

Consistently stylish wine marks 2-decade milestone

With some regularity over the past few months we've recommended wines from Joseph Phelps Vineyards among our Wine Selections of the Week. That means we think they're head and shoulders above many of their peers in the marketplace.

It's 20 years since Phelps' first commercial crush of Johannisberg Riesling. A two-decade milestone makes Phelps one of Napa Valley's "older" wineries.

Maybe that's the trouble here. Older and established, not new, hot, trendy, splashy, flashy, with bells and whistles, just some consistently stylish, excellent wines with a high quality price ratio made by winemaker Craig Williams who's held this position with Phelps since 1976.

Williams understands the importance of quality grapes in the design of stylish wines. We made our own footprints in the vineyard along with Williams recently.

"Today, wineries must constantly redefine and prove themselves to the wine consuming public," Williams said. "The way is through quality wine and delivering a consistent product to the consumer."

On the other hand, Williams contends that it is the consumers' responsibility to search for wines they personally like, and not be dependent upon the ratings of wine critics. He also believes that

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

there's been too much emphasis on how long a wine will age and not on how good it tastes upon release.

"There are very few wines made in the last hundred years that can age gracefully for over 20 years," he said. "It's such a minute fraction of all the wine that was made, yet some critics give it significant attention. This is not reality."

"I feel fortunate if one of the Phelps reds lasts 10 years. Let's face it, why would anyone want to stock up on hundreds of bottles of ponderous wine? Wine is meant to be drunk and enjoyed. This is the kind of wine I try to deliver."

Because of the major replanting necessary in the Napa Valley due to the current phylloxera infestation, California producers in their replanting efforts have begun to pay more attention to soil profiles.

"Our ranches have different

soils and challenges and this is not the case in France," Williams, a frequent visitor to French vineyards points out. "A French vineyard is, generally speaking, one plot of soil with similar properties throughout."

"In Napa Valley, we have the inverse challenge of the French. What does it mean to translate to our vineyards. They've learned over hundreds of years the systems that work. Phelps and others have only been growing grapes since the early 1970s."

From the 1970s through the 1980s Williams believes the California focus was on winemaking, not on grapegrowing. "This is the great challenge of phylloxera," he said. "Today, we're paying much more attention to soils and matching the variety on the correct phylloxera resistant rootstock within its proper soil profile. The world has yet to see the great wines of California."

Rhone-styled wines

There's been a lot of well-deserved attention given to California's planting of Rhone varieties. Phelps is one of the leaders in this emerging wine category. Four of these Rhone-styled wines are under the Vin du Mistral label. 1992 Grenache Rose (\$10) is not a winery wine. It's actually more delicious than many stemming

Michigan winemaker makes waves

Some out-of-the-ordinary wines to try: Michigan-born Dan Moore, owner of Z Moore Winery in California's Sonoma County is doing some very creative winemaking with gewurztraminer.

The varietal is hard to pronounce, but in the Z Moore style, it's great drinking. Try 1991 Dry Gewurztraminer (\$10.50), the very stylish 1991 Punccheon Select Gewurztraminer (\$13.50) or the truly "new wave" Barrel Select (\$16.75).

Ce'el Solo wines are brought to you by the imaginative Randall Graham, winemaker at Bonny Doon Vineyard. The 1991 vintage of Malvasia Bianca (\$10) is an intensely aromatic and dry aperitif sipper while the Pescatore (\$13.50) is dry, but complemented with barrel fermentation and suited for grilled fish. Moscato del Solo (\$10.50) is a low alcohol (7 percent) dessert wine that is simply delicious.

Clivo (\$11) from Italy's Ruf-

fino is a delicious blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir in a rose style. Also from Ruffino is Torgale (\$9.50), a new-style sangiovese with lively fruit to be enjoyed young and fresh.

1992 Preston Vineyards Faux (\$10) takes its inspiration from the blended red wines of the southern Rhone Valley. This is a great hamburger or pizza wine; a garlic-lover's wine and a red wine that's just plain fun to drink.

from France's Rhone Valley. Light-bodied and refreshing, its raspberry fruit makes it a terrific match with a variety of Mediterranean dishes.

The 1992 Vin du Mistral Viognier (\$13) gives new meaning to this white varietal. Phelps' 10-acre commitment to it, gives indication of how serious a wine this is. Floral and tropical fruit accents make this wine a great aperitif with fruit and mild cheeses or in harmony with grilled white fish.

Syrrah's the "in" red from California. Its popularity comes in

great measure from wines like the Vin du Mistral 1990 Syrah (\$9.50). We like this spicy, peppery fruit-accented wine with game and steaks. Last, but not least, is the 1991 Le Mistral (\$15), a blend of the five southern Rhone red grape varieties used in making Chateaufort-du-Pape. Its spicy aromas and abundant red fruit flavors pair it handsomely with autumn's heartier dishes or with a meatless preparation of grilled vegetables, ratatouille or spicy chili.

Phelps makes a host of traditional wines including chardon-

nay, sauvignon blanc, gewurztraminer and Johannisberg riesling (both dry and late harvest styles). Two dessert wines, schneure and Delice du Semillon are excellent. Among the reds are cabernet sauvignon, merlot, zinfandel and the ultimate expression of a red Bordeaux-style blend Insignia.

The 1989 Insignia (\$35) is dynamite now, but will build even more complexity in the bottle for another five to six years.

To leave a message on the Heald's voice mail — dial 953-2047, mailbox 1864.

Hectic days cry out for snappy single-skillet suppers

On busy days when there's no time to cook, single-skillet suppers can save the day. Easy to prepare and a snap at cleanup, they're midweek menu mainstays for many active people.

Two new single-skillet recipes from home economists at Uncle Ben's, Inc. will streamline the way to family-pleasing suppers. Ready to serve in about half an hour, each recipe relies on a package of Uncle Ben's Country Inn Recipe rice dishes.

The rice dishes require only the addition of water to prepare be-

cause of a carefully selected mixture of vegetables and seasonings, with no artificial flavors, already included in the box. Combined with meat, seafood or poultry and a few easy additions, they become great-tasting dinners in short order.

Crab Louis Rice Au Gratin was inspired by the West Coast favorite Crab Louis salad. The quick combination of Country Inn Recipe Broccoli Rice Au Gratin, imitation crab meat, hard-cooked eggs and shredded lettuce is

"dressed" with mayonnaise and can be enjoyed warm or chilled.

Herbed Rice Au Gratin combined with ground beef, onion, tomato and garlic makes another single-skillet dinner favorite. A last-minute sprinkling of cheddar cheese completes the homely dish.

For additional recipes that take little time to prepare, write for a complimentary copy of "Great-Tasting, Good-For-You Meals." Send name and address to: Uncle Ben's Country Inn Recipes, P.O. Box 11166, Chicago, IL 60611. Of-

fer good while supplies last.

CRAB LOUIS RICE AU GRATIN

1 package (4.5 ounces) Uncle Ben's Country Inn Recipes Broccoli Rice Au Gratin
1 pound imitation crab meat chunks
4 cups shredded lettuce
2 hard-cooked eggs, quartered
¼ cup mayonnaise
1 teaspoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
Thinly sliced green bell pepper rings

Sliced black olives

Cook rice according to package directions; cool slightly. Add remaining ingredients except green pepper and olives; mix well. Serve immediately or chilled, as desired, garnished with green pepper and olives. Makes 4 servings.

BEEF AND HERBED RICE SKILLET SUPPER

½ pound lean ground beef
½ cup chopped onion
2 teaspoons minced garlic
¼ teaspoon seasoned salt

1 package (5.1 ounces) Uncle Ben's Country Inn Recipes Herbed Rice Au Gratin

1-½ cups water
1 cup chopped tomato
¼ cup (1 ounce) shredded cheddar cheese

In 10-inch skillet, brown ground beef with onion, garlic and salt; drain. Add rice, contents of seasoning packet, water and tomato; mix well. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 20 minutes; remove from heat. Sprinkle with cheese. Cover and let stand 5 minutes. Makes 2 servings.

Microwave 'hot spots' avoided

"The microwave oven has become a common household item which can be a real boon for saving time," said Sylvia Treitman, home economist for the Oakland County Cooperative Extension Service. "There are some very simple yet effective tips to help you cook safely with your microwave."

The main concern is ensuring that food is completely cooked, yet not so hot that it may burn a baby's mouth. Cold spots can occur because of the irregular way the microwaves enter the oven and are absorbed by various foods.

"Learning placement and special microwave techniques is a good idea," adds Treitman, who suggests either buying a microwave book or taking a class. Some tips to help with safe microwave cooking:

- Arrange food items uniformly.
- Turn food several times — or stir or rotate dish during cooking.
- Observe standing time when called for.
- Use utensils made for the microwave.
- Avoid use of cold storage containers — like margarine tubs — they can melt.
- Never use brown bags or newspapers which can catch on fire.
- Heat leftovers to at least 165 degrees.
- Use caution when warming baby food and formula — stir and taste before serving.

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If you have other questions on microwave safety or other Food and Nutrition concerns call the

Food and Nutrition Hotline, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 858-0904.

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