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Volume 20

Number 8

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SKU 20000

# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

## A Wine Country Wish: An 'Uneventful' Harvest

Exploring the  
Pleasant Valley  
Wine Trail

The Secrets  
of Oregon's  
Rogue Valley

Pairing Wine  
With Spicy  
Ethnic Cuisine

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**EDITOR'S JOURNAL**

**Avoiding the Great Debate**

By Robert Johnson

***California's two largest metropolises — Los Angeles and San Francisco — are about as different as two cities could be. Just ask residents of one city to describe the other...***

Los Angeles is urban sprawl. San Francisco is neighborhoods. Los Angeles is cars. San Francisco is trolleys. Los Angeles is smog. San Francisco is fog. (Although if you've ever been stuck at LAX, waiting for those "late night and early morning low clouds" to clear out, you may disagree with that last comparison.)

Which city is "better"? There can be no "right" or "wrong" answer to such a question. We at Vinesse happen to love both cities. (Hey, with a statement like that, maybe we'll run for office!) We also love a town that's situated about midway between them along California's famous Highway 101: Paso Robles.

Once known as a place where bandits on the run could escape the long arm of the law, today Paso Robles has gained a reputation for growing grapes that are transformed into world-class wines.

And over the past 15 years, it has grown by leaps and bounds — particularly when it comes to acreage

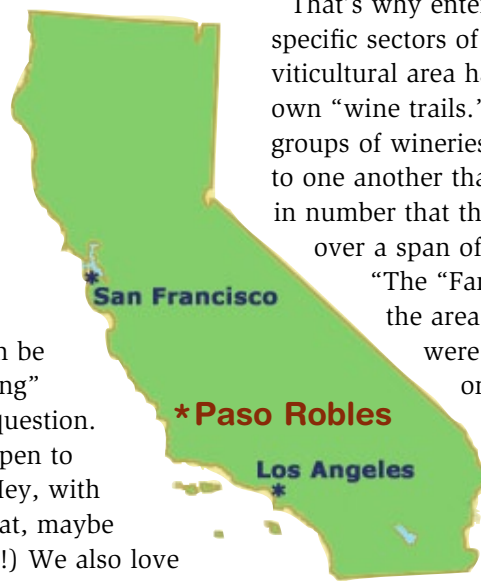
devoted to grapevines. There now are so many wineries that touring Paso Robles in just a few days... or even a few weeks... has become next to impossible.

That's why enterprising vintners in specific sectors of the Paso Robles viticultural area have created their own "wine trails." These "trails" are groups of wineries in close proximity to one another that are few enough in number that they can all be visited over a span of just a few days.

"The "Far Out Wineries" near the area's western boundary were among the first to organize. The latest: ten wineries closer to town that have unified under the banner of the "Pleasant Valley Wine Trail."

Those wineries, and that trail, are the subject of this issue's "Wine Touring Tips" feature, which begins on page 6.

A visit to Paso Robles not only is a fun experience for a wine drinker; it also enables you to take a "Pas-o" in the great Los Angeles-versus-San Francisco debate.





## Hoping for an ‘Uneventful’ Harvest

***Summer is still sweltering, but it won't be long until another harvest season begins in "wine country" locales all across America.***

When a grape is picked is every bit as important as what the winemaker does with it back at the winery. In fact, most vintners agree that the timing of the picking is the most important factor in the ultimate quality of the wine.

There is a point in the maturation of a grape when its accumulation of sugars and its depleting supply of plant acids are optimal. Some vintners utilize a contraption called a refractometer to measure a grape's sugar content. Others pick based on the taste of the grape, summoning the knowledge gathered over countless harvests past. And still others utilize a combination of science and experience.

Whatever their choice of picking barometer, vintners take the harvest seriously. They know that picking even a few hours late can result in a wine that fails to live up to its full potential. The wine may still be of good quality, but the vintner will forever be haunted by thoughts of what could have been.

This is understandable. After all, making wine is not

like making bread. Flour, yeast and water are readily available to a baker year-round. Winemakers, however, get only one shot per year at gathering the grapes from which they'll make their unique elixirs.

The grape harvest can be looked upon as a "transition period" in the winemaking cycle — the time when the grapes are transferred and transformed from the vineyard to the cellar. It is a time of year romanticized by the wine-drinking public, and anxiously anticipated by the farmers and vintners whose livelihoods depend on it. In actual practice, however, harvesting grapes is far from romantic.

Since harvest comes but once a year, all of us who love wine hope that Mother Nature smiles on her vineyards at this crucial stage of the winemaking process.



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**The Non-Romantic Tale  
of Judd's Hill Winery**

***Before his passing in 2010, Art Finkelstein had many conversations about the “romance” of wine — or, rather, the lack of romance.***

Finkelstein founded Judd's Hill Winery in 1988 with wife Bunnie, and named it after their son. It's located in the eastern hills of California's Napa Valley, and home to a 14-acre hillside vineyard.

“Creating music from an instrument, ceramics from a lump of clay, or a great meal from fresh foods all represent forms of art to me,” Finkelstein said. “But to take grapevines, farm them to produce the highest quality fruit and then turn them into wine... well, this process gets me closer to and more appreciative of whatever higher power there may be out there than anything else.”

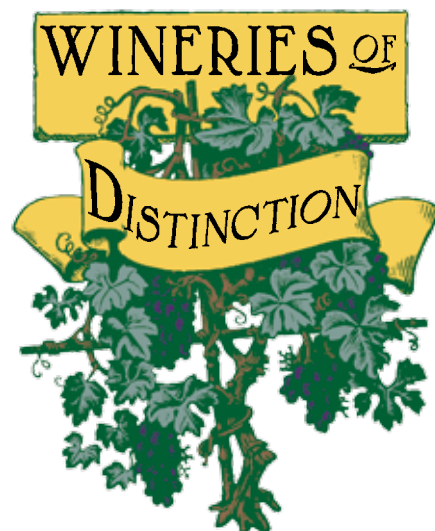
But a *romantic* endeavor? Finkelstein was always amused by that thought.

“Crushing grapes is nasty, grungy, necessity-fulfilling labor,” he said. “Beginning in August and lasting through October... from early morning until after dark... we're hoisting bins, shoveling pomace, pitch-forking stems, hauling hoses, hand-bucketing must into the press, pumping over, punching down, picking grapes, lugging lugs, towing trailers, sorting MOG [material other than grapes], and getting through a myriad of other toils.

“Also, it's darn hot out!” Finkelstein added. “The sweltering weather can be brutal, but we must wear long-sleeved shirts with collars up, long pants, and heavy gloves to protect ourselves from the masses of bees and yellow jackets which swarm to sip the sugary grape juice covering not only the crusher, but our sticky selves as well.

“Romantic? It's barely pleasant.”

But don't misunderstand; Finkelstein was not complaining. Really, he wasn't. He said that the reason he put himself through the myriad of tiring tasks each harvest season was that he was selfish.



“Once the grapes stop arriving and that last press-load has run into a barrel, a wonderful sensation fills me,” he said. “The understanding that we have taken our hands to the soil to grow luscious fruit, and then from that, employing our senses, have created and crafted a sumptuous wine which gives great pleasure to so many, is the greatest satisfaction I have known.”

It’s a feeling he embraced for more than 30 years — after studying music, ceramics, cooking and architecture. He began making wine at home in the early 1970s, and earned top honors from numerous wine competitions.

His “homemade” wines were getting better with each vintage, and a trip to Napa Valley in 1971 marked the beginning of his pursuit of winemaking as a profession. In 1979, he purchased a vineyard south of St. Helena, where he designed and built Whitehall Lane Winery.

There, he released his first wine in 1980. The estate became quite successful, and as demand grew and production increased, Finkelstein found himself spending more time managing and less time making wine, which was not what he had set out to do. With the winery growing to more than 30,000 cases a year, he and his partner/brother decided to sell Whitehall Lane in 1988.

Believing that smaller is better, he and his wife then built their second winery: Judd’s Hill. The idea was to produce no more than 3,000 cases of wine annually, an amount that would allow Finkelstein to enjoy a hands-on approach to every aspect of wine production — yes, even the non-romantic aspects. His first release of Judd’s Hill wine was a 1989 Cabernet Sauvignon.

“Our idea is that great fruit makes



fine wine, and we want that fact to show through,” Finkelstein said. “To that end, we use oak subtly, keep the alcohols at moderate levels and blend carefully. We let the grape shine, which results in wonderful wines with true varietal characteristics.”

Because of Finkelstein’s reputation as a fine winemaker, many grape growers began approaching him to make small quantities of wine in order to showcase their fruit quality to prospective grape buyers. Soon, enthusiasts were retaining his services to produce small lots of ultra-premium wines. Custom MicroCrush was created, a business that Finkelstein ran along with his winemaking duties at Judd’s Hill.

An accomplished ceramicist, he continued to make fine art ceramics. He also was featured in the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a master winemaker and chef. But he always said he and Bunnie got the greatest satisfaction out of sharing the family business with their son Judd and daughter-in-law Holly.

“You romantics can keep your ideal visions,” he said with a smile. “I know the harvest has toil, trouble, heat and vermin — and I say, ‘Bring it on!’ Because in the end, it makes me happy.”

It was a philosophy he held until the very end.

## Winery 4-1-1

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## Exploring Paso Robles, One 'Pleasant' Area at a Time

**P**aso Robles has long been a quiet outpost between California's two most famous cities — San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Today, it retains much of its small-town charm. The historic downtown area boasts an abundance of boutique shops and locally owned restaurants, not to mention a picturesque park — a Western version of a Norman Rockwell painting.

Neighboring Paso Robles along the coast are San Simeon, home to Hearst Castle, and the fishing village of Morro Bay. Between those two towns, you'll find Cambria, Harmony and Cayucos.

The proximity to the ocean plays a key role in the emergence of Paso Robles as a winegrowing region. Today, the town is surrounded by vineyards — at last count, some 26,000 acres that produce more than 40 winegrape varieties. You name the grape, and someone in Paso probably is growing it, from traditional Bordeaux varieties and California's own Zinfandel, to Spanish and Italian varieties.

To help wine-loving visitors narrow their focus, 10 local wineries, all in San Miguel, have joined to establish the "Pleasant Valley Wine Trail." Located in the beautiful rolling hills just east of town, the trail is just

minutes off Highway 46 East and Highway 101, yet offers tasters a unique experience off the beaten path.

You can follow the 12-mile trail for an unforgettable day of tasting while enjoying spectacular views. Here's a brief look at what you can expect at each estate...

• **First Crush** — Go beyond the tasting room to learn about wine and how it's made. You can explore the world of wine through exciting and informative "berry to bottle" wine workshops and crush encounters.



## TOURING TIPS

• **Graveyard Vineyards** — This estate is situated next to a 140-year-old country graveyard, atop a hill with 50-mile views of rolling hills of vineyards. It's a perfect spot for a picnic by the on-site pond that's stocked with fish.

• **J & J Cellars** — This family-owned estate and has been farmed for more than a hundred years. Visitors can sample Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Barbera, among other varieties. Another great place for a picnic and soaking in the views.

• **Locatelli** — Enjoy single-varietal and proprietary blends poured by the owners in an intimate tasting room. A special collector's edition label, with proceeds benefiting historic Mission San Miguel, also is available.

• **Ranchita Canyon Vineyard** — This boutique winery is family-owned and operated, with the goal of achieving rich, concentrated fruit for its estate wines. The hilly location provides great vistas, and helps the hand-tended vines produce high-quality fruit.

• **Riverstar Vineyards** — Want to immerse yourself in the "wine country" experience? This family-owned and operated winery also offers a family vacation rental — a great home base for a Pleasant Valley Wine Trail excursion.

## For Further Information

### First Crush

2995 Pleasant Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
877-82-CRUSH

### Graveyard Vineyards

6990 Estrella Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-2043

### J & J Cellars

2850 Ranchita Canyon Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-2891

### Locatelli

8585 Cross Canyons Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-0067

### Ranchita Canyon Vineyard

3439 Ranchita Canyon Road  
San Miguel CA 93451  
805-467-9448

### Riverstar Vineyards

7450 Estrella Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-0086

### Silver Horse

2995 Pleasant Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-WINE

### Tackitt Family Vineyards

6640 Von Dollen Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-467-9490

### Tassajara

2995 Pleasant Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-610-3651

### Villa San-Juliette Vineyard & Winery

6385 Cross Canyon Road  
San Miguel, CA 93451  
805-550-0522

• **Silver Horse** — Sitting atop a hill, this estate offers a tasting experience unique to the Central Coast. In addition to the tasting room, Silver Horse boasts three patios, bocce courts and horseshoe pits.

• **Tackitt Family Vineyards** — If you enjoy “talking wine” with the person who made it, this is a must stop. This family-owned winery celebrated its first crush in 2007 and quickly has gained a reputation for quality.

• **Tassajara** — Located in the barrel room of Silver Horse Winery, this

family-owned winery specializes in Rhone varieties. The winemaking philosophy can be summed up in a single word: “balance.”

• **Villa San-Juliette Vineyard & Winery** — This property boasts a beautiful 168-acre vineyard that produces a broad range of grapes, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc.

Some of the wineries along the trail occasionally host special events, and an up-to-date calendar is maintained online at: [pleasantvalleywinetrail.com](http://pleasantvalleywinetrail.com).



# VINESSE

## Hot LIST

**1 Hot Wine Train Excursion.** The V&T Railroad, based in Virginia City, Nev., is known as “the queen of the shortlines,” featuring excursions that offer spectacular views of the historic Virginia Range. On Saturdays through Sept. 8, a “Toast of the Canyon” route includes a vintage train ride, gourmet snacks and a glass of wine. [www.virginiatruckee.com](http://www.virginiatruckee.com)

**2 Hot Wine Tasting Opportunity.** Tahoe Ridge Winery, Marketplace & Bistro, located in Minden, Nev., gives visitors to the Lake Tahoe region a reason to take a break from some of the best sightseeing on Earth. Located on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, Tahoe Ridge offers wine tasting and a delectable bistro menu, featuring everything from ahi sliders to garlic chicken pizza, and from seasonal soups to Mascarpone mac-and-cheese. [www.tahoeridge.com](http://www.tahoeridge.com)

**3 Hot Wine Festival.** Completing our “Hot List” tour of the Lake Tahoe region, we head over to the California side for the Alpen Wine Festival at Squaw Valley. This famous ski resort offers an array of “off-season” activities, including zip-lining, hiking, tennis, and disc golf. And on Sept. 2, The Village at Squaw Valley will host the 23rd Alpen Wine Festival, offering samples from more than 40 California wineries. [www.squaw.com/things-to-do/events-calendar](http://www.squaw.com/things-to-do/events-calendar)



**Edmond August.** A winery in Paso Robles, Calif., founded by Edmond August Sauret, a native of Paso Robles and a former wine shop owner.

**Fining.** The addition of egg whites or gelatin (for example) to clear wine of unwanted particles and other components.

**Grand Cru.** A French term for an outstanding vineyard or a “great growth.”

**Hot.** Burning sensation in the mouth encountered when a wine is too high in alcohol.

**Indicazione Geografica Tipica.** One of the three levels of wine regulated by Italian law, typically referring to everyday table wines.

**Jug Wine.** An inexpensive table wine, generally lacking flavor complexity, and often bottled in a jug.

## VINESSE STYLE

*Nestled in the heart of California’s seaside village of Carmel, where Mayor Clint Eastwood once was responsible for keeping the peace, is an historic inn with a must-visit restaurant.*

The Cypress Inn, combining Mediterranean grace with warm hospitality, has been welcoming guests since 1929. There, Terry’s Restaurant & Lounge offers true local flavor — in more ways than just on the plates.

For years, Terry’s has been a gathering place for Carmel-by-the-Sea residents, many of whom bring along their four-legged family members. They mingle effortlessly with the inn’s guests, and four nights per week enjoy great music by local musicians in the “living room.”

But Terry’s isn’t just about ambience. It’s also about great food, creative cocktails and a wine list that’s heavy on Monterey County bottlings.

Among the culinary treats one can enjoy are clams sautéed with shallots, parsley, leeks and



garlic butter, and served with garlic fries... Monterey sand dabs, lightly breaded and grilled, and served with Tarragon sauce, fingerling potatoes and seasonal vegetables... lamb lollipops, pan-seared with mint-pistachio pesto and served with sweet potato fries... and the out-of-this-world mango crab salad with red bell pepper, basil, mint saffron, aioli and a rice vinaigrette dressing.

The restaurant serves all day, beginning with a complimentary breakfast for guests of the inn.

For further information, visit: [www.cypress-inn.com](http://www.cypress-inn.com).

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## APPELLATION SHOWCASE

### Rogue Valley, Oregon



***Drive up America's West Coast and you'll encounter one wine region after another... from Temecula to California's Central Coast, from the North Coast to southern Oregon, and from the Willamette Valley to Washington's Columbia Valley.***

About half-way between the Napa Valley and the Willamette Valley is southern Oregon's Rogue Valley wine country.

Easily accessible from both sides of Interstate 5, the Rogue Valley is home to an ideal "wine country" climate. The long growing season includes both warm days and cool evenings, which give rise to vibrantly ripened fruit with dynamic flavor profiles that translate beautifully in the finished wines.

The geographical diversity and interior valley locale contribute to wines that are well balanced and food friendly. The "heat units" exceed those in the Willamette Valley to the north, which means that heat-loving varieties thrive. While the Willamette is known primarily for Pinot Noir, the Rogue

is home to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Tempranillo, Malbec, Zinfandel, Syrah and Viognier.

The styles of wine are just as diverse as the varieties. The growers and winemakers are passionate about what they do, and share a deep commitment to sustainability and wine quality.

Today, the Rogue Valley is home to some 200 growers, around 1,800 acres of vineyards, and more than 20 wineries.

So while the Willamette Valley dominates the media among Oregon wine regions, the Rogue Valley is gaining a reputation for both quality and diversity. Along with Crater Lake and Ashland's Shakespeare Festival, it's one more reason to visit southern Oregon.

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**Q** We opened a bottle of Chardonnay with dinner last night, but didn't finish it. How long will it keep, and do you have any tips on how to store it?

**A** It depends on how old the wine is and the style embraced by the winemaker. In our experience, big, oaky, buttery bottlings of Chardonnay tend to fade fairly quickly after opening. You'd want to finish off the bottle within a day or two. "Unoaked" Chardonnay, as some refer to the more fruitful renditions, can last a day or two longer. Refrigeration may add an extra day to either style's "life span," but keep in mind that you'll need to take the wine out of the refrigerator about an hour before serving in order to experience all of its aromas and flavors. Also, older wines will fade more quickly than younger ones. It's always best to finish a bottle on the day it's opened, if at all possible.

19.9

Value, in billions of dollars, of California wine sales in 2011.

Source: Wine Institute.

“For us, it's not marketing, it's our philosophy. We want as many people as possible to follow suit.”

— Caroline Blondeel of France's Chateau Fonroque, talking about the estate's organic farming methods. Source: Yahoo! Finance.

**C**ould cow horns, vortexes and the words of a prophet named Rudolf Steiner hold the key to producing the most alluring wines in the world — and to saving the planet? In *Voodoo Vintners*, writer Katherine Cole reveals the mysteries of biodynamic winegrowing and explores its practice in Oregon vineyards. Her story starts on the back of a motorcycle in Persia and ends on a farm where the work is done by draft horses, chickens and goats. Best of all, it's written in Cole's engaging style, which has been featured in the pages of the (Portland) *Oregonian's* FOODday section since 2002. To order the book and request a personal autograph, go to: <http://katherinecole.com/buy.html>.



**I**t was during the Iron Age that wooden barrels first became popular. They were developed by northern Europeans — the Celts generally receive most of the credit — and used for shipping a wide array of products. Today, wooden barrels are used almost exclusively in the making of wine and spirits.



**J** Vineyards & Winery has achieved certified sustainable status through the California Sustainable Winegrowers Alliance (CSWA). The certification covers all vineyard and winery operations. J Vineyards & Winery is located minutes south of Healdsburg, Calif., and owns 10 estate vineyards sprinkled throughout the Russian River Valley, totaling more than 250 acres of planted Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris grapes. “For the past two years, we’ve been diligently working on aligning J with CSWA’s commitment to wine quality,” said John Erbe, the estate’s viticulturalist. “Our estate vineyards have been planted utilizing the latest techniques in water conservation, wildlife habitat corridors, and soil erosion reduction.” Founded in 2010, the sustainability program is a third-party verification and certification process maintained by CSWA. Based on 227 “best practices,” it’s designed to ensure environmental stewardship, the conservation of energy and natural resources, and socially equitable business practices.

## FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

### SPICY ETHNIC FARE

*It is the age-old question among foodies: What type of wine should one serve with spicy ethnic fare?*

A handful of suggestions commonly are proffered — so much so that they have become “go-to” wines in many Indian, Korean, Vietnamese and Basque restaurants... and even some Tex-Mex eateries.

These include Gewurztraminer, dry or off-dry Riesling, rosé-style wines and sparkling wines. The trait they share is a solid acid backbone that can refresh the palate while it’s being “assaulted” by the spiciness of the food.

But are these the only choices? No, according to some restaurateurs. It’s also possible to match spicy fare with dry wines. The key is to differentiate between “spicy” and “hot.”

In Tex-Mex cuisine, for example, among the popular ingredients are peppers — which tend to be hot on the palate, ranging from mildly so to “five-alarm.” Especially with the ultra-hot varieties, finding a complementary wine — one whose flavors aren’t totally blown away by the heat — is next to impossible. An ice-cold beer is a much better beverage choice.

But Indian food can be an entirely different matter. Indian cuisine isn’t about heat; it’s defined by the spices used. And very few spices could be considered hot. “Exotic” would be a better word. One must still pay attention to the flavor of the spice when selecting an appropriate wine, but the pairings are not limited to the aforementioned “go-to” bottlings.

In her “Wine Notes” column for the (Portland) *Oregonian* newspaper, Katherine Cole once cited a dish being served by a local Indian restaurant: rack of lamb marinated in yogurt, garlic, ginger and mint, and then roasted over coals in a tandoor oven. It was served with a puree of minty spinach, a mint chutney and wild mushrooms.



The recommended wine? A California Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wrote Cole: “The mushroom and lamb complement Cab’s darker side — earth, leather, chocolate, pencil shavings — while all that mint highlights the wine’s brighter notes of green bell pepper and aromatic herbs. The charred flavor from the tandoor oven brings out toasted barrel oak to seal the deal.”

You now have another wine option when dining at an Indian restaurant. Understanding that “spicy” does not equate with “hot” opens the door to many pairing possibilities.

*For more on Cole and her new book see “Wine Buzz” on page 10.*

## Light & Sweet

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## GARLIC-MUSHROOM HAMBURGERS

It's grilling season, and if you'd like to add some flavor to your hamburgers, you've come to the right place. This recipe yields three palate-pleasing burgers, and pairs nicely with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot or Pinot Noir.

### Ingredients

- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 can (4.5-oz.) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 pound ground beef
- 3 hamburger buns

### Preparation

1. Preheat an outdoor grill for medium-high heat, and lightly oil the grate.
2. Mix egg, garlic, salt and mushrooms in a bowl.
3. Add ground beef, and mix until combined. Divide into three patties.
4. Cook on the preheated grill until the burgers are cooked to your desired degree of doneness (about 5 to 7 minutes per side for well done).
5. Add patties to hamburger buns, with no additional toppings, and serve. (Note: Additional toppings may be added, but likely would change the wine pairing recommendations.)

## SCALLOPS PROVENCAL

This recipe makes about three servings, and pairs perfectly with Sauvignon Blanc. A sparkling Blanc de Blanc also would work well.

### Ingredients

- 1 pound sea scallops
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- All-purpose flour, for dredging
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1/2 cup large shallots, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/4 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped
- 1/3 cup Sauvignon Blanc
- 1 lemon, cut in half

### Preparation

1. Cut each scallop in half horizontally.
2. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, toss with flour, and shake off the excess.
3. In a very large sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of the butter over high heat until sizzling. Add the scallops in a single layer.
4. Lower the heat to medium and allow the scallops to brown lightly on one side without moving them. Then turn them and brown lightly on the other side. (This should take a total of 3 to 4 minutes.)
5. Melt remaining butter in the pan with the scallops. Add the shallots, garlic and parsley, and sauté for 2 more minutes, tossing the seasonings with the scallops.
6. Add the wine, and cook for 1 minute.
7. Serve hot with a squeeze of lemon juice.

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