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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

Does the Shape of the Glass Really Make a Difference?



California's
Central Coast
'Rhone Zones'



Benziger and
Kinzie Make
a Great Team



Hot List: An
Inn Among
the Vineyards

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Does the Shape of the Glass Really Make a Difference?

By Robert Johnson

Some Champagne houses are now recommending that their sparkling wines be served not in traditional flutes, but rather in white-wine glasses.

That's the word from glass-maker Georg Riedel, who told *Drinks Business*: "The larger surface areas give more aromas, complexity and a creamier texture. Flutes are too narrow and don't allow the aroma and richness of the Champagne to shine, as there isn't enough air space."

Is this really a trend, or merely a marketing ploy? Interestingly, Riedel continues to sell both flutes and white-wine glasses — not to mention several other shapes of glassware intended for specific types of wine.

Over the years, I've attended several Riedel seminars in which various types of wine are served in various types (shapes) of glasses. In my archives (otherwise known as my closet), I found the most detailed notes about a seminar that featured:

- Sauvignon Blanc in a Sauvignon Blanc glass
- Sauvignon Blanc in a "generic" glass
- Chardonnay in a Chardonnay glass
- Chardonnay in a Sauvignon Blanc glass
- Sauvignon Blanc in a Chardonnay glass
- Chardonnay in a "generic" glass

- Pinot Noir in a Pinot Noir glass
- Pinot Noir in a Chardonnay glass
- Cabernet Sauvignon in a Bordeaux glass
- Cabernet Sauvignon in a Pinot Noir glass
- Pinot Noir in a Bordeaux glass
- Cabernet Sauvignon in the "generic" glass



In most cases, I noted minor aroma and flavor differences as a specific type of wine moved from one type of glass to another. Emphasis on *minor*. Only in the case of Sauvignon Blanc were significant differences noted — the variety's "grassy" aroma more pronounced in a "generic" glass, and its fruitful qualities more noticeable in a Sauvignon Blanc glass.

Not one of the classes ever motivated me to invest in multiple shapes of glassware. In fact, after close to 30 years of tasting and assessing wine, I'm convinced that a Bordeaux glass — with its large bowl and steep "sides" — works just fine for virtually all types of wine.

All types, that is, except Champagne. When the wine is sparkling, I still prefer a flute.



Winemaking and the Oak Influence

Here is a statistic that may startle you: Only 2 percent of all wine made ever spends time in wood barrels.

That's according to someone who should know: Francois Peltreau, president of Seguin Moreau Napa Cooperage, a maker of oak barrels for wine aging. Oak barrels are expensive, and because of that, they are reserved for only the very best wines.

In a world of "Two-Buck Chuck," jug wine and wine in cardboard boxes, the barrel-aged wine is a true rarity. We, as wine lovers, experience it much more often than most people, but that's only because we're willing to shell out for a glass what most would expect to pay for a bottle... or a jug.

Which brings up the question: Is wood worth it?

Absolutely. Here's why...

While other types of wood can be used for storing wine, oak is preferred and most commonly used by a wide margin. Think of the resins and sap found in pine; they would not be complementary additions to a wine's flavor profile. Oak, on the other hand, offers aromas and flavors that marry nicely with most types of wine — it's a matter

of matching the right kind of oak to the right kind of wine.

Because oak is ever so slightly porous, an oak barrel exposes wine to oxygen at a very slow pace. This serves to "soften" the wine without spoiling it, smoothing out the rough edges that can make red wine, in particular, seem angular and harsh.

Oak also imparts flavors, the exact nuances dependent upon the source of the wood and the degree of "toasting" that the barrel staves undergo. Among the aromas one may experience in a wine that has been barrel aged are caramel, smoke and vanilla, which can be very enjoyable accents to the natural fruit flavors.

Many winemakers think of oak barrels as condiments. Just as chefs select certain spices and sauces to elevate or define a dish, vintners choose oak barrels based on their "vision" for a finished wine.

Style preferences run the gamut from "no wood" to "200 percent" winemakers (those who ferment their wine in barrel in addition to aging it in barrel). All styles are valid; the trick is finding the style you enjoy most.



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Where highways 101 and 128 meet in northern Sonoma County, you'll find the town of Cloverdale — population: 8,618.

Cloverdale is part of the Alexander Valley, home of Pick's Drive-In and its red relish-topped hamburgers... the historic Gould-Shaw House Museum and its collection of memorabilia from the 19th and early 20th centuries... Clover River Park, where you can launch a kayak or canoe... and Miroslav Tcholakov and his winery.

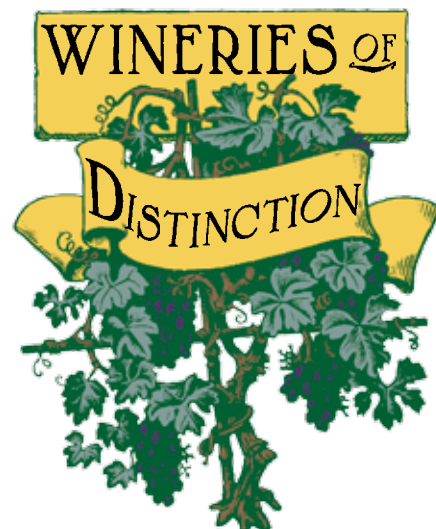
Born and raised in northern Bulgaria, a region with many millennia of winemaking history, Tcholakov — who prefers to be called Miro — was exposed to wine and winemaking at a very early age. His grandfather had long made the family's annual supply of wine, and as a boy, Miro was at his side during all phases of the process.

After completing his mandatory military service, Miro attended the Higher Institute of Agriculture in Plovdiv, where he studied viticulture and enology. Soon after graduation, in the summer of 1990, he was chosen from hundreds of candidates to participate in an international exchange program in agriculture set up by The Future Farmers of America. Destination: California's Napa Valley.

After a few months in Napa, Miro was taken on as a harvest intern at

Sonoma County's Dry Creek Vineyard. What was supposed to be a temporary harvest job turned into a nine-year position as he moved up through the ranks from cellar master to assistant winemaker.

Then in 1998, Miro was hired as winemaker for Trentadue Winery — and that remains his "day job." Miro has brought greater acclaim to Trentadue by crafting world-class, award-winning wines, and his duties include overseeing numerous "custom crush" operations for some renowned clients.



In 2001, Miro became his own custom crush “customer” with his inaugural bottling of Petite Sirah. Within a few weeks of its release, it received a 90-point rating from wine critic Robert Parker, and just like that, the brand enjoyed widespread credibility.

The Miro Cellars label, featuring “The Madara Horseman,” is based on a Bulgarian monument carved 23 meters above ground level in an almost-vertical hundred-meter-high cliff. This mysterious sculpture was created at the beginning of the 8th century during the birth of the Bulgarian nation, and the label thus pays homage to Miro’s homeland.

In his adopted homeland of northern Sonoma County, Miro searches the region for the finest grapes from a variety of vineyards in order to make his one-of-a-kind specialty wines. He considers the particular geology and seasonal climate variations of each vineyard when selecting the most interesting grapes the area has to offer.

You can sense Miro’s enthusiasm and passion as he describes his various bottlings...

• **Grist Vineyard Zinfandel** (190 cases) — “Finding and producing the ultimate Zinfandel has been my passion for over 20 years. This Zin comes from a famous vineyard located 1,500 feet above Dry Creek Valley. The vines grow in red, mostly volcanic, soil. The terroir influenced the bright, firm acidity and concentrated the wild berry aromas. The finish is long, juicy and appetizing.”

• **Piccetti Vineyard Zinfandel** (220 cases) — “The grapes are grown on a steep hillside above the Dry Creek Valley. This Zin has a classic Dry Creek style: abundant jammy strawberry, blackberry and sweet dark cherry aromas surrounding a full-bodied red wine with fine tannins and a long, crisp and juicy finish.”

• **Piccetti Vineyard Petite Sirah** (220 cases) — “This Petite is a great example of the varietal’s potential: abundant flavors and aromas of

blackberries, blueberries, plums and white pepper. In the mouth, substantial tannins with a long, juicy finish deliver a dark and delicious wine that’s destined to age well.”

• **Cabernet Sauvignon** (371 cases) — “The relatively young vineyard (that supplied the grapes for this wine) is planted nearly at the top of Pine Mountain at 2,200 feet above the valley of the Russian River. The moderate temperature inversion at that altitude supports softer, richer tannins in the wine, concentrated wild berry aromas, and enhanced varietal-specific flavors of dark fruit, slight earthiness and subtle spices.”

• **Windsor Oak Vineyard Pinot Noir** — “This vineyard is planted on the hilly east end of the Russian River Valley. Judicious use of French oak barrels only amplifies the varietal character without obstructing it. The meticulous attention to detail in the vineyard and great terroir produced near-perfect fruit. The wine is a great example of Pinot Noir, known for its intriguing and seductive nuances of cherry fruit, wild berries, rose petals and spices.”

Miro Tcholakov is a living, breathing, walking, talking example of the “American Dream,” a man who came to the United States eager to learn and with a willingness to work hard. He made an impact at Dry Creek Vineyard, he has taken Trentadue Winery to new heights, and he is achieving great things with his own brand.

(And here’s a culinary secret, little known outside of Cloverdale: Miro Cellars’ Piccetti Vineyard Zinfandel goes great with a Pick’s Drive-In burger... if you can resist the Pick’s root beer float.)

Winery 4-1-1

Miro Cellars

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April in Napa Valley



Special art and culinary experiences await visitors throughout the month.

California's Napa Valley is America's wine capital, and during the month of April, it also will be a cultural capital, offering a bevy of art and culinary events.

Throughout the month, the valley will focus on the elemental connection between wine and the arts, incorporating many of the artists, curators and collectors that make up "The Napa Valley Collection." In the valley's charming towns, wineries, galleries, studios, performing arts venues and other businesses will serve up special arts-related offers and host art-and-wine events under the umbrella of "Arts in April."

On April 7, for example, Clos Pegase owner and collector Jan Shrem will present his acclaimed program called, "Bacchus the Rascal: A Bacchanalian History of Wine Seen Through 4,000 Years of Art."

On April 14 at Markham Vineyards, you can take a trip back in time with Baron Wolman, *Rolling Stone* magazine's first chief photographer. Wolman not only witnessed what is considered the most important period of change in popular music and culture, but his photographs helped shape it. He'll share some of his amazing photographs of the iconic musicians of the 1960s, and recount the stories behind the pictures — including anecdotes about

Janis Joplin, Miles Davis, Woodstock and the early days of *Rolling Stone* magazine. "That was the great thing about *Rolling Stone*," Wolman says. "You could do anything, and we did." Visitors will be able to purchase Wolman's new photo book and have it autographed.

Andretti Winery is using "Arts in April" to spotlight the grand opening of its new gallery space. Featured will be the work of Andretti's first artist-in-residence, Edmund Ian Grant.

A complete list of events is available on the Legendary Napa Valley website (see accompanying information box).

Meanwhile, NapaStyle Yountville's weekly culinary program is providing some serious Friday afternoon kitchen inspiration throughout April. Culinary enthusiasts get to learn new tricks and pick up useful tips while sipping wine and snacking their way through expert demonstrations.

Each Friday, seasoned Napa Valley chefs and vintners demonstrate the preparation of extraordinary meals, sharing personal cooking secrets in an intimate setting. It's the perfect way to kick off a Napa Valley weekend, and because the classes tend to fill quickly,

advance reservations are strongly suggested. Here's the April schedule...

• **April 6 — Culinary Gardening: Starting With Seeds.** Peter Jacobsen of Jacobsen Orchards in Yountville is a certified organic master gardener. His culinary garden — with more than 120 different fruit trees and a vast array of vegetables, as well as 15 different types of culinary flowers — supplies some of the best restaurants in the world... including the Napa Valley.

Jacobsen's class will provide a fun foundation for getting your culinary



TOURING TIPS



NapaStyle Yountville

garden started, whether it's several pots of herbs in your window or your whole backyard. A how-to demonstration of seed starting and plant starts propagation will be the primary focus. Jacobsen also will discuss and provide a handout on local and national seed and start resources. Everyone will plant and take home their own pot of basil seeds, ready to water and place in the windowsill. Attendees should come ready to garden, sip some wine and snack on fresh herb canapés.

• **April 13 — The Wild Table: Seasonal Foraged Food and Recipes.**

Chef/author Sarah Scott's *The Wild Table* is an invitation into the romantic, mysterious and delicious world of exotic, foraged food. Once overlooked by many culinary aficionados, foraged foods have gained attention in recent years through farmers' markets, artisanal producers and growing interest in organic foods. From four-star restaurants to local markets, more and more wild food is appearing and gaining star status.

On the forefront of the foraging movement is long-time "huntress" Connie Green, who sells her gathered goods across the country and to Napa Valley's top restaurants, along with chef and culinary consultant Scott. *The Wild Table* takes readers with them into the woods and then back to the kitchen with wild delights. At this event, the featured recipes will be nettle malfatti with brown butter, lemon and Parmesan; wild salmon with morels and fava beans; and elderblossom panna cotta.

• **April 20 — Spring Has Sprung:**

Asparagus Three Ways. Chef Julie Logue-Riordan will share three of her favorite recipes for California asparagus. The techniques used to create these dishes are the key to creating good flavors. They are easy enough to make for a quick dinner on a work night, or as part of a multi-course dinner for guests.

The featured recipes will be creamy asparagus soup; asparagus pesto with rigatoni; and roasted asparagus with tangerine oil and black olives.

• **April 27 – Salute Santé: Extra Virgin Cold-Pressed Syrah Grapeseed Oil.** Valentin and Nanette Humer of Salute Santé will introduce their grapeseed oils — including Syrah, Merlot and Chardonnay — providing chefs with a new way to pair their culinary creations with wine. The oils exude a golden-green hue, an aroma of fresh-crushed grapes, a smooth and buttery mouthfeel, and a complex fruity/nutty flavor.

Executive chef Rob Hohmann and chef Arthur Coutinho of Bottega Napa Valley Restaurant will be on hand to make and extrude the Stozzapretti pasta, and then prepare a creative southern Italian sauce using the Syrah-flavored grapeseed oil.

Napa Valley gets quite busy and crowded during the summer, so consider a springtime trip — when the valley's world-class wines are joined by world-class art and culinary experiences.

For Further Information

NapaStyle Yountville
6525 Washington St.
Yountville, Calif.
707-945-1229

Arts in April
Venues Throughout
Napa Valley, California
<http://visitlegendarynapavalley.com>

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Inn Among the Grapevines. You can really feel as if you're away from it all at Beltane Ranch, located in the Sonoma Valley town of Glen Ellen. The inn is surrounded by vineyards (which produce a very nice Sauvignon Blanc), orchards and gardens, and breakfast includes items featuring garden-fresh veggies, eggs laid by the ranch's hens, and jams made from orchard-grown fruit.

www.beltaneranch.com

2 Hot Wine Book. From the authors of *The Flavor Bible* and *What to Drink With What You Eat* comes another essential text for foodies: *The Food Lover's Guide to Wine*. This time, Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg take an encyclopedic approach to the subject of food-and-wine pairing, and the gorgeous photography makes the book almost as much fun to gaze upon as it is to read. Seen on Amazon recently for just over \$20.

www.hachettebookgroup.com

3 Hot Decanting Tool. When wines are young and tightly wound, or well aged and finally ready to reveal themselves, the process known as decanting can help release the aromas. The Menu Wine Breather Carafe is an ingenious decanting tool that enables one to pour wine into a carafe and then pour it back into the bottle, providing just enough air exposure.

www.menu.as/US/winebreather/



Jeroboam. A large bottle with a split personality (although we don't mean "split" as in a 375-ml. bottle). The jeroboam actually comes in two sizes — one that holds the equivalent of six bottles of still wine (4.5 liters), and one that holds the equivalent of four bottles of Champagne (3 liters).

Kosher Wine. One produced under the supervision of a rabbi so as to be ritually clean.

Lieu-dit. French term for a named vineyard site.

Moscato Giallo. Wine made in the hills of Colli Euganei, near Padua, in Italy's Veneto wine region. The "yellow Muscat" is typically low in alcohol and at least semi-sparkling, and some say it's even more enjoyable than Asti Spumante.

Nose. The aroma or "bouquet" of a wine.

VINESSE STYLE

L'OUSTALET AND 'LINKAGE'

Those who embrace the concept of "linkage" are destined to enjoy multiple life experiences that are extremely enjoyable.

A good example of "linkage" involves music. It's the late 1970s, and you've become a fan of Neil Young after hearing "Like a Hurricane" on the radio. Then you hear a song called "Long May You Run," recognize one of the voices, and discover it's a collaboration between Young and Stephen Stills. You later discover that Stills and Young also were part of a band called Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young — and before that, in a band called Buffalo Springfield.

Using that concept with wine, you could begin with a visit to a winery in California's Paso Robles region, and end up at a restaurant in France's southern Rhone Valley.

First stop: Tablas Creek Winery, located on the west side of Paso Robles. It's a partnership between importer Robert Haas and France's Perrin family. Through "linkage," we learn that the Perrins have been making wine in France for five generations, and that they're the family behind the famed Chateau de Beaucastel in France's Chateauneuf-du-Pape region.

But the "linkage" doesn't end there. Remember that southern Rhone restaurant we mentioned? It's called L'Oustalet, located in an historic house in the center of Gigondas at Place de la Marie. And it's owned by the Perrin family.

At L'Oustalet, one could enjoy a lunch of grilled pork with spinach, potatoes, porcini mushrooms and sauce, accompanied by a bottle of wine from Chateau de Beaucastel... or perhaps a bottle of Domaine du Clos des Tourelles Gigondas.

And even if you opted for the latter bottle, the "linkage" would not be broken. The Perrin family acquired that domaine several years ago.

You can check out L'Oustalet's menu at: www.restaurantoustalet.com. Meanwhile, long may you run.

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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



California's Central Coast 'Rhone Zones'

Paso Robles

In recent years, Paso Robles has received its due as "The Rhone Zone" for producing rich, full, gregarious Rhone-varietal wines.

But just under 100 miles to the south lies another Rhone Zone — the Santa Ynez Valley — with a distinctly different climate, and wines possessing personalities that mirror those of France's Northern Rhone.

The coexistence of two divergent terroirs and styles within a major wine region — California's Central Coast appellation — is not unlike that of the Rhone Valley itself, where the cooler-climate North produces structured and elegant Syrah-dominant wines, while the South is known for juicier Grenache-based wines.

The primary distinction between the Paso Robles Rhone Zone and that of

the Santa Ynez Valley is geographical orientation.

The Paso Robles appellation is situated in a valley that runs north-south, with the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west and the Cholame Hills to the east. With the largest diurnal swing of any winegrowing area in California (40 to 50 degrees during the summer), heat-loving varieties such as Grenache have put the region on the map for big, ripe flavors, much like those of the Southern Rhone.

Conversely, the Santa Ynez Valley takes more after the Northern Rhone, with an east-west transverse range that allows the Pacific Ocean a significant influence over the area with near-daily fog and crisp ocean breezes. This cooler climate leads to trimmer wines than those from Paso Robles, with firm structure, plenty of secondary flavors like white pepper and tobacco, and great potential for aging.



Santa Ynez

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Q I'm watching my weight, and was wondering: How many calories are there in a glass of wine?

A It depends. Do you fill your wine glass to the brim, or do you allow room for swirling? And how big is that glass? A standard Bordeaux glass holds a lot more wine than a standard Champagne flute. The USDA defines a standard glass of wine as about 5 fluid ounces (which would yield about five glasses from a standard-sized bottle). Each ounce of wine has about 20 calories, so using the USDA standard, a typical glass of wine would contain about 100 calories — much better for your diet than a soft drink. Sweeter wines will have a slightly higher caloric count, but the numbers quoted are pretty accurate for dry table wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay.



Before the wine glass (which you can read about in detail in the “Editor’s Journal” column on page 2), there was the baked clay goblet. According to the Uncork website, those goblets came into use during the Pleistocene Age. Timber and bronze tankards emerged during the Bronze Age, and silver and pottery goblets (often with ornate decorations) were all the rage among the Romans. But it wasn’t until the 15th century that a vessel made out of glass, with both a bowl and a stem, was introduced — available only to the very rich and/or privileged.

“Red wine and chocolate! And people insist on it. It’s like, ‘OK, I’ve decided I want to rub sandpaper on my face.’ It’s that bad.”



— Drew Hendricks of Pappas Restaurants in Houston, asked by Food and Wine magazine to describe his No. 1 “nightmare pairing.” Note: A good many sommeliers strongly disagree.

Each summer, Robert Mondavi Winery, one of the iconic estates in California’s Napa Valley, hosts a Summer Concert Series on the edge of the famed To Kalon Vineyard. Guests are invited to bring a picnic or enjoy



a sit-down dinner prepared by Mondavi’s Chef Mosher. Either way, of course, Mondavi wines are available for sale. The 2012 lineup has just been announced, and the series will feature O.A.R. on Saturday, June 30; Plain White T’s on Friday, July 6; and Five For Fighting on Saturday, July 14. The O.A.R.

show will feature “4th of July” fireworks. For ticket information, visit www.robertmondavi.com, and then click on the “Events and Concerts” link.

98

Percentage of wine consumed within the first week after it is purchased.

Climate change and sustainability have become big issues in Australia, where the Australian Wine Research Institute is working to provide information and programs for grape growers and vintners. As an example, opportunities exist to add value to winery processes and waste streams through renewable energy technology such as biomass electricity, liquid biofuels and solar thermal systems. The AWRI is researching the use of grape marc as a fuel source for low-emission, renewable power generation, and also is investigating bioethanol and solar thermal co-generation and tri-generation options.



FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



Kinzie Winery Dinner

“Our mission is nothing less than an exceptional dining experience in every way: great food, a phenomenal wine list, outstanding service and the perfect ambience to enjoy it in.”

That’s how Susan Frasca describes her Kinzie Chophouse, a locals’ favorite in Chicago’s River North neighborhood for more than 20 years. While bigger-name steakhouses such as David Burke’s Primehouse, Chicago Cut, Harry Caray’s and Keefer’s garner most of the media attention, Frasca and Co. simply go about their business, offering more than a dozen cuts of top-quality meats, a choice of nine preparations (from Oscar-style to peppercorn crusted) and eight sauces (from Bearnaise to Gorgonzola cream).

There’s also an extensive list of starters (it’s hard to beat the wild mushroom and Gorgonzola cheese tart with lemon Buerre blanc), a five-selection cheese flight, 11 salad offerings (the chicken salad bowl is a meal in itself), seven pasta dishes, 15 sides (the wild mushroom risotto is amazing), a dozen entrees besides the steaks (the grilled meatloaf will make you forget about Mom’s), and 10 desserts (you’re in Chicago — have the hot buttered rum cheesecake).

And it’s all complemented by one of the best wine lists in the city, a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence winner every year since 2002.

Long story short: When Kinzie Chophouse organizes a winery dinner, as it did on March 22 in cooperation with Benziger Family Winery, it’s a must-attend event.

On this occasion, winemaker Mike Benziger was on hand to describe the wines, while Frasca worked with executive chef Jesus Martinez to develop sublime dishes to pair with Benziger’s Biodynamic wines.

All four courses were winners. Per usual, we present the menu and wine pairings not to gloat (okay, maybe just a little...) but rather to motivate you to experiment with similar dishes and styles of wine at home...

- **Starter:** Butternut Squash Soup.
Wine: 2009 Benziger Carneros Chardonnay.
- **First Course:** Smoked Salmon Cake with Pesto Ranch Remoulade.
Wine: 2007 Benziger Russian River Pinot Noir.
- **Entrée:** Beef Tenderloin Filet Center Cut in a Sage Butter Sauce. Wines: 2008 Benziger Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon, and 2007 Benziger Sonoma County Merlot.
- **Dessert:** Chocolate Terrine with Dark Chocolate Truffles. Wine: 2007 Benziger Sonoma Mountain “Tribute.”

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GRILLED SHRIMP TACOS

You might expect there to be a few slices of pineapple in this dish, considering it comes from the folks at DOLE. There are not. There's still plenty of flavor, though, and this recipe yields 6 servings. Pour a glass of Sauvignon Blanc or Chenin Blanc, and enjoy a beer-free Cinco de Mayo.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 lime, juiced and grated
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 6 (8-inch) flour tortillas
- 1 (12-oz.) package DOLE All Natural Southwest Salad Kit

Preparation

1. Combine olive oil, lime juice, peel and cumin in a small bowl.
2. Thread shrimp onto skewers, and season with salt and pepper. Brush shrimp with lime mixture.
3. Grill until shrimp are cooked through, about 3 minutes per side, brushing occasionally with lime mixture. Roughly chop shrimp.
4. Meanwhile, heat tortillas according to package directions.
5. Combine taco ranch dressing, sour cream and shredded cheese (included in the kit).
6. Spread mixture over each tortilla, then top with shrimp, salad greens and chips.

CHARDONNAY-FRIENDLY GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH

A well-oaked Chardonnay is a delight to drink, but can be a nightmare when it comes to pairing with food. The smoky characteristic provided by the oak barrels provides the primary pairing challenge. But there is an answer: an “adult” take on the classic grilled cheese sandwich. The preparation — cooking on an actual grill — is just as important as the ingredients. And don't be embarrassed to serve it; at a restaurant, this simple sandwich would fall under the fancy-sounding “Panini” heading. This recipe yields one sandwich.

Ingredients

- 2 slices dense multi-grain bread
- Butter
- 2 slices mozzarella cheese
- One-half avocado, cut into thin slices

Preparation

1. Preheat grill.
2. Butter bread on both sides.
3. Place one slice of cheese on one of the bread slices.
4. Add avocado pieces.
5. Place the other slice of cheese on top of the avocado pieces.
6. Top with the other bread slice.
7. Place sandwich on grill, and cook to desired “crispness.” Turn the sandwich over, and do the same with the other side. The cheese should melt nicely during the grilling process.
8. When done, remove sandwich from grill, and slice in half for easy handling.

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