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# The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



## SPOOKY SPECIAL EDITION

- Scary Bottle Holders
- Transylvania Wine
- Porto, Portugal
- Corks vs. Screw Tops

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## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

# The Great Cork Debate

By Robert Johnson

*It is a very long word — way too long for Scrabble: trichloroanisole. I was not all that good in chemistry class, so I won't even try to pronounce it.*

Let's just agree to call it TCA, okay?

TCA is the chemical primarily responsible for cork taint in wines.

When we perceive mustiness or a moldy aroma in a wine, it's said to be "corked," and the culprit is the

presence of TCA in the cork used to seal the bottle.

During the 1980s, cork taint became such a problem — some estimated that one bottle in 20 could be infected — that winery owners and winemakers began experimenting with Stelvin closures, generically referred to as screw caps. When a bottle was opened, the traditional "pop" sound was replaced with a "crackle."

One of the reasons cited for the move to screw caps was the simple assertion that no other industry would accept a 5% failure rate with its products or services. Beyond that, wine consumers were becoming more sophisticated, and with sophistication can come a more persnickety attitude. Restaurateurs would tell stories of diners refusing bottles — perfectly good bottles — because the wine inside was corked. In reality, they



were simply trying to impress their fellow diners with their wine "knowledge."

Today, more screw caps are being used than ever before, largely because more wines are being made for

immediate enjoyment than ever before. With such wines, it makes better business sense to seal the bottles with a nearly infallible closure.

But for wines that are intended to be cellared for several years, most vintners still prefer corks because, unlike screw caps, cork allows a minute amount of oxygen inside the bottle. Too much oxygen would cause the wine to age more quickly than intended; a little bit of oxygen promotes slow aging, giving the wine time to evolve and reach its full potential.

Now, the closure is selected based upon what the winemaker hopes to achieve with wine.

What does the future hold? If I had to guess, we'll be seeing still more Stelvin closures and fewer corks. A new generation of wine drinkers doesn't care about the tradition of the cork; they just want great-tasting wines.





## Drought Causes Some to Consider Dry Farming

**D**ry farming has been a choice for California grape growers through most of California's wine history

But given the ongoing drought in the state, and its severity, it's becoming more of a necessity.

Dry farming basically means that a grower depends only on the rain that Mother Nature provides as a source of water for the grapevines. It's a perfectly logical approach to farming in areas that typically receive a good deal of rain, such as Washington state, but it can create challenges in drier states such as California — and those challenges intensify when drought conditions exist for an extended period of time.

Why is dry farming used at all? Many growers and winemakers believe (and scientific evidence bears it out) that a lack of water stresses the vines, and stressed vines produce berries that are smaller and, thus, more concentrated in aromas and flavors. Because wines with ultra-ripe flavors have been the preferred style in recent years, all of this has been seen as a positive.

But there comes a point when a lack of water leads not just to smaller, more concentrated berries, but to raisins. And that limits the winemaking possibilities to late harvest-



style, ultra-sweet, almost Port-like wines — which are much harder to sell than dry but fruit-forward table wines.

Stuart Smith, one-half of the brother winemaking team at Napa Valley's Smith-Madrone winery for four-and-a-half decades, had perhaps the best description of the current harvest season.

Smith told Eric Asimov of the *New York Times*: "It's been a normally bizarre year."

In other words, if it isn't an extended drought, it's too much rain from El Niño. Rare is the absolutely perfect growing season, and grape growers and winemakers have to adapt all the time.

For some, during an extended drought, that means considering the possibility of dry farming.



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***Koehler Winery: A Place  
to Get Away From It All***

**A**aron Spelling was one of the most prolific producers of programs in television history.

His long resumé of programs in which he had a hand includes “The Mod Squad,” “The Rookies,” “Charlie’s Angels,” “Beverly Hills 90210,” “The Love Boat,” “7th Heaven,” “Charmed,” “Jane’s House” and “Sunset Beach.”

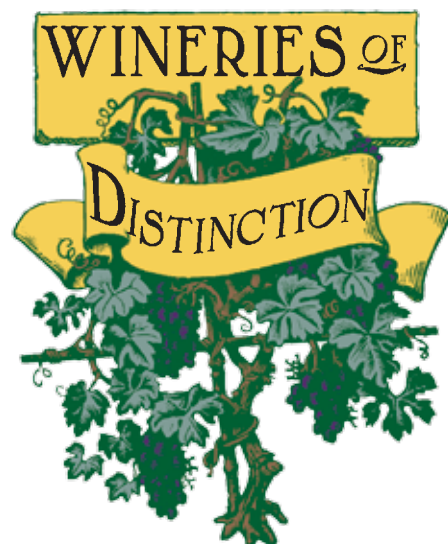
Like many people involved in the hustle and bustle of Hollywood, Spelling needed a place to get away from it all. For some, the small communities of Ventura County, just north of California’s San Fernando Valley, were far enough away. Others trekked still farther north to Santa Barbara. And a handful — including Michael Jackson and James Garner — headed even farther north to the Santa Ynez Valley. That, too, was where Spelling headed to relax.

Today, Koehler Winery sits on a spectacularly beautiful 100-acre estate, surrounded by rolling hills and a small riparian stream that gently nestles its way throughout the property. And the estate’s storied history includes ownership by Aaron Spelling.

It was during this period, more than 40 years ago, that the vineyard on the property was expanded to its current 67 acres. And by the time the property was acquired by the Koehler family in 1997, the estate’s bountiful vines and

superb fruit had been well documented as among the best in the Santa Ynez Valley.

Once the Koehlers recognized that some of the best wines in the valley were being produced with grapes harvested from their vineyards, they resolved to launch their own winery and tasting room. Drawing on their own entrepreneurial experience, the Koehlers’ mission was to create a world-class winery committed to making premium wines at affordable prices. And today, Koehler Winery is celebrated as one of the most popular







and beautiful stops on the Foxen Canyon Wine Trail.

Winemaker Colin Murphy and Vineyard Manager Felipe Hernandez — one of the most skilled and knowledgeable vineyard managers in Central California — collaborate regularly to ensure the quality of the fruit improves from year to year. The vines are diligently tended, from pruning through harvest, to ensure they thrive in harmony with the natural conditions of the vineyard.

Since the Koehlers acquired the property, they have grafted six additional varietals to the original four, and plantings on the estate now include Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Grenache Blanc, Riesling, Syrah, Sangiovese, Grenache, Mourvedre and Viognier.

Winery guests sample a selection of estate-grown wines, and are invited to enjoy their tasting in one of the outdoor settings located around the tasting room, each offering impressive views of the estate and vineyard grounds.

Just steps from the tasting room are a gathering of rustic picnic benches, shaded by an awning of 30-foot-tall pepper trees. This meeting spot sits on a large, sprawling lawn, with views of the vineyard and a pasture where the Koehlers' furry family members love to hang out.

The Oak Terrace is a breathtaking setting, with magnificent views of the vineyard surrounded by majestic

200-year-old oak trees. Here guests may enjoy a more private picnic experience while delighting in the tranquil scenery.

Adjacent to the tasting room, guests can relax and picnic at the harvest tables, shaded under a canopy of 130-year-old olive trees. Just a short walk leads to the deck, which is surrounded by a year-round display of blooming wild flowers. The deck is perfect for sipping wines while relaxing on the lounge furniture.

The winery offers a “Signature Flight” of six wines for a \$10 fee, and a “Premium Flight” of six other wines for \$15. Each flight includes a Koehler logo glass for the guest to take home.

For those who want to immerse themselves in a true vineyard and winery experience, the Koehler Estate Vineyard House can be rented. The 4,000 square feet of rustic elegance is complemented by stunning panoramic vineyard views, and the house sits on a one-third-acre manicured lawn.

High-speed wireless internet, HDTV and digital cable, Viking appliances, and beautiful original artwork are some of the amenities that make this a hidden gem in Santa Barbara County's wine country.

The Vineyard House is just minutes away from top-notch dining, shopping, and wine tasting at other estates. It's the perfect place to take time away from one's busy work life.

## Winery 4-1-1

### Koehler Winery

5360 Foxen Canyon Rd.

Los Olivos, CA 93441

805-693-8384

*Open Daily, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.*

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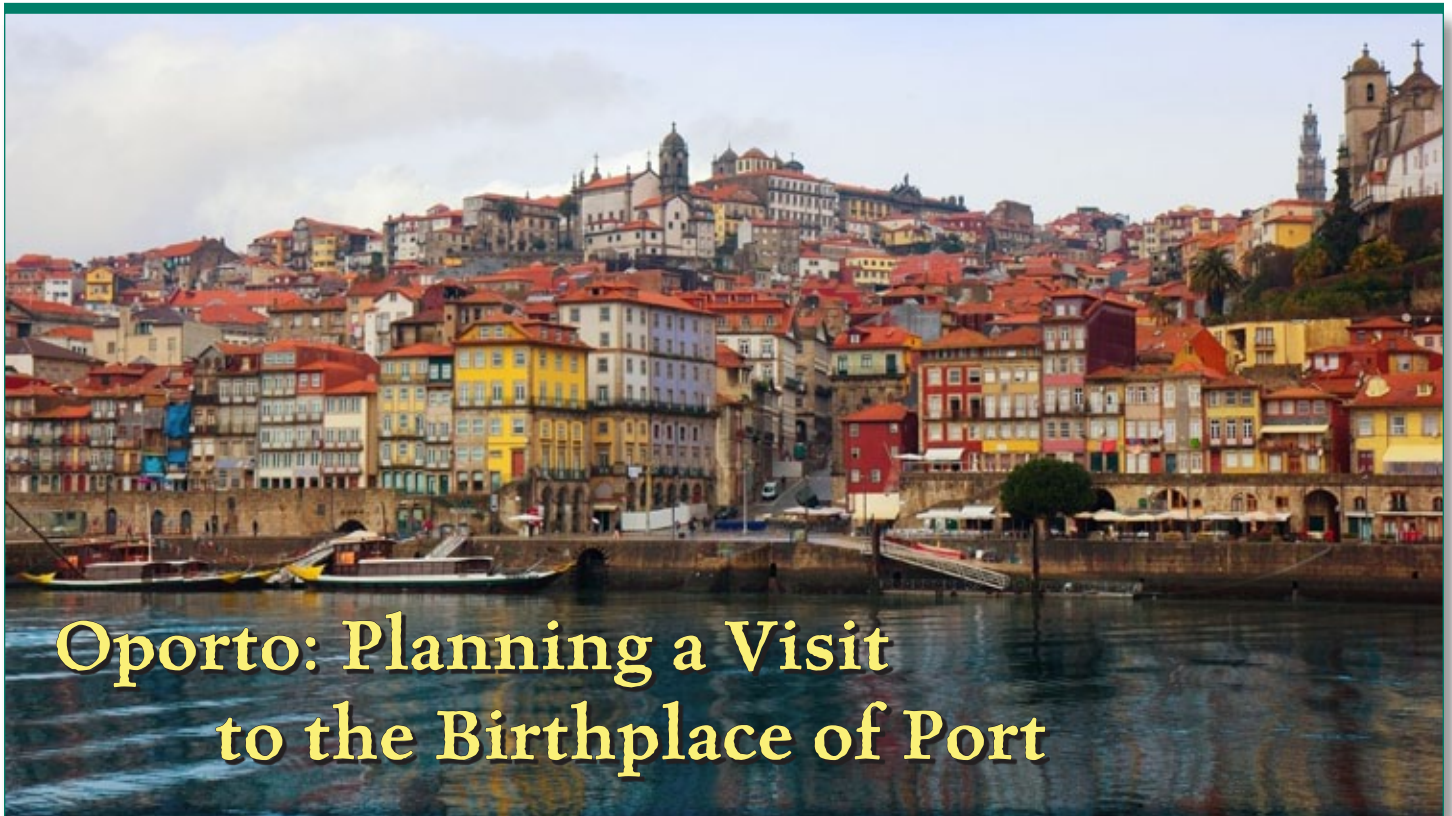
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**S**tart with buildings designed by leading world architects from the past and the present.

Add some unique Baroque sculptures and carvings. Then mix in a world-famous sweet wine and a certain British flair. Place it all by a grand river, and what do you have?

Portugal's second largest metropolis, and one of Europe's most charismatic cities: Oporto.

Long one of the last undiscovered European metropolises, Oporto is preparing for its time in the spotlight. There now are direct flights from New York, plus numerous connections to and from the rest of Europe, and an increasing number of low-cost airlines serving the city.

Why it has taken so long for the rest of the world to discover Oporto is a mystery. It is an ancient port city steeped in history and tradition — a place that has become known for its monuments by renowned architects (Gustave Eiffel's Dona Maria Bridge, Nicolau Nasoni's Clerigos Tower, Rem Koolhaas' Casa da Musica, and Siza Vieira's Serralves Museum).

Oporto also gave birth to one of world history's legendary figures, Prince Henry the Navigator. And it's

the birthplace of that world-famous fictional character, Harry Potter. Author J.K. Rowling was living in Oporto as an English teacher when she started writing her first book.

Of course, we wine lovers know Oporto as the home of one of the world's great sweet wines: Port.

Oporto has many hotels from which to choose, ranging from basic hostels to business hotels, to mid-range choices, to five-star properties.

For a romantic option, the Pestana

Porto Hotel is situated along the Douro River, adjacent to the historic Ribeira Square. Cruises on the River Douro depart from right in front of the hotel, and the Torre dos Clerigos Bell Tower and the Porto Cathedral are less than a 10-minute walk away. Each morning, guests can enjoy breakfast at the Agua D'Ouro restaurant, which offers stunning views of the Douro River.

There is so much to see and do in this historic city that one should set aside several days. Some of the sights and activities recommended by locals:

■ **Cais de Gaia** — The city's postcard skyline and the birthplace of one of the world's most famous wines. Most of the world's supply of Port is stored and aged here, and a visit to any of the warehouses should not be missed. If you venture into the alleys uphill, you will find 19th-century manor houses and even more port lodges (that of Taylor's is especially worth a visit).

■ **Casa da Musica** — An architectural masterwork by world-renowned architect Rem Koolhaas. The striking



**TOURING TIPS**



*Douro Valley, Portugal.*

white concrete structure is an inventive building. Inside the 1,300-seat auditorium of perfect acoustics is a Baroque organ pinned to the wall. Top international orchestras play there.

■ **Sao Francisco Church** — Home to one of Europe's most extraordinarily lavish church interiors, completely covered in gold. Church services are no longer held there, but it is often the venue for classical music concerts.

■ **Clerigos Tower** — It was the tallest structure in Portugal when completed in 1763, and still provides the best aerial view of the city.

■ **Palacio da Bolsa** — This 19th-century building with a vast Neoclassical facade is the former stock exchange, built to impress and earn the credibility of European investors. Inside, it could be mistaken for a royal palace, especially the

ornate Arab Room, an oval chamber that attempted to copy Granada's Alhambra Palace. It now serves as "the grand reception room" of the city, where heads of state and other luminaries are received on a visit to Oporto.

Of course, no visit to Oporto is complete without a day trip to the Douro Valley, and Viator partners with local tour companies to provide outstanding experiences at reasonable prices.

One tour, called "Douro Valley Wine Tour from Porto Including Lunch," features tours and tastings at two wine estates, Quinta do Seixo and Quinta do Tedo. There's no better way to learn about Port and other wines of Portugal than by visiting the region from which they come — while soaking in some spectacular scenery along the way.

## For Further Information

### **Pestana Porto Hotel**

<http://www.pestana.com/en/hotel/pestana-porto>

### **Viator**

<http://www.viator.com>

### **Oporto Tourism**

<http://visitportoandnorth.travel>

# VINESSE

## Hot LIST

### **1 Hot Central Coast Wine Bar.**

Can wine drinkers and beer drinkers co-exist in harmony with one another? They can at The Wine Shed, located in San Luis Obispo, Calif. There, locals gather to sip reds, whites and brews — and on Friday and Saturday nights, they don't have to stop sipping until midnight.

805-543-9463

### **2 Hot Cedar City Winery.**

What is it about wine and communities that host annual Shakespeare festivals? Perhaps the most famous is Ashland, Ore., which is known for its productions of plays written by The Bard, and also is just a few miles away from several southern Oregon wineries. And then there's Cedar City, which has concluded the 2015 summer season of the Utah Shakespeare Festival, but has three productions continuing through Halloween. Just west of downtown Cedar City, Instant Gratification Winery has a tasting room (tucked behind the Iron Gate Inn) that's worth a visit.

<http://igwinery.com>

**3 Hot Wine Scene.** Locals have been flocking to Malibu Family Wines, a Southern California winery, for birthday parties, after-work gatherings and, in some cases, just to be seen. Guests can choose between wines made from grapes grown on the estate, and another line crafted from Central Coast grapes. And on weekends, there's live music.

<https://www.facebook.com/malibufamilywines>



**W**eisser. “White” in German, a common prefix used for many pale-skinned grape varieties in Germany. Example: Weisser Burgunder is German for Pinot Blanc.

**X**arel-lo. A white grape variety common in Catalonia (Spain), used to make both powerful table wines and sparkling wines (known as cava).

**Y**ork Mountain. An American Viticultural Area in San Luis Obispo County, part of the larger Central Coast AVA, established in 1984.

**Z**ibibbo. The Sicilian name for the Muscat of Alexandria wine grape.

**A**delaide Hills. A cool-climate winegrowing region of South Australia, which is known for its wines of great finesse.

**B**udwood. Name given to vine cuttings when they are going to be used for grafting.

## VINESSE STYLE

### SCARY BOTTLE HOLDERS

*Last year about this time, we visited the Dragon’s Lair shop at the Excaliber Casino in Las Vegas — and check out what we found!*



The store carries a wide range of cool — not to mention scary — wine bottle holders that would be perfect for using at a Halloween party.

Opening a good bottle of wine on Halloween night is a great way to deal with the constant ringing of the doorbell, and displaying a scary bottle holder right by the front door adds to the “atmosphere” of the occasion.

You can also find these holders online. A simple Web search

brought us to Amazon (where else?) and a product labeled, “Dark Dragon Gothic Wine Bottle Holder.” At the time of our search, it was priced at \$23.99.

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- Detailed Tasting Notes for each wine



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## APPELLATION SHOWCASE



### Transylvania

**A**sk almost any wine expert who has been there, and they'll tell you that Transylvania has the potential to produce some scary-good wines.

Now that we have the obvious Halloween-time pun out of the way, we can tell you in all seriousness that the Romanian wine region of Transylvania is making good wines now — and has been since before World War II.

In those days, Transylvanian villages were sprinkled with small vineyards; nearly every property owner grew grapes. However, after the war, when communists confiscated and nationalized the lands, the private vineyards gradually wilted away, and Transylvanian winemaking began a phase of decline that lasted until 1989, when communism fell in Romania.

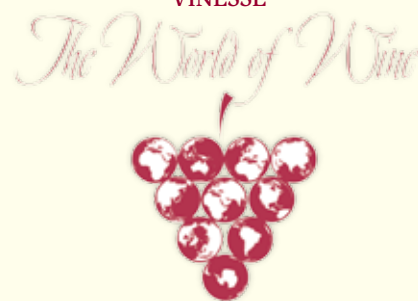
Today, Transylvania's vineyards produce high-quality white wines, combining local traditional methods with new technology, mostly from Germany. The wines produced are both noble and original, some possessing nuances of taste and smell you won't find anywhere else in the world.

Transylvania is situated in the center of the northern half of Romania, most of the territory being represented by a wide plateau surrounded by the Carpathian mountains. The sloping hills seem endless, just waiting for an influx of vineyard plantings.

Local residents hope a Transylvanian wine renaissance will be ignited by a return to its pre-World War II tradition, when individual property owners grew their own grapes. Then, from there, cooperatives could be formed to produce wines in quantities suitable for commercial distribution. After that, additional family-owned wineries could be developed as additional vineyards are planted.

That is the vision. Whether it will come to fruition is anyone's guess. For now, Transylvanian wines are good but still relatively rare in the United States — which means they won't be taking a big bite out of the American wine market anytime soon. (Sorry, we couldn't help ourselves.)

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### FREQUENCY:

6 times per year

### PRICE:

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“People of balance age as gracefully as wines of balance.”



— John Jordan of Jordan Vineyard & Winery



Wine Institute has released a new book, *Down to Earth: A Seasonal Tour of Sustainable Winegrowing in California*, a consumer-friendly guide to environmentally and socially responsible practices. The book shares the stories of 15 vintners and growers, representing thousands across the state, and how they embrace sustainable practices throughout the cycles of the winegrowing calendar. It features beautiful wine country photography by George Rose and a dozen fresh, seasonal recipes. The book is available on Amazon.

3,985

Number of bottles of wine produced by a standard acre of grapevines.

More and more restaurants seem to be offering flights of wines — which is cool, because my husband and I like to try new things. How do we know what order to taste the wines in?



That’s a great question, because not every restaurant has a sommelier to guide you through the process. At a minimum, you should be provided with a “tasting sheet” to guide you through the wines. Often, these pre-printed sheets will include circles, on which the wine glasses will be placed, and sometimes the circles will be accompanied by numbers. Those numbers could be keyed to selections on the restaurant’s wine list. If there is no sommelier and if there is no tasting sheet, you’re on your own. The basic process is to taste the lighter white wines first, then the richer white wines, then the lighter red wines, and finally the robust red wines. If there also is a sparkling wine in the flight, taste it first. If there also is a dessert wine, such as Port, taste it last. We suggest tasting all of the white wines before moving on to the reds. Once your palate has been exposed to the tannins that big red wines possess, it’s difficult to go back to lighter-styled wines and be able to taste all of their more delicate flavors.



## FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



*Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards & Winery*

**E**very so often, we like to take a look at what types of food wineries are serving at their tasting rooms to accompany their wines.

After all, winery owners have a vested interest in making their wines look good. That means the food pairings they select must be enjoyable.

Of course, the menus may change as the vintages change — which means there are always new pairings to discover.

In California's North Coast wine country, a number of estates take food-and-wine pairing seriously. That means they make great destinations for foodies.

In alphabetical order, here are four such wineries:

■ **Chalk Hill Estate Vineyards & Winery** — The Estate Luncheon experience begins with a driving tour around the estate. Guests then arrive at the Pavilion, a magnificent conservatory offering panoramic views of the Chalk Hill valley. There, a decadent meal is expertly paired with Chalk Hill wines, along with many fresh foods from the culinary garden, prepared by the estate chef. Monday through Friday. 707-933-3314.

■ **Jordan Vineyard & Winery** — The Estate Tour and Tasting includes a guided wine tour of Jordan's breathtaking vineyards, scenic vistas, chef's garden and more. Guests ride in style to remote destinations where they explore Sonoma County wine and food in the countryside where they're grown, enjoying tastings of current release Russian River Valley Chardonnay and Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, special vintage selections, Estate Extra Virgin Olive Oil and an array of food pairing delicacies from Jordan's chef. Thursday through Monday, May through October, weather permitting. 800-654-1213.

■ **Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates & Gardens** — Three culinary experiences are available on a regular basis: 1. Reserve Wine and Food Pairing; 2. Wine and Cheese Pairing; 3. Wine and Chocolate Pairing. 707-576-3810.

■ **Lambert Bridge Winery** — Available by reservation for groups of 10 or fewer, Food & Wine Pairings includes a flight of exclusive wines presented with gourmet food pairings specially prepared by chef Bruce Riezenman. Guests may reserve a table in the candle-lit barrel room or an intimate stone-walled private VIP room. 707-431-4675.

## 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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- 4 bottles of specially-selected wines
- Detailed Tasting Notes for each featured wine

### WINE COLOR MIX:

Reds, Whites, or Mixed

### FREQUENCY:

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## CHARDONNAY-BRAISED CHICKEN THIGHS

This delicious dish pairs perfectly with Chardonnay, and this recipe yields 4 servings.

### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 chicken thighs
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 small shallots, peeled and quartered
- 1 pound parsnips, peeled and cut into 3-inch by 1/2-inch batons
- 1 rosemary sprig (about 6 inches)
- 1 cup Chardonnay (not too oaky)
- 1 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. In a large, deep skillet, melt the butter in the oil.
3. Season chicken with salt and pepper, then dust with the flour.
4. Add chicken to skillet, skin side down, and cook over high heat, turning once, until browned (about 6 minutes). Transfer to a plate.
5. Add the shallots, parsnips and rosemary to the skillet and cook, stirring, for 1 minute.
6. Add the wine and boil until reduced by half (about 3 minutes).
7. Add the broth and bring to a boil.
8. Nestle the chicken, skin side up, in the skillet, tucking it between the parsnips.
9. Transfer skillet to the middle rack of the oven and braise the chicken, uncovered, for about 25 minutes, until cooked through.

10. Turn the broiler on. Broil the chicken for 3 minutes, until the skin is crisp.
11. Return the skillet to high heat and boil until the sauce is thickened (about 3 minutes).
12. Discard the rosemary sprig. Transfer the chicken and vegetables to bowls, and serve.

## ROASTED PORK LOIN

A pork loin often is served with Chardonnay, but because of the garlic and rosemary for which this recipe calls, this dish is best with Merlot. This recipe yields about 8 servings.

### Ingredients

- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary
- Salt
- Pepper
- 2 lbs. boneless pork loin roast
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup Merlot

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Crush garlic with rosemary, salt and pepper, creating a paste.
3. Pierce meat with a sharp knife in several places and press the garlic paste into the openings. Rub the meat with the remaining garlic mixture and olive oil.
4. Place pork loin in oven, turning and basting with pan liquids. Cook until pork is no longer pink in the center (about 60 minutes). Note: An instant-read thermometer inserted into the center should read 145 degrees.
5. Remove roast to a platter. Heat the wine in the pan and stir to loosen browned bits of food on the bottom. Serve with pan juices.

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