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There's No Place Like

Napa for the Holidays

words by Wine Dog – Bob Ecker



Vintage Estate and V Wine Cellar in Yountville has just debuted its Legends of Wine Winemaker Dinner Series

We all know times are difficult. I can hardly walk through Petco without lamenting the price of rawhide treats. Fortunately people still continue to need to drink wine. I say, visit wine country, go out to your local restaurants or enjoy wine at home. Why? Because the Wine Dog knows his Cab from his kibble and you'll thank me later. Whether you come up to Napa Valley or order online - there are some great wine-related gift packages up here during the holidays.

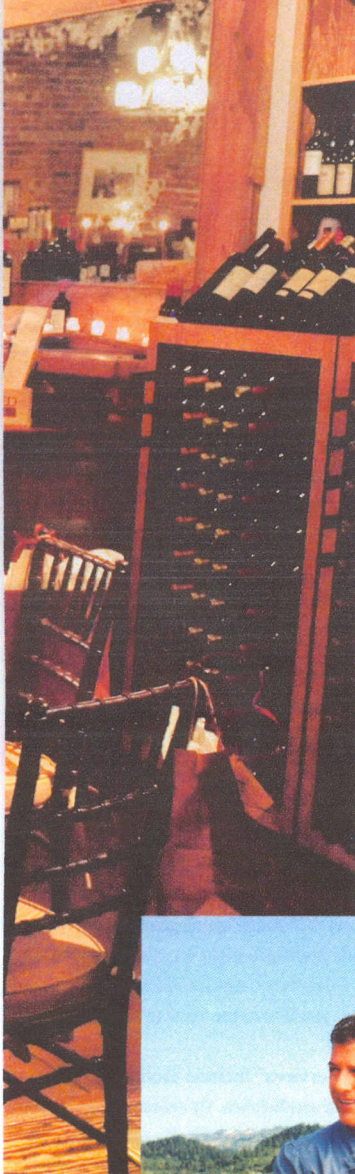
Napa's Signorello Vineyards, out on Silverado Trail, has a unique program, "Kobe & Cabernet Club," sent directly to you in special freezer packs. The holiday package includes a Waygu rib-eye roast that serves ten, paired with three bottles which includes the Estate Cabernet, the Padrone Reserve Cabernet, and the club-exclusive Meta (a 50/50 blend of cab and syrah). "Signorello Vineyards is proud to be working with Snake River Farms whose philosophy is similar to ours," said Ray Signorello, Jr., Proprietor and Winemaker. "Kobe and Cab is a natural pairing, creating the ultimate luxury food and wine experience." I've always enjoyed this Stag Leap winery quietly producing excellent wines. Incidentally, The Stags Leap

District is celebrating its 20th year in 2009 and their superb V2V event takes place in April. If you enjoy Stags Leap wines, you must take part in V2V. www.signorellovineyards.com/wine-club-kobe-cab.html.

Another of my local faves – Duckhorn - has great wine gift packs. Check out their Portfolio Collection. Duckhorn's chic Paraduxx winery is offering a new blending seminar, complete with delectable bites, in their barrel room. "The Blend Experience" is by appointment Thursday – Sunday. www.paraduxx.com

The always enjoyable Peju Province winery offers complementary open houses every weekend in December that includes goodie bags from the Peju kitchen. (www.peju.com) And the estimable Groth Winery has begun an elegant Reserve Tasting. Mondays and Thursdays at 11am, by appointment. Groth is understated and very "Oakville". www.grothwines.com

Mustards Grill, Cindy Pawlcyn's landmark Napa Valley restaurant, is celebrating its 25th year and to share in the festivities they have started a winter special with a Thursday night dinner series. I experienced the first Great Mustards Pour Off-Pair Off featuring Cindy's famous Wood Fire Grilled ▶



Chef Michael Chiarello in Napa Valley

Pork Loin paired with an unctuous Maremma Super Tuscan. Delish. The best part is diners don't have to select every recommended pairing – they go the mix-and-match route instead. I highly recommend the amazing duck breast with chili and pineapple. Always enjoyable and non-fussy, Mustards remains a consistent winner.

Chef Michael Chiarello, the Emmy winning Food Network host and founding chef of the famous Napa Valley Tra Vigne restaurant, is finally returning with Bottega, a new restaurant inside Vintage Estate's V Marketplace in Yountville. It should be open any day now. "I'm excited to again be greeting food lovers at my table with my own personal blend of Napa Valley's famous hospitality," said Chiarello. "To be joining Yountville's talented community of chefs and restaurateurs is a true honor." His shop next door, Napa Style (which features everything one can imagine in culinary appurtenances) opened in mid 2008. In a related development, the Vintage Estate and V Wine Cellar in Yountville has just debuted its Legends of Wine Winemaker Dinner Series with the venerable Christian Moueix of Dominus Estate as the opening host. Wow, what a soiree in the Barrel Room - gorgeous, lively, and fun. Try and attend one in this series.

Here's a great Bubbly class to consider. The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) has a wonderful program called Champagne in Depth (with the next program December 18th.) Attendees will sample Champagnes side by side in a one-day workshop, learning to evaluate the nuances of Champagne, food pairing, and more. Taught by Karen MacNeil, author of "The Wine Bible", this program also includes breakfast and lunch in the Institute's fascinating teaching kitchens. Contact: c_hatley@culinary.edu for further info. www.ciachef.edu/california

Meadowood Napa Valley is gearing up for a massive holiday event, "The Twelve Days of Christmas". This incredible culinary event benefits Share Our Strength®, an organization striving to wipe out childhood hunger in America. From December 9th through the 24th, 12 exclusive culinary events will bring world-renowned chefs together with extraordinary Napa Valley vintners to create unique holiday feasts each night. Not inexpensive mind you, but this will be the hot ticket in town, and certainly for a good cause. www.meadowood.com

The splendid subterranean Spa Terra, entirely within a cave, has a number of stress releasing holiday specials, like its chocolate wrap, worth exploring. (www.spatterra.com). The Taste Napa Downtown card program is a great way to sample the many wine collectives and tasting rooms, all within walking distance in the City of Napa. Lots of other perks come along with this incredible bargain. www.napadowntown.com

By the way, I just read "The Devil's Food Dictionary" by Barry Foy. Foodies, winos, and others who consume may enjoy this funny (often fictional) mix of culinary and kooky definitions.

Travelin' note – I recommend flying in and out of Sacramento, it's easy and it's a faster commute to Napa than the other Bay Area airports. Also, Horizon Air now flies directly from LAX to the "new" Sonoma County Airport, not too far from Napa. There are plenty of other events, wineries, and fine places to enjoy here too. Drink up, have fun, and happy holidays. ■