

There is no formula for the world's best wines

The world's best wines are not made by formula. They are made by science-educated artists who understand the physiology of the grapevine, the biochemistry of fermentation and have the experience needed to deal with the inevitable nuances presented by each new harvest.

If you ask a winemaker when cabernet sauvignon should be harvested, they might say, "it depends." If you question whether it's better to use American or French oak or what proportion of new barrels is recommended, the winemaker will again answer, "it depends."

Harvest criteria are tied to climatic conditions. The warmer the growing season, the earlier the harvest. The use of oak barrels, on the other hand, depends on the intensity of the harvested fruit. Rich, intensely perfumed fruit can handle, and in fact requires, a large percentage of new oak bar-

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

rels to tame its aggressive character.

Fruit with a milder personality would be completely dominated by new wood and is better aged in barrels that have been used in previous vintages.

We asked Julia Lantosca, winemaker at William Wheeler Winery in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley to explain how she selects barrel types for aging Wheeler's premium chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon. To answer our

query she prepared a tasting of five experimental lots of the 1991 William Wheeler Chardonnay, each aged in barrels made of different oaks by a variety of coopers.

Of the five chardonnay samples, one was aged in American oak and four in French. Of the four French barrels, one was made in Cognac by Tonnellerie Vicard and three in Burgundy by Damy, Boule and Billon. The names of the coopers are not important. What is important is how the barrels change the taste of the wine.

The chardonnay was grown in the Russian River Valley, a very cool growing area in Sonoma County that is excellent for premium chardonnay. Of the first five wines tasted, each was fermented in a different oak with the same yeast and none completed malolactic fermentation (ML).

Several samples showed that the oak dominated the wine's

fruit character. This is a negative for us, since we like the fresh fruit aromas and flavors in chardonnay. Other samples illustrated oak characters that we described as coarse, sweet, vanilla, toast, smoke or coffee.

We then sampled five chardonnays made by exactly the same method except that all had completed ML. In every case, the wine's fruit and oak flavors were better integrated than before. We knew that ML reduced a wine's acidity and added a smooth texture and buttery flavor. But Lantosca's experiments revealed that ML allows the oak and fruit to marry in the wine and provide harmony.

We were also interested in Wheeler's red wines, so Lantosca tasted us through the 1985 to 1989 Wheeler Cabernet Sauvignons. Wheeler cabernets have always had a note of olives in the nose that distinguishes them

from other cabernets.

The tasting revealed that the olive character, present in the cabernets from 1985, 1986, and 1987, was absent in 1988 and 1989. Its absence allowed an exuberant black cherry quality to be showcased.

The 1989 Wheeler Cabernet Sauvignon (\$16) is particularly impressive. It is highlighted by intense black cherry aromas and a full, rich-fruit palate impression. Lantosca explained that improved canopy management in

the vineyard allowed dappled sunlight through the vines and onto the grapes. This change allowed for improved grape maturity, eliminating the olive character dominating the older vintages. A wine's aromas and flavors are born and controlled in the vineyard.

For the Voice Mail wine recommendation of the week or to leave a message for Ray and Eleanor Heald, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

Wine Selections of the Week

A few weeks ago, Dennis Walsh, owner of Ye Olde Wine Shoppe in Rochester Hills, sponsored the annual Great Wine Shootout. At this event, participants voted for their favorite red, white and sparkling wines. And the winners are!

Red: 1986 Dominus Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$45), 1989 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars SLV Cabernet Sauvignon (\$30), 1984 Rutherford Hill Library Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$28), 1990 Shafer Merlot (\$21), and 1989 R.H. Phillips Syrah "EXP" (\$16/500mL).

White: 1989 Grigich Hills Char-

donnay (\$35), 1990 William Hill Reserve Chardonnay (\$20), and 1990 Chateau St. Jean Robert Young Vineyards Chardonnay (\$30).

Sparkling: Domaine Chandon Etoile (\$25), 1988 Schaffnerberger Blanc de Blancs (\$19), and 1989 Iron Horse Wedding Cuvee (\$30).

Consumers didn't know the price of the wines when they voted. We wonder if this information might have influenced their vote.

Believing the answer to the question is "yes," we're recommending some overlooked values: 1990 Meridian Chardonnay (\$11), 1989 J. Lohr Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon (\$12), and 1990 Chateau Souverain Merlot (\$9).

Actually, we could recommend any wine from Chateau Souverain for their high quality/price ratio. Right now these wines are hard to beat.

Pick your own pumpkin to make delicious pie

See Larry Jones' column on Taste front.

PUMPKIN PIE

Pasty for 1 crust pie
2 large or 3 small eggs
½ cup sugar
2 tablespoons molasses
pinch salt

1 teaspoon ground ginger
1-2 teaspoons cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves or allspice
2 cups pureed cooked pumpkin
1½ cups Half and Half or evaporated milk
Prepare the pie shell and brush

lightly with egg white or melted shortening. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Beat the eggs with the sugar, molasses, salt and spices until well blended.
Add the pumpkin and the milk and mix well. Taste and adjust seasonings, if necessary.
Turn the mixture into the pre-

pared crust and bake on the lower shelf of the oven for 10 minutes. Lower the heat to 400 degrees and bake until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean, or about 30 minutes longer. Serves about 6.
Recipe from "The New York Times Cookbook" by Craig Claiborne, Harper & Row Publishers.

Junior Group's homemade goodies an antique show tradition

See related story about the Junior Group of Goodwill Industries on Taste front.

CHUNKY CHIPPERS

2 cups sifted flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt

½ cup vegetable shortening
½ cup chunky peanut butter
2 eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
½ cup lightly packed brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 tablespoon water

1 12-ounce package semi-sweet chocolate chips
Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease cookie sheets. Sift together flour, baking soda and salt. Beat shortening, peanut butter, eggs, sugars, vanilla and water until creamy; add flour mixture, blend

well, stir in chocolate chips. Drop by teaspoonfuls about 2 inches apart on cookie sheets. Bake for 12-14 minutes or until firm. Cool on racks. Makes about three dozen large cookies.

CHEESE WAFERS

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
2 cups flour
2 sticks butter
½ teaspoon red pepper
2 cups Rice Krispies
Mix all ingredients together. Roll

into logs. Chill until hard. Slice into thin biscuits. Can mash with fork. Bake at 350 degrees on ungreased cookie sheet for 10 minutes.

BEER BREAD

3 cups self-rising flour
½ cup sugar
1 12-ounce can beer
Mix all ingredients together. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Can add ¼ cup of grated cheddar cheese, chopped onion, minced red and green pepper, or ¼ tablespoons of dill before baking.

Chef from page 1B

Favorite herb or spice
Rosemary. "It's aromatic, but it's tricky. You can overdo it."

Favorite tool at home and at work.
A saute pan and a knife. "If you have those two things, you can do just about anything."

Cooking philosophy
"Don't embellish too much. Make sure sauces and spices complement and don't hide the flavor. That's why we use a wild mushroom sauce with some steaks. It brings out the flavor."

Who does the cooking at your house?
"I do on my days off. Otherwise, it depends on who has the time. We go out to eat a lot."

What's a normal dinner at your house?

"Pot roast. I make a big one on Monday and my wife adds barbecue sauce another day. So it will last and you can vary it."

Name five things in your refrigerator.

"Celery, carrots, redskin potatoes, an English cut pot roast and some meatloaf."

Chef shares salad recipe

SWORDFISH SALAD

4 oz. cubed fresh swordfish
1 medium shallot, peeled, diced fine
1 oz. of your favorite whiskey
1 teaspoon olive oil
pinch of fresh, chopped garlic
salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons of butter
1½ oz. of assorted wild greens (red romaine, radicchio, baby spinach)
Saute olive oil until it is al-

most smoking. Add the swordfish and brown well. Toss until it is caramel brown. Add shallots, salt, pepper and garlic.

Remove from flame and add whiskey. Put back on flame and reduce liquid until whiskey is about a teaspoon. Add butter and stir until thickened.

Remove swordfish and arrange over greens. Pour sauce over greens and swordfish. Serves 1. Increase ingredients in equal measure for more servings.

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TO OUR FELLOW CITIZENS...

The eagle stood, perched in her tree, wishing for the life she could not see. Her vision was too great, all she could see was her doomed fate.

When vision is too keen, all we see is trouble, constantly looking for something to pop the bubble. Nothing is perfect in this world of ours. history books are filled with the scars.

America - quit looking for all the flaws. We think it's time to pull in the reins. To move forward and do the best we can. should be our desire down to the last man.

Yes, times are bad and not getting better, but we are free and not in fetters. What can we do to help our fate? Vote November third... it's not too late!

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