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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

News and Views From the Wonderful World of Wine

By Robert Johnson

There is always a lot of news in the world of wine, and sometimes the news provokes some views...

■ **NEWS:** All eastbound lanes of Southern California's 210 freeway were closed for 10 hours when a big rig crashed and overturned, spilling most of its load: 35,000 pounds of grapes.

■ **VIEW:** Grapes?!? This is a tragedy! Think of all the wine that those grapes could have made. What? Oh... right. The winegrape harvest is still several months away. Those were *table* grapes. Like the late Los Angeles Lakers broadcaster Chick Hearn used to say, "No harm, no foul."

■ **NEWS:** For five days in May, a music festival called BottleRock — featuring acts ranging from Alabama Shakes to Kings of Leon, and from The Black Keys to Jackson Browne — took over the Napa Valley Expo grounds in the city of Napa. Organizers estimated total attendance at "well over 100,000."

■ **VIEW:** One of my friends who lives "up valley" posted an intriguing picture to his Facebook page during the festival. It depicted an empty booth at the Rutherford Grill, my favorite restaurant on the planet, and a place that *never* has an empty booth.

It seems that a great many people who normally would have been

touring Napa Valley decided to stay home or venture elsewhere during BottleRock, fearing the valley would be overrun by wild-eyed festival-goers. I checked with a couple of wineries and they, too, experienced less traffic than normal.

It turns out that those attending BottleRock were very well behaved, and the wineries that invested in booth space at the festival enjoyed great exposure to a demographic that's much younger than typically visits the tasting rooms. There was no reason for the local populace or wine tourists to panic.

It already has been announced that BottleRock will return in 2014 and I, for one, am planning to attend — especially since it will be condensed into a three-day event, allowing for some wine touring immediately before and/or after.

■ **NEWS:** In New Jersey, several T.G.I. Fridays restaurants were cited for substituting cheap alcohol for "top-shelf" Scotch, apparently in an attempt to boost profits. According to state officials, one establishment substituted rubbing alcohol.

■ **VIEW:** Just one more reason to avoid the "hard stuff" and drink wine.



The Age-Old Question: To Age or Not to Age?

There are no hard and fast figures on this, but experience tells us that at least 90% of all wines are made to be consumed within a year or two of their release.

The percentage probably is higher. But for the purpose of this discussion, let's say 90% is accurate. That means only 10% of wine should even be considered for additional aging, referred to as "cellaring" — or, as the case may be, "closeting" or "shelving."

Which brings up the question: How can we tell which wines should be opened soon, and which should be set aside for a while?

Perhaps the leading "indicator" is whether the wine spent significant time in oak barrels — and not just any oak barrels, but ones that were being used for the first or second time, and thus imparted significant flavor to the wine. If it did, then aging can provide time for the oak and fruit flavors to fully "integrate." Drink such a wine too soon, and the oak flavors are likely to dominate the fruit flavors.

Wines that are not aged in oak tend to be "fresher," and



thus should be consumed sooner rather than later. The longer such a wine remains in the bottle, the greater the risk of losing some of that characteristic.

Another fairly reliable indicator is the price of the wine. Bottles that cost \$25 or more are better candidates for aging than those costing less. Often, this ties in with the aging process

at the winery, which takes us right back to those oak barrels; it costs more to age wines in oak than in stainless steel tanks, because barrels must be replaced after a few years. It's a cost of doing business that is passed on to the consumer.

Finally, it's almost always better to err on the side of drinking a wine in its relative youth. Once a wine is "over the hill," it's on that side of the hill forever. A young wine, even though it may be "developing," can still offer plenty of drinking pleasure.



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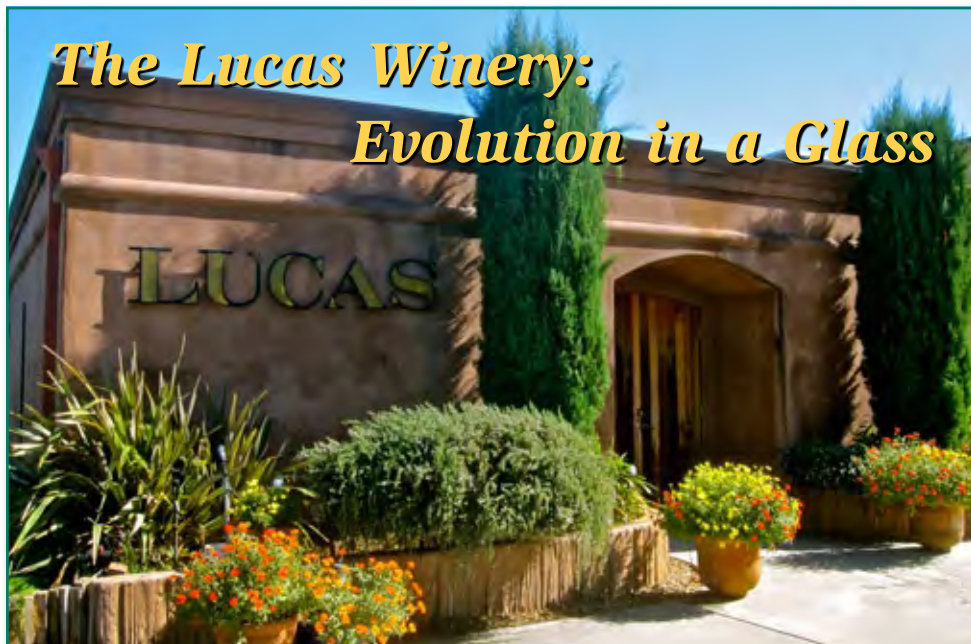
FREQUENCY:

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Few among us spend our entire adult lives working for the same company or even in the same field. That was the America of the mid- to late-20th century. This is the America of the 21st century, when we must be more nimble professionally, and no longer wait for opportunities to come to us, but rather make our own opportunities.

David and Heather Pyle Lucas lived through the last days of the “old ways,” and emerged with fresh outlooks on their chosen profession: winemaking.

For 16 years, Heather made wine for Robert Mondavi Winery in California’s Napa Valley. But not just *any* wine. She was responsible for the Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve program, as well as the wines of Opus One.

From that corporate culture, with literally millions of dollars at stake each vintage, Heather returned to her winemaking roots, helping a number of small start-up wineries in Napa and elsewhere in California.

“I found that my winemaking heart and soul belongs to the farming of grapes,” she reflects. “I personally spend more time in the vineyard than I do in the winery. I am a traditionalist, and my own vineyard and winegrowing reflects this with organically grown grapes.

“My mantra is to make seamless wines that are distinctive and age-worthy,” she adds. “I love discovering

a vineyard through its wines and how to fine-tune the vines and hence the wines they produce.”

For David, his evolution involved radically altering his winemaking style — admitting that others were crafting superior wines, and learning from them.

“I used to make what I call ‘terrifying’ wines — high alcohol, jammy, port-like and unageable,” he says. “While I was employed by



a world-class winery — responsible for the vineyards, research and grape supply — I had the opportunity to visit some of the world's great vineyards, to stand in those vineyards, and to taste the grapes and wines they produced.”

It was an eye-opening experience.

“I discovered that the wines I was making were nothing at all like those wonderful, balanced and elegantly structured wines,” he admits. “So, I started on a long journey. Years of



research and experimentation led to the completion of our new winery in 2000.”

That is The Lucas Winery, located in California's historic Lodi appellation.

“My goal is to create wines which reflect their environment, that represent the place they come from,” David says. And that is exactly what he and Heather are doing, as their wines now are beautifully balanced rather than high in alcohol, fruit-forward rather than jammy, and crafted in an elegant style that accommodates aging for appropriate varieties.

“We believe great wines begin in the vineyard,” Heather says. “ZinStar is a 3.5-acre, historic, organically farmed, head-pruned vineyard. The vineyard is unique, as she achieves ripe flavors at low sugars, yielding low-alcohol wines of pleasure and promise.”

It's a good thing that Heather prefers a hands-on approach in the vineyard, because head-pruned vines *require* it, as they can't be harvested by machine. Hand harvesting is labor intensive,

but it helps ensure that only perfectly ripened grapes find their way into the fermentation tanks.

“We apply several techniques to achieve uniformity of ripeness,” Heather says, including weak shoot removal (the goal being 16 to 20 leaves per cane) and veraison thinning (dropping as much as 40-50% of the fruit). “Since we do not blend our wines, quality has to begin in the vineyard. All we have is what is in that little berry!”

David and Heather also are very picky about the type of oak barrels they use for aging their wines. Five different barrel coopers were chosen to carefully enhance the unique characteristics of the vineyard as they assemble their cuvees of Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Rosé,

Chardonnay and Late Harvest Zinfandel.

“Depending on the special quality of the vintage, the wine will rest in barrels for 12 to 16 months,” David says. “Crushed gravel under the barrels is used to maintain the proper temperature and humidity in order to age the vintages in ideal conditions.”

That is a centuries-old technique typically reserved for the world's most elegant wines — the kind of wines for which The Lucas Winery is now becoming known.

Winery 4-1-1

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It's Time for a 'Wine Country' Vacation

“Staycations” can be great fun, a way to better connect with your hometown or a neighboring village without spending an arm and a leg.

But if the time has come for a vinous vacation, chances are you're going to have to travel. Where to go? *Wine Enthusiast* magazine has come up with a list of the 10 “best wine travel destinations” for 2013 (see box on next page).

Space does not permit an exploration of all 10, but we have plenty of room to touch on the highlights of the first three. So, pull up a chair, keep your seat belt loosely fastened around your lap (even when the seatbelt sign is not illuminated), and let's take off to wine country...

RIOJA

You can view the vineyards from a hot air balloon in California's Napa Valley, and the same is true in Spain's Rioja region, home to more than

500 wineries.

But Rioja offers several other “perspectives,” a few of which may be unique in the wonderful world of wine. According to the La Rioja Tourist Board, visitors may also explore selected local vineyards on horseback, in a kayak, on a bicycle, by foot, and even in a 4x4. Most accompanied tours are available in both Spanish and English.

La Rioja produces about 40% of Spain's wines, and the region's wineries have great success with both red and white varietals.

Among the reds to look for are Monastrell, Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo. Top white varieties include Sauvignon Blanc, Verdejo, Viura, Malvasia, Garnacha Blanca, Chardonnay, Torrontes and Tempranillo.



DANUBE

What sets Austria apart from virtually all other wine regions around the world are its steep vineyard terraces.

These can be viewed by car as one drives next to the Danube River in the Wachau Valley, or at a much more leisurely pace on a barge or boat, floating on the Danube. Each mode of transportation offers its own advantages and adventures.

For instance, by car, one can actually visit the wineries adjacent to the vineyards, and also explore some of the local castles. By water, it's all about relaxation — and trying to figure out how they actually farm



those terraced vineyards, which are planted primarily to Riesling and Gruner Veltliner.

In Langenlois, the Loisium Wine & Spa Resort offers luxurious accommodations for unwinding after a long day of wine touring — even if you did that touring by boat.



TOURING TIPS



Wine Enthusiast's Top 10 Wine Travel Destinations for 2013

1. Rioja, Spain
2. Danube, Austria
3. North and South Forks of Long Island, N.Y.
4. Stellenbosch, South Africa
5. Monterey County, Calif.
6. Vale dos Vinhedos, Brazil
7. Willamette Valley, Ore.
8. Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia
9. Douro Valley, Portugal
10. Puglia, Italy



LONG ISLAND

Long Island, the closest “wine country” to New York City, extends about 120 miles into the Atlantic Ocean. Its maritime climate, geography and soil characteristics provide ideal conditions for producing wines of exceptional quality, including Merlot, Cabernet Franc, exciting blends and even sparkling wine.

Just 25 years ago, Long Island was home to just one small vineyard. Today, there are more than 3,000 acres devoted to winegrapes, and family-owned wineries can be found all across the North Fork (with a few on the South Fork as well).

With an abundance of bed-and-breakfast inns and a growing number of fine-dining restaurants joining long-established locals haunts, Long Island offers an enjoyable “wine country” experience.

For Further Information

La Rioja Tourism Board
www.lariojaturismo.com

Loisium Wine & Spa Resort
www.loisium.com

Austrian National Tourist Office
www.austria.info/us

Long Island Wine Council
www.liwines.com

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot New Cookbook. The Finger Lakes region of New York is home to one of the Empire State’s most vibrant wine regions, a place where Riesling reigns supreme. There’s also a vibrant culinary scene, which has been captured in a new book by Karl Zinsmeister and his children, Kate Harvey and Noah Zinsmeister — *Finger Lakes Feast: 110 Delicious Recipes From New York’s Hotspot for Wholesome Local Foods*. \$22.95.
www.mcbooks.com

2 Hot New New York City Italian Restaurant. Interestingly, the pastas at Carbone, located in New York’s Greenwich Village neighborhood, are considered by some critics to be the restaurant’s weak spot. But there’s nothing weak about the veal chop or the scampi or the absolutely flawless Caesar salad. There’s a nice wine-by-the-glass menu that, like the food, is expensive. Bring your appetite, and bring money (or plastic).
www.carbonenewyork.com

3 Hot Cool Wine County Art Exhibit. From June 8 through July 28, the Napa Valley Museum and Lincoln Theater will host an exhibition of 35 original pieces of art from a jazz music legend. It’s called, “Miles Davis: The Art of Cool,” and also will feature personal effects (including one of Davis’ prized trumpets), a film screening and special events.
www.napavalleymuseum.org



Limestone. A key “ingredient” in some of the best soils in the world for grapevines. Wine regions known for their limestone soils include Champagne, Burgundy and South Australia. In California, it’s found primarily in the mountains above Santa Cruz.

Malolactic Fermentation. A secondary fermentation that imparts a buttery quality to white wines, and softness and complexity to reds.

Nebbiolo. Piedmont variety used to make Barbaresco and Barolo.

Old World. Used to describe a wine made in or emulating the style of wine made in Europe.

Premier Cru. Term used in conjunction with Champagne and Burgundy, representing a “first growth” or superior wine.

Quinta. The Portuguese term for a wine estate.

VINESSE STYLE

Charity Music Festival

Wine, food, music and golf being the four necessities that sustain life, you should consider attending the 27th annual B.R. Cohn Fall Music Festival and Celebrity Golf Classic.

Bruce Cohn, long-time Sonoma County winery owner and even-longer-time manager of the Doobie Brothers, has just announced the schedule for the 2013 festival, which is set for Sept. 20-23 on the winery grounds in Glen Ellen, Calif.:

• **Friday, Sept. 20** — Charity Auction Dinner, featuring chef Mark Stuart (a James Beard award nominee) and an acoustic musical performance by Pablo Cruise.

• **Saturday, Sept. 21** — Seven hours of music with Bad Company (including Paul Rodgers), the Doobie Brothers, Pablo Cruise, Lara Johnston and Pat Simmons Jr.

• **Sunday, Sept. 22** — Seven more hours of music with Simmons, Johnston, the Doobies, Gin Blossoms and Heart.

• **Monday, Sept. 23** — Celebrity Golf Classic, with a scramble format and a shotgun start at 10 a.m.

The dinner will take place in the B.R. Cohn winery’s olive grove, the two days of musical performances will unfold at the estate’s amphitheater, and the golf event will be held at the Sonoma Golf Course.

And here’s the best part of all: While you’re dining, sipping wine, listening to music and chasing that little white ball, you’re also providing much-needed financial assistance to four charities — the Redwood Empire Food Bank, Sonoma Valley Education Foundation, The Guardsmen and Wounded Warriors.

For tickets and further information, visit br.cohn.com.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



There are 16 American Viticultural Areas within the Napa Valley, and you've probably heard of at least a dozen of them.

Names such as Los Carneros, Rutherford, St. Helena, Yountville and Calistoga are among the more famous "appellations within an appellation."

But there's one that tends to draw blank stares when its name is brought up: Coombsville.

There are two reasons for its low profile: 1. It is the newest of Napa's AVAs, established 11 days before Christmas in 2011. 2. It has no tasting rooms with regular hours; to visit a winery, one must call for an appointment.

That probably will change with time, but for now, each Coombsville winery is family owned and a very small producer.

The AVA is located just 10 minutes from downtown Napa, tucked up against the foothills of the Vacas Range in the southeastern corner of the valley. Like Los Carneros, its climate is influenced by San Pablo Bay. But because it is farther inland, the average air temperature is higher, which means that Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux

varietals can be grown successfully.

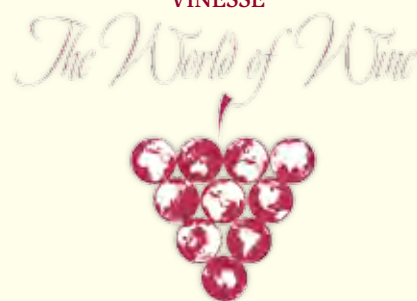
Growers and winemakers also are having success with Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah, and the reds typically exhibit soft but significant tannins — which means they are accessible in their youth, but also capable of mid- to long-term aging.

Geologists describe Coombsville as "a bowl-shaped depression, cradled by a crescent-shaped section of the foothills of the Vacas Range." The soil mix in various parts of the AVA includes volcanic ash, cobblestone and gravelly loams. It's an ideal environment for grapevines, as rainfall drains easily, yet is retained in the sub-soils for access by the vines during the dry season.

With heat spikes few and far between, the grapes are dependably able to attain full ripeness, a key to balanced flavors and richness in the finished wines.

It may not be as famous as Yountville... yet... but don't be surprised to hear more about Coombsville within a few years.

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Q We're going to be driving through Santa Barbara County next month. Unfortunately, we won't have time to stop at any of the wineries, but we're hoping to find a restaurant for a good "wine country" lunch. Do you have any suggestions?

A Yes! Right across from the Santa Ynez Post Office is the Rancho & Reata Roadhouse (3569 Sagunto St.), which serves up what its owners describe as "contemporary cowboy cuisine." At lunchtime, this can range from an open-faced steak (a 6-oz. top sirloin with stilton blue cheese, lettuce, tomato and onion on a ciabatta roll) to the "Cowgirl" mac-and-cheese (made with eight cheeses). If you desire something a little lighter, you can't beat the "Valley Vegetable Platter," consisting of garden-to-table local vegetables (the mix varies by season), tossed in olive oil and then grilled. By the way, it's too bad you're just passing through. The Roadhouse also has a wonderful performance venue, and hosts intimate concerts four or five nights per week.



“The idea of wine evaluation is implicitly bizarre. No other consumer product causes such paralysis by analysis.**”**



— Evan Goldstein, from his book, *Perfect Pairings*

All over the Napa Valley, winery owners are voluntarily making efforts to enhance the watershed and restore habitat. Many receive assistance and guidance from a program called Napa Green, which is based on the Fish Friendly Farming program — in use in the Russian River, Navarro and Gualala watersheds since 1999. Napa Green helps to ensure compliance with all environmental regulations (such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act), improve water quality and aquatic habitat, implement restoration and soil erosion control projects, and expand community awareness of responsible management practices by grape growers.



2.49

Gallons of wine consumed per person, per year, in the United States (as of 2011).

14.47

Gallons of wine consumed per person, per year, in Vatican City (as of 2011).

“Fine English sparkling wine.” Four words seldom seen, written or uttered in that precise order. But things are changing. England — specifically, southern England — now is producing sparkling wines that can command as much as \$70 per bottle. It's enough to make a French vigneron shake his head in disbelief and dismay. For centuries — basically, as long as there is some form of recorded wine history — winegrape growing in England has been virtually impossible because of the cold, clammy climate. But with changes in weather patterns, not only is the annual harvest in Bordeaux occurring, on average, two weeks earlier, but cool-climate grapes are being grown successfully in southern England. Although the export market remains quite small, homegrown bubbly is gaining a foothold in England. Last year, for the Diamond Jubilee that marked the 60th year on the throne for Queen Elizabeth II, French Champagne was passed over in favor of English sparkling wine.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



Spicy Asian Fare

Over the years, countless wine writers have recommended Gewurztraminer as a sublime wine-pairing partner for spicy Asian fare.

And they have been correct in their recommendation — although not always for the right reason.

Typically, the reason cited for the pairing involves matching spice with spice. When eating spicy food, one way to complement the dish is to pour a wine that also exhibits a spice quality.

But here's where it gets a little tricky: The spice associated with Gewurztraminer is not in the flavor of the wine; it's in the aroma. "Gewurz" translates to aromatic.

That said, Gewurztraminer still makes a solid pairing partner, and here's why: A "typical" Asian dish involves some fat (which may come from either the meat or the oil used, or both), some salt (often from soy sauce) and a certain degree of chili heat, otherwise referred to as spice.

When those elements are in play, it's important that the accompanying wine not be high in alcohol, because the alcohol tends to take center stage and mute the flavors. So, that's one "check mark" for Gewurztraminer, which typically is low in alcohol.

It's also important to pick a wine

with a solid acid base. This provides a counterpoint to the spice, and helps keep the palate refreshed, rather than "fried." Again, a good, dry Gewurztraminer can be very refreshing. Give Gewurz another "check mark."

Finally, the wine should be relatively "simple" in flavor because there's no way it's going to compete favorably with the flavor of the dish. So, we seek out wines that emphasize their fruit flavors primarily, with very little or — even better — no oak influence within its flavor spectrum. That's a third "check mark" for Gewurztraminer.

Another solid wine choice when enjoying spicy Asian fare is Riesling, which is quite similar to Gewurztraminer in mouthfeel, acidity and range of flavors.

It's great to have your own personal "go-to" wines, but every so often, it can be very rewarding to exit your comfort zone and try something different. Dining on spicy Asian fare provides a perfect excuse for trying a dry Gewurztraminer or Riesling.

Light & Sweet

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RACK OF LAMB WITH GARLIC CRUST

Lamb dishes typically call for Syrah as a wine companion. When garlic is a prominent flavor in a dish, the usual wine suggestions are Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay, and occasionally Viognier. So what kind of wine should one select for this dish, which features lamb *and* garlic? We suggest pouring a glass of Syrah and a glass of your favorite Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc or Viognier, and deciding for yourself. This recipe yields about 8 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 head of garlic, cloves peeled
- ¼ cup rosemary leaves
- ¼ olive oil
- 2 racks of lamb (2-lbs. each), Frenched
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Preparation

1. In a food processor, combine garlic, rosemary and olive oil. Process until the garlic is finely chopped.
2. Season lamb racks with salt and pepper, and rub the garlic-rosemary oil over them.
3. Set racks fat side up on a large rimmed baking sheet, and let stand for 1 hour.
4. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
5. Roast lamb in the upper third of the oven for 15 minutes. Turn the racks and roast 10 minutes longer (for medium-rare).
6. Transfer racks to a carving board, stand them upright and let them rest for 10 minutes.
7. Carve the racks between the rib bones, and transfer to plates for serving.

HOT PEPPER MANGO SALSA OVER CHEESE

For wine lovers, summer is the season for salsa, because it gives us an excuse (as if we needed one!) to pour something cold and bubbly... like a good Spanish Cava or Italian Prosecco. This recipe, courtesy of the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, delivers an abundance of flavor.

Ingredients

- 2 cups mango, peeled, cored and diced
- ½ cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1 Tbsp. Jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced
- ¼ cup red onion, finely diced
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 tsp. fresh ginger, grated
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp. cider vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. orange juice
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Preparation

1. Combine all ingredients in mixing bowl and blend.
2. Refrigerate covered for at least 3 hours.
3. Spoon over your favorite Hispanic-style cheese.



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