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The Grapevine

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*Setting a New Standard in
the Russian River Valley*

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WINE WITH VEGETABLES

TODAY'S WINES: TOO MUCH
FROSTING ON THE CAKE?

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Chief Operating Officer (aka "The Buck Stops Here"):
Lawrence D. Dutra

Editor:
Robert Johnson

Wine Steward:
Katie Montgomery

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Big Globbs of 'Icing' Can Make for Clunky Wines

By Robert Johnson

I was talking with one of California's top winemakers the other day. I'm not going to tell you who it was because he would not want to offend any of his fellow vintners with his observation that I'm about to share with you.

What I *will* tell you, because there are quite of a few of them around, is that he is a disciple of Andre Tchelistcheff, a legendary vintner who, during the harvest season, depended more on his gut and experience than on sunny day counts and fractometer readings. To Tchelistcheff, making wine was as much about art as it was about science.

At one point of our wide-ranging conversation, the topic turned to big wines — Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab-based blends, Zinfandel, et al. That's when he made the observation that has stayed with me ever since because I was able to relate to it immediately.

"A lot of big wines today are clunky," he said. "Too much frosting on the cake."

As soon as he'd said it, I was transported to the 1970s and the bakery that my parents owned and operated on the Balboa peninsula in Newport Beach, Calif. It was not a franchise or part of a large conglomerate; it was a family business, and as such, every member of the family pitched in.

The year I was in the sixth grade, my before-school duties included

frying and glazing or frosting donuts, making turnovers (apple and cherry), and icing the cupcakes that had been baked earlier in the morning.

We had four types of cupcakes in all: 1) chocolate cake with chocolate icing; 2) chocolate cake with white icing; 3) white cake with chocolate icing (my favorite); and 4) white cake with white icing.

To the top of each cupcake, with a spatula, I spread a layer of either chocolate or white (buttercream) icing — a very thin layer. The icing, as my Dad explained it, was intended to complement the cake, not be the main ingredient.

Today, however, cupcakes with thick gobs of icing are all the rage. And to my palate, the flavors are totally out of balance.

Just like those "clunky" wines my vintner friend was describing. In his opinion... and I agree... too many winemakers now choose bombast over balance, and in-your-face over finesse.

In winemaking, as with cupcake frosting, too much of a good thing can be... too much.



2 Schools of Thought on Filtering Wine

One of the most common practices in winemaking comes very near the end of the process. It's called filtering, and it has both supporters and detractors in the vintner community.

Filtering is one of the tools in a winemaker's tool box that can be used to bring a beautifully hued wine of great clarity to the marketplace. That's important because even though a wine that appears slightly cloudy normally has no flaws, it may appear "not right" to the consumer.

When it comes to how a bottle of wine is presented on a retail shelf, and how the wine in the bottle looks, that old saying definitely applies: Appearance is everything.

Let's take a closer look at the two schools of thought in regard to wine filtration.

Those who do not support use of the process say that it may remove certain natural compounds that contribute to the wine's aging potential, its strength and its flavor — in a word, its personality.

Vintners who believe strongly that filtration can be harmful often will have the word "Unfiltered" printed on the front label of the wine bottle. They want the world to



know that what they are about to taste is what the winemaker intended them to taste.

Those who support the filtering process explain that, over time, it's possible for an off-flavor to develop in a wine bottle — a flavor that could have been avoided had filtration been undertaken.

Often, commerce plays a role in determining whether a wine undergoes filtration. As one veteran winemaker noted, "You're much more likely to see an 'Unfiltered' wine that's made in limited quantities — a few hundred cases or less.

That way, if something does go wrong in the bottle, the loss is sustainable.

"At the other end of the spectrum," he added, "you'll never see an 'Unfiltered' wine that has production of a few hundred thousand cases. It's just too much of a risk for a winery to take; if the winery is under-financed, one bad vintage could put it out of business."

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Over the past three decades, MacRostie Winery and Vineyards has established itself as one of the Sonoma Coast of California's defining wineries, and a leader in a bright, balanced and age-worthy style of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Today, MacRostie is guided jointly by winery founder Steve MacRostie and the talented up-and-coming winemaker, Heidi Bridenhagen, who together are making the finest Chardonnay and Pinot Noir bottlings in the winery's storied history.

Using grapes farmed by legendary winegrowing families — including the Duttons, Sangiacomos, Martinellis and Bacigalupis — as well as from MacRostie's own Wildcat Mountain Vineyard, the Sonoma Coast wines from MacRostie have established themselves as benchmarks, offering a rare intersection between labor-intensive small-lot winemaking and the complexity that can be achieved only by working with the finest vineyards.

And now, there is a new place where wine drinkers can learn about and savor these special wines: the MacRostie Estate House in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley.

The unveiling of the Estate House is the culmination of a lifelong dream for MacRostie, who founded his winery in 1987. Many are saying that it sets a new standard, bringing something elevated, new and gorgeous to Russian River Valley wine country.

To achieve their vision, MacRostie and his team sought out three of the most creative and acclaimed firms in the business: Gould Evans for architecture, Roche + Roche for landscape architecture, and Grant K. Gibson for interior design. Because they were able to create the Estate House from the ground up, every detail was thoughtfully considered. Both aesthetically and experientially, the MacRostie Estate House is warm, welcoming and beautifully open in its design.

Located just five minutes from the



Healdsburg Square, on a picturesque hillside, the Estate House is surrounded by beautiful vineyards and meadows. This setting was a key inspiration for Gould Evans, providing a backdrop for the gracefully modern architecture.

The Estate House features multiple indoor venues for seated wine tastings, and three expansive patio terraces with beautiful valley and vineyard views. The 20-acre property also includes a 13-acre estate Pinot Noir vineyard (named Thale's Vineyard, after MacRostie's wife) and a winery



designed exclusively for fermenting Pinot Noir in very small one-ton lots.

In a given vintage, it is not uncommon for MacRostie to do as many as 130 individual fermentations of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with a focus on Pinot. This keeps different vineyards, blocks and clones separate. While this is an incredible amount of work, when it comes time for blending, it gives Bridenhagen and MacRostie an amazing palette of flavors with which to work.

This diversity has also allowed MacRostie Winery to enhance its portfolio, adding a Russian River Valley Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, as well as a handful of sought-after vineyard-designate wines from

throughout the Sonoma Coast.

And now, with its numerous indoor and outdoor venues, and multiple seated tasting flight options, the MacRostie Estate House offers an array of experiences and environments for enjoying those wines.

While each area has its own aesthetic, the overall design combines modern elegance with the inviting character of beautifully grained woods, richly hued leathers, abundant glass and gorgeous landscaping that incorporates MacRostie's Scottish thistle motif. The Estate House will

also offer numerous special visitor experiences throughout the year, including barrel samplings, rotational tastings and interactive "roll up your sleeves" educational programs, all of which will begin in the months ahead.

Winery 4-1-1

MacRostie Estate House

4605 Westside Road
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Guests are welcome daily from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m., and all tasting experiences are seated, with reservations recommended. Call 707-996-4480 for reservations and directions.

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The Sights, Sounds and Flavors of Yolo County



The Department of Viticulture and Enology, U.C. Davis

Known for its incredibly rich soil, warm days and mild Delta breezes, California's Yolo County yields unforgettable wines of great character and diversity.

There, you'll find outstanding renditions of Syrah, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Tempranillo, Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, but also lesser-grown varietals such as Viognier, Primitivo, and Albarino... not to mention sparkling wines and Port-style wines.

Virtually all of the wineries are family owned and operated — some for multiple generations — guaranteeing visitors an intimate experience with highly knowledgeable artisans.

Yolo County also is home to the University of California Davis Viticulture and Enology Department, as well as the Robert Mondavi Institute for Food and Wine Science. Clearly, local expertise helps put Yolo County on the leading edge of the industry.

From Clarksburg to Davis, and from Winters to verdant Capay Valley and Dunnigan Hills, you'll enjoy gorgeous scenery, great dining opportunities, and comfortable, welcoming places to stay.

Among the wineries that are worth a visit:

■ **Route 3 Wines** — Produced from 100% Dunnigan Hills AVA wine grapes, the handcrafted wines reflect the unique soils and terroir of the historic Hucke Ranch. The wines can be tasted at RootStock Tasting Room and Gift Shop in Winters.

■ **Putah Creek Winery** — Crafting award-winning wines since 2006, Putah Creek has a newly-opened tasting room in downtown Davis. Founded by a grape farmer, it uses locally grown grapes to produce balanced, approachable wines.

■ **Bogle Vineyards and Winery** — Located on the Sacramento River Delta, Bogle's tasting room is open daily, and guests are invited to bring a picnic to enjoy on its grounds while unwinding and soaking in gorgeous vineyard views.

■ **Capay Valley Vineyards** — Located in the beautiful Capay Valley, this winery produces award-winning wines, including a unique Sparkling Viognier, dubbed "the Champagne of Yolo County."

In addition to wine-tasting, the vibrant cities of Davis, Winters and Woodland, as well as the outlying communities in the gorgeous countryside, all have something to offer year-round.

Start with outstanding places to stay, from picturesque B&Bs to full-service hotels. Then explore the natural beauty by touring verdant farmlands or walking quiet creek-side trails. You also can enjoy great entertainment, from intimate theaters to the world-class stage of the Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts.

Sample just about any cuisine under the sun at one of the region's many



TOURING TIPS



U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame

fine restaurants, and take time to shop for art, antiques, personal goods, and so much more. Yolo County also is known for its vibrant farmers' markets.

Among our favorite attractions (when we're not visiting tasting rooms) are:

■ **U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame** — Housed in Davis, this world-class attraction features priceless bicycles, trophies, medals and memorabilia from the cycling world's best. Changing displays highlight contemporary pros. Also on display is the prestigious Pierce Miller antique bicycle collection.

■ **Woodland Opera House** — Built in 1885, the original Opera House burned down in the 1892 fire that destroyed much of downtown

Woodland. It was rebuilt on the same site, using some of the remaining foundation and bricks for the walls. It reopened in 1896, and still hosts plays and musical acts each season.

■ **Reiff's Antique Gas Station Automotive Museum** — See a collection of antique gas pumps, gas station signs and car culture memorabilia from the 1950s and before. It just may be Yolo County's coolest tourist attraction.

■ **U.C. Davis Arboretum Tours** — A living museum of 22,000 types of trees, plants and shrubs. Located on the campus in Davis.

Yolo County may not be California's most famous wine region, but it's certainly among the most diverse... and fun.

For Further Information

**RootStock
Tasting Room and Gift Shop**
22 Main Street
Winters
530-794-6008

Putah Creek Winery
110 F Street, Suite D
Davis
530-601-9828

Bogle Vineyards and Winery
37783 County Rd. 144
Clarksburg
916-744-1139

Capay Valley Vineyards
13757 Highway 16
Brooks
530-796-4110

U.S. Bicycling Hall of Fame
303 3rd Street
Davis
530-341-2363

Woodland Opera House
340 2nd Street
Woodland
530-666-9617

**Reiff's Antique Gas Station
Automotive Museum**
52 Jefferson St.
Woodland
530-666-1758

U.C. Davis Arboretum Tours
530-752-4880

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Wine Country Chocolate Experience. Wineries have the tasting room model down to a science, offering a wide array of tours, product sampling and other experiences. In downtown Napa, Anette's brings the tasting room experience to fine chocolates, with offerings ranging from "Taste and Talk" (\$5 for 10 minutes) to the "Premier Tasting" (\$30 for 45 minutes). In addition to an array of chocolates and truffles, Anette's crafts chocolate wine sauces which, by themselves, make the stop worthwhile.

www.anettes.com

2 Hot Napa Valley Golf Experience. At the Chardonnay Golf Club, don't be surprised to encounter grapevines where you'd simply be out of bounds on other courses. The club consists of three 9-hole layouts (called Meadows, Lakes and Vineyards), configured so golfers have a choice of three 18-hole courses. There's also a driving range and practice facility, as well as a bar and grill called The View.

www.chardonnaygolfclub.com

3 Hot Program for Art Lovers. Napa Valley Arts in April is a month-long celebration of wine and the arts featuring winery art installations, interactive programs, pop-up exhibitions and exclusive tastings. Throughout the month, each Napa Valley town is highlighted, showcasing their unique artistic contributions to the cultural landscape of the valley.

www.napavalleycollection.com



Maceration. The process of allowing grape skins and crushed juice to ferment together, intended to enhance tannins, color and aroma in the wine.

Nose. The totality of a wine's aromas; basically synonymous with "bouquet."

Organic. Describes grapes grown without the use of chemical-based fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides in the vineyard.

Plonk. A derogatory term for a poor-tasting, usually cheap wine, often bottled in a large jug.

Quixote. Winery in the Napa Valley designed by the free-spirited Austrian artist, Friedensreich Hundertwasser. It is the only Hundertwasser building in the U.S.

Riesling. One of the world's most revered types of white wine (along with Chardonnay). Particularly popular in Germany, Alsace and Austria.

VINESSE STYLE



Basement Wine Storage

Homes with basements are common in the Midwest, in part out of necessity: Families need someplace safe to ride out the tornadoes that hit the region.

But in Las Vegas, they are rare because the dirt is hard. Venture just below that the desert sand, and you encounter something called caliche, which acts as a binder for other materials such as gravel, clay and silt.

As a result, most builders stay away from constructing basements in their homes. But American West Development actually specializes in basement homes, with the price starting at \$114 per square foot.

"There are many benefits to subterranean living, especially here in Las Vegas," Daniel Welsh, American West's Vice President, told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "It was a dream of mine to own one and,

fortunately, my family and I currently enjoy it and couldn't be happier."

Adds Welsh: "The basement will hover right around 68 to 70 degrees without any assistance."

And that makes it close to ideal for storing wine, particularly bottles that are not earmarked for long-term aging. A little bit cooler would be better for the long haul, but bottles stored at 68-70 degrees for a year or two, especially when kept out of direct sunlight, should sustain no damage.

Even in a desert setting surrounded by sand, it's possible to store wine safely... and stylishly... in a basement.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE

Negev, Israel



Amid the harsh desert scenery that dominates the landscape of southern Israel, a series of vineyards have been planted over the last decade by a number of pioneering and dedicated people.

These are idealistic people who love their land and, together with state-of-the-art drip irrigation technology, have grown vines and crafted wines where, just a few years before, the idea would have been unimaginable.

The Negev Wine Route was established with the support of the Ramat Hanegev Regional Council and the government, which provided the land on the condition that it would be accessible for tourists and used for tourism-related purposes.

The wineries are part of a bigger series of such farms that stretch across the Ramat Hanegev region and each offer something for tourists — be it lodging, restaurants, cheese-making, olive-oil making or, of course, winemaking.

The first winery to open in the Negev was the Boker Winery, which began 15 years ago as an experiment led by Zvi Remek, a member of the Sde Boker kibbutz who studied agronomy in California before returning to his home. Having previously worked with the grapevines of the kibbutz, opening the winery was the start of a transition from simply growing

produce in the Negev to creating a high-value product from it.

Slowly, the Sde Boker Winery expanded, and today is still modestly housed in the old communal laundry facility of the kibbutz.

The Boker Valley Vineyard not only grows its own vines, but also offers visitors the opportunity to taste many of the other wines produced in the region. It is run by a couple with diverse origins: Moshe is from Eilat, while Hilda hails from the Netherlands.

In addition to wines, they sell local olive oil and olives, and offer beautiful accommodations in the heart of the desert.

Not all of the farms along the Negev Desert Wine route make wine, but all produce some type of high-quality produce originating from the Negev.

Just north of Mitzpe Ramon and the famous makhtesh, Carmey Har Hanegev is a farm that produces a wide range of natural desert resources, including olive oils, fruits and liqueurs using the produce of the farm. The farm has camping and cabin facilities for overnight stays, and also sells artwork.

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Q When is the best time of the year to visit the wineries in Santa Barbara County?

A There's really no bad time, although the tasting rooms can be packed during the summer months and into the harvest season. If your goal is to taste what the region is all about, consider attending the Santa Barbara Vintners' Spring Weekend, which this year will be held April 23-26. Fun events are planned all four days, but if you have time to attend only one, make it the Grand Tasting on April 25, which will run from 1 to 4 p.m. at River View Park in Buellton, Calif. More than 100 Santa Barbara County wineries will be pouring their wares, dozens of restaurants and other food purveyors will be serving bites of their specialties, and live music will provide a melodic backdrop. For full festival as well as Grand Tasting-only ticket pricing, to go: sbvintnersweekend.com.

25

Percentage that wine sales increase during Passover at Yatir Winery in Israel. Yatir's vineyards are sited close to 3,000 feet above sea level, and the winery produces approximately 50,000 bottles per year.

“On the one hand, many of us are now filling our plates with more greenery and less wine-friendly meat dishes. On the other, as the health benefits of wine become better known, more vegetarians are pouring a glass with the meatless meals. We're all more health conscious, but don't want to give up good taste.”



— Wine writer Natalie MacLean, on the challenge of pairing wine with vegetables

Coffee king Starbucks, which has been experimenting with wine, beer and upscale snacks during evening hours at a number of locations for several years, plans to expand the program widely. According to a Reuters report, the company believes it can increase evening sales by \$1 billion via its plans for after sunset, and will add wine, et al at nearly 3,000 of its 11,900 cafes. As one Starbucks district manager told *The Grapevine*, “The roll-out will be gradual. The speed has a lot to do with [liquor] licensing, which is largely out of our control.”



Sicily, which is at the heart of all wines produced by Stemmari Estates, has a reputation for its rich, fertile soil. Home to gently sloping hills and recipient of an abundance of vine-nourishing sun, that Italian island is paradise to the people who inhabit it. Stemmari, situated along the south coast of Sicily, practices some of the most sustainable wine production methods in the world in order to support the island, its flora and fauna, the future of its people, and the quality of its wines.



To the ever-growing list of things that you can eat with Champagne or other sparkling wine, add raclette. As Robert Reid described it in *National Geographic Traveler*, raclette is “basically gourmet nachos: cow's milk heated open-air and served with potatoes, onions, cornichons and dried ham.” He added that Sierre's Chateau de Villa, a Swiss castle built in the 1500s, was one place to taste the melted morsels. Because of the complexity of the flavors complementing the saltiness of the ham, sparkling wine would be an ideal libation to pour.



FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS



Vegetables

Fresh vegetables are among the best gifts of spring, but those gifts can wreak havoc when it comes to wine pairing.

Here are a few ideas to help you navigate those challenges. (And, yes, we know that not all of the gifts of spring listed below, technically, are vegetables. But you *will* find them in the produce department.)

- **Asparagus** — This is probably the most vegetal of all vegetables, so let's deal with it first. And yet, it can be paired successfully with wine, as long as that wine is not red. Opt for a white that offers citrus impressions among its flavors, or try a Gruner Veltliner from Austria. Another enemy of asparagus is oak, so stay from most California renditions of Chardonnay and opt for bottlings with the word "Unoaked" on the label.
- **Squash and Pumpkin** — These demonstrate that oaked Chardonnays *can* be paired with veggies. It's their starchiness that makes the pairing work. And here's a pairing that really works well: an oaky, buttery Chardonnay with a baked potato topped with butter, sour cream with chives.
- **Spinach** — This is another choice with a toasty Chardonnay, but only when prepared with bits of bacon. Yes, that may sound like cheating, but if it takes a little bit of bacon to make one eat their spinach, where's the harm? (It's the smokiness of the bacon that makes the pairing work.)
- **Eggplant Parmesan** — Yes, we're "cheating" again here by adding some assertively flavored cheese to the dish, but it's the Parmesan that makes the pairing with medium-bodied red wines possible. Sangiovese (a.k.a. Chianti in Italy) is an ideal partner.
- **Green Peppers** — The "white Pinots" are the wine picks when the flavor of a dish is defined by green (or red or yellow or orange) peppers: Pinot Grigio, Pinot Gris or Pinot Blanc. Important: Seek out versions that have no residual sugar; these wines need to be fully dry in order for the pairing to sing.
- **Black Olives** — A little "cheating" is required to make wine pairing work with olives because of their natural saltiness. As an example, if you include lots of sliced olives in a salad with herbs and mushrooms, you can pour an earthy red wine such as Syrah, Petite Sirah, Grenache and or "old vine" versions of Zinfandel.

Light & Sweet

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BRAISED SHORT RIBS

This dish pairs beautifully with Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet-based blends. This recipe yields about 5 servings.

Ingredients

- 5-lb. bone-in beef short ribs, cut crosswise into 2-inch pieces
- Salt and black pepper
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 medium onions, chopped
- 3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 bottle Cabernet Sauvignon
- 10 sprigs flat-leaf parsley
- 8 sprigs thyme
- 4 sprigs oregano
- 2 sprigs rosemary
- 2 fresh or dried bay leaves
- 1 head garlic, halved crosswise
- 4 cups beef stock

Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Season short ribs with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in two batches, brown short ribs on all sides, about 8 minutes per batch. Transfer short ribs to a plate. Pour off all but 3 tablespoons drippings from pot.
2. Add onions, carrots and celery to pot and cook over medium-high heat, stirring often, until onions are browned (about 5 minutes). Add flour and tomato paste, and cook, stirring constantly, until well combined and deep red (2-3 minutes).
3. Stir in wine, then add short ribs with accumulated juices. Bring to a boil; lower heat to medium and simmer until wine is reduced by half (about 25 minutes). Add all herbs to pot along with garlic. Stir in stock. Bring to a boil, cover, and transfer to oven.

4. Cook until short ribs are tender (2 to 2.5 hours). Transfer ribs to a platter. Strain sauce from pot into a measuring cup. Spoon fat from surface of sauce and discard. Season sauce to taste with salt and pepper. Serve in shallow bowls with sauce spooned over.

ASPARAGUS WITH CHEESE SAUCE

This dish pairs nicely with Sauvignon Blanc, and this recipe yields 4 servings. Serving suggestion: Because of the assertive flavors of the dish, chill the wine a bit longer/colder than you normally would.

Ingredients

- 400 grams asparagus
- 25 grams butter
- 25 grams flour
- 300-ml. milk
- 50 grams cheddar cheese, grated
- Pinch of salt and pepper to taste

Preparation

1. Snap the ends off the asparagus and discard.
2. Grill or steam the asparagus by your favorite method while you prepare the cheese sauce.
3. Place the butter in a small saucepan and melt over a low heat.
4. Remove from heat and stir in the flour with a wooden spoon to form a paste.
5. Slowly and carefully add one-fourth of the milk, slowly incorporating it into the paste without allowing lumps to form.
6. Return to a low heat and continue to add the remainder of the milk, again ensuring that it is fully mixed in without lumps forming.
7. Add the grated cheese and keep stirring until the sauce thickens and the cheese has melted.
8. Place the asparagus on plates and pour a small quantity of cheese over each serving.

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