

# FOOD & DRINK

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2012 • RGJ.COM/FOOD



CONTACT  
JOHNATHAN L. WRIGHT  
775-327-6770  
JWRIGHT@RGJ.COM

## EATING NEWS & NOTES

### Wines help family

Through Dec. 31, the Grill at Quail Corners, 6520 S. McCarran Blvd., is offering deep discounts on bottle and case sales of wines from Wente Vineyards, Tamás Estates and Entwine.

The proceeds benefit the family of local wine broker Dennis Medina Jr., who passed away in February and who brokered the wines. Details: 775-827-6262.

### SPARKLING WINE TASTING AT VINTAGE

Today from 5 to 8 p.m., Vintage Wine Shop, 6135 Lakeside Drive, is offering a tasting of sparkling wines for \$20. Details: www.vintagewineshop.com or 775-824-9463.

### BOYS & GIRLS CLUB HOLIDAY HELPERS

Boys & Girls Club of Truckee Meadows is still seeking people or organizations to be holiday helpers by adopting a local child or family facing economic challenges. Wish list items range from food baskets and clothes to toys and school supplies.

Contact Kathleen Oppio at koppio@bgctm.org or 775-331-5437, ext. 210, or drop off donations through Dec. 18 at the Donald W. Reynolds Facility, 2680 E. Ninth St.

### EAT, DRINK AT 'POWER OF THE PURSE'

From 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Reno Ballroom, 401 N. Center St., the Nevada Women's Fund is presenting its fifth annual Power of the Purse to benefit programs to empower women.

The event features appetizers, drinks and vendors selling beauty products, home decor items, jewelry and more.

Cost: \$45 at the door. Details: www.nevadawomensfund.org or 775-786-2335.

### FREE LA STRADA MUSHROOM RAVIOLI

Through Dec. 18, La Strada restaurant in the Eldorado Hotel Casino, 345 N. Virginia St., is offering a free appetizer of mushroom ravioli in porcini cream sauce with the purchase of a regular-price entrée.

The Eldorado is known for its mushroom ravioli, which are made fresh daily in its pasta shop. La Strada is open from 5 p.m. Friday through Tuesday. Reservations: 775-786-5700.

### LOCALLY CRAFTED SIERRA KOMBUCHA

Sierra Kombucha Company makes its kombucha, a fermented tea, in Minden. In Reno, it can be found at Everlasting Health Center, Great Basin Community Food Co-op, Rubicon Deli, the Studio and Súp.

In Carson City, look for the product at Lifestream Natural Food Store. The kombucha also is available at Hungry Mother Organics and Minden Meat & Deli in Minden and at various Raley's. Details: Facebook.

— Johnathan L. Wright, RGJ

#### INSIDE

**IN ONE EAR:** Ladies about town; meeting interesting people at the bar. **Page 2**

**COURTNEY'S KITCHEN:** Cinnamon rolls for Christmas morning. **Page 2**

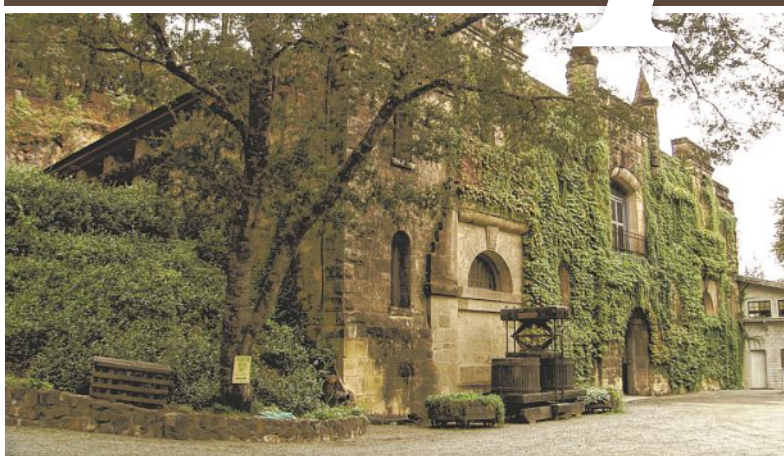
#### ON THE WEB

#### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow Food & Drink on Twitter at @RGJTaste and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/RGJTaste.



## Three for the pour



Clockwise from top: Robert Sinskey Vineyards raises lambs; cabernet sauvignon vines at PlumpJack Winery; and the chateau that houses the tasting room and winemaking operations at Chateau Montelena. PHOTOS BY JENNIFER BLAND/FOR THE RGJ AND PROVIDED TO THE RGJ

### A trio of Napa Valley wineries with friendly folk, accomplished wines and stylish settings

By Laura Longero  
llongero@rgj.com

The Napa Valley is a special place for me because it's the first wine region I ever visited, and it's where my husband and I fell in love. But when some people talk about visiting the valley, they often use words like pretentious, touristy and overpriced. True, tasting rooms can be crowded with people willing to pay a lot for Napa's prestigious wines, especially its renowned cabernet sauvignon, but the valley's reputation among some is hardly fair.

During a trip to Napa Valley earlier this fall, I had the opposite experience. I've always been impressed by the quality of the wine produced in the valley, but this time, I got a chance to meet winemakers and winery staff, who were attentive and talented, kind and hospitable.

And, not to mention the physical beauty of the valley itself, bordered on the west by the forested Mayacamas Mountains and on the east by

#### IF YOU GO

» **PlumpJack Winery**, 620 Oakville Cross Road, Oakville, Calif., 707-945-1220, www.plumpjackwinery.com;

» **Chateau Montelena Winery**, 1429 Tubbs Lane, Calistoga, Calif., 707-942-5105, www.montelena.com;

» **Robert Sinskey Vineyards**, 6320 Silverado Trail, Napa, Calif., 707-944-9090, www.robertsinskey.com

the golden hills of the Vaca range. A thin, hazy fog blankets the vineyards when I arrive. Driving along side roads between the main thoroughfares of Silverado Trail and California Highway 29 is an adventure in itself as I steer and look for signs and my companion looks at a map.

Suddenly, I have to screech to a near halt to turn onto a dirt road along the vines — they're laden with dark purple grapes — and into the winery and tasting room parking lot. The trees are heavy with leaves in

See **NAPA VALLEY**, Page 4E

#### HOLIDAY WINES

The holidays are for celebrating, so leave the budget wines in the cellar. Try these wines — a red, white and sparkler — for your holiday feast this year:

#### CHAMPAGNE JACQUES COPINET BRUT

**Alcohol:** 12 percent  
**Price:** About \$42

**Tasting notes:** Pale straw in color with aromas of brioche, white peach and honeysuckle; on the palate, it's dry with medium acidity and subtle fruit notes. Pair with roast chicken.

#### 2009 DRY CREEK VINEYARD ESTATE SAUVIGNON BLANC DCV3

**Alcohol:** 13.5 percent  
**Price:** \$25

**Tasting notes:** Straw-colored with minerally aromas of pear, fig and grape-

fruit. On the palate, the fruit shines forward first, followed by oily notes, structured acidity and a lingering finish. Pair with shrimp cocktail.

#### 2009 LAPOSTOLLE LAS KURAS VINEYARD CUVÉE ALEXANDRE SYRAH

**Alcohol:** 14.1 percent  
**Price:** \$24.99

**Tasting notes:** Inky ruby in color with aromas of black pepper, black plum, blueberry and vanilla. On the palate, it has structured tannins and acidity with powerful fruit. Pair with braised short ribs.

— Laura Longero, RGJ

## Make-ahead sausage strata for Christmas morn

One of the best gifts you can give yourself and your family is a homemade, freshly baked, hot-from-the-oven Christmas breakfast or brunch. But with all the holiday scurrying and hurrying, planning a Christmas morning meal might feel like just another stressor. So let me share a night-before-Christmas secret (and no, it's not the fastest way to assemble a two-wheeler): Make breakfast the day before.

Yes. If you spend an hour or so prepping the day before, you'll have a huge payoff. You'll be able to be in the moment with your family and friends, and you'll probably sleep better, too, knowing you've got breakfast in the bag.

#### DISH IT UP

**NANCY HORN**, owner of Dish Café and Catering, uses fresh ingredients to create upscale comfort food.



Our family's Christmas morning is actually a combination of several traditions.

Strata, the main dish, is a twist on what my Mom made every year when I was growing up. Strata is a baked breakfast casserole. Our version is stuffed with morning's best offerings like buttered toast, spicy sausage sautéed with wine, and layers of

See **DISH IT UP**, Page 3E



The filling for Christmas morning strata can be chopped meats or sautéed vegetables or a mix of both. ANDY BARRON/RGJ

# Napa Valley

Continued from Page 1E

fall hues of red, orange and gold.

## California royalty

Even with its physical beauty, the call of the Napa Valley is its wines. The first stop is PlumpJack Winery in Oakville and a tour and tasting with PlumpJack marketing director Christian Oggenfuss. The winery is on the Oakville Cross Road between Silverado Trail and Highway 29, along with famous neighbors like Groth, Silver Oak and Opus One. The tasting room is nestled between rows and rows of vines.

California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom and philanthropist Gordon Getty established PlumpJack Winery in 1995, and it's surrounded by a 42-acre estate vineyard. PlumpJack's owners also have debuted Cade Winery (up on Howell Mountain) and, most recently, Odette Estate (in the Stags Leap District of the valley), which both produce wine from organically farmed grapes.

Getty, who has an extensive wine collection, experienced many wines with cork taint and thought PlumpJack should employ screw caps. So, half the wines are sealed with screw caps and half are sealed with corks.

Oggenfuss said the screw caps could be recycled and were locally produced. Wine ages slower with a screw cap enclosure, which allows winemakers to control the amount of oxygen transfer that happens. PlumpJack and the University of California at Davis are conducting a study to test all wine enclosures.

The winery prides itself on the approachability of the brand, and Oggenfuss said crush happened right in front of the tasting room.

"Make the best wine you can, but don't bring the snobbery with it," he said.

PlumpJack's chardonnay is the reason for my visit because I tasted it years ago and still remember its vibrancy. Oggenfuss said the chardonnay was 100 percent French oak-aged and had zero malolactic fermentation. "We've built a very loyal following with our chardonnay."

Head winemaker Aaron Miller said the site the grapes were harvested from produced a natural creaminess, so he forgoes malolactic fermentation to keep the malic acid in the wine for a crisper, cleaner chardonnay.

"We are able to have a wine that has great acidity," Miller said. "I let the vines speak for themselves."

And they do. The 2011 PlumpJack Napa Valley

reserve chardonnay is made from 100 percent chardonnay grapes. It has aromas of apple, pear and baking spices. On the palate, the wine is crisp and refreshing, with a luscious mouthfeel and a lengthy finish.

PlumpJack's 2010 Napa Valley merlot is the only PlumpJack wine not aged completely in French oak — it has some American oak thrown into the aging. The blend includes about 5 percent (or less) cabernet sauvignon. On the nose, there are blackberry, juicy plum, chocolate and vanilla aromas. On the palate, juicy fruit and acidity, a luscious texture, and a great balance among acidity, tannins and fruit.

The 2009 Napa Valley estate cabernet sauvignon garnered 94-plus points from Wine Advocate critic Antonio Galloni in December 2011 for its "remarkable freshness, clarity and precision."

Oggenfuss said the 2009 was almost sold out, but the 2010 vintage would be released soon. The 2009 has aromas of black cherry, cola and clove. On the palate, it has acidity, structured tannins and black fruit flavors with a lengthy finish.

Oggenfuss said PlumpJack's estate cabernet sauvignons should be aged five years if a young and fruity style is preferred or 15 to 20 years for those who appreciate older wines.

The 2010 Napa Valley syrah was made in the style of syrahs from the Northern Rhône in France and was aged in Burgundy barrels, Oggenfuss said. It has aromas of bacon and plum. On the palate, it's velvety but structured, layered, elegant and intensely complex.

"Great wine is made in the vineyard," Oggenfuss said.

## Of French fame

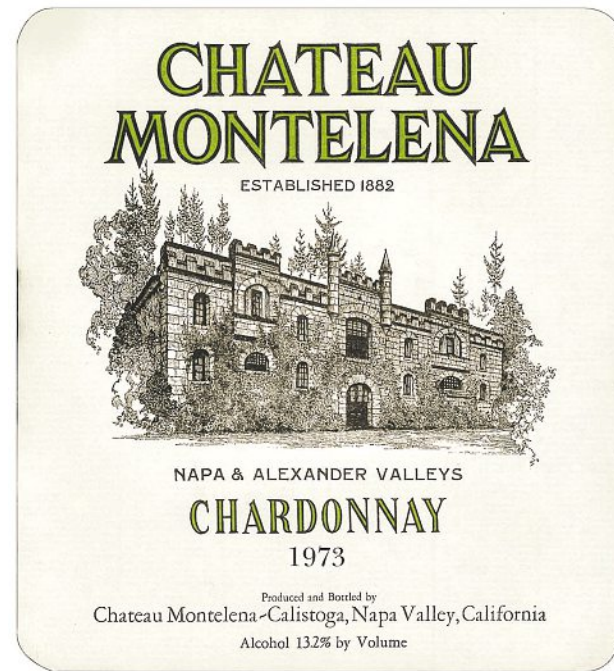
The next day, a trip north on Highway 29 to Calistoga is in order to visit renowned Chateau Montelena Winery, made famous by its 1973 chardonnay's triumph over white Burgundies in the 1976 Judgment of Paris tasting. The winery, one of the oldest in Napa Valley, was founded by Albert Tubbs in 1882.

The Old World chateau houses the winery and tasting room, as well as exhibits that detail the winery's history and previous owners, including the Frank family, who added a pagoda and the lake to the property. The James L. Barrett family, made famous by the movie "Bottle Shock," bought the winery in 1972.

The winery has revamped its production facility while maintaining the character of the building, Chateau Montelena winemaker Cameron Parry said. He described the 2012 vintage



A shield announces PlumpJack Winery on the exterior of the tasting room. JENNIFER BLAND/FOR THE RGJ



The label of the 1973 Chateau Montelena chardonnay that beat out famed French white Burgundies during the 1976 Judgment of Paris tasting, an event that put Napa Valley wines on the map. PROVIDED BY CHATEAU MONTELENA



A selection of pinot noirs from Robert Sinskey Vineyards. PROVIDED BY ROBERT SINSEY VINEYARDS

as classic.

"(It was a) really good growing season all around — great yields, great quality. This year's weather has been ideal. In farming and production, we want average — it means no surprises."

And then, it's time to taste. The 2011 Chateau Montelena Napa Valley sauvignon blanc has aromas of melon, grapefruit, lemon and lime, and has notes of crisp fruit and refreshing acidity on the palate.

Montelena founder Alfred Tubbs made riesling, so master winemaker Bo Barrett sticks with it. The 2011 Potter Valley riesling is a "wonderfully aromatic wine (that) shows layers of floral notes — soft, round and fleshy on the palate," Parry said.

The winery's famous chardonnay has zero malolactic fermentation, features free-run and first-pressed juice only, and is fermented in stainless steel and aged in 80 percent new French oak. The winery buys its grapes for chardonnay

each year. The 2010 Napa Valley chardonnay has aromas of crisp apple, pear, river rock and lemon. On the palate, it's crisp and clean, almost like a Chablis.

The first vintage of Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon was 1991. Before, it was called Calistoga cuvée. The 2009 Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon is made to be approachable and drinkable right away, though it could be aged for eight to 10 years. It has brambly aromas of black fruits like blackberry and plum mingled with vanilla and cedar. On the palate, it has structured acidity and tannins.

The estate cabernet is winemaker Parry's favorite wine to create, he said, and the grapes are gleaned from the same blocks of vines each year, the oldest of which are from 1972. The estate cabernet is made in a similar house style each year; its first release was the 1978 vintage. The 2005 Montelena estate cabernet sauvignon has aromas of black pepper,

black cherry and cocoa with intensity on the palate and a lengthy finish.

## Lunch among the vines

Vintner Rob Sinskey is a bit of a renegade. The elegant, balanced wines produced at his winery, Robert Sinskey Vineyards, are made in an Old World style and stay true to that philosophy rather than pander to critics and consumer trends. In fact, Sinskey doesn't even send his wines out for review.

As the winery's website puts it: "We never said we were making wine for everybody ... just for those who appreciate age-worthy, classically-proportioned wines that open as they swirl in the glass. But most of all, we make wine for those who enjoy it, not as a points-driven athletic competition, but as a culinary journey, paired with the right foods and shared with the right company."

The vineyard was the brainchild of Sinskey's father, Bob Sinskey. He had the idea that the American diet would be changing and with that change would come demand for lighter-bodied red wines like pinot noir. He bought a 15-acre farm, then acquired more land. By 1985, he had 115 acres in production when the winery he had been selling grapes to, Acacia Vineyard, was sold.

With no one to purchase his grapes, he hired a winemaker and went into wine production. The winery opened in 1988, and his son, Rob, took over management of the winery; in 1996, Rob took over the vineyards as well. He and winemaker Jeff Virnig converted the vineyards to organic beginning in 1991 and adopted biodynamic methods.

The winery started with pinot noir. Rob Sinskey said the winery produced age-worthy pinots that tended to be more understated, with lower alcohol and more acidity, because "pinot noir should be subtle." He said pinot noir was his first passion, and he likes both how it ages and its culinary potential for matching with food.

Sinskey is a self-taught winemaker who said he wanted to be successful in the vineyard first. "We do things as pure and natural as we can."

The wine-making operation includes 18,000 square feet of cave de-

## ON RGJ.COM

Visit this story on RGJ.com to see a photo gallery.

signed like a honeycomb, one that includes a wine library room that holds old vintages and seats 60 people at two long tables. Wine bottles line the walls and ceiling, which is barrel vaulted. I ask Sinskey if he worries about the bottles falling from their perches (they are wired in, but still), and he said he was more worried about someone imbibing too much and knocking into the precious bottles.

The Sinskey operation also includes raising lambs, working gardens, and a kitchen run by Sinskey's wife, chef Maria Helm Sinskey. During my visit to the winery, I got to taste the fruits of labor at Robert Sinskey Vineyards — in the glass and on the plate.

Lunch with Rob Sinskey begins with an early fall salad of heirloom apples, toasted pecans and Point Reyes Original blue cheese. Paired with the salad is Sinskey's 2011 Abraxas, a blend of pinot gris, riesling, gewürztraminer, and pinot blanc from the winery's Scintilla Sonoma vineyard. The wine has intoxicating aromas of peach, honeysuckle, apricots and fragrant flowers. On the palate, it's juicy and fruity, with a lingering finish.

Next, three glasses are filled with different wines to be paired with with smashed new potatoes; haricots verts, Niçoise olives and shallots; and with chops from lambs the Sinskeys raise.

The 2009 Four Vineyards Los Carneros pinot noir arrives first, bursting with fruit. The pinot has aromas of red cherry, cranberry, raspberry and violets. On the palate, acidity emerges, followed by tart fruit, elegant structure and an enduring finish. Although we sip only this one pinot during lunch, the winery offers several more.

The "POV" in Sinskey's 2009 POV Napa Valley red blend of merlot, cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon stands for "point of view" — as in a fine wine needs to evolve from a distinct point of view. The juicy POV has aromas of leather and dark plum, with refreshing acidity, elegance and restraint that lingers on the palate.

The last wine, the one paired with the lamb, is the 2006 Marcién Los Carneros proprietary red blend, which offers aromas of cassis, lavender and blueberry; structured tannins and acidity; and a layered, lingering finish.

Rounding out the meal is a cheese course featuring Cowgirl Creamery's wagon wheel with olive toasts and plum mostarda, and a fig tart with whipped crème fraîche. When the conversation and wine are flowing, and the food is superb, heart and head are sublimely in tune, if only for a few precious hours away from everyday life.

Follow Laura Longero on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/SipRGJ](http://www.facebook.com/SipRGJ)

**SCAMP BAR**  
 20 MINUTE OR LESS SOUP & SALAD LUNCH BUFFET  
 Holiday Party? Let Us Provide The Food!  
 Call Now For Pricing!  
 425 S. Virginia, Reno | 775-284-0660  
 www.scampireno.com

**DONNA LUCHETTI**  
 YOUR TRUSTED REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL SINCE 1979  
 You Can Count on Me!  
 CALL TODAY 775-741-1468  
 DLuchetti@dicksonrealty.com **DICKSON REALTY**

**We've Got Homes to Sell You!**  
 In Fallon Area.  
**Berney Realty** LTD.  
 Contact Berney Realty  
 Mike Berney 775.423.4230 [mike@berneyrealty.com](mailto:mike@berneyrealty.com)  
 Gwen Lister 775.427.5884 [gwen@berneyrealty.com](mailto:gwen@berneyrealty.com)  
 Shannon Nelson 775.224.4163 [shannon@berneyrealty.com](mailto:shannon@berneyrealty.com)

**Café Now Open**  
**Fresh Creations** CULINARY SCHOOL  
 Delicious Lunch and Daily Specials 11am-2pm  
 • soups  
 • salads  
 • sandwiches  
 • sumptuous meals  
 • vegetarian  
 • special wines  
 Mention This Ad for a FREE DESSERT  
 Featuring Chef Paul Crucitti & Paq  
 800 West Second St. • Reno, NV 89503  
 775-284-1080  
 www.freshcreationsculinaryschool.com

**New Year's Day Champagne Brunch**  
 Tuesday, January 1st from 10am to 3pm  
**Buffet Includes:**  
 Bottomless Champagne and Mimosas, Pancake & Waffle Stations, Salad Bar, Our Signature Chilled Seafood Bar Assorted Desserts & Entrees made to order fresh from the kitchen  
 Adults \$29.95. Kids 12 and under \$14.95.  
 Kids under 4 are FREE.  
**RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED**  
**THUNDER CANYON**  
 775-882-0882 • www.thundercanyon.com  
 19 Lightning "W" Ranch Road, Washoe Valley, Nevada

**皇城 CJ PALACE** Tastefully Unforgettable  
 CHINA BISTRO • SUSHI  
 New Dinner Menu Items  
 • Fresh All-You-Can-Eat Sushi  
 • Sumptuous Chinese/Japanese Dishes  
 • Full Bar  
 • Family Friendly Atmosphere  
 • Dine in & Take Out  
 Open Daily from 11:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.  
 129 Los Altos Pkwy., Ste. 119 Sparks, NV 89436  
 775.626.8878  
**\$5.00 OFF DINNER** w/ purchase of \$35.00 or more  
**LUNCH ALL YOU CAN EAT SUSHI \$2.00 OFF**  
 w/Coupon Only. Not valid w/any other offer. Exp 12/31/12