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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

A Toast to the Holidays

**Tips for Successful
Holiday Entertaining**

**Christmas in Napa
Valley Wine Country**

**Sparkling Conversation:
Know Your Bubbly**

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Sparkling Conversation

By Robert Johnson

It's that time of the year again: time for bubbles! Americans once again are embracing not only the Prosecco bottlings of Italy and the Cavas of Spain, but also the fine Champagne of France.

In 2009, 12.5 million bottles of Champagne were shipped to the United States. In 2010, the bottle count jumped to 16.9 million. And in 2011, it rose again to 19.2 million.

If you'll be raising a glass of bubbly with friends this holiday season, it wouldn't hurt to know a little bit about what's in the glass — you know, for cocktail party conversation. Commit the following factoids to memory, and you'll be the most interesting person at the party...

■ With a couple "grandfathered" exceptions, the only wine that can be labeled "Champagne" is that which comes from the Champagne appellation of France.

■ Even within France's boundaries, the Champagne designation is protected. Sparkling wine made outside that appellation typically is labeled "Cremant." Some bubbly made in the Loire Valley may be labeled simply as "Vouvray."

■ A "vintage Champagne"— one that designates a specific year on the label — almost always will cost more than



a winery's "non-vintage" bottlings. That's because vintage wines are made only in years that are well above average in wine quality.

■ The term "non-vintage" is a misnomer. Such

wines really should be termed "multi-vintage," because they embody the juice of grapes from at least two growing seasons.

■ Opening a Champagne bottle in a manner that results in the cork flying out not only is dangerous, but results in a good deal of spilled wine. Once the bottle's "cage" has been removed, the cork should be gripped tightly and the bottle twisted slowly. Replacing the "pop" with a "poof" eliminates spills — not to mention possible eye injuries.

■ If you're called upon to offer a toast this holiday season, you could do worse than to borrow this one from American writer Wallace Irwin: "I used to know a clever toast, but — pshaw! — I cannot think of it. So fill your glass to anything and, bless your souls, I'll drink to it!"



Not All Chardonnay Is Created Equally

Do you like Chardonnay? Most wine drinkers would say yes. But what style of Chardonnay do you like? The answer to that question probably is a bit more complicated, and helps illustrate how both climate and a winemaker's style influence the perception of wine.



Let's use Chardonnay grown and made in California and in the Burgundy region of France to point out a few of the variables.

Generally speaking, California Chardonnay is grown in areas that are warmer than Burgundy — and that includes the Golden State's so-called "cooler" regions. As a result, the California grapes are able to attain full ripeness, and the resulting wines have a higher alcohol content. That's why the California renditions are fuller in body and more fruitful in flavor — largely a function of Mother Nature.

Other big stylistic differences emerge in the cellar, where the winemaker lends his skills and preferences to the equation.

In California, many vintners opt to age their Chardonnay in oak barrels — French, ironically — to lend additional aromas and flavors to the finished product. They may also utilize a process called malolactic fermentation,

which imparts the rich, buttery character that truly defines "California Chardonnay."

In France, on the other hand, vintners prefer to let the grapes speak for themselves, and present "liquid pictures" of the Burgundian soil and climate. French "Chablis" often is quite austere, with a mineral-like underpinning.

Put a glass of "California Chardonnay" next to a glass of French "Chablis," and you'd be hard-pressed to identify the two wines as coming from the same grape variety.

Likewise, there are stylistic differences in other winegrowing countries. In Australia, Chardonnay is more like the California version. In Chile, vintners tend to split the difference, often aging their Chardonnay cuvees in older oak barrels that lend more subtle aromas and flavors than new barrels.

So... do you like Chardonnay? If you have a stylistic preference, the real answer may be, "It depends on where it's from."



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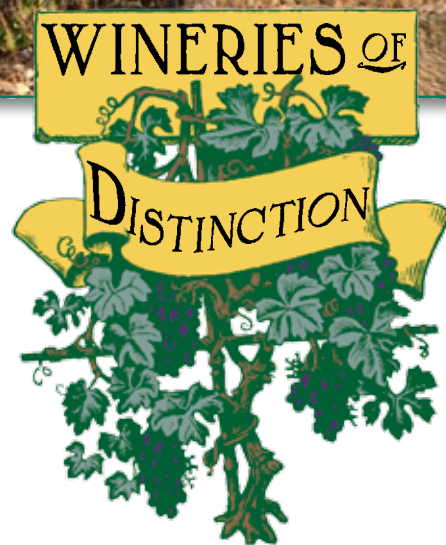
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***The Winery
Behind WS's
2013 Wine of the Year***



Fall is a big time of the year in the world of wine. It's when the first wine of the vintage — *Beaujolais Nouveau* — arrives on American shores, and it's when *Wine Spectator* magazine unveils its "Top 100 Wines" and its "Wine of the Year."

For 2013, "Wine of the Year" honors were bestowed upon the 2004 Cune Imperial Gran Reserva — a Tempranillo-based blend that includes Graciano (10%) and Mazuelo (5%) in the cuvee.

"Cune was one of the first bodegas to bottle and export its wines, and one of its earliest labels, which gained renown in the 1920s, was called Imperial," noted *Wine Spectator* in its "Top 100" issue. "It was intended for the English market, and bottled as an 'Imperial pint,' about 500-ml."

What made the 2004 vintage worthy of "Wine of the Year" recognition?

"For its ability to balance past and future in such delicious harmony," the magazine explained. "The wine itself has maintained a consistent character. Imperial is rarely aggressive or musclebound, but it doesn't lack structure or grip... There is ripe fruit,

but it is framed by spice and mineral notes. The wine never seems too young or too old."

The wine is produced at Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España (CVNE), and brought into America by Michael Skurnik Wines. As Skurnik points out, CVNE is one of the most renowned and historic bodegas in all of Spain.

Founded in 1879 by the Real de Asúa brothers, Eusebio and Raimundo, the company has been an integral part of the Rioja region's ascendance in the world of fine wine. With its combination of traditional roots and innovative vision, CVNE has been one of Rioja's most reliable sources for high-quality wine. The company is still run by descendants of the Real de Asúa brothers, now represented by the fifth generation and current CEO Victor Urrutia Ybarra.



Since its founding, CVNE's goal has been to increase the scope of production while maintaining the level of quality on which its reputation was built. Forty years after the

original bodega was created, CVNE expanded into the Alavesa region.

Today, CVNE is comprised of three separate bodegas: Cune, Viña Real, and Contino. Each estate produces a distinct style of wine from distinct terroir, and each of the flagship bottlings occupies a well-deserved place in the pantheon of great Spanish wine.

Now, thanks to the *Wine Spectator* honor, Cune — the winery where the company began in 1879 — is in the wine world's spotlight.

Cune still sits on its original site, Barrio de la Estación, in Haro, Rioja Alta, right next to the train station. It produces white, rosé, Crianza, and Reserva wines, sourced almost entirely from Alta fruit.

And as the world now knows, Cune also produces a sub-label called Imperial, which releases Reserva and Gran Reserva bottlings in exceptional years — like 2004.

The bodega in Barrio de la Estación boasts an impressive collection of 19th century structures that surround a central patio. Chief among the architectural wonders is the Nave Eiffel, designed by Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel. This room, begun in 1890 and



completed in 1909, is a textbook example of the marriage of aesthetics and functionality.

The roof is supported by metal trusses that criss-cross the room at regular intervals, thus eliminating the need for columns and making for more efficient use of space.

The beauty of the winery notwithstanding, the real wonders of Cune are found below ground. To walk through the dank, dimly lit cellars is to trace the history of the bodega, vintage by vintage, era by era. Through civil war, regime change and the march of technology, Cune has remained a constant in the cultural iconography of Spain.

And now, it has produced *Wine Spectator's* "Wine of the Year."

Winery 4-1-1

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Dreaming of a Napa Valley Christmas



There probably won't be any snow, but there definitely will be lots of holiday spirit in California's Napa Valley this month.

Here's a look at just some of the special events around which a wine country holiday getaway could be built...

■ **Dreaming of a Wine Christmas** at Compadres Rio Grille, Napa. December 2-19. Wine sampling/tasting every Monday-Thursday, 5-7 p.m.

■ **The Art of Helping Children** at Cakebread Cellars, Rutherford. December 6. Cakebread is hosting a holiday event to help abused and neglected children at a fundraiser for the Napa Court Appointed Special Advocate program. Enjoy music, appetizers, fine wine and good company, and bid on great silent auction items.

■ **Annual Holiday Light Tours** on the Napa Valley Wine Trolley. Selected dates, December 6-22, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Pick-up at Oxbow Public Market in Napa. Enjoy holiday music and hot cocoa, and a candy cane will be provided. Adults (10 years and older), \$25; children (3-9), \$15.

■ **Meadowood's Twelve Days of Christmas** at The Restaurant at Meadowood in St. Helena. Selected

dates, December 6-21. Meadowood chef Christopher Kostow rounds up kitchen masters from around the world to showcase their work. Every night, it's a different chef and a different feast, all benefiting Napa Valley charities.

■ **Holiday Open House & Art Show** at Black Stallion Winery in Napa. December 7. Ring in the holidays with this festive daytime celebration, showcasing the art of the winemaker and works from the world of visual arts.

■ **Calistoga Lighted Tractor Parade** in downtown Calistoga. December 7. The 18th annual parade is the ultimate small-town holiday celebration. Embracing Calistoga's agricultural heritage, vintage and modern tractors, antique trucks and construction equipment bedecked with dazzling lights parade down the charming main street to celebrate the Christmas season. Santa himself makes a special appearance during the parade, rain or (moon) shine. This popular event, which gets bigger and better each year, is perfect for the whole family. Arrive early to join in the Christmas



TOURING TIPS

songs as carolers wander up and down the street spreading holiday cheer. The parade starts at 7 p.m.

■ **Calistoga Christmas Bazaar** in Calistoga. December 7. This 44th annual event features local arts, crafts, jewelry, baked goods, candies, ornaments and hundreds of one-of-a-kind gift items for home, friends and family.

■ **Holiday Performance** at St. Clement Winery in St. Helena. December 7. Enjoy the sounds of the season with a holiday performance by the Napa High School Choir.

■ **Holiday Open House** at Beringer Vineyards in St. Helena. December 7. Celebrate the holidays with a tasting of reserve wines, paired with small bites, in the festive Rhine House (\$25).

■ **Hanukkah Hootenanny** at Judd's Hill Winery in Napa. December 8, 12



Hanukkah Hootenanny at Judd's Hill Winery

Tour in Napa. December 14, 3-7 p.m. This year's tour showcases the history and eclectic architecture of Napa's "Tree Streets: West of Jefferson." The self-guided tour features seven houses ranging from Victorian cottages to Craftsman bungalows, built in the early 20th century. Tickets are \$40.

noon-2:30 p.m. A benefit for Napa Children's Health Initiative, featuring current vintages, library wines and an extravagant latke bar. Satisfy your sweet tooth with traditional jelly donuts as you revel in the fine company and grand entertainment that are the hallmarks of a lively Judd's Hill event (\$50).

■ Air Force Band of the Golden West Holiday Concert at the Performing Arts Center at Lincoln Theater in Yountville. December 11. Led by Commander and Conductor Jason Plosch, this acclaimed 40-piece ensemble from Travis Air Force Base has performed for millions of listeners and inspired enthusiastic critical acclaim.

■ Wine on America's Holiday Table at Markham Vineyards in St. Helena. December 12. Women for WineSense's holiday party includes fine wine and a sumptuous buffet dinner, along with a presentation by Tim Hanni, M.W., on "Vinotypes." Also features a silent auction.

■ 25th annual Candlelight House

■ Windham Hill Winter Solstice at Napa Valley Opera House in Napa. December 14.

Barbara Higbie, Lisa Lynne and Liz Story play their own particular version of traditional holiday music. The Windham Hill recording label was synonymous with the best of jazz, new age and pop instrumentals. An annual holiday tradition, Windham Hill's Winter Solstice brings some of the label's most celebrated recording artists back to Napa for the third year in a row.

■ Christmas Dinner at Siena Restaurant at The Meritage Resort at Napa. December 25, 2-7 p.m. The resort will be decked with holiday spirit, including white lights on all of the trees in the front of the property and the large Christmas tree in the lobby. The dinner (\$69) will feature four courses, each paired with a selected wine (wine pairing available at an additional cost).

For further information on any of these events, go online to visitnapavalley.com.

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Ice Wine Producer. Situated in the heart of British Columbia's breathtaking Okanagan Valley wine country, Mission Hill Family Estate crafts stunning renditions of labor-intensive, ultra-sweet ice wine. The winery also is worth a visit to see its catacomb-like wine caves, extensive art collection and 12-story bell tower. <http://missionhillwinery.com/>

2 Hot Wassail Destination. The Vermont town of Woodstock looks like what you'd see on a Norman Rockwell canvas — only this place is real. And on the weekend of December 13-15, Woodstock will present its annual Winter Wassail Weekend. It's an opportunity to view a parade through the center of town (featuring more than 50 costumed horses and riders), listen to holiday music, tour historic homes and — best of all — partake of the spiced apple drink known as wassail. <http://www.woodstockvt.com/wassail.php>

3 Hot Layover Wine Bar. Flying this holiday season? If you're connecting through Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, be prepared for weather-related delays. You can make such annoyances a little more bearable by heading for Terminal 3 and grabbing a seat at Bubbles Wine Bar, which offers a nice selection of sparkling wines and artisanal cheeses. You may be so impressed that you'll want to toast your... good luck.

<https://foursquare.com/v/bubbles-wine-bar-chicago-il/4f3e5b38e4b04eeb4a5089dc>



Calistoga Lighted Tractor Parade



Village Wine. Traditionally, a wine that comes from any of a number of villages in the Burgundy appellation of France.

Weissherbst. A single-variety rosé-style wine from Germany. Only black grape varieties may be used.

Xanadu. A winery located in the Margaret River growing region of Australia.

Yield. Quantity of grapes produced from a given area of land, or the amount of juice that is pressed from those grapes.

Zesty. Term used to describe a wine's tactile impression. Used interchangeably with "zingy" and "zippy."

Auslese. A category of German wine — very sweet, made with late-harvested or even botrytized grapes.

VINESSE STYLE

Holiday Entertaining

***H**oliday parties can be a lot of fun — especially if you're not the person throwing the big bash.*

But if you *are* that person, here are five tips to help you host a successful party... without totally stressing out...

1. Start planning early. Develop a menu, make a list of ingredients, and go shopping several days before the big event. Think about where you want people to congregate in the house, and set up folding chairs and other "temporary furniture" such as card tables in those areas.

2. Make room. In order to accommodate those extra pieces of furniture... not to mention your guests... it may be time to de-clutter. Do you have items that are basically taking up space and collecting dust, rather than enhancing the ambience? Donate them to your favorite charity, or host a yard sale. Think of it as spring cleaning in the winter.



3. Prepare food ahead of time. No cook is perfect, and things can go wrong in the kitchen. To avoid disaster on the day of the party, make as many dishes

as possible the day before, and then simply reheat them when your guests arrive.

4. Put together a wine table. Unless you're preparing a formal, sit-down dinner, don't sweat the wine pairings. Simply put a number of different bottlings on a table (nicely decorated, of course), and let your guests sample and select on their own.

5. Have a focal point. You can dress up a wine table by placing an attractive Champagne bucket in the middle. Williams Sonoma always has a nice selection, including a gorgeous hammered copper model from Mauviel (\$345).

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Carneros

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Carneros became an official AVA in 1983, its unique characteristics based on climate and on its geographic features — the Pacific Ocean, the Coast Mountain Ranges and San Francisco Bay — that affect the region's terroir and put a distinctive stamp on its grapes... and, ultimately, its wines.

Strictly translated, the French term *terroir* refers to the earth... to soil. In practice, it encompasses everything in the geography of a place that affects the grapes grown there: the slope and orientation of the hillsides, the climate and weather, the soil's chemistry and myriad other factors. All together, the *terroir* of a particular grape-growing region stamps its wines with a character recognized as unique.

When "Carneros" appears on a wine label, it assures you that at least 85% of the grape variety in

the bottle comes from the Carneros AVA.

Noted wine historian William Heintz of Sonoma contends that Carneros may, in fact, be the second-oldest vineyard area in Northern California. In the late 1830s, Jacob Leese planted a small vineyard on the Huichica grant. In the mid-1850s, William H. Winter of Indiana purchased 1,200 acres of the Huichica Rancho from Leese. By the early 1870s, Winter had not only one of the largest vineyard holdings in the area, but also had built the first winery in Carneros, Winter Winery.

Today, the Carneros AVA is known, in particular, for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay — varieties that excel in the relatively cool climates. Those grapes are used to make sublime table wines, as well as expressive sparkling wines.

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Q Does a wine’s alcohol level decrease over a period of time?

A The short answer is no. The longer answer is that, with some wines, that may *seem* to be the case. Wines that are high in alcohol — such as California Zinfandel, which often tops 15% — tend to “smooth out” over the years. At year 10, a California Zin can be downright “elegant,” a far cry from the big, jammy “fruit bomb” it was in its youth. There’s still a lot to learn about how wine evolves in the bottle, but one thing we do know is that its alcohol level does not change.

If you’re putting on a holiday party, here are three steps to being a responsible host:

1. If you’re serving alcohol, also serve food.



2. If you have wine glasses of various sizes, use only the smaller ones at the party. This may inhibit a guest’s ability to smell the wine, but it will help assure that their driving is not impaired.



3. Have plenty of coffee on hand, and substitute it for the wine and other alcohol as the party nears its end.



“ I think it is a great error to consider a heavy tax on wines as a tax on luxury. On the contrary, it is a tax on the health of our citizens. ”



— Thomas Jefferson

In Australia, there is an institute devoted to wine research, education and helping grape growers and winemakers implement farming practices that are as Earth-friendly as possible. This is its vision and mission statement:



AWRI

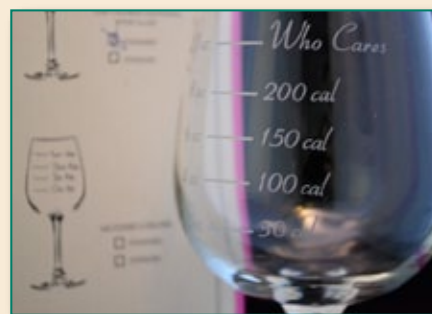
“The Australian Wine Research Institute believes in sustained innovation and commitment to a profitable, environmentally responsible grape and wine sector. We recognize the high priority of environmental issues for the Australian grape and wine sector, and are committed to research in this area, as well as the provision of information and support tools. We are adopting a broad-based approach to dealing with the challenges of climate change and sustainability. Our vision is one where economic stability and environmental

sustainability go hand in hand in a profitable partnership that is carefully maintained by collaborative, constructive action.”

13

Spain’s percentage of the global acreage devoted to growing winegrapes. France has 11%, followed by Italy with 10%, China with 8% and the United States with 6%. (Source: Wine Institute)

It’s the holiday season, and that means many people will be attending parties and lifting a glass... or two. Many of us count calories when it comes to food, but we ignore the caloric intake associated with beverages. Where does wine fall on the adult beverage calorie spectrum? Right in the middle. An average serving of beer (12 ounces) has 150 calories. An average serving of liquor (1.5 ounces) has 100. An average serving of wine (5 ounces) has 120. Of course, there are variables. Beer drinkers can save calories by drinking “Light” variations. Liquor drinkers often see their caloric intake jump, based on the beverage (such as Coca-Cola or orange juice) that’s mixed with the liquor. Sweet dessert-style wines carry more calories than white or red table wines. This holiday season, be aware not only of what you’re drinking, but how much; your thighs will thank you.



Caloric Cuvée Wine Glass

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



Home for the Holidays

Entire books — really thick ones — have been written about food and wine pairing. One would think that it's a scientific endeavor, rather than the simple pursuit of pleasure.

While there's no question that drinking precisely the right wine with precisely the right dish can make for a memorable meal, it's also true that one can over-think pairings to the point that no match could ever measure up.

A few years ago, the public relations firm Calhoun & Company put together a "Holiday Wine & Food Pairing Guide," spotlighting bottlings from its winery client list. It made for an excellent shopping guide, and removed a great deal of pressure from the shoulders of holiday dinner hosts.

Earlier this year, Douglass Miller of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., shared a list of cookie-and-drink pairings, including two that included wine.

We've merged those two very helpful lists, and present the following suggested pairings as exactly that — *suggestions*. Science aside, these are simply ideas to help get your creative juices flowing as you begin to plan your special holiday meals.

- New England Lobster Bisque with a creamy Chardonnay.
- Black Mission Fig and Camembert Crostini with Rosé.
- Roasted Goose and Apple Currant Stuffing with Pinot Noir.
- Sweet Italian Sausage and Mushroom Risotto with Merlot.
- Rustic Potato Gnocchi and Marinara Sauce with Sangiovese or Zinfandel.
- Beef Rib Roast and Traditional Yorkshire Pudding with Cabernet Sauvignon.
- Lace Cookies with Late Harvest Riesling.
- Sugar Cookies with Demi-Sec Champagne.

Need more pairing ideas? Go online to <http://BLOG.vinesse.com>, and take a keystroke stroll through the "Food and Wine Pairings" archives. There, you'll find topics ranging from ethnic cuisine to season-specific suggestions, and from sweet dessert ideas to holiday fare.

Meanwhile, don't be afraid to try food-and-wine pairings that you've never heard of before. Many "trends" of today are little more than broken rules of yesteryear. The best-selling book, *Red Wine With Fish*, emerged from a willingness to try new things.

Who knows? This holiday season, perhaps you'll discover the next hot culinary trend.

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TURKEY SOFT TACOS

For a different way of dealing with leftover turkey this holiday season, try this tasty dish, which pairs nicely with Pinot Noir or Beaujolais. This recipe yields 4 to 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 12 corn tortillas (6-inch size)
- 2 cups shredded turkey, white and dark meat
- 3/4-cup chunky tomato salsa
- 1 avocado, cut into small pieces
- 1 can (4.5-oz.) chopped green chilies
- 1/2-cup chopped walnuts
- 3 strips bacon, cooked crisp and crumbled
- 1/2-cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2-bunch cilantro, chopped

Preparation

1. Combine turkey and salsa in a microwaveable container. Heat on high until heated through, between 1 and 2 minutes.
2. In a skillet, toast tortillas lightly on both sides over medium heat, and place on plates.
3. Divide turkey among tortillas.
4. Top with avocado, chilies, walnuts, bacon and cheese.
5. Fold over tortillas to form soft tacos.

ROAST PORK LOIN WITH PORT & ORANGE MARINADE

For a tasty change of pace from turkey and ham, try this dish, which makes a wonderful pairing partner for Moscato or Port. This recipe makes about 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 1/4-cup Port wine
- 1/4-cup honey
- Grated zest and juice of 2 oranges
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano
- 3-lbs. pork loin, boned and trimmed of fat

Preparation

1. Combine Port, honey, orange zest and juice, ginger and oregano to create a marinade.
2. Place pork in a bowl. Pour half of marinade over pork. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or, preferably, overnight.
3. Place pork in a roasting pan. Bake on cooking rack at 400 degrees F for 50 to 60 minutes. Baste every 10 minutes or so with remaining marinade.
4. When done, remove roast from cooking pan, cover loosely with foil, and let stand for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

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