

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Facilitating cognac's decadence

Our readers really got into the fifth taste (umami) we wrote about in the March 31, 2002 column. We were prompted to write this column by a reader who phoned our voice mail and inquired, "Can you use the same principles of umami to match food with spirits?"

You can. We learned "how" from New York City spirits expert Steven Olson, with a myriad of food examples prepared by the talented Executive Chef Takashi Yagihashi of Tributo restaurant in Farmington Hills. Hennessy cognac served as the spirits model, but you can use your favorite. Although the Hennessy was superb! Hennessy, like all cognacs, has a moderately high alcohol content, yet it is well-balanced with fruit and acidity, creating an elegant full-bodied spirit with structure and complexity. Except for the alcohol, we could be using similar words to talk about a great wine.

The flavor profile of cognac includes pears, molons, apples, and citrus fruits, such as lemon, orange and tangerine. French oak barrels used for aging cognac add complementary vanilla characters along with caramel, butterscotch, and brown spices such as cinnamon, clove or ginger. Because cognac ages in barrels far longer than a wine, floral complexities, dried fruits, nuts and chocolate notes often develop.

Making the match

Like wine, sweet, salty, sour and bitter tastes are present. Because cognac is a spirit with moderately high alcohol, let's use the word "richness" to reference the umami factor we talked about in wine and food pairing in the March 31 column.

Cognac can easily overpower food, but it can also work oppositely. Rich foods, such as duck confit, foie gras, pate, or even pasta with a cream sauce will be the best cognac complements.

Meats that are rich and fatty, with full-bodied texture, tame the alcohol and crisp acidity of cognac, making it elegant, velvety and rounder as the cognac acidity cuts through richer foods.

Roasted root vegetables or wild mushrooms help to downplay the alcohol and enhance an intriguing earthy character of top-of-the-line cognacs.

If you think of cognac as an after-dinner beverage only, here's a new spin. Cognac can be a perfect raw bar accompaniment, matching lightly smoked fish, oysters, lobster, sea urchin and basically any shellfish. It's excellent with sushi, sashimi, Asian flavors and spices and a great foil for fried foods.

A well-crafted cognac, such as those from Hennessy, are perfect flavor vehicles. Think matching textures and softening the alcohol as you endeavor to make matches. However, avoid alcohol enhancers, such as peppers, chilies or other hot spices.

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WINE PICKS

Did you fire up your outdoor grill yet? Both zinfandel and syrah are great matches for the caramelized character of grilled foods, whether that's beef, lamb, pork or veggies.

ZINFANDEL PICKS: Two exceptional values: 2000 Rancho Zebaco Dancing Bull Zinfandel \$8 and 2000 Bogle Old Vine \$11. Bigger and richer are 2000 Geyser Peak \$17; 1999 St. Francis 'Old Vines' \$22 (a perennial favorite); and 1999 White Oak 'Pourroy Vineyard' \$28.

SYRAH PICKS: 1999 Shafer Relentless, Napa Valley \$40 (dynamite first release); 1999 Kunde \$23; and 2000 Caliterra, Chile \$8 (best buy).

Getting the scoop



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL

That's good: Madalyne Savich, 4, at Baskin-Robbins in Livonia, eats a cone of sherbet called "Wild 'n' Reckless Spirit," listed as a "wild twirl of green apple, blue raspberry and fruit punch sherbets."

The scoop, and nothing but the scoop

Baskin-Robbins "Free Scoop Night"

Is May 1



Customers will be able to receive a free scoop of ice cream and, at the same time, help children receive free books, through Baskin-Robbins' third annual "Free Scoop Night," to be held 8-10 p.m. on Wednesday, May 1. In addition to supplying needy children with books, the event is planned as a way for Baskin-Robbins franchise owners to thank loyal customers.

For every free scoop served, Baskin-Robbins will make a donation to First Book, a national nonprofit organization that provides free, new books to children from low-income families. To date, Free Scoop Night donations have enabled First Book to distribute more than half a million new books to children across the country.



Spirited flavors: Two of the offerings on the Free Scoop tasting menu are Wild 'n' Reckless Spirit (left) and S'More Spirit.

It's the season to scream for ice cream

BY SANDRA DALKA-PRYBY
SPECIAL WRITER

Lines are forming all over the area for that frozen confection that brings people out of their houses when the temperatures rise. It's spring time and it's the season for going out for ice cream or one of its close relatives - frozen yogurt, ices, sorbets and sherbets.

"One of our favorite family activities when the kids were young was going on 'M.T.'s - mystery trips," says Sue Wood of Beverly Hills. "We'd load the family into the car and head off to some unknown to the kids - destination. The children knew that no matter where we went, we would end up some place for ice cream."

The Woods did, and still do, have some favorite places, including Dairy Deluxe on Woodward in Birmingham. "Over the years we have visited many ice cream establishments. It all depended on where our trips and the car took us."

Now "mystery trips" have passed down to another generation. The Woods' grandchildren, especially 4-year-old Cooper Peters-Wood, who lives with his parents, Katy and Jeff, and baby brother, Hank, in Franklin, eagerly waits to hear the initials "M.T."

According to his grandmother, "he knows this means ice cream."

Cooper and thousands - of children and adults with a sweet tooth would be out of luck if it weren't for Emperor Nero of Rome, who is credited with making the first frozen dessert in the 4th century B.C. It was a mixture of snow, brought back from the mountains by slaves, and fruit pulp, nectar and honey for sweetness.

Others believe that the predecessor to ice cream was invented in China about 200 B.C. when a soft mixture of milk and rice was further solidified by pecking it in snow.

In the 13th century, Marco Polo learned the Chinese method of making ices, sherbets and ice milks and brought it back to Europe. Eventually, the recipes made their way to the United States and were served by many of the country's first presidents, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. In 1812, Dolly Madison created a sensation when she served ice cream as a dessert in the White House at the second inaugural ball. Ice cream probably wouldn't be as popular today if it weren't for Charles Minches of St. Louis. He is credited with creating the first ice cream cone in 1904 by filling a pastry cone with two scoops of ice cream. The ice cream cone was a sensation that year.



STAFF PHOTO BY STEVE CANTRELL

It's mine, don't even think about it: Caroline Hughes, 1, of Clarkston, enjoys a cool treat on a sunny day.

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Make your own or try recipes using cool flavors

CHUNKY PEANUT BUTTER ICE CREAM

2 egg yolks
1 can (14.5 ounces) evaporated milk
1/2 cup chunky peanut butter
2/3 cup sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt

In bowl, beat yolks well. Add other ingredients and mix well. Pour into freezer tray and freeze until almost hard. Pour into a bowl. Beat until smooth. Return to freezer tray or molds and freeze until firm.

Makes 4-6 servings.

BASKIN-ROBBINS S'MORE PIE

2 hand-pecked quarts Baskin-Robbins S'More Spirit® Ice Cream
1 cup hot fudge topping
1 prepared graham cracker pie crust
1 cup marshmallow cream topping
1 cup miniature marshmallows

Take ice cream out of freezer and soften, about 10-15 minutes. Heat hot fudge topping according to directions and pour into pie crust. Spread to cover sides and bottom of crust. Let cool to room temperature, about 5 minutes.

Scoop ice cream into crust. Smooth to fill entire crust but mound slightly in center. Put in freezer for 15-20 minutes or until ready to serve.

When ready to serve, cut into pieces, place on plates. Drizzle marshmallow topping on each piece. Top with marshmallows. Serve immediately.

Serves 6-8.

S'More Spirit, Flavor of the Month for May and June, is a blend of chocolate and toasted marshmallow mousse ice creams with graham cracker pieces and chocolate flakes.

More recipes, Page B3

7-layer salad is perfect pick for an outdoor meal

BY DANA JACOBI
FOR THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Summer is almost here, and along with it, the return of casual outdoor meals for a crowd.

For the main course, fire up the grill and you can cook colorful kebabs, meaty but meatless burgers and succulent fish roasted in foil, all with minimal effort. Speedy, effortless side dishes are more challenging, especially a big salad. Often, my solution when feeding a mob draws from a retro favorite. Do you recall the layered salads popular back in the seventies and eighties? They include so many goodies they can suffice as the only side dish. Designed to be made in advance, these salads are perfect for feeding a dozen or more. They sur-

vive on the buffet table without wilting, too. If anything, they taste even better by the time people are back for seconds.

Layered salads are like an archaeological dig of easily assembled ingredients. Shredded lettuce is the classic bedrock of a layered salad. Above it come layers of five or more chunky choices, including canned beans, thawed frozen green peas and other ready-to-eat foods added straight from a can or a package, plus sliced fresh tomatoes and onion.

Often topped with diced cheese, layered salads were usually bathed in a creamy, dense, mayonnaise-based dressing. Applied ahead of time, even the night before, it worked down through the layers while in the



Layers: Layered salads are a perfect choice for an outdoor meal.

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