

Sunday, May 27, 2001

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Director has cast of great wines too

To movie buffs for about 35 years, Francis Ford Coppola is probably best known as the five-time Oscar-winning director, writer and producer of epic films, such as *The Godfather* trilogy and *Apocalypse Now*. More recently, *The Rainmaker*, a film adaptation of the John Grisham novel, was the hit from Coppola's San Francisco-based film company American Zoetrope.

In 1975, Coppola purchased part of the historic Niebaum estate in the Napa Valley. In 1995, he and his wife, Eleanor, fulfilled a long-held dream when they purchased the remainder of the original Inglenook estate founded by Gustave Niebaum. They not only reunited historic properties, but restored them to historic dimensions, including replanting vineyards on the same rootstock used by the estate's founder at the turn of the century. The reunited vineyards are now certified as organically farmed.

Coppola knew he purchased not just a piece of California wine history, but an extraordinary vineyard. He launched his flagship proprietary red blend Rubicon,

Wine Picks

Pleasantly surprised by the sweet oak, richly textured and refined 1999 Francis Coppola Diamond Series Chardonnay, an incredible value at \$15, we were prompted to do another chardonnay blind taste off. And the winners, in addition to the Niebaum-Coppola are:

- Pick of the pack: 1999 Geyser Peak Block Collection Rice Vineyard Chardonnay, Carneros \$23
- Best import: 1999 Casa Lapostolle Cuvee Alexandre Chardonnay, Casablanca Valley, Chile \$17.50
- Most luscious: 1999 Shafter Red Shoulder Chardonnay, Carneros \$37
- Best with food: 1999 Leclaire Estate Chardonnay, Arroyo Grande Valley \$18
- Very good value: 1999 Geyser Peak Chardonnay, Russian River Valley \$18

Scott McLeod believes that the 1999 vintage for cabernet sauvignon may be a better vintage than 1997 and 2000 may be the best yet.

Released along with the 1997 Rubicon is a new Niebaum-Coppola white wine called Blancaneaux, literally meaning white waters in French, but essentially a fantasy name expressing simple beauty and grace in Coppola's mind. The 1999 Blancaneaux \$32 is an intriguing blend of chardonnay and three Rhone Valley white varieties, roussanne, viognier and marsanne. Produced at a tenth of the production of Rubicon, it is available in a few restaurants in the area.

Why are we telling you this? We dislike as much as you do learning about great wines with the chance of a snowball in hell to purchase them. So why are we writing about Rubicon and Blancaneaux? Every winery of decent size producing some high-profile wines, also offers excellent wines at more affordable prices that are in generous distribution. Niebaum-Coppola is no exception.

The following are our notes from a tasting of area-available Coppola wines across a broad price range.

■ 1999 Francis Coppola Rubicon, DZ

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PHOTO BY PAUL HUSCHMAN

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK

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Ricotta cheese in potato salad? Yep, and there's Parmesan cheese, apple cider vinegar, garlic, and oh yes, onions and potatoes, adding tang and bite for a delicious flavor combination.

Trish Applegate of Canton adapted a recipe from "New Recipes from Moosewood Restaurant" to create a great accompaniment for barbecues that's different from the traditional mix of mayonnaise, mustard, onions and potatoes.

"The ricotta cheese makes it a little creamy, and the Parmesan and garlic gives it a little bite," said Applegate. "I don't like potato salad, but I do eat this one."

Making it is simple enough. Cook potatoes, mix the remaining ingredients, then combine them.

"Make sure the ricotta is on the bottom so the warm potatoes will melt it," she said. The cider vinegar adds pungency to the dish, she said.

Trish prefers the salad chilled, but it can be served hot. She likes a Mondavi Fume Blanc with it, and a summer salad of greens.

As the traditional barbecue season kicks off, potato salad fills the paper plates of many families and friends at gatherings. The Applegates enjoy them as well.

Trish said her husband Phil also likes her potato salad. "He makes really good shish kebabs and it goes well with that, or hamburgers or Delmonico steaks. The kids (Jack and Georgia) like it, too. My kids eat just about anything, so that's good."



Tangy and tart: The salad's ingredients include ricotta and Parmesan cheese, apple cider vinegar, garlic, onions and potatoes to create this creamy dish.

POTATO SALAD

Readers share tips, old favorites, just in time for cookouts

Mixing it up: Trish Applegate of Canton cuts up redskin potatoes for her potato salad. She'll mix the potatoes with Ricotta and Parmesan cheese to create a hearty and unique blend of flavors.



Trish, a nurse care manager in the trauma burn center at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor, enjoys cooking and trying new recipes when she can. She likes fixing main dishes, which consists of beef or vegetable dishes.

"We're trying to get more vegetables and expand those from side dishes into main courses," she said.

Salad beckons

We all have favorite recipes we "tweak." Mary Gleason Tobin of Redford used an old Betty Crocker recipe and adds favorite herbs — sweet basil leaves, dill weed, chives and Beau Monde, a

Please see SALAD, D2

Trish Applegate of Canton writes: "This potato salad is a favorite because of the garlic's zip, unusual flavor and terrific aroma. It's also excellent warm or cold, and tastes great as a leftover."

TRISH APPLAGATE'S POTATO SALAD

- 3 pounds (about 12 cups) cubed new red or new white potatoes (with or without the skin)
- 2/3 cup (2 ounces) freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup Ricotta cheese
- 4 cloves pressed garlic
- 1/2 red onion, sliced very thin
- 1/4 cup (or less) olive oil
- 6 tablespoons cider vinegar
- Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
- Chopped fresh parsley (to garnish)

Cook the potatoes in boiling salted water until just tender. Drain. While they are still hot, stir in the rest of the ingredients. Garnish with parsley just before serving. (Trish adds: "Don't forget the after-dinner mint!")

Recipe adapted by Applegate from the "New Recipes from Moosewood Restaurant."

OLD-FASHIONED POTATO SALAD

- Boiling water
- 3 pounds unpeeled medium potatoes (10) well-scrubbed
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 cups mayonnaise
- 1 cup coarsely chopped celery
- 1/2 cup sliced radish
- 3 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and coarsely chopped
- Crisp lettuce; garnishes
- Marinade:
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard

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Chicken and asparagus go together well

MAIN DISH MIRACLE



MURIEL WAGNER

Lemon, chicken and that perennial springtime vegetable, asparagus, are natural friends.

The thinner the asparagus shoot, the younger and more tender. Pick crisp, tightly closed stalks no bigger than your little finger. The cut ends should not be dry.

If you buy asparagus, try to serve it as soon as possible after it is purchased. Submerge the ends in a pitcher of water and refrigerate to maintain freshness. When you're ready to cook, rinse and then bend the spear. It will snap at the point where the spear starts to toughen.

Asparagus can be boiled, steamed, roasted or sautéed, but I like to microwave my asparagus this way: After preparing as above, I place them in a circle on a microwave-safe plate. The tips face inward. I cover them loosely with wax paper (no water, please)

and cook on high until tender crisp (2 to 3 minutes, depending on the thickness of the spears).

LEMON CHICKEN AND ASPARAGUS

- 1 pound fresh asparagus
- 4 3-ounce chicken breast halves, skinned and boned
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped onion
- 1/4 cup dry sherry or white wine
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon rind
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 cup fat-free, reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped

Cook asparagus in microwave (see above) until tender crisp. Set aside.

Place chicken between two sheets of heavy plastic wrap and flatten to 1/4-inch thickness with a mallet or rolling pin. To ensure moist chicken, brush lightly with canola oil or olive oil before flattening.

Coat a large nonstick skillet with olive oil. Add chicken to skillet and cook until lightly browned on each side (about 6 minutes). Remove chicken to a 3-quart baking dish coated with cooking spray, saving liquid in skillet.

Add wine, onion, lemon juice and rind to skillet. Cook until onion is just tender, not brown. Add broth to skillet. Blend water and flour and add to skillet contents. Blend well. Cook until thickened and bubbly. Divide asparagus among chicken breasts. Spoon sauce over chicken. Sprinkle with cheese and parsley. Bake at 350°F until just heated through. Serves 4.

Nutritional information per serving: Calories, 201; total fat, 7.5 grams; saturated fat, 1.9 g; cholesterol, 75 mg; sodium, 384 mg. Food exchanges: 3 lean meat, 2 vegetable.

Muriel G. Wagner is a registered dietitian and nutrition therapist with an office in Southfield. She publishes "Eating Younger," a quarterly newsletter with recipes and nutrition tips. To subscribe, send a check for \$13.50 to "Eating Younger," P.O. Box 69021, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069.

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