

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY AND ELEANOR HEALDS

Elusive 5th taste makes difference

When all four primary tastes, sweet, sour, salty and bitter are in balance, wine and food taste good. Yet some savory foods taste out of this world. Make the correct wine match and you're in wine and food paradise.

Consistently creating such matches is elusive, unless one understands what an increasing number of food professionals acknowledge as the impact of umami, the hard-to-define fifth taste. It's not new. It's been known for a long time. Yet its applications have more recently been linked to food and wine. Like the heat in a habanero chili, umami is quantifiable. In 1998, a Japanese researcher at Tokyo Imperial University traced the elusive savory taste to L-glutamate, an amino acid found in high protein foods.

Because its chemical base is known, it's possible to conduct laboratory analysis proving that a creamy blue cheese has more umami than a hot dog or that shiitake mushrooms are higher in umami than an ordinary yellow onion.

Umami is enhanced by ripeness, aging, curing or fermenting foods. You know by taste that aged steak has more flavor (more umami) than freshly-ground hamburger.

Asian fish sauce, anchovies, lobster, balsamic vinegar, soy sauce, cooked potatoes, Parmigiano-Reggiano and Gruyere cheese are all high in umami. That's why classic French onion soup is heavenly topped with Gruyere cheese. And why we say, "yes, please" when the waitperson asks, "would you like some freshly-grated parmesan cheese on your pasta?"

Making the wine match

Foods high in umami have a lot of personality and what we like to call resonance. They are sometimes difficult to match with wine. If you learn some "tricks," however, you're going to create matches made in heaven. To do this, you need to cook with a glass of wine, that you plan to serve with the dish, in one hand!

First consider the body, or more properly, the weight and texture of both the food and wine you'd like to match. You've probably done this. Lighter wine with a lighter fish, such as sole or white fish. With salmon, you may opt for a big chardonnay or even a less tannic red wine, such as merlot. Good, you've practiced step one.

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WINE PICKS

Get the outdoor grill going early in the season. Nothing suits some great grilled foods like a cabernet.

Plek of the pack: 1999 Peju Provence Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley \$30. Not cabernet sauvignon; cabernet franc and one of the very best of this varietal.

Now it's cabernet sauvignon's turn: Excellent: 1998 Beringer Knights Valley \$26; 1999 Raymond Burr \$38; 1998 St Supery Meritage Red \$50; and 1998 Raymond Generations \$80.

Very good: 1998 Fetzer Barrel Select \$17; 1999 Cinnabar Mercury Rising Meritage \$18; 1999 Clos du Bois Reserve \$22; 1999 Stonegate, Napa Valley \$40; and 1998 Geyser Peak Reserve \$40.

Best buys at \$10 and under: 1999 Bodega Norton, Argentina \$8; 1999 Fetzer Valley Oaks \$10; 2000 CB Cheviot Bridge Cabernet-Merlot, Australia \$10.

Michigan's St. Julian Winery was awarded the prestigious Jefferson Cup for its Solera Cretin Sherry \$12 dessert wine, which the winery has produced for 30 years. It is the first time that a Michigan wine has won this award.

Naturally good

Organic foods rich in flavor, color, health benefits

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Sixty percent of herbicides used on fruits and vegetables are carcinogenic, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ruled. Thirty percent of insecticides and 90 percent of fungicides were ruled the same.

Nationwide, 2 percent of last year's food supply was organic and grown by just 7,800 certified organic farmers. Sales have risen 20 percent each year since 1990 and it's a \$9.3 billion yearly industry; meaning organic foods aren't going away.

Organic means: Foods grown without chemicals and in soil that's been free of chemicals for at least 36 months. Supporters say organic foods are not just healthier, but tastier and more attractive too.

Organic foods are smaller since they are planted naturally and aren't injected with growth hormones. Organic strawberries aren't huge and bulbous, rather small, heart-shaped and deep red in color. Red pepper isn't super-shiny and its skin might wrinkle.

Let organic buyers say taste and health are equally important. "I personally feel the foods have more flavor because they're growing naturally," said Vera Morton of Livonia, who buys her produce from the Good Food Co. in Canton. "The color and ripeness is from the sun; they're not forcibly grown through genetic engineering and chemicals. Nothing is better than organic tomatoes on the vine — rich and red."

Morton is a big fan of organic balsamic vinegar and organic red wine — both free of headache-causing sulfites.

No government subsidiaries

Still, despite insecticide and herbicide health warnings from the EPA, the government isn't encouraging organic farming. Organic farmers are still low in numbers because they've refused government subsidies. Farming companies that use harmful pesticides, insecticides and fungicides still get government help, said Susan Bellinson of Whole Foods, the largest retailer of organic foods worldwide.

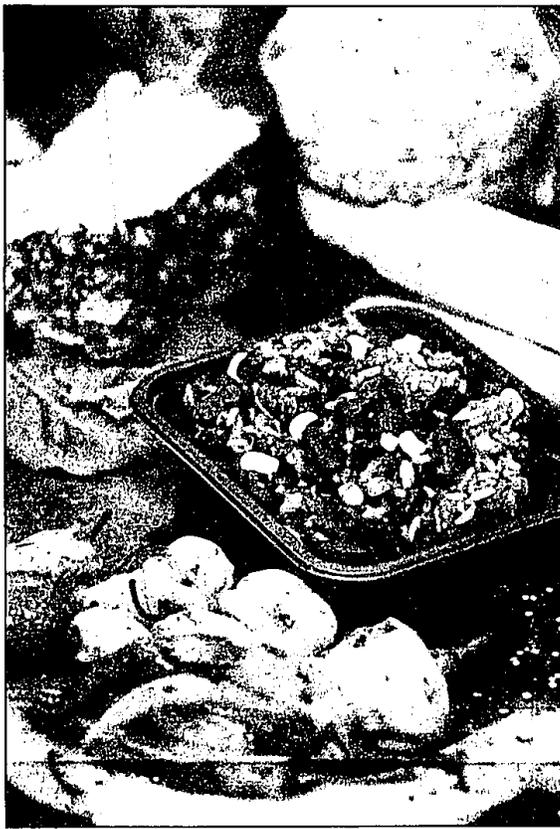
Organic retailers like Whole Foods have action alerts on its website to keep the public informed about the foods they eat.

What about flavor?

Morton also purchases organic meat from animals who aren't fed antibiotics and pesticide-laden grains. "I eat only salmon and occasionally chicken, and it's



Extensive: Whole Foods has an extensive deli counter display of prepared organic, natural, and vegetarian foods.



STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMAYER

Wholly good: Best selling dishes at Whole Foods West Bloomfield include organic red beans and rice, grilled marinated hot peppers, and potato salad.

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always organic."

Organic salmon is the biggest seller of meat at Whole Foods Market stores in Michigan. Bellinson said the stores try to carry locally grown organic foods in season to reduce prices.

"There is an organic alternative for every product we sell in the store," Bellinson said.

Frozen foods too

Frozen and prepared food companies are taking the organic route too. Cascadian Farms last week unveiled its new line of organic prepared and frozen entrees including macaroni and cheese, panne marinara and spinach lasagna. Muir Glen Organic carries tomatoes that Chef Rodney Wait of Whole Foods in West Bloomfield uses in his lasagna.

Kroger carries Amy's frozen organic pizzas, for example. Stores like Good Food Co. in Troy and Canton, and Whole Foods in Ann Arbor, West Bloomfield, Troy and other locations, both have impressive deli cases.

But the crown jewel is the deli at Whole Foods West Bloomfield. The dishes there are constantly evolving at the hands of Chef Rodney Wait. Last week, he introduced his newest creation: Marinated peppers; an array of bold color,

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Some produce is higher in chemical content

More than half of the total dietary risk from pesticides is found in just twelve crops. The EPA lists the following foods as heavily containing pesticides that are probable human carcinogens and endocrine-system disruptors.

Washing with soap and water helps, but some fruits and vegetables absorb the chemicals. The following lists the non-organic fruit and vegetables that have the highest chemical content, from highest to lowest:

1. Strawberries
2. (tie) Green and red bell peppers; spinach
3. U.S. cherries
4. Peaches
5. Cantaloupe (Mexican)
6. Celery
7. Apples
8. Apricots
9. Green beans
10. Grapes (Chilean)
11. Cucumbers

— source: the Environmental Protection Agency

Get hooked on variety of delicious fresh fish dishes

There is nothing like a big juicy steak dinner with all the fixings, if you are a carnivore. But, as we all know, too much red meat in our diet is not good for us. Chicken is always a good source of protein but we need a little variety in our lives. Fish, just out of the water, is a great stand in for beef or chicken.

The first known fish on Earth has been dated back to living

about 500 million years ago. Fish are believed to be the first vertebrates and all other vertebrates can be traced back to one type of fish called ostracoderm.

Ostracoderm gave rise to the jawed fish and they in turn gave rise to the amphibians. Amphibians have legs, swim in water or live on land. Amphibians are also some very good eating, if prepared properly.

Fish grow all over the world. With over 14,000 known species, you would have a hard time running out of fish to taste. Fish are considered cold-blooded, which means their body temperature

changes with the water they swim. In extreme cold waters like the Arctic or Antarctica the blood of the fish is transparent.

Fish have become big business all around the world. The Great Lakes have a huge supply of pickerel, whitefish, perch, salmon, blue gill and trout.

Most fish sold in the food service industry is farm raised. That means they are raised in a controlled environment in large bodies of water. When choosing a fish that has been farm raised, you need to look closely at the flesh of the filet. If the flesh is mushy

then it has come from a lower quality farm that forced the fish so it would grow quicker. This helps the farm turn over more fish for less money. So as the saying goes "you get what you pay for."

When you see a quality fish filet you will notice the firm flesh, good marbling in the filet, the bones adhere to the flesh, the eyes if still in contact will be clear and bulging, and the skin will be slimy.

Chef Randy Emert was a Michigan Culinary Team captain, and lives in Lake Orion. He is a certified Chef de Cuisine and works at the Great Oaks Country Club in Rochester.

KITCHEN KAPERS



CHEF RANDY EMERT