

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Hunter Valley wines bright and flavorful

OK. We'll be upfront. We have not been fans of Hunter Valley wines from Australia. In general, they seem tired and lack youthful exuberance. No pizzazz. No spark. No great taste recommendations to pass on to our readers.

That attitude modified when we recently tasted the wines from Hope Estate in Australia's Hunter Valley with owner Michael Hope. Not only are the wines bright and flavorful, there are many values under \$15.

Former pharmacist Michael Hope decided in 1994 that he'd rather grow grapes and make wine than fill prescriptions. He purchased 37 vineyard acres in Australia's Hunter Valley, ideal for white grapes. A second acquisition of nearly 200 acres of famed red basalt soil was then purchased and planted to shiraz and merlot. In 1996, he bought a hill prescription that had been dormant for a number of years and modernized it for vintage 1997.

He further expanded his wine domain by acquiring Virgin Hills Estate, a renowned property in Victoria, Australia, and its winery. This is a challenging, high altitude site on which to grow Bordeaux varietals, shiraz, albec and pinot noir. Spring frosts are common and the estate bears the moniker "marginal climate" for red varieties.

When you taste the 1998 Virgin Hills Estate, Victoria \$32, a blend of 85 percent cabernet, 10 percent shiraz, three percent merlot and two percent malbec, you'll know why Michael Hope jumped at the chance to own this estate, first planted in 1968. It's low yields of a minimal 1.5 tons per acre, would be considered by most as economically untenable. It is the vision of people like Michael Hope who bring the world atypical wines with amazing fruit depth. At this price, this wine is not only outstanding but a world-class gem.

Hope Estate wines

To understand why 2000 Verdelho \$8 is in the Hope Estate portfolio, it's necessary to recall that the early wines of Australia were fortified and made from verdelho.

"So, this grape has always been in the Hunter Valley," Michael Hope said. Using modern winemaking techniques, this dry, still white has the aromas of wild flowers, d'Anjou pears, tropical and other lush fruits, yet crisp taste and finish. A touch of spiciness from American oak adds a unique diversion. It's perfect for Asian cuisine or seafood. Try it if you're looking for new and different.

"Balanced wines with complexity and length," Hope continued, "are my winemaking goals."

These are achieved in the 2000 Hope Estate Chardonnay \$10 with its nice touch of pineapple and abundant tropical fruit. Plump in the middle, it has a delicious fruit profile and a splendid finish with a tasty touch of oak. Awesome at this price

Please see HEALDS, B2

WINE PICKS

Except for a few regions in Victoria, Australia is too hot to grow great pinot noir. But the following California regions and wineries do it exceptionally well.

- 1999 Cinnabar Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir, \$42
- 2000 DeLoach OFS Russian River Valley Pinot Noir \$40
- 2000 Fetzer Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir \$40
- 1999 Cinnabar Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir \$38
- 2000 La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir \$25
- 1998 Beringer Carneros Stanly Ranch Pinot Noir \$30

These cooking recipes are anything but typical fare. They're...

Readers' choice

By LANA MENI
STAFF WRITER
lmeni@oe.homecomm.net

Steaks and hamburgers will always be popular on the grill, but there are many ways to spice up summer meals.

HALLOUMI KEBABS

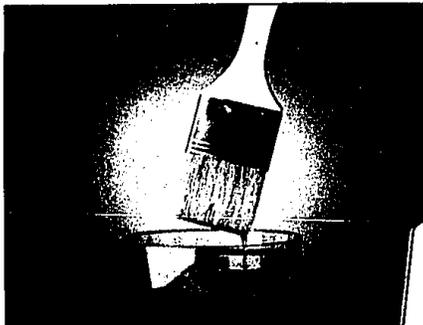
- 1 package of G&I. Kases Halloumi cheese
- 1 large red pepper, cored, de-seeded
- 1 large courgetta (zucchini)
- 1 small onion
- 8 bay leaves
- Lemon wedges (to garnish)
- 150g (5oz) mixed salad leaves

For salad dressing:
2 tablespoons olive oil
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
or 1 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cut Halloumi into one-inch cubes. Cut and de-seed pepper into one-inch cubes. Cut courgetta into one-inch slices. Cut onion into 8 wedges.

Thread the Halloumi, pepper, courgetta, onion and bay leaves onto four skewers. Make salad dressing by mixing all ingredients. Preheat grill and cook the Halloumi Kebabs, turning regularly for 4-8 minutes or until the cubes of Halloumi are well browned. Garnish with lemon wedges, and serve on a bed of salad leaves. Drizzle salad dressing on top.

The cheese can be found at gourmet markets or at www.halloumicheese.com through Mediterranean Ventures of Ann Arbor. It's a cheese that's used in omelets or on top of pasta — or grilled. Look for it at Whole Foods, Zingerman's in Ann Arbor, and Plymouth Market.



Family favorite: The darker the olive oil the better the taste and reader Linda May uses it on California white potatoes for a grilled dish that her family adores.

No peeling required

Linda May, of Farmington Hills, cooks the usual fare on the family grill all summer long, she said. However her new family favorite is easy and handy. "We grill white potatoes all the time," May said. "Everyone loves them and they aren't complicated to make."



Wrap: Prosciutto can be thinly sliced and wrapped around figs on the grill. Serve with stone ground wheat bread as a side.

Fresh figs

Liliana A. Ciccodicola of Beverly Hills wishes she could take credit for the stuffed grilled fig recipe she submitted to us. Instead, she said, her treasured recipe comes from her friend Joe Allote of Wisconsin. Making grilled figs is a family affair in the Ciccodicola household with daughters Leah, 10 and Eliza, 6 forming a fun assembly line to help. Ciccodicola's husband Joe then completes the process by grilling the figs.

"It's fantastic," Ciccodicola said. "Fresh figs have a short season so we make these appetizers whenever we can find fresh figs."

For those with the patience and skill to grow fig trees, they'll have to wait until August when the figs are ready to pick. Fresh figs, either deep purple or white, are now available at specialty markets.

"You can use dried figs, but they are more difficult to stuff," Ciccodicola said.

JOE'S GRILLED FIGS STUFFED WITH GOAT CHEESE AND PROSCIUTTO

- Fresh figs
- Goat Cheese (about 1 tablespoon for each fig)
- Prosciutto (1/2 or 1 slice, depending on how big the figs are and how adept you are at wrapping)
- Wooden toothpicks

Make a small slit in the fig just below the stem and to the side. Holding the fig in the palm of one hand, put your index finger of the other hand in the slit and pack the "inside" of the fig against the skin, so there is room to pack in the goat cheese.

Then take a clump of goat cheese and pack it into the fig. Next, take a piece of Prosciutto and wrap it around the fig and secure with a wooden toothpick.

Try to cover the opening in the fig, so cheese does not ooze out. Grill over a low heat for about 4 minutes and then turn and grill for another four minutes. The Prosciutto will "shrink wrap" around the fig as it cooks. Cooking time will vary depending upon grill heat and your personal preference — just be sure not to burn the Prosciutto but cook well. Enjoy.

LINDA MAY'S CALIFORNIA POTATOES

- California white potatoes, washed and dried. (2.3 medium size potatoes for two people)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- garlic to taste
- salt and fresh pepper to taste

1 teaspoon dry rosemary
Using thin skinned unpeeled, California white potatoes slice into 1/4-inch thick slices. Do not make slices paper thin. Toss the potato slices with olive oil, garlic salt and fresh ground pepper. Place potato slices on hot grill for about 15 minutes, turning often until done. Place potato slices in a bowl and toss with dried rosemary, if desired. Serve hot.

May said basic ingredients like extra virgin olive oil, garlic, salt, rosemary and pepper spice up the California white potato. And they don't even require peeling, she said.

Cleaning's the pits, but picking cherries is fun

By KEELY KALESKI
STAFF WRITER
kkaleski@oe.homecomm.net

Perched on a ladder, surrounded by leaves and ripe fruit, I smiled when I heard a child say, "Mom, it's a beautiful day, a perfect day for picking cherries. Come down, all the good cherries are here. Where are you?"

Since my bucket was nearly full, I followed the sound of laughter and found Carla Beers of Livonia, her children Kevin, 9, Nicky, 4, Larissa, 13, and cousin Rochelle Lampe. Like me, they were having a grand time picking sour cherries on a sunny July morning at Wasem Fruit Farm in Milan.

Cherry pie, crisp and jam are reasons Lampe enjoys picking cherries. "And homemade sour cherry jam is a nice gift too," said the Garden City resident. Larissa likes picking cherries more

than strawberries and peas because you don't have to bend over.

"It's fun to do with the kids because they love to be outside," said Carla. "It's great, and I like making jam." "They get back to work," my boyfriend Thomas said teasingly. He's the one who got me started picking cherries, and red and black currants, which you can also pick at Wasem's. We picked 16 pounds of sour cherries on Sunday, July 7, and nearly 3 pounds of black currants.

On Wednesday morning we picked another 16 pounds of cherries; 5 pounds of red currants and 6 pounds of black currants.

Pitting cherries is easy compared to cleaning currants. But Thomas told me that we will have the most wonderful stuff to eat, absolutely delicious.

Both and her sister Jan grew up on



Super Sunday: Rochelle Lampe (left to right), Kevin, Carla, Larissa and Nicky Beers are ready to fill their buckets with sour cherries at Wasem Fruit Farm.