



For years I wrote the WOM selections and included recipes because I love to show how a great food and wine pairing work. I never received a lot of feedback about the recipes until one month when I did an extended write up and skipped them, boy did I get feedback then! (In fact it almost makes me wonder if anyone reads about the wines.) So every few months I make the selections in reverse order, finding a recipe I really like then wines to match. January is one of those months but I think you will agree, these are some great combinations.

## **2008 Nieto Senetiner Chardonnay Reserva (\$12)**

I made the first recipe this month and started looking for a good Italian white to pair. As it turns out, in my taste test I preferred this bottling, which seemed to bring out the earthy quality of the bean salad better than any of the other wines. I never would have thought a Chardonnay would be the best choice, but once you open this wine you will see why.

This wine comes from the northern region of Mendoza, an area called Lujan de Cuyo. The vineyards of this area sit at very high elevation, often over 5000 feet. As a result the vines receive the trifecta of perfect growing conditions: hot days, cold nights and very little rain. In the day the leaves create a lot of sugar that gets pumped to the grapes for storage. At night the cold temperatures cause the vine to shut down, preserving malic acid in the grapes and the lack of water prevents all sorts of molds and funguses, and makes it hard for critters to live.

The Nieto winery is one of the oldest in the appellation, being founded in 1888. It is a large estate of over 1000 acres with a state-of-the-art winery on the property. Unlike many wineries in the area they only focus on wines selling for at least \$10 a bottle, with this brand being their lowest-end shipped to the United States. Despite their size they take great care to make sure that every wine is distinctive and shows the character of the region.

For this Chardonnay all the fruit is hand picked into small baskets then pressed using a modern, pneumatic bladder press. All of the juice is drained to stainless steel tanks via gravity then chilled overnight before the fermentation is allowed to begin. After fifteen days, or when the wine is completely dry, it is moved to French oak barrels, where it is aged for four months before bottling. Winemaker Roberto Gonzalez uses barrels for their oxidative qualities but they are all two or three years old, so they do not impart much wood flavor in the wine. I think it is the subtle texture that is achieved during this step that makes this wine stand out with the shrimp and bean dish. After aging the wine is bottled and then held for an additional four months before shipping.

When you decide to drink this wine I encourage you to do so with food, this is not cocktail Chardonnay. The nose shows notes of magnolia blossom, Meyer lemon and tangerine, with the faintest notes of butterscotch and vanilla. In the mouth this wine is clean and fresh, with a sense of texture that pops out mid-palate that tells you it is fuller bodied than the nose indicates. The finish is almost soft, with the understated sense of oak giving a persistent, slightly nutty quality. Drink this wine over the next year with grilled fish, shrimp or chicken.

## **2005 Curtis Winery Heritage Cuvee Rouge (\$16)**

I tasted this wine in the summer and really liked it, buying a few cases, but it never gained traction due to the onslaught of stunning 2007 Southern Rhones that we sold at the same time. The supplier reached out to me in October to find out if I would consider a winter feature for the club and, after tasting another sample, decided I knew exactly where the wine would work. Wait until you taste this with the Sicilian shrimp recipe.

The Curtis winery was founded in 1995 and is dedicated to producing only Rhone varieties. Their vineyards lie in the heart of the Santa Ynez Valley, an area with diverse climatic conditions and the source of some really thrilling wines. Most of the soil is ocean floor pushed up by tectonic plate shifts, so it is limestone based and has good drainage. Winemaker Chuck Carlson, who has been with the winery since its inception, has worked to match clonal material with the proper rootstocks in order to de-vigor the vines in such perfect growing conditions. By doing this he forces the vines to naturally produce less fruit and that yields wines with greater concentration. For this bottling some of the Syrah and all of the Grenache and Cinsault come off their estate vineyard. They also buy Syrah and Mourvedre from the famed Vogelzang vineyard, which is a warmer site, and contributes additional body and aromatics.

Curtis produces a number of single varietal wines for their Single Vineyard and Estate Series, all designed to be long lived, and relatively expensive. For the Heritage Series, of which there is a delicious white too, the emphasis is on drinkability. The wine is aged mostly in French oak barrels for eighteen months, of which there are no new barrels. Carlson, who's nickname is Calypso due to his penchant for wearing Hawaiian shirts, wants to emphasize the fruit of this wine, not oak, which also makes it ideal for pairing with food.

When you pull the cork on this wine and pour a glass you will notice that it is not terribly dark. The nose shows sappy cherry and raspberry notes, complicated by fresh sage, rosemary and thyme. In the mouth this wine is not super deep but has a charming sense of fruit that runs from the tip of the tongue into the long finish. If there were ever tannins in this wine they are gone now and consequently this is one of the softest, juiciest reds I have tasted in quite a while. Drink over the next few months with lamb stew, snapper poached with tomatoes and olives or with the Sicilian shrimp dish.

## **Ten days off, four pounds on**

I always take off the week between Christmas and New Year's, reconnecting with my family after a fast and furious holiday season. We usually go out of town for a couple of nights but this year we stayed close to home and I tried to wear out my wife's new panini press. We also travelled to the Gainesville Farmer's Market, which my produce buyer friend Dan, tells me is the best in the state. What makes their market worth the two hour plus drive is that the products sold must be grown or harvested from no more than 50 miles from Gainesville. This time of year most of the produce available is greens and citrus, but there was a gentleman selling head-on, Mayport, flash frozen shrimp (U-16's.) I bought five pounds, and after a short side trip to Dunellen for pie, went home and started working on recipes. This month both recipes are inspired by those heavenly, wild caught shrimp and Mario Batali. If you don't like shrimp both recipes should work nicely with chicken or tilapia.

### **Grilled Shrimp with white bean salad**

**1 1/2 cups cooked white beans (canned is fine)**  
**1/2 cup, red onion, cut in 1/4 in dice**  
**2 tbsp fresh mint, chopped fine**  
**1 tbsp fresh rosemary, chopped fine**  
**1/2 cup olive oil**  
**zest and juice of one lemon**  
**salt and pepper to taste**

**1 1/2 lbs of the biggest shrimp you can find**

**2 cups of arugula**

Preheat the grill or broiler. In a medium bowl combine beans, onion, herbs, two tablespoons of olive oil, lemon juice and zest. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Season the shrimp with salt and pepper, brush with the remaining olive oil and grill or broil, turning once, until cooked through, about four minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

Mix the arugula and beans and arrange in the center of four plates. Divide the shrimp between the plates, leaning them against the salad. Drizzle with the remaining olive oil and serve.

### **Shrimp Sicilian Style**

**2 tbsp olive oil**  
**1 red onion, cut into 1/4 inch dice**  
**1 rib of celery, chopped fine**  
**1/2 fennel bulb, cut into 1/2 inch dice**  
**4 plum tomatoes, chopped ( I prefer canned)**  
**1 tbsp pine nuts, toasted**  
**1 tbsp currants (or raisins)**  
**2 tbsp capers, rinsed and drained**  
**1 cup dry Marsala**  
**1/2 tsp hot pepper flakes**  
**1 bay leaf**  
**2 lbs of shrimp, head-on is best**  
**salt and pepper to taste**  
**1/2 cup parsley, chopped fine**

In a 10 or 12 inch saute pan, heat olive oil over medium heat until almost smoking. Add the onion, celery and fennel bulb and cook until softened. Add the tomatoes, pine nuts, currants, capers, marsala, pepper flakes and bay leaf and bring to a boil.

Remove the pan from the heat and lay the shrimp in one layer into the sauce. Season with salt and pepper and cover. Then return the mixture to the heat and simmer for four minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to rest, covered for four minutes.

Serve this dish warm or at room temperature over rice or couscous.