wine per year.

The vineyard is located on the valley floor in an alluvial fan, with very well-drained, gravelly soils that help produce wines of deep intensity.

The Fowler Vineyard is owned by

Four Seasons



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Vinous Vermont: Beyond Maple Syrup's Wonders



One of the great gifts that the Native Americans gave to the early settlers of the United States was the art of maple sugaring.

No trip to Vermont is complete without some contact with maple syrup — whether it takes the form of a small puddle atop a stack of pancakes at a small-town cafe, or a visit to a maple-focused museum. Many people visit Vermont for two specific purposes: to see the leaves on trees turn into beautiful shades of red and orange, and to experience the wonders of maple syrup at its most famous source.

But Vermont's culinary offerings extend far beyond that sweet elixir. The state also is home to artisan cheese makers, purveyors of world-class chocolate, a number of fun-to-visit wineries and one very famous ice cream factory.

But first things first. There are several places where one can soak in (and soak up) the maple syrup experience, including the Maple Sugarhouse Museum in St. Johnsbury, Bragg Farm Sugarhouse and Gift Shop in East Montpelier, the New England Maple Museum in Pittsford, and Sugarbush Farm in Woodstock.

The Maple Sugarhouse Museum is operated by Maple Grove Farms, and

is a replica of a maple sugarhouse. Guests can view an informative 15-minute video before exploring a gift shop packed with pure maple syrup, maple candy, maple spreads and much more.

Bragg Farm has been producing maple syrup for eight generations, and still uses traditional methods of maple sugaring. During the sugaring season, guests can see as many as 2,500 buckets hanging in the nearby woods. In addition to a gift shop, Bragg Farm is home to a maple ice cream parlor.

An extensive collection of sugaring artifacts can be viewed at the New England Maple Museum, which also features more than 100 feet of murals, an antique photo collection, an informative slide show and something wine lovers will appreciate: a tasting room. Is your favorite grade of syrup light, medium or dark?

Woodstock's Sugarbush Farm offers a double-barreled tasting opportunity: four grades of pure maple syrup, along with 14 varieties of cheese. It's a great stop for families, as kids will enjoy looking at the farm animals



TOURING TIPS

and walking the maple and nature woodland trail.

Cheese lovers will want to pick up a copy of the Vermont Cheese Trail map, which includes listings for 44 cheese makers throughout the state. The brochure includes addresses and hours of operation. Be aware that many have limited hours depending on the season, and some require an appointment.

The same is true of many of Vermont's wineries, so a copy of the Vermont Breweries and Wineries brochure can be very helpful.

For a unique vinous experience, head for the tiny island of South Hero in Lake Champlain, which is home to Snow Farm Vineyard. Snow Farm is believed to be Vermont's



View from Grandview Winery

oldest vineyard, and owner Harrison Lebowitz sees it both as a winery and a way of fighting urban sprawl.

Fresh Tracks Farm is located in the rolling hills just outside Montpelier. From its 14-acre vineyard, a selection of rosé-style and white wines is complemented by a highly acclaimed apple wine.

An array of fruit and specialty wines can be found at Grandview Winery in East Calais. You may feel like you're in an isolated corner of Napa Valley as the estate includes a winemaking learning center that accommodates tours, a gorgeous garden and a gallery featuring the work of Vermont artists.

No visit to Vermont is complete without a stop at Ben & Jerry's in Waterbury, where guests get the

inside scoop on some of the most delicious ice cream made anywhere. The factory tour lasts 30 minutes, and keep in mind that no ice cream-making takes place on the weekends; to see the entire process, visit on a weekday.

And for one more sweet treat, take a tour at Lake Champlain Chocolates in Burlington, where you'll see numerous confections made right before your eyes. Tours are offered only on weekdays, so plan ahead.

As you can see, there's a lot more to Vermont than maple syrup. That said, don't forget to take some syrup home. After pouring it on homemade pancakes, waffles or French toast, you may look upon supermarket "table syrup" much like boxed wine.

For Further Information

Maple Grove Farms

St. Johnsbury, VT
www.maplegrove.com

Bragg Farm

East Montpelier, VT
www.braggfarm.com

New England Maple Museum

Pittsford, VT
www.maplemuseum.com

Sugarbush Farm

Woodstock, VT
www.sugarbushfarm.com

Vermont Cheese Council

www.vtcheese.com

Vermont Brewers Assn.

www.vermontbrewers.com

Snow Farm Vineyard

South Hero, VT
www.snowfarm.com

Fresh Tracks Farm

Berlin, VT
www.freshtracksfarm.com

Grandview Winery

East Calais, VT
www.grandviewwinery.com

Ben & Jerry's

Waterbury, VT
www.benjerry.com

Lake Champlain Chocolates

Burlington, VT
www.lakechamplainchocolates.com

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Wine Region. The floor of Argentina's Uco Valley has been covered with grapevines for decades, but only recently has the area become "hot" in the wine world. That's because as the vineyard plantings have gradually inched their way up the Andean foothills — some now perched at 4,500 feet above sea level — wine quality has spiked. Today, the Uco Valley is considered a go-to source for high-quality Malbec and other varieties. www.mendozawinetours.com/ampora/tours/uco_valley.html

2 Hot Airport Wine Bar. Should you ever find your flight out of Hartford's Bradley International Airport delayed, head back just outside the security checkpoint and grab a glass of wine at the Cask & Barrel. The by-the-glass list isn't all that imaginative, but it includes some good selections to accompany an assortment of appetizers, salads and sandwiches. www.bradleyairport.com

3 Hot Charleston Restaurant. There are many ways to organize a restaurant wine list. At Husk in Charleston, S.C., the list is presented not by varietal or even by country, but rather by terroir and soil type. The categories include "Slate" (which, as the menu states, often gives wine a "flinty" flavor), "Clay," "Limestone," "Primary Rock" and "Volcanic." Flavor descriptions that accompany each wine listing help diners with food pairing. www.huskrestaurant.com



Uco Valley. A growing region in Argentina that has come into its own as its vineyards have inched up the Andean slopes. (See “Vinesse Hot List” on page 7 for more on the valley.)

Verdelho. A white winegrape that’s grown extensively on the Portuguese island of Madeira.

White Zinfandel. A sweet wine made in a “blush” style that has helped introduce millions of people to wine. Because of its sugar level, it’s best served well chilled so as not to be cloying.

Xwinery. A winery in California’s Napa Valley that has adopted the motto, “Bad at rules. Good at wine.”

Yountville. A Napa Valley town between the towns of Napa and Oakville. It’s home to the Napa Valley Museum.

VINESSE STYLE

COOKING WITH WINE

Just the sound of it evokes an air of adventure, perhaps even romance: “cooking with wine.”

But there’s more to it than simply splashing some wine into the pan you’re using to fry or cook a main dish. Here are a few dos and don’ts to help assure a successful cooking-with-wine experience...

Do: Use wine instead of water when you want to add a unique additional flavor to a dish.

Don’t: Use a tannic wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon because, when reduced, it’s likely to leave a flavor that’s more bitter than wine-like.

Do: Use a wine with well-balanced acid, such as Pinot Noir or a lighter-bodied Merlot. Acidity helps to lift the flavors of many foods, just as vanilla lifts the flavors of baked goods.

Don’t: Use “cooking wine,” which can be found in most supermarkets. A vast majority of such products are packed with salt, so you’ll end up with very salty food, which is next to impossible to match successfully with wine.

Do: Use the wine you intend to drink with the meal. Much of its flavor will burn off in the cooking process, but it’s still better than using a different wine that may possess and retain non-complimentary flavors.

Don’t: Drink all the wine while cooking. You lose “style points” when you don’t share.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

Santa Lucia Highlands



Approved in 1991 as a unique American Viticultural Area, the vineyards of California's Santa Lucia Highlands are planted on the southeast-facing terraces of the Santa Lucia mountain range, overlooking the Salinas River Valley.

The vines' elevated locations take full advantage of the morning sunshine before the afternoon maritime breezes cool the vineyards. This climatic combo results in an especially long growing season, which allows the grapes to fully develop and attain maximum varietal potential.

Ancient, glacial alluvial soils pair with ocean fog and breezes to create a true Region I climate. Cool weather-loving Chardonnay and Pinot Noir flourish, while Rhone grape types emulate their French northern district brethren, thriving in the slightly warmer, more wind-protected canyons and slopes.

Today, 5,900 winegrape acres are under cultivation, with the majority heavily weighted toward Pinot Noir (2,700) and Chardonnay (2,000). The Rhone varietals also are in evidence, with Syrah gaining increasing notice.

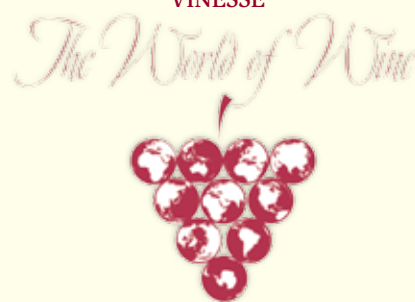
The winegrowers of the Santa Lucia Highlands are innovators, as almost every vineyard is a living laboratory with new clones, trellising systems and farming regimens being

explored on an ongoing basis.

The earliest vinifera plantings in the area can be traced to the 1790s, with the arrival of the first Spanish missionaries and conquistadors. The modern era began in the early 1970s with plantings by Rich and Claudia Smith at Paraiso, the McFarland family at Sleepy Hollow, Phil Johnson at La Estancia, and Nicky Hahn at Smith & Hook.

■ On Tuesday, Feb. 7, the winegrowers of the Santa Lucia Highlands will host their first-ever "New Release Reception" at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Twenty-nine wineries will be showcasing their latest Pinots, Chardonnays and Syrahs. The reception runs from 5 to 7 p.m., and the \$50 admission fee includes the wine tasting and a sampling of artisan charcuterie and cheeses. Tickets are very limited and available only at: <http://www.santaluciahighlands.com/index.php/wsdevent/eventview/action/view/fmArticleID/92/>

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Q We're going to be spending some time in Sacramento next spring, and have thought about visiting wineries around Lodi. We were there about 25 years ago and there really wasn't much to see. Is it worth a trip now?

A Absolutely. In years past, Lodi was mainly a grape-growing region, supplying fruit to some of the state's largest wineries. But beginning in the mid-1990s, some of the long-time growers decided to make and sell their own wine. Today, there are dozens of wine estates — mostly family-owned — that sell their wares to visitors. In many cases, the people pouring the wine in the tasting rooms are the owners and/or winemakers. With each passing vintage, they prove that when grapevines are pruned to limit yields, outstanding wines can be the result.

France is famous for being protective of its culinary traditions. Example: Its decades-long fight to prohibit other winemaking countries from using words such as "Champagne" and "Burgundy" on their wine bottle labels. Now, ketchup has been banned from France's school cafeterias for use on anything except French fries. "Food is very important here," Federation of Parent Councils President Jean-Jacques Hazan told writer Kim Willsher, "and we can't have children eating any old thing."



“ We believe we can control nature, but the only thing we can do is go with the flow. It's like riding a horse: You can never be as strong as a horse. ”

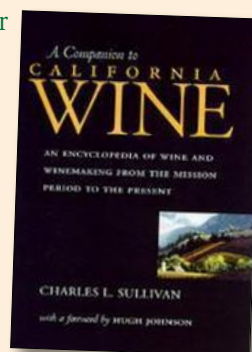


— Sicilian winemaker Ciro Biondi, whose family has been making wine on Mount Etna since the 1800s. (Source: Food and Wine)



Actors Zac Efron and Heather Graham were in Chicago recently, shooting a movie titled "Heartland," and paid a visit to a night spot known as the Board Room. While there, according to *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Richard Roeper, a mysterious son of a Russian billionaire reportedly bought them a 15-liter bottle of Armand de Brignac Nebuchadnezzar Champagne — often referred to simply as "Ace of Spades" Champagne. In what Roeper described as an example of "wretched excess," the purchaser paid \$100,000 for that bottle. Including a few bottles purchased for his own table, the total bill for the Russian billionaire's son came to \$112,500 — to which he added a 20 percent tip for the server, identified only as Jasmine. Added Roeper: "Good table for you, Jasmine."

“ Green” grape growing takes place under a number of names — including sustainable farming, biodynamic farming and so on. But the movement toward more Earth-friendly practices really got its start during the 1970s, when “organic wine” became all the rage. Charles L. Sullivan recalls that time in his book, *A Companion to California Wine*: “The vineyardists who want to ‘go organic’ must shun pesticides, herbicides and commercial fertilizers. They must also limit mildew control to the application of elemental sulfur. By the 1990s, more than 60 California wineries controlled vineyards certified by the California Certified Organic Farmers, an independent regulatory organization... Some vineyard owners now contend that, although an organic approach is more labor intensive at first, in the long run it is less expensive than conventional viticulture is.”



45

The slope, in degrees, of some vineyards in Germany's Mosel Valley winegrowing region. The Mosel is known, in particular, for its bottlings of Riesling.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



STEAK

Welcome, class, to *Steak 101*. Those who pass this course will advance immediately to *Steak-and-Wine 102*.

Unless you're a vegetarian, you probably like steak. But you've probably never thought much about it — that is, what makes a steak a steak. (Pay attention; there may be a quiz later...)

In very basic terms, a steak is a slice from a larger piece of meat, typically beef. Red meat and fish are often cut into steaks.

Most steaks are cut perpendicular to the muscle fibers, which improves the perceived tenderness of the meat. In the United States, restaurant steaks typically are grilled, often cooked over wood chips such as oak.

Because steaks are cooked quickly (using dry heat) and served whole, the most tender cuts of the animal usually are used. This also means that steaks carry a premium price and perception; the idea of eating steak is a signifier of relative wealth.

In many parts of the country, the grills have been put away for the long winter, but that doesn't mean we stop eating steak. Some people like to pan-fry the meat (sometimes in butter), while others opt for broiling in the oven.

Almost regardless of the

preparation, a good steak calls for a good glass of wine alongside it. Fortunately, the pairing possibilities are almost limitless.

We asked seven members of our tasting panel to name the type of wine they most enjoy with steak... and we got seven different answers. Their recommendations, in no particular order: Chianti Classico from Italy; Zinfandel (red, not white) from California; red Burgundy (i.e., Pinot Noir); Cabernet Sauvignon (one mentioned Bordeaux; another suggested the Napa Valley); Malbec from Argentina; and Shiraz from Australia.

One tasting panel member also mentioned that when she fries a steak in butter, she prefers a nice, buttery Chardonnay. That's right — white wine with beef.

In *Steak-and-Wine 102*, that is an idea which definitely is deserving of extra-credit points.

■ For a tasty garlic butter recipe — perfect for topping a sirloin steak — turn to the “Grapevine Cookbook” on page 12.

Light & Sweet 

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LENTIL & SAUSAGE SOUP

This delicious soup pairs perfectly with Syrah, and the recipe comes from our friends at Chateau Julien, one of the top wineries in California's Central Coast growing region. The recipe yields 8 servings.

Ingredients

- 1/2 lb. sweet Italian sausage
- 1 large onion
- 1 stalk chopped celery, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp. chopped garlic
- 1 package (16-oz.) dry lentils, rinsed
- 1 cup shredded carrot
- 8 cups water
- 2 cans (14.5-oz.) chicken broth
- 1 can (28-oz.) diced tomatoes
- 1 Tbsp. garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/4 tsp. dried thyme
- 1/4 tsp. dried basil
- 1 Tbsp. salt, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1/2 lb. ditalini pasta (optional)

Preparation

1. Place sausage in a large pot. Cook over medium-high heat until evenly brown.
2. Add onion, celery and chopped garlic, and saute until tender and translucent.
3. Stir in lentils, carrot, water, chicken broth and tomatoes.
4. Season with garlic powder, parsley, bay leaves, oregano, thyme, basil, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat.

5. Cover, and simmer for 2 1/2 to 3 hours, or until lentils are tender.
6. Stir in pasta, and cook 15 to 20 minutes, or until pasta is tender.

GARLIC BUTTER

Leave the A1 Sauce in the cupboard and top that sirloin steak with a dollop of garlic butter. This recipe yields about half-a-cup, enough for 2 to 4 steaks, depending on your personal preference.

Ingredients

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed and finely minced
- 1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1/4 tsp. white or black pepper
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. fresh chopped parsley

Preparation

1. Place butter in a bowl and leave at room temperature until it is soft.
2. Add all other ingredients; mix to combine thoroughly.
3. Using a spatula, scrape the butter mixture onto a square of plastic wrap. Shape it into a log, and roll the mixture up in the plastic, twisting the ends.
4. Refrigerate until firm.
5. When ready to use, remove wrap and slice into rounds. Place atop hot steak just before serving.

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