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Volume 24

Number 1

©Vinesse Wine Club 2016

SKU 25836

The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS

Vinesse Style: A Visit to a Master Swiss Chocolatier

**A 5-Point
Sparkling
Wine Primer**

**Swartland: A
Stellenbosch
Alternative**

**Starbucks
Gets Serious
About Wine**

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

The Starbucks Wine Experience

By Robert Johnson

I'm a Starbucks guy. They should put me in their commercials. I have a gold card, I use the Starbucks stores as my "third place," and I even buy Starbucks ornaments for my Christmas tree.

Starbucks transcends its core product (coffee). It's about a brand. Even though I know this from my schooling in marketing and management, I buy into it. Fully. (If you're also a long-time Starbucks fan, do you miss their music sampler CDs as much as I do? They were extremely well curated and introduced me to a number of singers and bands I now count among my favorites.)

Now, after several years of testing in a number of markets, Starbucks is introducing the sale of wine during the early evening and nighttime hours at more and more stores. Earlier this year, according to a report in *USA Today*, the company submitted several hundred new applications for liquor licenses.

Starbucks was largely a morning business until it introduced Frappuccino. That helped revenues during the afternoon hours. Now, the company hopes wine will help keep its stores humming into the night.

The key word is "humming" — not singing loudly or yelling, as you might encounter in other environments where alcohol is served.

"There aren't very many places you can go in the evening where you can

go very relaxed, very casual," Rachel Antalek, Starbucks' Vice President of New Product Innovation, told *USA Today*. "It's not loud. You can actually have a small group and hear yourself talk."

Obviously, this is not just about wine. It's about business. The company is projecting that by 2019, its "Evenings" concept — which incorporates wine, beer and "small plates" sales — will generate \$1 billion in additional revenue.

One of my local Starbucks introduced "Evenings" several years ago, and I was among the first to "test" it. The food was tasty, and the wine was served in stemless glassware to help prevent spills and breakage. As for the "wine list," it was small but well selected. Any wine lover would know the names and where to find them, but in a program that could become huge, Starbucks needed dependable sources.

Now that Starbucks is introducing wine to even more stores, will I find myself there morning, noon *and* night? No. But it's nice to know I can visit my favorite coffee house at night, order something other than decaf, and still be able to get a good night's sleep.



A 5-Point Sparkling Wine Primer

Chances are pretty good that you raised a glass of wine on New Year's Eve to welcome in 2016.

Chances also are good that the wine in that glass was Champagne, or perhaps some other type of sparkling wine.

Which brings up the question: How much do you know about Champagne? This five-point sparkling wine primer will turn you into an instant Champagne expert... or provide you with just enough information to be dangerous.

1. Words on the bottle label can help you know what type of grapes were used to make the Champagne. "Blanc de Blancs" means that white grapes were used — almost always Chardonnay exclusively. "Blanc de Noir" means that red grapes were used — mostly Pinot Noir, but often with some Pinot Meunier added.

2. Some Champagne has a vintage year on the label, while some does not. In general, a "vintage Champagne" is made in years when the weather cooperated, enabling the picking of exceptional grapes. However, that doesn't mean that a "non-vintage" Champagne is in any way inferior. Many Champagne houses bottle non-vintage wines exclusively, often blending wine from several vintages in order to maintain a "house style."

3. Champagne should be served ice cold in order to keep the bubbles alive after a bottle has been opened. The most effective type of ice bucket is one filled half-way with ice and then topped with water, leaving only enough room for the bottle.

4. Who would ever imagine that the type of glass used for serving Champagne would be controversial in 2016? Didn't we get rid of those flat, bubble-depleting tulip glasses a long time ago? Well, some people now are saying that the long, tall flute should be replaced by a standard wine glass — the wider the mouth the better. The idea is that one could then swirl and sniff the Champagne, just like a still wine. Ultimately, though, the choice is yours.

5. Don't forget the food. While we think of Champagne as a beverage of celebration, it's much more than that. Besides Sunday brunch and "small plates"/tapas fare, it pairs beautifully with spicy Southwest cuisine, shellfish and sushi.

And that means it should be enjoyed year-round... not just on New Year's Eve.

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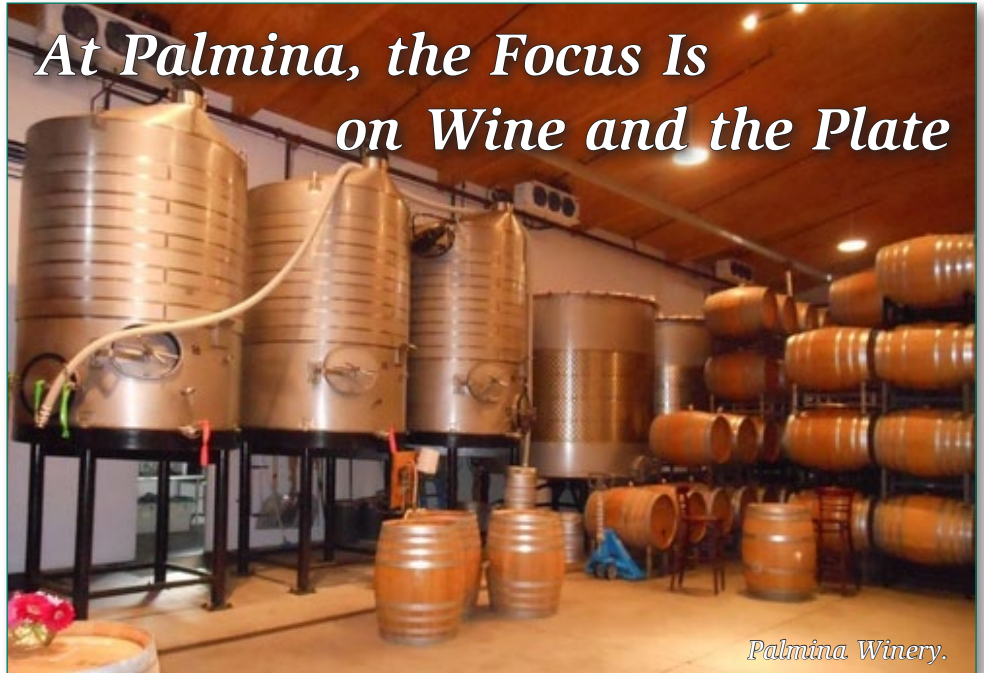
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At Palmina, the Focus Is on Wine and the Plate



Palmina Winery.

Palmina is more than a winery. It's a philosophy, a passion and a strongly held belief that wine is an extension of the plate, a component of a meal and a means to bring people together.

Formed by winemaker Steve Clifton in 1995, Palmina is named in honor of Steve's great friend, Paula. Like a grandmother to him, she taught Steve to love cooking and wine, and the Italian lifestyle became a spark in his life. After Paula succumbed to breast cancer, Steve found that her given name on her Italian birth certificate was Palmina, and the winery was thus fittingly named.

Serendipity intervened in 2000 when Steve became more in contact with Italian winemaker mentors and needed to find someone who spoke Italian. He was advised that a manager at a local restaurant was fluent and was introduced to Chrystal Seals, who not only provided the needed translation but shared his passion for wine, food and all things Italian. Chrystal soon became involved in all aspects of Palmina, and the couple was married in Friuli, Italy in the spring of 2004.

Steve produced the first Palmina wines in the basement of his home in 1995. His career in the wine industry had begun in 1991 when he left his previous incarnations as a musician and nightclub entrepreneur behind and

decided to beg his way into a tasting room position at Rancho Sisquoc Winery. Little by little, he worked his way into the cellar and, in time, became the assistant winemaker there.

Over the next few years, Steve's on-the-job schooling would include production and winemaking positions at Beckmen, Brander and Domaine Santa Barbara wineries. Steve met Greg Brewer in 1995 and formed the partnership that became Brewer-Clifton, a winery devoted solely to





Tasting room.

vineyard-designated Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the Sta. Rita Hills appellation in western Santa Barbara County.

Chrystal (Seals) Clifton went to Italy to study film and communications for her college years abroad and fell in love with the entire culture of wine and food. Studying at the University of Bologna, she returned to the United States and the Santa Barbara area fluent in Italian, passionate about food and wine, and with a yearning to return to Italy.

Realizing that the lifestyle she loved so much in Italy could be attained here, in 2000 she joined Palmina and became involved in all aspects of the growing business. With her language skills and background, she is invaluable in forging the relationships with wine producers in Italy that have provided phenomenal insight in forming Palmina's philosophy and style.

Today, Palmina produces a full range of wines crafted from Italian varietals grown in Santa Barbara County. Palmina is not trying to emulate the Italian versions of those wines, but rather translate the history of the grapes to the growing conditions and vineyard sites of the unique characteristics of Santa Barbara. The wines are Italian by inspiration with flavors rooted in Santa Barbara, and each is intended to be a delicious component of a meal.

In Italy, food and wine are part of a healthy, happy way of life that brings people together. Palmina wines are made in a deliberate manner that allows each to complement food. Indeed, the wines are simply a part of the meal — an extension of the plate.

Palmina is all about relationships that bring people back to the table to sustain themselves with good wine and food, conversation and a small respite from the hustle and bustle of today's world. Palmina crafts wines that are a key part of that equation — wines that can be enjoyed everyday, and that complement and enhance a wide range of food styles.

Steve Clifton recently launched a new endeavor. It's called La Voix, and is focused on upscale Pinot Noir. That's a French variety, which is why you won't find it under the Palmina name.

But if La Voix delivers on quality like Palmina and Brewer-Clifton have, you can bet the wine will be sublime.

Winery 4-1-1

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Exploring South Africa's Stellenbosch Alternative



It's close enough to get to, yet it's a perfect place to get away from it all. Only an hour's drive north from Cape Town, the Santam Swartland Wine & Olive Route, established in 1986, offers visitors to South Africa the kind of country comfort and hospitality that quickly sweeps away the stress of city living.

Post-apartheid, the first wine region of South Africa to gain widespread attention was Stellenbosch. But thanks to a group of quality-focused vintners in Swartland, visitors now have more options when planning a wine-focused vacation.

Swartland is an ideal day trip destination from South Africa's largest city, while tourists heading toward the West Coast, the Northern Cape or Namibia along the N7 will find a detour along the Wine & Olive Route a delightful journey of discovery.

The 20 members of the Wine & Olive Route include cooperatives, private cellars and wine merchants. Visitors can explore the winemaking history of the region at some of the historic estates, or enjoy exquisite wine experiences at modern tasting rooms. Smaller wineries present intimate wine tastings in rustic cellars, while family concerns dating back generations will welcome visitors with the customary Swartland warmth and cheer.

The Swartland area of the Western Cape encompasses a uniquely diverse geographic region, from the undulating hills of the Paardeberg in the south to the rolling waters of the Berg River in the north. There lie the charming, historic towns of Malmesbury, Piketberg and Porterville, and the twin villages of Riebeek Kasteel and Riebeek West, nestled on the slopes of the looming

Kasteelberg.

Sweeping wheat fields — golden in summer, mint-green in winter — are punctuated by azure dams on working farms, and sheep and cattle dot the landscape. Huge swathes of natural vegetation are everywhere, and the resident birdlife is complemented in spring by migrants, with steppe buzzards and black-shouldered kites commonly seen atop roadside fence posts.

In this little corner of the world, fruit orchards abound, vineyards carpet the slopes, and olive groves nestle around unexpected corners. It's a quietly charming place of abundance and color that welcomes visitors to be cosseted in guest houses and B-and-Bs, to feast on fresh and deliciously prepared local produce and, above all, to sample a wide range of palate-pleasing wines.

The Swartland wine region is divided into four sub-regions.

The Paardeberg ("horse mountain") divides the Paarl and Swartland



TOURING TIPS

VINESSE



LIST

1 Hot Reno Restaurant. The best known casino resorts in Reno probably would be the Atlantis, Eldorado, Silver Legacy and Circus Circus. All serve good food (Eldorado, in particular), but if it's steak you seek, follow the locals to the Cactus Creek Prime Steakhouse inside the Bonanza Casino. There, USDA Prime graded beef is aged 28 days to ensure maximum flavor and tenderness, while the signature prime rib is roasted for up to 14 hours. A "Best of Nevada" pick six years running by *Nevada* magazine, Cactus Creek also has an excellent wine list and hosts occasional wine dinners. <http://www.bonanzacasino.com/cactus-creek-prime-steakhouse/>

2 Hot New York Wine Festival. The 2016 NYC Winter Wine Festival will be held Feb. 6 at PlayStation Theater in Times Square. Two three-hour sessions are available, the first from 3-6 p.m. and the second from 8-11 p.m. In addition to 250 wines available for sampling, guests can enjoy the jazz music of Alex Bugnon. Also available is a VIP suite featuring 12 high-end wines ranging in price from \$75 to \$225 per bottle. Ticket prices range from \$62.50 to \$199. <https://www.showclix.com/event/nyc-winter-wine-festival/listing>

3 Hot Wine Movie. "Somm: Into the Bottle" gained rave reviews at film festivals throughout 2016. It's set for release on DVD on Feb. 9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0mFgDgZlB4>

The Paardeberg region.



regions. This hilly, off-the-beaten-path area offers delightful surprises around every bend. The climate during winter is very cold. Summer is typically very hot during the day, with cooler temperatures at night. Some of the highest vineyards above sea level in the Swartland region are found there. Vines are planted on the slopes of the Paardeberg in relatively deep soil consisting of decomposed sandstone, granite and some clay.

Nestled in the protective shadow of the Kasteelberg ("castle mountain"), the villages of Riebeek West and Riebeek Kasteel are the perfect retreat for any city dweller. You can take your time discovering the wineries, eateries, shops and art galleries. The vineyards of the Riebeek Valley stretch along the lower contours of the Kasteelberg. The soil is mainly Malmesbury shale, with loamy soil on the higher grounds and sandy loam lower down the slopes, interspersed with rich Hutton soils. The climate is perfect for viticulture, with the low-rainfall summer months tempered by cool afternoon breezes, and the cold winters allowing the vines to rest and build up reserves.

The wineries situated close to

Malmesbury, the main business center of the Swartland, range from a large company to small privately owned cellars. Spread out over a large area, the wineries produce diverse wines thanks to the differing soils and microclimates of the area. Although summers are typically very hot and dry, some farms catch the cool sea breezes from the Atlantic Ocean and hence have a cooler climate. Soils range from sandy (ideal for Rhone cultivars) to deep red and fertile (perfect for dry-land vineyards), while others derive from granite.

The wines of the Berg River region are made from grapes cultivated from a vast, climatically variable area, stretching from the banks of the Berg River to the foot of the Groot Winterhoek Mountains in Porterville. Local foodies agree that this is an area not to be missed. Small owner/chef-run eateries, cozy coffee shops and larger-scale restaurants offer a huge range and variety of meals, most prepared with fresh produce sourced in the area and many made to old family recipes.

Regularly scheduled farmers markets and street markets bring out the locals in droves, and there you can buy anything from homegrown veggies in season to free-range eggs and poultry, homemade cakes, sweets, savory dishes, freshly baked bread and, of course, olives in every shape and form — from oils, pickles, spreads and tapanades to soaps, creams and shampoos.

From tiny B-and-Bs to luxury hotels, there's an accommodation option along the Santam Swartland Wine & Olive Route to suit every taste and pocket. No matter what type of lodging you choose, the famous Swartland hospitality will make you feel right at home — and the quality of the wine will make you wish you'd planned a longer trip.

For further information, including links to winery websites and more, go to:
www.swartlandwineandolives.co.za.



Oaky. Term used to describe a wine that has been aged in oak barrels and picked up some of the aroma characteristics of the wood.

pH. Term of measure for the acidity in wine; high pH equates with low acidity.

Quaffer. An easy drinking, no-brainer of a wine — one that may not be profound, but is well made and fun to drink.

Racking. The process of moving wine from one barrel to another, primarily to remove sediment. Typically performed with hoses.

Sec. The French term for a dry wine.

Terroir. French term that encompasses the soil type, grapevine exposure (which direction it faces), topography, etc. of a grape-growing area.

VINESSE STYLE

LINDT CHOCOLATIER

In the world of chocolate, a handful of producers stand out as true master chocolatiers. One of them is Switzerland-based Lindt, which produces fine chocolates that often are described with words similar to those used to describe fine wines.

It all started in 1845, when confectioner David Sprungli-Schwarz and his inventive son, Rudolf Sprungli-Ammann, who owned a small confectionery shop in the Marktgasse of Zurich's Old Town, decided to employ a fashionable new recipe from Italy for manufacturing chocolate in solid form.

Thirty-four years later, Rodolphe Lindt developed a technique by which he could manufacture chocolate superior to all others of that period in aroma and melting characteristics. Lindt used the "conche" he had invented, producing chocolate with the wonderfully delicate flavor and melting quality which we know and love to this day. His "melting chocolate" soon achieved fame, and contributed significantly to the worldwide reputation of Swiss chocolate.

In 1949, inspired by a heritage of chocolate making, Lindt's master chocolatiers created a chocolate masterpiece, the iconic Lindor recipe. The delicious Lindt chocolate shell enrobes an ultimately smooth filling. Once the shell breaks, the irresistible and decadent filling starts to melt.

Today, Lindt chocolate can be found in many forms here in the United States, including bars. These exquisite treats offers layers of aromas and flavors, and the Lindt master chocolatiers encourage people to indulge all of their senses while enjoying them.

For a truly mind-blowing experience, they suggest eating a Lindt "Excellence" bar that includes a touch of sea salt alongside a glass of Pinot Noir. The pairing elevates the pleasurable flavors of both, intensifying the taste experience.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



Rheinhessen, Germany

The largest of Germany's 13 wine regions, Rheinhessen, lies in a valley of gentle rolling hills. While vines are virtually a monoculture in the Rheingau or along the Mosel, they are but one of many crops that share the fertile soils of Rheinhessen's vast farmlands.

Wine grapes have been grown there since Roman times, and Charlemagne (a.k.a. Charles The Great) was a big promoter of viticulture in the area.

Steep vineyard sites are confined to small areas near Bingen and south of Mainz along the Rhein Terrasse. Varied soils and the favorable climate make it possible to grow many grape varieties, old and new. In fact, many of Germany's aromatic, early-ripening new crossings were bred in Rheinhessen by Professor Georg Scheu, after whom the Scheurebe grape is named (pronounced "shoy").

The region boasts the world's largest acreage planted with the ancient variety Silvaner, and is the birthplace of Liebfraumilch, the soft, mellow white wine originally made from grapes grown in vineyards surrounding the Liebfrauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, in Worms.

Today, Rheinhessen has approximately 3,800 wineries. It's a big wine exporter and sells around 30 percent of the wine it produces to international markets, with the United States being the No. 1 destination.

Around two-thirds of Rheinhessen vineyards are devoted to white wine varieties, although the area used for producing red wine has doubled in size over the last 10 years, with Dornfelder being the No. 1 variety. Red wine stars such as Pinot Noir and newer discoveries such as Portugieser are producing some really great wines. Even so, Rheinhessen will always be considered a white wine region.

Rheinhessen wines are often characterized as being soft, fragrant, medium-bodied and mild in acidity — pleasant, easy to drink, and extremely food friendly. There also are wines of great class and elegance, with a depth and complexity second to none.

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FREQUENCY:

6 times per year

PRICE:

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Q Is a wine sealed with a screwcap inferior to a wine sealed with a cork?



A It depends entirely on the wine. Screwcaps have been in use for many years now, and more and more wineries are using them. The main advantage of a screwcap is that it prevents wines from being corked and ruined — the No. 1 problem associated with cork-sealed bottles. But when a quality cork is used and a bottle is sealed properly, that problem is virtually eliminated. So, it all boils down to the quality of the wine; whether a bottle is sealed with a screwcap or a cork makes no difference.

“A bottle of wine begs to be shared; I have never met a miserly wine lover.”



— 20th century intellectual Clifton Fadiman (1904-1999)

California vineyards and wineries are being encouraged to apply for the 2016 California Green Medal: Sustainable Winegrowing Leadership Awards. Applications are now being accepted at www.greenmedal.org. The California Green Medal is presented by California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, California Association of Winegrape Growers, Wine Institute, Lodi Winegrape Commission, Napa Valley Vintners, Sonoma County Winegrowers and The Vineyard Team. More than a dozen regional winery and winegrowing association partners are also involved in promoting the new awards. California vineyards and wineries that participate in any sustainability program available in California are eligible to apply in four award categories that will recognize outstanding achievement in sustainability. “We had stellar applications the first year, and look forward to receiving 2016 applications. The awards provide a terrific opportunity for California growers and vintners to be recognized for their hard work and dedication to sustainability,” said Allison Jordan, CSWA Executive Director. The inaugural 2015 Green Medal recipients were Fetzer Vineyards (Leader Award), Benziger Family Winery (Environment Award), Nord Vineyard Services (Community Award), and Trinchero Family Estates (Business Award). Videos highlighting the sustainability accomplishments of each of the award recipients can be viewed at: <http://www.greenmedal.org/award-winner-page/>. Applications for 2016 are being accepted now through Feb. 5.



If you find your wine collection growing and are in need of more storage space, you could build or buy traditional wooden wine racks... or you could get creative, and emulate this wine display. We encountered it at the Gnusserei Restaurant and Gourmetladen in Zurich, Switzerland. It actually can hold many more bottles than are shown in this picture, but if you want to showcase a handful of special bottles, this is one way to do it.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

JUNK FOOD FAVORITES

Volo Restaurant and Wine Bar is one of the most popular destinations in Chicago for wine lovers.

Located in a boutique storefront, with both street parking and easy access to public transportation, the space combines cozy and chic design elements with urban vintage charm. An innovative approach to ordering sets Volo apart, and makes enjoying wine easy, accessible and unintimidating — all in a relaxed neighborhood atmosphere.

In addition to a stellar wine list, small plates menu and artisan cheeses, Volo schedules an array of special events that can be counted on to be creative, informative and fun.

Last year, for instance, the restaurant hosted a wine-and-food pairing event based on junk food. Well, in the interest of full disclosure, the food was house made and emulated various junk food favorites. Then those items were paired with appropriate wines.

Attendees were blown away by how well the junk food and wine went together. So, Volo is going to do it all over again in 2016.

The date: Sunday, Jan. 17. The time: 2-4 p.m. Chef/partner Stephen Dunne and wine director Meghan Vandette promise some eye-opening pairings and a fun time for all.

To get an idea of what might be in store, take a look at last year's junk food and wine pairings, which followed an aperitif of NV Flama d'Or, Cava Brut, Spain...

- Onion Ring, Spicy Brown Mustard — NV Ca di Rajo, "Le Moss," Glera Frizzante, Veneto, Italy.
- Fish & Chip, Malt Aioli — 2013 Chateau Grand Traverse, Ship of Fools, Michigan (Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir).
- House-made Cracker Jacks — 2011 Michel Briday, Cuvee Axelle, Bouzeron, Burgundy, France (Aligoté).
- Italian Beef Sandwich — 2013 Field Recordings, Dead End Ranch, Tempranillo, Paso Robles, Calif.
- Seven Layer Taco — NV Candor, Zinfandel, Paso Robles and Lodi, Calif.
- Cookie Dough Pops — Gutierrez Colosia, Moscatel Soleado, Jerez, Spain.
- Ice Cream Sandwiches — Cossart Gordon, 5-Year Madeira, Portugal.

Dunne was drawn to cooking during high school in suburban Detroit. After working in family-style eateries, he earned a job in the kitchen at the Townsend Hotel, where he was introduced to classic structure and cooking techniques, planting a seed of desire to dive headfirst into cooking.

His journey eventually brought Stephen back to the Midwest. Upon arriving in Chicago, he took on Chef de Cuisine positions at both Spago Chicago and Michael Kornick's MK prior to joining Jon Young in opening two ventures, Volo Restaurant & Wine Bar, and The Paramount Room.



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PINOT GRIGIO-INFUSED PORK CHOPS WITH MUSTARD SAUCE

This recipe yields 4 servings, and pairs perfectly with Pinot Grigio — the same wine you'll want to use in preparing the dish.

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 1-inch-thick boneless pork chops (about 1.5 lbs.)
- Salt
- Black pepper
- 2 shallots, finely chopped
- 3/4 cup Pinot Grigio
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon fresh tarragon, chopped
- 1 small head frisée, torn into pieces
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

Preparation

1. Heat oven to 400° F.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Season the pork with ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper.
4. Brown for about 2 to 3 minutes per side.
5. Transfer the pork to a baking sheet and roast until cooked through (5 to 7 minutes).
6. Add the shallots and 1 tablespoon of the oil to the skillet and cook, stirring often, until soft (3 to 4 minutes).
7. Add Pinot Grigio to the skillet and simmer until reduced by half.
8. Add the cream and simmer until the sauce just thickens. Stir in the mustard.
9. Top the pork with the sauce and tarragon. Drizzle the frisée with the remaining tablespoon of oil and serve with the lemon wedges.

BRAISED PORK WITH PINOT NOIR

This dish is a tasty companion to Pinot Noir, and this recipe yields 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds boneless pork shoulder, cut into large chunks
- Salt
- Pepper
- 2 cups Pinot Noir (not overly oaked)
- 1 cup water
- 1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Cooked egg noodles
- Chopped fresh parsley leaves

Preparation

1. Combine pork, salt and pepper to taste, wine, water, carrots and garlic in a saucepan.
2. Bring to a boil, then adjust heat so that mixture simmers steadily but not vigorously.
3. Cook, stirring every half-hour or so, until meat is very tender and just about falling apart (at least an hour, and most likely a bit longer).
4. Use a slotted spoon to remove solid ingredients to a bowl, then turn heat to high. Reduce to about a cup. Taste and adjust seasoning, then lower heat and stir in butter.
5. Add solids to sauce and reheat.
6. Serve over egg noodles, and garnish with parsley.

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