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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

The Rest of the Story About Carignano from Sant'Antioco

By Robert Johnson

I've been writing the Tasting Notes that accompany the wines featured by Vinesse for 20 years. I haven't kept track precisely, but a pretty fair estimate would be a few thousand Tasting Notes.

When a fairly new addition to the Vinesse team heard about that, he asked me whether I ever got tired of writing about wine. I didn't even have to think about my answer: Never.

The reason? Because of something Vinesse founder Larry Dutra told me on the day I met him: "Every wine has a story. Some are just more interesting than others."

Yes, there are times when prying information out of winemakers or winery owners can be like prying a chocolate bar out of the hands of a child... not that I make a habit out of doing that. But even when I don't have much to go on, there's always *something*.

Every so often, however, the Vinesse tasting panel selects a wine with a story that almost tells itself. In such cases, my job is to sort through the wealth of information and pare it down to the most interesting parts that also will fit the format of our Tasting Notes. That's what I refer to as "a nice problem."

Such was the case recently when I was working on

Tasting Notes for The World of Wine Club. One of the featured wine selections was the 2012 Nur Carignano del Sulcis, a red wine from Italy's island of Sant'Antioco, west of Sardinia. I was able to describe the variety and the island briefly, but I was left with so much more to say... er, write. So, allow me to do it here.

Carignano is the Italian name for the French variety known as Carignan. In Italy, many believe that the very best Carignano grapes are grown in the southwestern corner of Sant'Antioco.

Why? Because the coastal zone provides the perfect combination of soils, sunshine and weather. That's something that has been known on the island dating back to the days of the Phoenicians.

Of course, the grapevines planted by the Phoenicians are long gone. But the Carignano vines now producing are in their prime. That, combined with the idyllic climate, is a recipe for delicious wines.

As Paul Harvey used to say, now you know the rest of the story.





Use of Yeast in Winemaking Is Getting Wild

For many years, a group of California winemakers have been practicing a technique known as “indigenous yeast” fermentation and making consistently excellent wine.

Why, all of a sudden, has this technique become a buzzword in the wine press and why have other winemakers recently begun experimenting with this technique? *Enology International* recently tackled that question.

Alan Tenscher, Senior Winemaker at Franciscan Vineyards, comments, “I see a trend toward a more natural way of making wine which starts in the vineyard with organic grape growing and extends to minimal handling of the wine. The use of wild yeast, from one perspective, puts one in that same camp. But on the other hand, there is a group of winemakers out there who are looking for any technique that will help them improve wine quality. The use of wild yeast is a tool to create complexity.”

The trend Tenscher observes has been popularized by influential wine critics who are proponents of wines made with more natural, less interventionist techniques. Indigenous yeast fermentations fall into this category because the vineyard’s native yeast start the fermentation naturally in contrast to the common California, and in recent years, European, practice of adding yeast to start the fermentation. Fermentation is a vitally important stage in winemaking.

The yeast not only convert sugar to alcohol, but also produce esters and other compounds which contribute to the wine’s fruit aromas. Extraction of flavor and color from the grape skins (for red wines) also occurs during fermentation.

Some yeast produce a heavier sediment which settles more quickly after fermentation, making racking and clarification easier. For smaller producers, varying the yeast strain as well as the temperature and duration (maceration) of fermentation can enhance the wine’s aromatic and flavor characteristics.

Wild yeast is not the secret, indispensable answer to making great wine. Rather, it is a piece of the puzzle — one in a number of ways to develop complexity in wines. This quality factor, coupled with the fact that the majority of winemakers feel these methods make their craft more interesting and challenging, assures that the use of wild yeast will continue to grow in the production of premium wines.

By matching the right grape varieties to the right growing regions, winemakers will be working with high acid, low pH fruit, reducing the risks of wild yeast fermentations.

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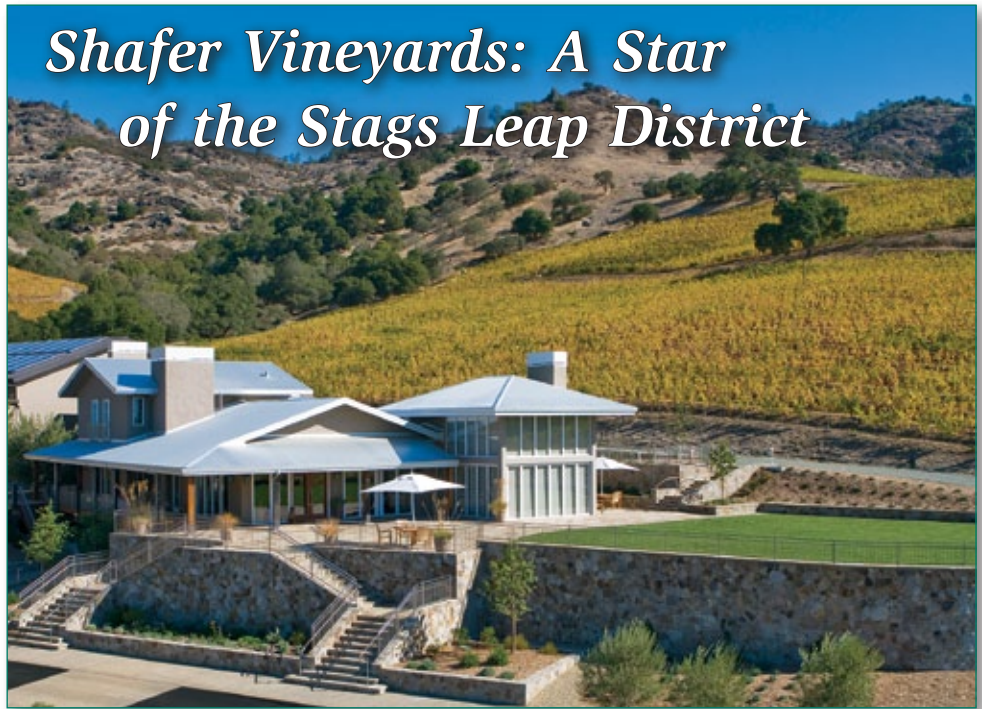
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***Shafer Vineyards: A Star
of the Stags Leap District***

Shafer Vineyards traces its beginnings to 1972 when John Shafer left a 23-year career in the publishing industry and, with his family, moved to the Napa Valley to pursue a second career in wine.

It was the lure of wine country farming that inspired Shafer to make that career change. After purchasing a 210-acre estate in Napa Valley's Stags Leap District, the Shafer family faced the arduous task of replanting the existing vineyards, which dated to the 1920s, and terracing the steep and rocky hillsides, eventually expanding vineyard acreage to its current 50 acres.

Adopting a hands-on approach from day one, John could be seen throughout the mid-1970s riding on his tractor as he tilled the soil of his family's new estate in the foothills of the Stags Leap Palisades.

Evolving from grape growers to vintners, the Shafers crushed their first Cabernet grapes in 1978 and began construction on their winery a year later. The debut wine, a Cabernet Sauvignon, was released in 1981 to a chorus of high praise and awards, including a first place in the San Francisco Vintners Club Cabernet Taste-off.

That first Shafer Cabernet became a benchmark wine. More than a

decade later, it took first place in an international blind tasting held in Germany, where it outranked such wines as Chateau Margaux, Chateau Latour and Chateau Palmer.

"I'll never forget the Napa Valley Vintners' 1981 Wine Symposium and the debut of our first vintage," Shafer says. "Because I was the new kid on the block, all the big shots of winedom were coming by to taste my first release. Commenting on how well-developed and soft this Cabernet





was for a wine that hadn't even been released yet, many asked the same question: 'How much Merlot did you add?'"

"'None,' was my reply. The truth was the first wine I made was 100% hillside Cabernet because that was all I had. But the tasters kept asking about Merlot.

"One of them, a wine buyer, was especially persistent. Returning a second time, he slipped behind my table, lowered his voice, and swore to secrecy if I let him in on it: 'How much Merlot did you blend?'"

"What I didn't know then, but realized later, was that the persistent wine buyer had identified the most prominent attribute of Cabernet grown in the Stags Leap District: the silky, supple, velvety tannins that don't require softening by the addition of Merlot."

Adds Shafer: "It was that distinct character so strongly identified with this region that prompted me, four years later, to head up a committee of growers and vintners in petitioning the government to designate this region the Stags Leap District appellation, now recognized worldwide for its Cabernet Sauvignon."

With each passing year, the Shafers learned more about the nature of grape growing in the Stags Leap District, now acknowledged as one of the world's best regions for the cultivation of Cabernet. What began for Shafer as a career in viticulture

quickly expanded into full-scale winemaking.

Doug Shafer became winemaker in 1983 after graduating from the University of California at Davis with a degree in enology and viticulture. A year later, Elias Fernandez joined the winery as assistant winemaker. Together Doug and Elias have worked closely to forge the Shafer style of quality, consistency and elegance.

New vineyards have been added over the years, with acreage acquired in the Oak Knoll, Stags Leap and Carneros districts, bringing the total Shafer vineyard acreage to more than 200 acres. Winery facilities have been expanded and extensive caves carved into the hillside for aging wine.

In 1994, Elias was appointed winemaker, and Doug took over the reins as president when John became chairman of the board.

From a modest beginning of 1,000 cases in 1978, Shafer Vineyards has grown steadily until reaching its present size of 32,000 cases of Chardonnay, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and, yes, Merlot.

Beyond that, John Shafer will always be remembered for the pivotal role he played in the establishment of the prestigious Stags Leap District appellation. A dynamic leader, much like Robert Mondavi before him, he works tirelessly to broaden international awareness of the nature and quality of the wines from that special part of the Napa Valley.

Four Seasons



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PLAN TO HEAR MUSIC IN THE VINEYARDS THIS SUMMER

The Mountain Winery in Saratoga, Calif., offers an expansive concert series each summer, complete with multiple pre-concert wining and dining options. This unique facility was profiled in a Vinesse Today blog last year: <http://blog.vinesse.com/2015/08/24/music-on-the-mountain-a-sublime-experience-for-wine-lovers/>

Each summer, dozens of wineries across the country welcome talented musicians to provide a lyrical backdrop to the bucolic vision of vineyards glistening with developing grapes.

Some have referred to listening to music as “cheap therapy.” Add a glass of wine to the experience, and psychiatrists could become an endangered species.

The West Coast is a hub of American wine, so it makes sense that it also would lead the way in winery concert series.

Thornton Winery in Temecula, Calif. continues to build on its national and critically acclaimed reputation as one of the finest outdoor venues. The intimate and acoustically superb Mediterranean fountain terrace, overlooking the beautiful Temecula wine country, offers a concert experience unmatched in Southern California. 2016 will mark the 28th year of Thornton’s Champagne Jazz Series; its schedule was expected to be announced shortly after this newsletter went to press.

For almost as long, Rodney Strong

Vineyards, outside the Sonoma County community of Healdsburg, has been hosting intimate performances by world-class musicians in a stunning vineyard setting, topped off by sweeping views of the Russian River Valley. Guests may bring a picnic or purchase food on site.

The concert series at the Robert Mondavi Winery in the Napa Valley was the brainchild of Mondavi’s wife, Margrit. “When I saw the lawn at Robert Mondavi I said, ‘Why don’t we do a concert?’”

Since then, performers have included everything and everybody from the Napa Valley Symphony Orchestra (which played the debut concert in 1969) to Lyle Lovett and His Large Band (who played last year). Other legendary performers have included Tony Bennett, Ella Fitzgerald, Smokey Robinson and so many others in so many music genres.

Hosting live performances since 1984, the Chateau Ste. Michelle Summer Concert Series in Woodinville, Wash., has provided a stage to some of the best artists in jazz, rock, blues and contemporary music: James Taylor, The Beach Boys,



TOURING TIPS

Vina Robles in Paso Robles, California

Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind & Fire, Diana Krall, Mark Knopfler, Alison Krauss, Crosby Stills & Nash, John Legend and Sarah McLachlan, just to name a few.

The new kid on the winery concert block is Vina Robles in Paso Robles, Calif. Its boutique amphitheater is nestled on a picturesque, oak-dotted hillside, and with its opening in the summer of 2013, it became one of the largest outdoor venues for arts and entertainment in San Luis Obispo County. Featuring a style reminiscent of the California missions, guests are able to immerse themselves in a unique and intimate concert adventure as they enjoy modern

amenities and first-class hospitality.

The concert season runs from April through October and features top tier acts from around the world in all genres. Various seating options, all within 150 feet of the stage — including regular, VIP and general admission lawn seating — make events accessible to anyone in the community.

Numerous other wineries on the West Coast and throughout the country bring music to the vineyards on scales from intimate to immense. When you combine two of life's great joys — music and wine — an unforgettable experience is virtually guaranteed.

For Further Information

Thornton Winery Champagne Jazz Series

[http://www.thorntonwine.com/
champagne-jazz-series/](http://www.thorntonwine.com/champagne-jazz-series/)

Rodney Strong Vineyards Summer Concert Series

[https://www.rodneystrong.com/
events/summer-concert-series/](https://www.rodneystrong.com/events/summer-concert-series/)

Robert Mondavi Winery Summer Concert Series

[http://www.
robertmondaviwinery.com/
summer-concerts](http://www.robertmondaviwinery.com/summer-concerts)

Chateau Ste. Michelle Summer Concerts

[https://www.ste-michelle.com/
visit-us/summer-concerts](https://www.ste-michelle.com/visit-us/summer-concerts)

Vina Robles Amphitheatre Concert Season

[http://www.
vinaroblesamphitheatre.com](http://www.vinaroblesamphitheatre.com)

The Mountain Winery Summer Concert Series

[http://www.mountainwinery.
com/concerts/off-season](http://www.mountainwinery.com/concerts/off-season)

VINESSE

Hot LIST

1 Hot Downtown Las Vegas Wine Bar. Located in the Container Park, an open-air shopping complex a few blocks from the Fremont Street Experience, Bin 702 claims to offer “the most comprehensive selection of wine available on tap in Las Vegas.” Artisanal cheeses, meat plates, salads and paninis also are featured, with all oils and aiolis made on site from scratch.

www.bin702.com

2 Hot Arizona Winery. Yes, wine tasting is available at Page Springs Cellars, located on the banks of Oak Creek. Rhone-style bottlings are the specialty of the house. But what sets Page Springs apart is that the winery also features an extensive menu of... massage treatments. But wait, there's more. Guests also may enjoy yoga and even hoop dancing.

www.pagespringscellars.com

3 Hot Miami Restaurant. It has long been a whole lot easier to get a Mojito than a good glass of Merlot in Miami. Part of the reason for that has been a dearth of really good Italian restaurants. Beachcraft, located at the 1 Hotel & Homes South Beach, offers a very creative craft cocktail menu. But it also spotlights excellent wines — some by the glass, some by the bottle, some both. Including Merlot? Only one of the best, made by Napa Valley's Shafer Vineyards (\$135 per bottle).

[http://www.craftrestaurantsinc.com/
beachcraft/](http://www.craftrestaurantsinc.com/beachcraft/)



Gran Reserva. A Spanish term for wines that are aged at least five years prior to release. That time may include both barrel and bottle aging.

Herbaceous. A “green” aroma or flavor that may be indicative of the grapes being under-ripe (common in cooler climates).

Inox vats. French term for (neutral) stainless steel vats.

Jammy. Describes wines that are extremely ripe, with jam-like aromas and flavors.

Kosher Wine. A wine produced under the supervision of a rabbi so as to be ritually clean.

Lees. Sediment — spent yeast cells and grape solids — left in barrels by fermenting wines. Some wines are aged “on the lees” to lend additional complexity before the lees are filtered out.

VINESSE STYLE

GOURMET GRILLED CHEESE

We have been in a state of GCD (grilled cheese depression) ever since the landlord opted not to renew the lease of Heywood: A Grilled Cheese Shoppe on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles last summer. Memories of the Italian Bleu Jeans sandwich — made from fresh mozzarella, creamy blue cheese, walnut pesto and sun-dried tomato — still haunt our palate.

But life must go on, so we reached out to friends for suggestions on where we could experience GCB (grilled cheese bliss) around the country. With April 12 being National Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day, what better time to share our findings?

■ You’ll need GPS to find Roxy’s Grilled Cheese, because it’s a Boston-based food truck — and Boston is a big city. Once you track it down, ask for the Mighty Rib Melt, made from fontina cheese, barbecued braised beef and caramelized onions.

■ MeltKraft has stands at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia and Reading (Pa.) Terminal Market. It’s difficult to recommend just one sandwich because, quite frankly, they’re all great. MeltKraft’s secret? It’s owned by Valley Shepherd Creamery — so not only do they make the sandwiches, they make the cheese.

■ At Central in Washington, D.C., Michel Richard melts Swiss cheese with a rich mushroom duxelle, garlic and sweet roasted onions. As if that weren’t enough, the sandwich is served with a four-cheese dipping sauce.

Now that Heywood is history, we had to find a credible replacement in the Los Angeles area. Clementine to the rescue. During most of the year, Annie Miller offers a “build-your-own” approach to customers. But during National Grilled Cheese Month, she offers an extensive menu of gooey goodness. We can’t wait to see what she comes up with this year.



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APPELLATION SHOWCASE



With fewer than 25 active wineries in the entire Napa Valley in 1968, the Trefethen family rehabilitated a ghost winery and began replanting the vineyards.

That year, residents established the Napa Valley Agricultural Preserve to permanently protect more than 38,000 acres of prime valley floor farmland. The Corley family followed the next year, building a winery and planting vineyards near the Napa River in Oak Knoll. Nearby, the Jaeger family planted its vineyards and the district, along with the entire valley, was embracing a bright new wine culture.

Success came early in this renaissance when grapes from the district's vineyards were in the top-placing Chardonnay wines of the 1976 "Judgment of Paris" and *Gault Millau Magazine's* World Wine Olympics. In the 1980s, red varieties took top honors with Oak Knoll District Cabernet Sauvignon ranked best in the state at the California State Fair Wine Competition.

The federal government formally recognized the Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley as the 14th American Viticultural Area of Napa Valley in 2004.

Today, the district's 8,300 acres find nearly 4,200 acres under vine —

the most grapevines of any wholly contained sub-appellation of the valley. It is located north of the city of Napa and south of Yountville. Mt. Veeder is the western border and the Silverado Trail defines its eastern boundary.

The Oak Knoll District's growing season is longer — cooler in summer than the warmer Upper Valley and drier in winter, allowing soils to warm earlier in the spring. The marine influence from San Pablo Bay is strong, with foggy mornings and cool summer nights. Summer daytime temperatures average 10 degrees cooler than in St. Helena.

This creates the longest growing season in the valley, one that can last up to eight months, providing early bud break and long, leisurely grape development for optimal, balanced ripeness. The cooler nights and slowly rising daytime temperatures of the growing season create a naturally long hang time for the fruit to achieve bright acidity, great texture, fruit-forward aromas and elegant flavors.

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Q My wife loves dry red wines, but I prefer wines that have some sweetness to them. She knows what kind to buy for me (Moscato, Riesling, etc.), but here’s what I want to know: How do they make some wines sweeter than others?

A With the exception of fortified wines, which are an entirely different style, sweet wines like Moscato and Riesling are made by halting the fermentation process while there still is some sugar remaining. Part of the fermentation process involves “burning off” the sugars of the grape juice. If you stop the fermentation before it is completed, some of the sugar is retained, and the finished wine will be much sweeter than those dry reds that your wife prefers.



As one might expect, wine is big at the Paris Las Vegas hotel and casino in Sin City. So much so, that if you pay close attention to the details, you’ll find this grape-themed artwork on some of the walls lining the casino.

“ Doctor says to a man, ‘You’re pregnant!’ The man says, ‘How does a man get pregnant?’ The doctor says, ‘The usual way — a little wine, a little dinner...’ ”



— The late comedian, Henny Youngman

WINE AND CHOLESTEROL: Good news on the health scene for wine drinkers from *Neurology Now* magazine: Studies have observed that small amounts of wine increase levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL, or “good” cholesterol), and reduce fibrinogen, a protein involved in coagulation. Lower levels of fibrinogen reduce the likelihood of a blood clot, a cause of ischemic stroke. An analysis of data from the long-running community-based Framingham Heart Study, published in the journal *Stroke* in 2006, found that wine may protect against atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) by raising HDL levels and inhibiting low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or “bad” cholesterol) in adults aged 60 to 69.



JERICHO CANYON VINEYARD: Since 1989, the Bleecher family has sustainably farmed grapes for their terroir driven, small production, estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc at Napa Valley’s Jericho Canyon Vineyard. Having raised their kids, grapes and multiple wine dogs on the estate, the Bleechers believe in being responsible land stewards. According to owner and vineyard manager Dale Bleecher, “Our approach to green growing is multi-pronged, employing tools like no-till farming, insectaries, bird boxes and erosion control.” No-till farming reduces wind and water erosion, while providing crucial habitat for beneficial insects. Insectaries also provide habitat for beneficial insects, which keeps Jericho Canyon insecticide free. Within the vineyard, owl boxes attract nesting owls who provide rodent control, and bluebird boxes invite bug-eating birds to call the canyon home.

2.4 Pounds of grapes (on average) that it takes to produce one standard (750-ml.) bottle of wine.

FOOD & WINE PAIRINGS

Garlic



Mushrooms with white wine, garlic, lemon.

I *t has been said that garlic has so many health benefits, it should be eaten at breakfast, lunch and dinner.*

Studies have shown that garlic can lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and help prevent blood clots. It contains allicin, an antibiotic compound, and has been used for centuries for fighting infections.

With April being National Garlic Month, this bulbous plant is certain to get a great deal of attention in the days and weeks ahead. We're good with that, because garlic pairs nicely with a wide variety of wines.

The key question when pairing involves how the garlic is used — that is, whether it's cooked or not. Cooking tames its flavor, whereas eating it raw underscores it.

A good example is a garlic-infused mayonnaise (aioli), like you might spread on a sandwich, or a salad dressing that uses uncooked garlic. These types of uses call for white wines that offer citrus-like flavors, including Sauvignon Blanc, Italian Vermentino or French Picpoul de Pinet. A dry Spanish rosé — known as rosado — also would work very nicely, as would the dry rosés of Provence.

Prefer dry red wines? They can also make great pairing partners, but the garlic needs to be roasted or used in a dish prepared in a slow cooker so that it complements the dish rather than defining it. With such dishes, try the three great varieties of France's Rhone region: Grenache, Syrah or Mourvedre — or, even better, a blend of the three. Another option would be a full-bodied Malbec, an increasingly popular variety thanks to the explosion of vineyard plantings in Argentina.

At tapas bars in Spain, where garlic is used in many of the dishes, Fino Sherry often is recommended by the bartenders and servers.

Finally, as long as the garlicky dish doesn't involve red meat, you can turn to Champagne as a wine companion. If you're an escargot fan, bubbly is definitely the way to go.



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SOUTHWESTERN-STYLE PORK CUTLETS

Here's a zippy take on pork cutlets, and a zippy preparation calls for a zippy wine — like Zinfandel. This recipe yields 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 3 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch pieces
- 2 poblano chile peppers, chopped
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- Cooking spray
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 2 cups Japanese bread crumbs (panko)
- 1 1/2 pounds pork cutlets, about 1/4-inch thick

Preparation

1. Position racks in upper and lower thirds of oven and preheat to 425 degrees.
2. On a rimmed baking sheet, toss sweet potatoes and peppers with olive oil, 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Spread in a single layer.
3. Bake on lower oven rack until tender and charred in spots (about 35 minutes).
4. Meanwhile, set a wire rack on another rimmed baking sheet and coat with cooking spray.
5. Stir mayonnaise, milk, chili powder and 1 teaspoon salt in a large bowl. Place panko in another large bowl.
6. Add the pork to the mayonnaise mixture and turn to coat. One at a time, transfer each cutlet to the bowl of panko and turn to coat. Arrange on the wire rack, coating both sides of the cutlets generously with cooking spray.
7. Bake cutlets on the upper oven rack until golden brown and cooked through (12 to 18 minutes).

CAPRESE GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH

To celebrate National Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day on April 12, make this delicious sandwich and enjoy it with a glass of Beaujolais, a Rhone-style blend (Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre), or any of the individual varietals in such blends. This recipe yields 1 sandwich.

Ingredients

- 2 slices fresh sourdough bread
- 3 oz. fresh mozzarella, grated
- 5 Roma tomato slices
- 1 Tbsp chopped, fresh basil ribbons
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 clove garlic

Preparation

1. Sprinkle grated mozzarella evenly over one slice of bread. Add a layer of sliced tomatoes.
2. Sprinkle basil ribbons over top and season with ground black pepper to taste, then cover with remaining slice of bread.
3. Drizzle 1 tsp. olive oil in a non-stick skillet and heat over medium-low heat, evenly coating the skillet.
3. Add sandwich, cover with lid, and cook until sandwich is golden brown on bottom (about 2 minutes).
4. Lift sandwich out of skillet and drizzle remaining 1 tsp. olive oil into skillet, again coating it evenly. Carefully flip sandwich to opposite side and return to skillet, cover with lid, and continue to cook until bottom side is golden brown and cheese is melted through.
5. Remove from skillet and lightly brush garlic clove along toasted sides of bread.

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