

### FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

## Meritage wines offer heritage of Bordeaux

Meritage wines are a U.S. expression of wines blended in the Bordeaux tradition. Meritage is not a French word. Pronounce it as a rhyme with heritage.

After decades of perfecting the art of producing 100 percent varietal wines, U.S. winemakers are focusing on a time-honored tradition of blending grape varieties, particularly the classic Bordeaux grapes. The name Meritage was chosen because it combined the words merit and heritage.

Some wineries belong to a "Meritage" organization and only they have the right to use the Meritage trademark on their label. To do so, the wine must meet the following criteria:

- It must be made entirely from a blend of the traditional Bordeaux grape varieties.
- Principal red varietals include: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot and malbec.
- White varietals include: sauvignon blanc, semillon and muscadelle.
- It must be the winery's best wine of its type. Exceptions are wines labeled estate bottled or vineyard designated.
- It must be produced and bottled by a winery in the U. S. from grapes that carry a U. S. appellation of origin.
- Each Meritage wine must be limited in production to no more than 25,000 cases from each vintage by a single winery.
- A winery must pay an annual licensing fee to use the name Meritage for its wine.

The Meritage amiktor has caught on. More wineries are producing either a White Meritage, Red Meritage or both. Many restaurants have listed Meritage wines separately on the wine list and progressive wine shops have shelving dedicated to Meritage wines.

### Meritage red varietals

- Cabernet sauvignon is deep-colored and tannic. Tannin acts as a natural preservative and gives the wine longevity. The grape has a natural affinity with oak adding flavor through barrel aging. Cabernet sauvignon contributes aromas of blackberries, blackcurrants, cassis, violets and cedar. Any vanilla characters come from aging in French oak.

- Merlot excels in fruitiness and lower tannin levels. It is the prime blending grape in the Medoc region of Bordeaux.

Please see WINE, D2

*Valentine's Day is an occasion that calls for special meals for spouses, lovers or that special someone. When chefs put together a "dinner from the heart," they like to prepare rack of lamb, lobster or stone crabs to impress loved ones.*

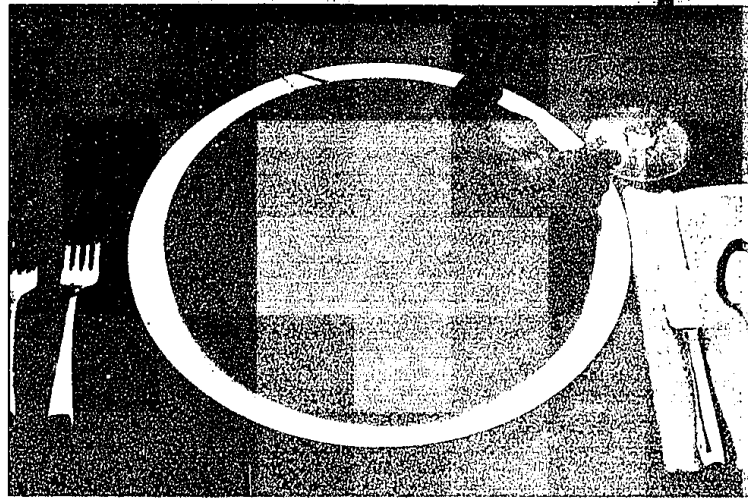


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JERRY ZALITZKY

# Wow your mate with Foods of Love

## Valentine's Day Menu

### HORS D'OEUVRE

Oysters on the Half Shell with Mignonette  
Champagne Caviar Hybrid & Mus on Crust 1996 First Reserve

### FIRST COURSE

Asada, Red Grapes and Curry Endive Salad

### PRINCIPAL PLATE

Rack of Lamb  
Wild Mushroom Risotto  
Seared Asparagus Bundles  
1995 Heritage Napa Valley Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon

### SWEET ENDING

Chocolate Pots de Creme  
Espresso Coffee  
Ramos-Fino Quinta da Urtiga Port

BY ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

**A**bsolutely! Some foods are aphrodisiacs. Greg Goodman, chef/proprietor of Café Bun Homme in Plymouth, cites caviar and champagne, stone crabs, truffles and chocolate.

Chef/proprietor Rocky Rachwitz of Rocky's in Northville and Brighton adds oysters. Chef de Cuisine Luis Kalaj of Livonia's Fonte d'Amore, translated from Italian as "fountain of love," suggests artichokes and asparagus.

Indefatigable Maitre d' Mickey Bakst of Tribute in Farmington Hills specifies his caviar aphrodisiac as "Beluga, double zero with perfect, mouth-popping eggs." He shares the belief about oysters and stone crabs, then tucks on foie gras, passion fruit and garlic!

### Dinner from the heart

But what if these restaurant pros were to make THE dinner from the heart to WOW their special someone?

Rachwitz would prepare rack of lamb with wild mushroom risotto and a fresh asparagus bundle. Kalaj would serve lobster and a simple risotto cooked with sautéed onions in a simmering chicken stock. Her plate garnish would also be asparagus.

Stone crabs with a Dijon mustard sauce beat out foie gras for Bakst. Most unique is Goodman's suggestion of game consommé with diced vegetables baked in a serving-size terrine with puff pastry topping. To duplicate this, you're going to have to start making the consommé several days in advance.

### Stone crabs

Both stone crabs and oysters are in season. If you prefer stone crabs to oysters, ask the seafood merchant to crack stone crabs for you. You can easily make a Dijon mustard dipping sauce by mixing a couple of tablespoons of mustard with sour cream and half-and-half, then season with salt and pepper to taste. If you aren't skilled at shucking oysters, get this done by the merchant also.

Canned foie gras is available in upscale gourmet food markets if you want to substitute it as an hors d'oeuvre in the WOW menu. Serve thin slices of foie gras with toast points.

Please see LOVE, D2

### Wine Picks

- Pick of the pack: 1997 Clos du Bois Flintwood Chardonnay, \$22.
- Meadow made: 1997 St. Francis Merlot, \$22; 1998 Ca' del Solo Barbera, \$15; and 1998 Ca' del Solo Sangiovese, \$12.
- Great deals: Baiting Wine Exchanges recently sold its value-priced brand Napa Ridge to Stronco Wine Company. If you've liked Napa Ridge wines that we've recommended numerous times, check up: The vineyard sources from which these wines were made were not part of the sale. Only the label and stock were. Wine is made in the vineyard so there are no guarantees on future quality once current stock runs out.
- Special occasion: 1997 Barbera d'Asti, \$13; 1998 Barlot (cabernet/sauvignon blend), \$17; 1998 Cabernet, \$12 (Hudson); Barbera (cabernet/sauvignon blend), and 1998 Cabernet, \$11.
- Special: 1998 Oyster & Seafood Dinner (1/20/06), \$12; 1998 Cabernet Chardonnay, \$15; and 1998 Petiteville Cabernet Sauvignon, \$11.

### LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Snacks
- Main Dish Miracles

## Gift of life prompts 'Spice of Life Cookbook'

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK  
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Jeffrey Leeds didn't write a cookbook with Valentine's Day and the hearts of lovers in mind.

Instead, the 55-year-old writer thought about his own heart and others who need one.

With a heart from an anonymous donor beating inside him that saved his life, he developed a deep appreciation for that gift, the donor of the heart and the surgeons at the University of California, Los Angeles who operated on him in 1993.

"I wanted to give something back somehow," said Leeds. "I told myself that if a donor was willing to help me continue a productive life, I'd help others by encouraging them to eat properly prepared meals."

A portion of proceeds will go to the

UCLA transplant unit for research, Leeds said.

About 20 years ago Leeds worked in advertising and public relations, then he fell into what he describes as a mid-life crisis and developed high blood pressure. He said he had "three or four" heart attacks, the first severely damaging his heart. Doctors performed bypass surgery which helped him, but over the next few years, he developed congestive heart failure and was told he needed a transplant.

"I knew I had to change my ways," Leeds said.

Good-bye, cheeseburgers. Hello, chicken. Lots of it, too.

Leeds' cookbook contains over 100 recipes with dishes below 600 calories, that contain less than 200 milligrams of cholesterol and sodium, and less than 50 percent of calories from fat.

Leeds "was always" around food — snack bars in college, restaurants while in advertising. But he also enjoyed collecting cookbooks over the years. He started pulling recipes from old publications, from family cookbooks and grandmothers.

He used chicken exclusively throughout the cookbook because it is his personal preference. "There is more chicken in the world than there are people," Leeds said.

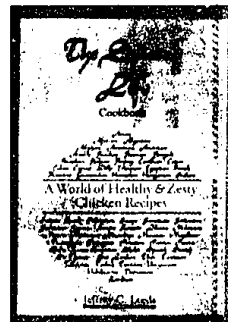
His book even has a Valentine's Day recipe, a chicken dish with rose petals, "perfect with candlelight," Leeds writes. Mud Chicken, which features lots of garlic on chicken breasts, Cuban Chicken and Brazilian Chicken are among Leeds' favorites.

Leeds believes cooks don't have to give up good taste when preparing healthier foods. "You have olive oil and a mixture of other ingredients, so you aren't cheating yourself," Leeds said. He also features butter in his recipes, but a minimal amount.

"Healthy eating doesn't have to be as serious as a heart attack," Leeds said. "It can be fun."

"The Spice of Life Cookbook" (\$19.95, paperback, 172 pages) is available in bookstores or by calling the publisher Momentum Books in Troy at (800) 758-1870.

See recipes inside.



**International favors:** The Spice of Life Cookbook by Jeffrey Leeds features more than 100 recipes, each containing less than 500 calories and less than 30 percent of calories from fat.