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Volume 21

Number 10

©Vinesse Wine Club 2013

SKU 21844

The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

Exploring Temecula's
Winery Restaurants

Pairing Wine With
Middle Eastern Fare

A Visit to a Port
Authority: Ficklin

Uncorking the Secrets of
Beaujolais

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Turn Columbus Day Into a Day of Wine Exploration

By Robert Johnson

While Christopher Columbus — whose 662nd birthday we mark on October 14 — didn't exactly discover America, he did contribute greatly to Europeans' awareness of the American continents.

That's good enough for a three-day weekend as far as I'm concerned.

All told, under the auspices of the Catholic monarchs of Spain, Columbus led four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean. It was his sense of discovery, apparently without fear, that I most admire, and have long sought to emulate in my encounters with wine.

It's so easy to get into a vinous rut once we discover a particular wine that we really like. But when it comes to the fermented gifts of the grape, a sense of discovery can be extremely rewarding. There is so much to explore, and the exploration can follow any of several paths.

Let's say you drink nothing but Chardonnay. Your "wine expedition" may begin by trying other white varietals, such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Vinho Verde or Viognier.

Are you a Merlot fancier? Perhaps it's time to try Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Malbec or Mourvedre.



If you've already explored many of the white varieties, it might be time to sample some reds... or rosés... or sparkling wines. Likewise, if all you drink is bubbly, the time has come to discover still table wines.

You also could emulate Columbus and do your

exploring by country. If you like California Cabernet, try a French Bordeaux red. If you like California Chardonnay, seek out an Australian rendition. Some countries grow varieties that you may never have heard of, yet can be amazing treats for your palate.

And here's the coolest thing of all for wine drinkers in search of vinous adventure: Whether you explore by wine style, wine type or wine region, every year... every vintage... brings something new to discover in each and every category.

On October 14, join me in raising a glass to Christopher Columbus... and uncorking (or unscrewing) a bottle you've never had before.



Celebrating With the Season's First Wine

Beaujolais Nouveau Day is marked in France on the third Thursday in November with fireworks, music and festivals. Under French law, the wine is released at 12:01 a.m., just weeks after the wine's grapes had been harvested.

Parties are held throughout the country and farther afield — including here in the United States — to celebrate the first wine of the season.

Beaujolais Nouveau — that much-ballyhooed, cherry-colored wine that's best served chilled — is clearly not for wine snobs. This fresh and fruity red owes its easy drinkability to a winemaking process called carbonic maceration, a.k.a. whole-berry fermentation. This technique preserves the fresh, fruity quality of the grapes without extracting bitter tannins from the grape skins.

Beaujolais Nouveau is meant to be consumed young. Most vintages should be enjoyed by the following May after its release. However, in excellent vintages — such as 2000 — the wine can live much longer and be savored until the next harvest rolls around.

The Gamay grapes that go into Beaujolais Nouveau are handpicked in the Beaujolais province of France (see "Appellation Showcase"

in this issue). The wine originated about a century ago as a cheerful drink produced by locals to celebrate the end of the harvest season. It goes well with either haute cuisine or Friday night's pizza.

The idea of a race to Paris carrying the first bottles of the new vintage was conceived, and attracted much media attention. By the 1970s, the race became a national event. Races spread to neighboring countries in Europe during the 1980s, followed by North America, and then to Asia in the 1990s.

The traditional slogan used in ad campaigns — "*Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrive,*" which translates to, "The new Beaujolais has arrived" — was changed in 2005 to, "It's Beaujolais Nouveau time."

In 2010, some 35 million bottles of Beaujolais Nouveau were made, nearly half of which were exported to Japan, Germany and the United States. Most of the rest was sold in French supermarkets for uncorking on the third Thursday in November.



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Ficklin: Fine California Wine Made With Portuguese Flair



Resting unobtrusively on a back road in California’s Madera County is the home of Ficklin Vineyards and its acclaimed and coveted Tinta Port, a California wine created in the Portuguese tradition.

Walter C. Ficklin and his wife Mame purchased the present acreage in 1918, initially growing fruit and raisin grapes. Not until after World War II did the transition from raisins and fruit to wine production begin.

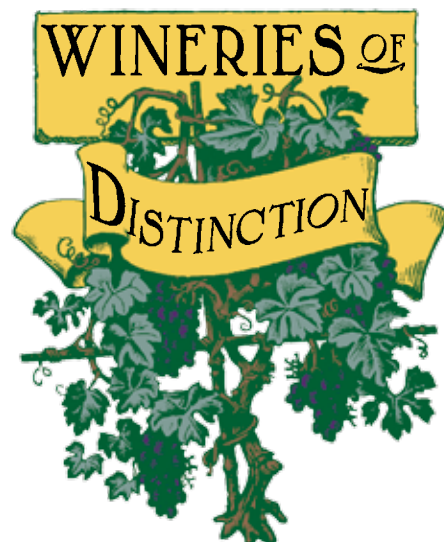
During the 1930s and ’40s, the University of California at Davis was testing grape varieties used in the production of Portugal’s premium red dessert wines under California’s growing conditions. The San Joaquin Valley showed promise for the propagation of these Portuguese varieties, and Walter Ficklin Sr. became interested in growing winegrapes.

In 1946, Walter and his sons, Walter Jr. and David, decided to move into wine production, making two decisions that would greatly affect the winery’s future success. They decided that the winery would produce only Port, in the tradition of great vineyards of Portugal’s Douro Valley, and using the finest Portuguese grape varieties.

They also decided to keep the operation small, so each step could receive the personal attention of the family. Ficklin Vineyards was

incorporated on September 30, 1946.

When the long process of establishing a quality winery began, Walter Jr. became the vineyardist. In the spring of 1944, he obtained 20 cuttings from U.C. Davis and grafted them to the family’s established nematode-resistant rootstock. That fall, buds were taken from the growth of those first 20 cuttings and budded to the existing 1613 rootstocks that were planted in 1945. This marked the beginning of what would become the finest



Portuguese grape varietal vineyards in America.

Over the next three years, about 15 acres of Souzao, Tinta Cao, Tinta Madeira, Alvarelhao and Touriga were planted. While Walter Jr. tended the young vines, his brother David was studying fermentation science at U.C. Davis.



generation of Ficklins joined the family business. Steven took over as vineyardist when his father, Walter Jr., retired. In 1984, Peter, David's son, became the master vintner, and in 1991, he became the President as well. David remained active as a consultant until his death in 1998.

David's first responsibility as vintner was to build the winery. Forty years ago, temperature control in a winery's cellar was a matter of construction. Large adobe bricks were handmade and dried in the scorching sun. These bricks formed thick walls and, with the heavily insulated roof, shut out the summer heat, providing a relatively uniform temperature in the cellar.

Casks and puncheons were accumulated. A used crusher was purchased. Bottling equipment and racks for bottle aging were acquired. All the while, the vines were maturing.

At the first crush, the grapes, fully ripened and heavy on the vines, were carefully hand cut into 50-pound lug boxes. The family and crew gathered for this moment of high drama.

The heavy box was lifted from the field wagon, and the deep purple-hued grapes were dumped into the crusher. Instantly, the mangled fruit flew back in the face of the worker. There was a moment of shocked silence... and then laughter. The necessary adjustments were made so the crusher no longer ran backwards, and the initial crush of Ficklin Tinta Port continued.

Marketing those first few hundred cases in the early 1950s was largely a matter of capturing a buyer's interest. Walter Sr. took over the sales and marketing of the new wine, his task made easier by early critical acclaim.

In the mid-1960s, David added a second building to expand cellar space, bringing the aging capacity from 43,000 to 51,000 gallons. A third building was added in 1978. The winery slowly added vineyard acreage over the years.

In the early 1970s, the third

The Ficklins use an age-old "solera" process to produce a blend that is consistent in character from year to year. They never bottle all of a single year's crush. In theory, there is some of the first wine ever produced in each bottle of Ficklin Tinta Port sold.

Today, Ficklin Vineyards covers some 35 acres planted to the same varietals that were planted in the 1940s. Annual production is just under 10,000 cases of the non-vintage Tinta Port. In very exceptional years, Ficklin bottles a vintage-dated Port in limited quantities of about 1,000 cases.

A relatively new addition to the Ficklin family of wines is the Aged 10 Year Tawny Port. Winemaker Peter Ficklin also has set aside a group of special barrels for a 20 Year Old Tawny Port.

Ficklin wines are available to be tasted free of charge. Winery tours include a guided walk through the processes and history of Port production. Tour participants can see wine production methods such as the solera blending system, and then taste Port from the processes they observe.

Tours are available by appointment, preferably made five to 10 days in advance.

Winery 4-1-1

Ficklin Vineyards

30246 Avenue 7½

Madera, CA 93637

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Open Daily, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.



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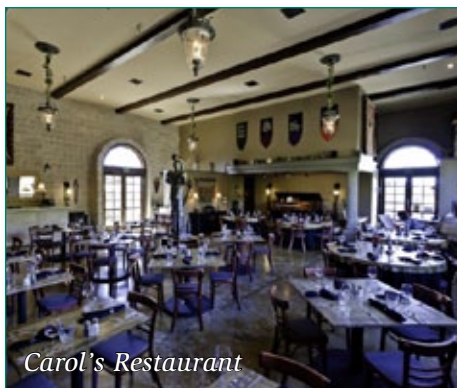
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Wining & Dining in Southern California's Temecula Valley

In Australia, many of the “cellar doors,” Aussie-speak for winery tasting rooms, include restaurants — an excellent way to showcase a given estate’s wines.



Café Champagne



Carol's Restaurant



Creekside Grille

For various reasons, winery restaurants are rare in the United States — with one exception. In Southern California's winegrowing region of Temecula, no less than nine of the closely bunched wineries offer an array of dining experiences to guests.

Following is a quick look at those wineries and restaurants, provided by the wine estates. Hours of operation may vary by season, or when special events are scheduled, so always call ahead for the latest information and/or to make reservations.

■ **Café Champagne at Thornton Winery.** Expect “contemporary fusion cuisine” paired with premium wines in a stylish setting, creating the perfect spot for the total foodie experience. (Open 365 days a year for lunch and dinner.)

■ **Carol's Restaurant at Baily Winery.** Casual dining overlooking the

grapevines at the Baily tasting room. Features California and Mediterranean cuisine, incorporating fresh herbs and vegetables grown in the adjacent garden. (Open for lunch, Thursday through Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; Saturday lunch, until 3 p.m.; appetizers, 3-5 p.m.; dinner, 5-8:30 p.m.)

■ **Creekside Grille at Wilson Creek Winery.** Seasonal ingredients and award-winning wines are the inspiration for a relaxing experience at Creekside Grille. Surrounded by grapevines, the view and ambience set the scene for a charming encounter. (Open daily for lunch; brunch on Sunday.)

■ **MDO Bistro at Monte de Oro Winery.** For a great “wine first”

and “food to complement” tasting experience, visit MDO Bistro. MDO's wines provide Chef Taylor with a rich foundation of aromas and flavors to create terrific casual lunch entrees or pre-dinner snacks. Voted 2013 “Best of Inland Empire.” (Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.)

■ **Meritage at Callaway.** Offers breathtaking views of Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards and glorious sunsets over the Temecula Valley, not to mention an exceptional menu along with light-hearted and spirited hospitality. (Open daily for lunch at 11 a.m.; call for dinner hours.)

■ **Pinnacle Restaurant at Falkner Winery.** Enjoy picturesque hilltop views of wine country with award-winning Mediterranean/American food made from local produce, gold medal-winning wines and wonderful service. Voted “Best Restaurant” for



MDO Bistro



TOURING TIPS



Meritage



Pinnacle Restaurant

six straight years. (Open daily, 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.)

■ **The Restaurant at Leoness.**

Alfresco dining featuring Italian and French dishes emphasizing fresh ingredients and unique flavors that complement Leoness wines. Warm hospitality and inspiring vineyard views complete the experience. (Open Friday-Sunday, 11:30 a.m.-6 p.m.)

■ **The Restaurant at Ponte Winery.**

A “top 50 restaurant” for outdoor dining in the United States. Taste



The Restaurant at Leoness

local produce and organic ingredients prepared by a skillful and passionate culinary team. (Open daily for lunch; dinner Friday and Saturday.)

■ **Vineyard Rose Restaurant at South Coast Winery Resort & Spa.**

Winner of the 2011 *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence, the Vineyard Rose serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, prepared with the freshest local ingredients and expertly paired with award-winning wines. (Open daily; call for hours.)



The Restaurant at Ponte Winery



Vineyard Rose Restaurant

For Further Information

Café Champagne
Thornton Winery
951-699-0088

Carol’s Restaurant
Baily Winery
951-676-9243

Creekside Grille
Wilson Creek Winery
951-699-WINE

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Meritage
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Falkner Winery
951-676-8231

The Restaurant
Leoness
951-302-7601

The Restaurant
Ponte Winery
951-694-8855

Vineyard Rose Restaurant
South Coast Winery
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951-587-9463

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot New Wine E-book. Bill St. John writes about wine for the *Chicago Tribune*, and now his food and wine pairing recommendations have been compiled in an e-book called *How to Pair Wine: An Expert’s Guide*. In addition to St. John’s tips and insights, the e-book includes numerous recipes that are extremely wine-friendly.
www.chicagotribune.com/ebooks

2 Hot Culinary Tour. East Coast foodies know something that West Coast foodies may not: Providence, R.I., is home to a thriving culinary scene. Visitors to our smallest state’s largest city can get a quick (and tasty) tutorial on the top local restaurants by taking a three-hour tour led by chef and cookbook author Cindy Salvato. The tour, typically held on Saturday mornings, focuses on the Federal Hill neighborhood, which is known as Providence’s “Little Italy.”
www.savoringrhodeisland.com

3 Hot Argentina Lodge. Just outside Mendoza, Argentina’s winegrowing capital, the Cavas Wine Lodge offers a unique escape for wine lovers. In addition to sampling the estate-grown vintages and noshing on Argentine rib-eye with chimichurri sauce, guests can soak in the sun vineyard-side, play golf, take a wine bath or indulge in a grape-seed exfoliation. Accommodations are in adobe-toned casitas, starting at \$560 per night.
www.cavaswinelodge.com



VINESSE STYLE

OYSTERS

You've probably heard this pearl of wisdom: Oysters are best in months that end in "R."

Jug Wine. American term for an inexpensive table wine. The equivalent in France long has been "vin de table," although French wine designations are changing.

Keg. A small barrel for aging wine.

Loire Valley. A winegrowing region in west-central France.

Malagousia. A nearly-extinct grape variety, saved in the late 1970s by Greek winemaker Vangelis Gerovassiliou. Before his intervention, only one vine remained.

Nascetta. A white grape variety native to the Piedmont region of Italy, known for its citrusy flavor.

Old Vines. Although not defined by law or regulation, this term is used by wineries to designate wines made from grapes grown on venerable grapevines. Of course, one person's "old" is another's "middle-aged."

Which means that we're now a month into "oyster season," with plenty of slurping still ahead.

No dish in a restaurant screams "sophistication" more loudly than a platter of fresh oysters over ice. Foodies love the bivalve mollusks just as they are, while others require various accompaniments — just as many people consume escargot only if the meat is soaked in melted butter.

Chef Wayne Bush of the Matunuck Oyster Bar in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, told *Edible Rhody*, "When dressing your oysters, go easy and let their natural flavors shine. A good rule of thumb is never put too much of anything on an oyster."



Bush's recommended "sides" include Chablis mignonette with green peppercorn, cucumber and jalapeno salsa, and cherry tomato cocktail sauce — but only a small amount.

Keep in mind that the accompaniments can... and should... vary, depending on the source of the oysters. Although there are regional and even local differences, generally

speaking, oysters from the East Coast are bigger, saltier and firmer, while those from the West Coast, in comparison, are smaller, sweeter and softer.

Those differences, as well as the accompaniments selected, also impact the wine pairing strategy. With sweeter oysters, opt for a semi-sweet or fruit-forward wine such as Moscato or a rosé. With saltier oysters, a Rhone-style white blend — Roussanne and Grenache Blanc, for instance — works very nicely.

And with either style of oyster, a well-chilled sparkling wine also makes an excellent, not to mention stylish, pairing partner.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



Extending 34 miles from south to north, the Beaujolais Appellation, which produces France's coveted Nouveau wines (as well as sublime bottlings of Gamay and Pinot Noir), is situated between Lyon and Mâcon.

Leaning up against the last foothills of the Massif Central range to the west, the region slides eastward down to the Saône River plain, its vines carpeting the slopes that change color with the seasons.

Generally northeast to southwest facing, the vine rows coat the Beaujolais hills at an average height of between 300 and 1,000 meters above sea level.

The angle of the hillside vineyards in the north exposes the grapes to more sunshine, which leads to an earlier harvest than in the south. The southern half of the region, also known as the Bas Beaujolais, has flatter terrain with richer, sandstone and clay-based soils and some limestone patches.

Though it's not unusual for there to be sudden changes in the weather — with winters that sometimes are harsh — the Beaujolais region makes the most of a temperate climate. In winter, continental currents cause frosts that can spread into spring. Between seasons, light ocean winds stir up the regulating role of the River

Saône, and soften the temperature differences.

With the return of the summer come winds from the Mediterranean. This is when the Haut Beaujolais mountain chain is particularly good for protecting the vines, and encourages the foehn wind that comes from the west — hot and dry in summer as it passes over the peaks of the Beaujolais hills and down to the Beaujolais plains.

Rain tends to be light, and the vineyards can be subject to very high temperatures for extended periods. Although these long summer droughts are definitely favorable to the quality of the region's wine, they also can ignite sometimes-devastating storms.

The Gamay grape originated in the village of Gamay, near Beaune in Burgundy, in the 14th century. While the growing of it was prohibited in Burgundy in 1395, the grape found a new home in Beaujolais where it has thrived, producing structured, complex wines in the north, and lighter, fruit-forward wines in the south.

Four Seasons



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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Q We have between two dozen and three dozen wines on hand at our house at any given time. Should we invest in a wine cooler?

A It depends. If some of those bottles were fairly expensive, and were purchased with the idea of not drinking them for several years, investing in a temperature-controlled wine cabinet may not be a bad idea. When cellaring wine for more than a few years, you can protect their quality by storing them at a constant temperature of 55 degrees. A steady humidity level of between 55 and 75% also is helpful in keeping corks from cracking (which allows wine-damaging air into the bottle). But if you purchase wine primarily to drink within a few days or months, no cooler should be necessary, unless you live in a desert community. Just be sure to store it well away from the oven or other sources of heat.

2,572

The number of wine producers in Australia, as of 2012 — an increase of 40 over 2011.

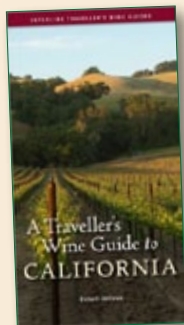
(Source: Wine Australia)

“I save good wine for finishing a dish, when you can really taste it. It’s just like olive oil. You’ve heard of finishing oil? That’s how I use good wine.”



— Alex Guarnaschelli of New York City’s *Butter and The Darby*, on cooking with wine (quoted in Food and Wine)

Biodynamic farming is embraced by the owners and stewards of Quivira Vineyards and Winery in Healdsburg (Sonoma County), California. The core of biodynamics involves creating the healthiest soil possible. Following this farming discipline, the soil in Quivira’s vineyards is closely (bordering on obsessively) monitored, ensuring that it is teeming with natural, healthy microbiotic life. Balance is essential; if something is taken out, something is put back in. Quivira feeds the microbiotic life with natural, time-tested techniques. As a winery spokesperson tells us, “Everything done in the vineyards is a testament to the fact that the earth under our feet is just as alive as the vines above ground.”



Interlink Books recently released another wine-focused book, *A Traveller’s (sic) Wine Guide to California*, written by Robert Holmes. The tome does not offer much that’s new in terms of wine education, but it does serve as a useful guide to some of California’s quality-focused producers. It even includes a list of California wine events, as well as several useful websites. Priced at \$22, it would make a nice holiday gift for anyone who is relatively new to wine.

The New Buffalo Harvest Wine & Food Festival will take place on Oct. 12 at Lion’s Park in downtown New Buffalo, Michigan. The \$5 admission fee provides access to wine tasting from several local estates, as well as live music, horse-drawn hayrides, a pumpkin patch, a bounce house and art activities for the kids. Yes, it’s a family-friendly event, and additional information is available online at: www.newbuffalo.org.



FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

Middle Eastern Cuisine



When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Those certainly are words of wisdom when traveling and eating out, particularly if you happen to find yourself someplace you've never been before.

And when it comes to wine, the same advice holds true: Drink what the locals drink.

But what about Middle Eastern food? America's larger cities are home to numerous restaurants featuring Middle Eastern cuisine, but it's rare to find wine from Lebanon or Israel or Morocco.

If a restaurant does offer such bottlings, by all means, give one a try — and don't be shy about asking for assistance in selecting one. Additionally, the tips that follow should help...

■ **Think pink.** Because so many Middle Eastern dishes are spicy, we look for wines that, first and foremost, are refreshing. In that regard, nothing beats a rosé-style wine — particularly one from Provence or made elsewhere in a similar style — that has been well chilled.

■ **Acid redux.** Another dependable choice is a wine that's high in acid, possessing a lip-smacking quality. New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is a good choice among white wines, and Sangiovese should delight red-wine fans.

■ **Eschew oak.** The "California style" of Chardonnay, which emphasizes a toasty oak aroma and a rich, buttery mouthfeel, does not work well with spicy fare. Instead, opt for a less okay, more refined style, such as that embraced by most vintners in Burgundy or Austria.

■ **Spice on spice.** Gewurztraminer often is recommended as a pairing partner for spicy Asian or Tex-Mex fare, the theory being that the spice of the wine would be complementary to the spice of the food. There's only one problem with that assertion: The spiciness of Gewurztraminer is found in its aroma. Even so, there's enough acidity in Gewurz that it can make a good pairing partner for Middle Eastern food. Ditto for another varietal often recommended with Asian fare: Riesling.

■ **Bubbly bliss.** As is the case with so many types of food, when all other wine choices fail, opt for sparkling wine. Its basically neutral flavors and refreshing mouthfeel can tame even the spiciest of Middle Eastern fare.

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PRICE:

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this Club, call 800-823-5527
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COQ AU VIN

This classic French dish calls for either Pinot Noir or Gamay — the same wine you use in preparing the dish. This recipe yields 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 1/2-lb. bacon slices
- 1 large yellow onion, sliced
- 3-lbs. chicken thighs and legs, skin on
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 2 cups Gamay or Pinot Noir
- 2 bay leaves
- Several fresh thyme sprigs
- Several fresh parsley sprigs
- 1/2-lb. button mushrooms, trimmed and chopped
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish

Preparation

1. Blanch bacon, then drop it into a saucepan of cold water, covered by 2 inches. Bring to a boil, simmer for 5 minutes, and drain. Rinse in cold water; pat dry with paper towels. Cut bacon into 1-inch by 1/4-inch pieces.
2. Brown bacon on medium-high heat in a Dutch oven for about 10 minutes. Remove cooked bacon and set aside. Keep bacon fat in the pan. Add onions and chicken, skin side down.
3. Brown chicken well, on all sides, about 10 minutes. Halfway through browning, add garlic and sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper.
4. Spoon off any excess fat. Add chicken stock, wine and herbs. Add back the bacon. Lower heat to a simmer. Cover and cook for 20 minutes, or until chicken is tender and cooked through. Remove chicken and onions to a separate platter. Remove bay leaves, herb sprigs and garlic, and discard.
5. Add mushrooms to remaining liquid and turn the heat

to high. Boil quickly and reduce liquid by three-fourths until it becomes thick and saucy. Lower heat, and stir in butter. Return chicken and onions to the pan to reheat and coat with sauce. Adjust seasoning.

6. Garnish with parsley, and serve over egg noodles.

BABA GANOUSH

The spice in this dish cries out for a refreshing beverage — lemonade, tea or beer. But don't discount wine; just be sure to opt for one defined not so much by its flavor as by its acidity — Sauvignon Blanc, Sangiovese or sparkling wine. This recipe yields 8 servings.

Ingredients

- 3 medium-sized eggplants
- 1/2 cup tahini (sesame paste)
- 1 1/4 teaspoons coarse salt
- 3 tablespoons freshly-squeezed lemon juice
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 1/8 teaspoon chile powder
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Half-bunch cilantro leaves

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.
2. Prick each eggplant a few times, then char their outsides by placing them directly on the flame of a gas burner. As the skin chars, turn them until the eggplants are uniformly charred on the outside. Note: A broiler also may be used.
3. Place the eggplants on a baking sheet and roast in the oven for 20 to 30 minutes, until they're completely soft.
4. Remove from oven and let cool.
5. Split the eggplant and scrape out the pulp. Puree the pulp in a blender or food processor with the other ingredients until smooth.
6. Season with additional salt and lemon juice, if necessary.
7. Drizzle with olive oil, and serve with toasted pita chips.

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