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The Grape Vine Newsletter

Traditional Spring Feasts and Wine

Spring is a time of celebrations, and Easter is usually celebrated with traditional spring feasts that are (hopefully) accompanied by very good wines. So what wines go best with a traditional Easter feast? Well, the answer depends on who you ask. We polled numerous wine and food experts, magazines and websites, asking this exact question, and this is what we found.

The two most common dishes served at a traditional Easter dinner are lamb and ham. Both pair quite well with a wide variety of wines - red, white and even rosé. The most important thing to remember is to envision the entire meal as a whole, and don't just focus on the main entrée. Consider the spices added to each dish and the sauces used - lightly seasoned green beans will pair nicely with a Sauvignon Blanc while green beans with a creamy mushroom sauce go better with a Chardonnay.

It is also a good idea to have more than one type of wine on the table to choose from. It is very difficult to have every course served with your meal go perfectly with the same bottle of wine. A fresh and crispy Pinot Grigio may be the perfect match for your appetizers and salad, while a Pinot Noir may be your choosing for the main dish. And don't forget about a sweet Muscat or Riesling with dessert. On this same note, some people will only drink red or white wines no matter what food they are eating. As you can see, expanding your wine offerings is really a good thing all the way around - good for you as the cook and good for your guests as the consumers.

White Wines - The most versatile whites are those that have little to no oak with a lively acidity. With its citrus flavors and aromas, Sauvignon Blanc fits the bill perfectly. Sauvignon Blanc will pair nicely with everything from creamy, rich asparagus soup to green salad to glazed ham with spicy cloves and glaze.

If you want a Chardonnay, choose one that is minimally oaked or has no oak at all. Chardonnays are also very versatile wines that really accent dishes with rich cream sauces.

For a glazed ham, semi-sweet Gewürztraminers are fantastic. They will accent the sweetness of the glaze and offer a refreshing contrast to the ham's natural saltiness.

Red Wines - The most versatile red wine for a traditional Easter feast is a Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir's greatest strength is its suppleness. Without the hard tannic structure found in many red wines, it pairs effortlessly with a wide range of foods - including both ham and lamb. However, don't overwhelm its gentle fruit and refined complexity with strong or spicy flavors; simply-prepared dishes are best.

The classic accompaniment to a rich rack (or leg) of lamb is Cabernet Sauvignon. This big and bold wine stands up beautifully to virtually all red meats, whether prepared simply or with rich, reduced sauces. Fine, older Cabernets are excellent accompaniments to special occasion meals, while younger ones match simpler fare. If you are planning a very rich or strong spiced entrée, you can't go wrong with a bold California Cab.

If you are looking for a **sparkling wine** (Champagne) that pairs well with a wide variety of flavors, try a Brut rose or Blanc de Noir. Both of these are made with the Pinot Noir grape which provide good body with a light tannin texture, and a red fruit character. The effervescence from the carbonation and the natural acidity actually help cleans the palate for the next course.

In closing, we all know that choosing wines that best suit your meal can be an intimidating task. But really, there is only one rule that deserves to be carved in stone. **THERE ARE NO RULES!** So relax, experiment and enjoy yourself. And remember, everything will taste better in the company of your cherished family and friends.

Quote of the Month

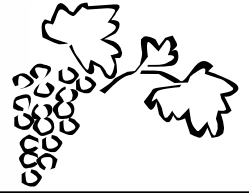
Wine improves with age. The older I get, the better I like it.

~ unknown ~



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Wine Gift Baskets

Our wonderful collection of Wine Gift Baskets, Corporate Gift Baskets and Gourmet Food Gift Baskets are perfect for any occasion. **Customizable** - You can choose to include only reds, only whites, or a combination of red and white wines. You can even substitute bottles of our fine Private Label Wine (see below) with any wine gift basket we offer. We are definitely the most unique and complete Wine Gift Shop online!

Wine of the Month Club

Because California is widely regarded as the finest wine growing region in America and one of the best wine producing regions in the world, the vast majority of our featured wines are from **California's finest, boutique wineries**. Now and then, when our wine experts find an outstanding selection, we may feature wines from some of the best growing regions of Washington and Oregon. However, the vast majority of our featured wines are California wines - arguably the best wines in the world.

- **You pick the number of bottles** - Monthly Wine Club memberships can be either 1-bottle per month or 2-bottles per month.
- **You pick the Wines** - all red, all white, or a mixture of both red and white wines. **You pick the Frequency** - Wine Club deliveries can be Every Month or you can Skip Months between deliveries.
- **You pick the Duration** - Wine Club memberships range from 2 to 12 months in duration.
- **You choose how to pay** - you can pay monthly or prepay the wine club membership up front - it's totally up to you.

We give you all the choices - **You make all the decisions!** No other clubs can compare.

Personalized Label Wines

We have a great selection of wine label templates available on our website that you can use to create your very own Private Label Wine. Simply click your favorite label template and change the words. You can also take a digital photo, or create your own label design and email it to us. Either way, we will print professional quality labels and apply them to your choice of our fine private wine selections. **Minimum order - only 1 bottle!**

Our private label wines come in either red or white varieties and you can mix and match them as you please. You can even choose to substitute private label wines in any of our wine gift baskets!

Private Label Wines are perfect for Birthdays, all Holidays, Thank You, Congratulations, House Warming, Corporate Gifts and Promotional Items.

The Wine Store

We always purchase a few extra cases of the fine wines we send our Wine Club members, and the wines we include with our Wine Gift Baskets. While these fine wines last, we make them available to you in our Wine Store, at discount prices that you won't be able to resist. As a bonus, our Wine Club members can buy more of the wines they really enjoyed at these discount prices, while they are available. **Check it out NOW!**

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March 2006 Classic Wine Club Selections

Every month our **Classic Wine Club** members receive one or two bottles of our featured wines. The wines you get depend on the membership you are enrolled in. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

2002 Minimally Oaked Chardonnay, Poole Vineyards

Beginning in 2000, the Poole Vineyard was the first acquisition of the Polkinghorn Family. It consists of two and a half acres of chardonnay located in the Russian River Appellation, world famous for growing some of the finest chardonnay, pinot noir and zinfandel and home to some of the worlds finest wineries. Names such as Sonoma-Cutrer, Kendall-Jackson, Joseph Swan, Hanna and Iron Horse surround the family's vineyard. Poole Vineyards is now also farming the adjoining Seeley Vineyard which shares the same soils and climate - a natural addition to the Poole Vineyard's lineup.

In Michael Polkingham's own words - "The Genesis of the 2002 Minimally Oaked Chardonnay is found in the depths of the winter of 2001. In 2001 we made an oakey, buttery chardonnay. It was our first vintage and that was the way that chardonnay was made, wasn't it? However as the fermentation progressed, we discovered wonderful nuances of tropical and citrus fruits that emerged and then were pounded out by the oak and the butter. It was disappointing to realize what we were losing by using the traditional barrel fermentation methods. There had to be a way to capture all of the fruit character that we knew was in our wine. So, in the dark of winter we hashed out a plan for a new chardonnay."

"Oakey and buttery chardonnays we already knew about. We also tasted the un-oaked chardonnays from New Zealand but decided that we didn't want to go that far. We came up with the idea for a Minimally Oaked Chardonnay. Instead of barrel fermentation we would ferment in a stainless steel tank. We would keep it under refrigeration to slow the fermentation so as not to lose any of the fruit character. Then the wine would be put into the used barrels from the previous year for just one month to get a bit of an oak backbone. While in barrel, malolactic fermentation would be prohibited so the wine would keep all of the acid it started with to further brighten the flavors. After that single month in the barrel, the wine would be pulled out and bottled."

The result is a bright clean chardonnay full of tropical and citrus fruit character. Yummy with just about any meal!

2001 Très Bien Rhone Blend, Topolos Vineyards

Topolos at Russian River Vineyards is an award-winning, family owned Winery and Restaurant located in Sonoma County. The Topolos Winery is an earth friendly operation. To this day, the Topolos vineyards and winery operations have done their best to stay true to this philosophy. In the vineyards, Michael uses organic and biodynamic practices that forbid the use of synthetic chemical products creating healthy soil that will in turn raise healthy vines and flavor-filled grapes.

The Topolos story starts in the 1960's when Michael Topolos, picked up a job in a local wine shop to make ends meet. It was his catalyst into the wine industry and in 1966 he moved to Sonoma. While working there as a wine buyer, he formed his plan to plant a vineyard of his own. In 1972 he realized that dream, buying a 50-acre parcel of land with two other partners. On it he planted 5 acres of Zinfandel. The following year, 5 acres of Chardonnay grapes were added. Soon he was doing well enough to buy out his partners and quit his wine-buying job. In 1978, while looking for more vineyard land, Michael discovered that the Russian River Vineyards Winery was up for sale. Michael and his brother Jerry purchased the property and restarted the winery operations. They converted the 100-year-old manor house into a restaurant and tasting room. The rest, as they say, is history...

The Très Bien Rhone Blend is a delicious blend of 34% Syrah, 33% Alicante Bouschet and 33% Carignane that seems to melt in your mouth. A unique, hearty, Rhone-style blend from several established vineyards in the Sierra foothills of California, this robust and full-bodied wine has a wonderful smoothness beginning with a citrus peel nose, followed by dark chocolate and smoky flavors and a cinnamon, spicy finish. It is a fine accompaniment to grilled meats and full-flavored dishes. Try this wine with dinner tonight.



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March 2006 Epic Reds Wine Club Selections

Every month our **Epic Reds Wine Club** members receive two bottles of our featured red wines. These wines are some of California's boutique winery's finest offerings. If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the fun. Happy wine tasting!

O'Brien Family Vineyard, Napa Valley

O'Brien Family Vineyard is a small, family-owned vineyard located between Napa and Yountville, in California's most famous wine producing region. The boutique property includes 26 acres of Merlot, 4 acres of Chardonnay, 2 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, 1 acre of Cabernet Franc, and an 8,400 case winery facility.

This region, recently designated the Oak Knoll District of Napa Valley appellation, is ideal for growing both chardonnay and merlot grapes. Wine history was made here in 1976 at the now famous Paris wine tasting, where French judges, in a blind tasting, were stunned to learn that they had judged two California from the Oak Knoll District wines to be superior to the most highly rated French wines.

Michael Hanna is both their vineyard and cellar manager, and he is also the great-great-grandson of John Muir, the internationally renowned naturalist. He comes from five generations of Napa grape growers with unparalleled experience using organic and sustainable farming techniques. Dave Cofran, the winemaker, has worked in the wine industry for 34 years and is a UC Davis graduate in oenology. He retired after 17 years as General Manager of Silver Oak Cellars in Napa.

O'Brien Family Vineyard is owned by Bart and Barb O'Brien, who purchased the former Costello winery from John Costello in March 2000. The winery was built in 1978 and produced approximately 8,400 cases of wine annually. The winery is unusual in that it is entirely self-contained, with everything required to turn grapes into wine, including a state of the art bottling line. Also on the property is a beautiful 5 bedroom residence, which is used as a tasting room during invitation-only parties. The winery is not open to the public.

2002 "O" Merlot, Oak Knoll District, Napa

"O" Merlot is handcrafted from grapes grown in the Oak Knoll district of Napa Valley. A beautiful deep violet color is the first indication that this is not your typical Merlot. The quality of fruit is ripe and dark exhibiting blueberry, ripe blackberry, Bing cherry, and cassis flavors. Subtle floral and spice notes accent the bold fruit adding complexity and layering to both aroma and flavor. The palate is thick and rich with youthful grippy tannins and unusually bright acidity.

The fruit for this wine was hand harvested on September 14, 2002 and gently pressed to yield a juice that needed no further adjustment. The first half of fermentation was conducted in stainless steel tanks at controlled temperature to preserve aromatics. The wine was aged for 19 months in 70% new and 30% one year old French oak barrels. At the end of barrel aging the finished wine was carefully racked to tanks for final settling.

This fine Merlot can be enjoyed immediately, but will improve with further bottle age through at least 2015.

2003 "O" Seduction, Napa

This second vintage of Seduction lives up to its name with a sensual deep color and provocative aromas. Notes of plum, dried cherry, and currants are accented by exotic notes of allspice and clove. The cedar and vanilla laced oak effortlessly makes the sum seem so much greater than the parts. The palate, though, is where this wine really seduces with a rich, round entry, bold ripe flavors, and a sexy earthiness that carries through the long, warm finish. The texture is suave and expansive with just enough grip and acidity to catch your attention, yet a plushness that is immediately appealing.

Seduction is O'Brien Family Vineyard's proprietary red blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot (Bordeaux varietal grapes) from the Napa Valley appellation. The 2003 Seduction is fantastic right now and will only get better and more seductive over the next several years with proper cellaring.