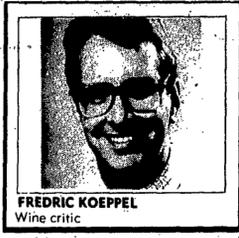


WORDS ON WINE

Making the case for California 'old-timers'

Pick of the week:

In the regular estate bottled Charles Krug Cabernet Sauvignon 1991, Napa Valley, we find a conventional but enjoyable wine with a core of concentrated raspberry-black currant fruit. It could age for three to five years, but it's good now for those who like a cabernet with plenty of backbone. Its present character would make it appropriate with steaks and hearty autumn dishes. About \$13.



FREDRIC KOEPFEL
Wine critic

I know, I'm always saying, "Drink wines when they're young, life is too short and you don't have a cellar." The corollary is that we ought to taste older wines any time the opportunity presents itself. It's a matter of curiosity, of checking on the state of a wine during hibernation, of gaining experience.

I wrote "older" rather than "old" on purpose, because we're talking about California wines today, not 25- or 50- or 100-year-old Bordeaux wines. Not many wines from California exist over the age of 20 or 25. Only a few collectors hoarded wines from such great years as 1968 or

1974, and the track records for aging California wines have yet to be set.

In the short history of the Napa Valley's post-Prohibition wine industry, Mayacamas Vineyards qualifies as an old-timer. The mountainside winery was founded in 1941 by Jack and Mary Taylor, who sold the concern to Bob and Elinor Travers in 1968. Mayacamas concentrates on cabernet sauvignon (about 2,000 cases annually), noted for its firm oaken and tannic structure, and also produces small quantities of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc and an occasional late-harvest zinfandel.

I recently tasted Mayacamas cabernets from 1990, 1989, 1985 and 1983. The complaint is often registered that Mayacamas cabernets sacrifice fruit to tannin, and, true to form, these wines, particularly the '89 and '85, were abidingly firm and resolute. The '89 exhibited close to unspeakable toughness and mineral depths. The '85 is a huge, biting and austere wine that will require five to eight years even to see if it will come around. The '85 and '89 can be found at retail for about \$35.

From the not-so-great vintage 1983, Mayacamas produced a more-than-decent cabernet that displays a generous, mellow, mineral bouquet; in the mouth, the wine shows plenty of grip, a high gloss of dried herbs and flowers and raspberry-tea flavors. After a few minutes in the glass, however, the wine gains a dusty tannic quality, and the fruit submerges. Available at the winery, about \$45.

It seems clear that the Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon 1990 is the best cabernet the winery has made in a decade. The bouquet develops from an

initial scent of mint and minerals to a heady fragrance of thyme, lavender and dried cherries; plenty of oak and tannin assert themselves, but the tannin — at first — is soft and grainy, encouraging the concentrated plum and black currant flavors to float to the surface. Give it five to eight years. About \$25.

The wines I didn't expect to be excited by, but was, were two Mayacamas chardonnays. Made completely without barrel-fermentation, malolactic fermentation or aging on the lees (sediment of dead yeast cells), these chardonnays were thrilling in their elegance, audacity and purity.

The Mayacamas Chardonnay 1990 is so perfectly balanced that you don't notice its stupendous 14.5 percent alcohol, so beautifully integrated that its 12 months in oak barrels seem merely to have lent an inextricable sheen to each atom in the bottle. No gushing, buttery, billowy, toasty tropical chardonnay here; its essence lies in hints and nods toward spice, limestone, caramel, flowers and dried herbs and citrus flavors,

bolstered with essential but respectful oak and acid. Wow. About \$20.

At this point, the Mayacamas Chardonnay 1992 is more high-toned and austere than its older cousin; there's a touch of juiciness to the citrus-pineapple fruit, a pass at cloves and floral fragrance, a burgeoning earthy chalky note. It needs three to five years to blossom. About \$16, and the chardonnay bargain of the decade.

Dignified, profound and grown-up, these wines definitely do not line up with the state's myriad "me-too" chardonnays. Founded in the Napa Valley in 1861, Charles Krug Winery rates as the second-oldest in the state; a bit older is Buena Vista, established in 1857. (Both, of course, took time out for Prohibition.)

Krug has suffered from inconsistent quality for decades, though it found a firm foundation again with red wines in the mid-1980s. It's the winery, by the way, that Robert Mondavi, after long battles with his brother and mother, broke away from in 1966 to start his own now widespread empire.

Krug markets a reserve-style cabernet under the Vintage Selection designation, recognizable by the diagonal red stripe in the label's upper left corner. I recently tried the Krug Vintage Selection Cabernets from 1991, 1988 and 1983.

All are well-made and fairly straightforward red wines. The simplest is the rustic '88, featuring a vivid youthful bouquet, luscious black currant and blackberry fruit and firm but well-mannered oak and tannin. The '83 is surprisingly lively and spicy; the mellow bouquet is dusty, fleshy and bacony. In the mouth, the wine displays raspberry-cherry flavors and dense tannin whose presence grows in the glass, slightly dominating the fruit. This wine has been re-released by the winery at about \$20.

The Krug Vintage Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 1991 is the blockbuster of the trio, though it's a wine that finds its ideal in solidity and power rather than complexity, requiring five to seven years to soften. About \$28.

(Fredric Koepfel writes this Scripps Howard News Service column weekly for The Commercial Appeal in Memphis.)



AP Photo

Chocolate Hanukkah Stars

Chocolate star cookies perfect Hanukkah treat

By The Associated Press

For Hanukkah, bake and serve chocolate Hanukkah stars. These festive cookies are made with cocoa and dusted with powdered sugar. The cookies can also be served plain.

Chocolate Hanukkah Stars

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 2 eggs
 - 2 cups all-purpose flour
 - 1/2 cup cocoa
 - 1 tsp. baking powder
 - 1/2 tsp. baking soda
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - Powdered sugar
- In a large bowl, beat butter, sugar and eggs on medium speed of electric mixer until light and

fluffy. Stir together flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda and salt; add to butter mixture, beating until well blended. Cover; refrigerate dough until firm enough to handle. Heat oven to 350 degrees F. On lightly floured surface, roll dough to 1/4-inch thickness; cut with star-shaped cookie cutter. Place on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake in a 350-degree F oven for 5 to 7 minutes or until no imprint remains when touched lightly in center. Cook for 1 minute; remove from cookie sheet to wire rack. Cool completely. Sprinkle with powdered sugar. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.

Nutrition facts per serving: 60 cal., 1 g pro., 9 g carbo., 2.5 g fat, 15 mg chol., 70 mg sodium, 10 mg calcium.
Recipe from: Hershey's Cocoa

Try Indian-style corn bread

By The Associated Press

Corn bread is always popular. The following recipe is an adaptation of Indian sweet-potato corn bread from the New York Public Library cookbook, "Around The American Table," by Michael Kronlid (Adams Media Corp.).

The baking powder is a modern addition, although it is possible that a leavening may once have been made from wood ashes; ash can combine with the natural acids of corn to form carbon dioxide.

Before European ovens came along, the bread was probably baked by setting it on a stone that had been heated with hot coals. An earthenware pan was then set over the bread and more coals heaped on top of it. This bread will be a little richer if you use milk, though water is more

authentic.

Sweet Potato Corn Bread

- 2 lbs. sweet potatoes
 - 1 Tbsp. butter
 - 1 cup cornmeal
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - 2 tsp. baking powder
 - 1 cup water or milk
- Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

Place the sweet potatoes in a small baking pan; bake until very tender, about 1 to 1 1/2 hours, depending on size. Cool briefly, then scoop out and mash the pulp. Measure 2 cups pulp. Butter a 10-inch cake pan or similar baking dish with the 1 tablespoon butter. Stir together the cornmeal, salt and baking powder. Add the water or milk. Stir in the mashed potatoes. Spoon into the prepared dish. Bake in a 375-degree F oven for 30 to 40 minutes, until firm. Makes 6 servings.

Microwave good holiday helper

By WOODENE MERRIMAN
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

After two glasses of pink champagne, Great Aunt Gertrude's getting giggly. Cousin Horace is starting in again on "how I won the war." And under the dining room table, the 4-year-old and the 3-year-old, tired of sharing, are pulling Pocahontas apart.

It's time to get dinner on the table, in a hurry. But you forgot a few things. The microwave is good at covering for you. For example:

The turkey's out of the oven, and has been standing, draped



Cooking with your microwave

with foil, the requisite 30 minutes before carving. When you cut into it, the breast is done but the legs aren't.

Put the underdone legs in a

Pumpkin flan sports less fat and calories

Ottawa News Service

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Made with egg substitute and evaporated skim milk, this reduced-fat flan sports pumpkin-pie seasonings and the traditional caramel topping. It tastes rich yet has only 3 grams of fat and 185 calories per serving.

Both desserts can be made a day or two ahead and need no further attention until serving time.

Adding corn syrup to the sugar when making the caramel and cooking it in the microwave reduces the chances of overcooking or burning.

Reduced-Fat Pumpkin Flan

- 1 cup sugar, divided
- 2 Tbsp. light corn syrup
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. water
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1 tsp. ground allspice
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup (8 oz.) frozen egg substitute, thawed
- 1 can (12 oz.) evaporated skim milk

In 10-inch deep-dish pie plate or round 1-quart casserole, place cup sugar, spreading evenly. Drizzle corn syrup, lemon juice and water over the sugar. Do not stir. Place in microwave oven and heat on high power 2 minutes. Rotate turn and continue microwaving in 30-second intervals. When sugar starts to melt and turn brown, microwave in 10-second intervals, rotating

It's a hot Chile

What's the world's hottest chile? The Red Savina Habanero. Recently accepted into the Guinness Book of Records as the hottest chile known, the wrinkled Chinese-lantern-shaped fruits are even hotter than the regular orange habaneros, tipping the Scoville heat scale at 350,000 to 400,000 units.

Red Savina's flesh has that fiery fruitiness that characterizes this family of chilies, which includes Mexican habaneros and the incendiary Scotch bonnet peppers of the Caribbean.

smorgasbord, the weekly food section of the Press-Republican is edited by Staff Writer Sue Boetford.

microwave-safe casserole, cover with crumpled wax paper, and zap at 50 percent power a few minutes. Time will depend on the size of the legs and how much additional cooking they need.

Forgot to get the butter out of the refrigerator to soften a little? Zap a stick of cold butter at 20 percent power for 15 to 20 seconds. If it is light butter (with water in it), reduce the time.

Dinner rolls are cold? Place four on a paper towel on a plate, put another paper towel on top. Zap 15 to 18 seconds on high. Take care not to overheat; they'll get so hard Cousin Horace could break a tooth.

The after-dinner chevre, Camembert or brie isn't as "ripe" as you'd like? Unwrap the cheese, put a half pound on a serving plate and zap at 50 percent for 1 minute, until the center begins to soften. Let stand 2 minutes before serving.

To warm up microwave-safe serving dishes, fill one with hot

water and zap until the water begins to steam. Remove, pour the water into another serving dish and repeat the process, until all serving dishes have been heated.

To warm up microwave-safe dinner plates, run each one quickly under the hot water faucet, or sprinkle with water, stack up to six at a time and zap on high. In my 850-watt microwave, six plates get very warm in 3 minutes. Dry with a dish towel.

If the 8-ounce tub of non-dairy whipped topping for the pumpkin pie is still in the freezer, get it out and zap it at 30 percent for 1 minute to thaw.

(Woodene Merriman is the author of "Zap It Again," featuring more than 400 ways to use your microwave. To order, send your name and address and a check for \$10.07 (\$8.50 plus \$1.57 for postage and handling), payable to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, to Zap It Cookbook, Box 476, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15230. Allow two weeks for delivery.)
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