



“Grapes are like people; they have to suffer a little to develop character.”

Though Michael Marston wasn't the first to say this—it's an old French adage, he explains—it captures the essence of his hillside vineyard.

Marston Family Vineyard, small by California standards, sits on Spring Mountain, just west of St. Helena in Napa Valley. Marston and his wife, Alexandra, have been involved with the vineyard since 1969 and have owned it, with their children John and Elizabeth, since 1976. (There are colorful stories about the vineyard's prior owner who, with his good friend Clark Gable, enjoyed carousing on the property into the wee hours.)

When describing the nuts and bolts of winemaking, Marston likens it to matchmaking. “The right grapes must be matched to the right vineyard,” he says, emphasizing that location, soils and climate must all be taken into account. The Marstons' vineyard, situated at elevations between 700 and 1,100 feet, is comprised of soil that is rocky and thin (as compared to the fertile soils of the valley floor), forcing the vines' roots to struggle for water and nutrients. As a result, yields are lower and the berries are smaller, but the flavor from the dark purple grapes is more concentrated than grapes from the valley. The vineyard's easterly facing exposure affords plenty of valuable sunshine, but not the potentially damaging hot afternoon rays. Instead, cool mid-afternoon breezes waft through the vineyard, slightly lowering temperatures during the long growing season and allowing the grapes to ripen more slowly.

The critical, final match is finding the right winemaker. In 1999 the Marstons hired Philippe Melka, a geologist turned winemaker, to craft their Cabernet Sauvignon. Melka, who studied oenology in his native Bordeaux, favors hillside wines which, he says, “are a little wild and need to be civilized.”

He also consults at a few other Napa wineries and finds that hillside grapes, particularly those grown in rocky soils, have intriguing subtleties and are perfect for making rich, complex wines. “Cabernet berries have a high ratio of skin to pulp, which gives the wine more structure,” he says. This, in turn, enables the wine to age well in the bottle. The fruit characteristics of the Marston Cabernet (though slightly variable from vintage



ABOVE: Chef Dennis Leary of San Francisco's Rubicon restaurant.



to vintage) clearly reflect dark berries, such as blackberry, blueberry and currants. Hints of chocolate and chestnut honey may also linger in the mouth. Marston and Melka are exceptionally proud of the wine's recent recognition: the 1999 vintage and the recently released 2000, each limited to 600 cases, have earned plaudits from many wine critics.

We asked Dennis Leary, executive chef of San Francisco's Rubicon restaurant, to build a dinner menu to complement this balanced, velvety Cabernet. Leary recommends braised beef short ribs, a seasonal favorite, paired with flageolet bean purée, sautéed pearl onions and Swiss chard.

"This is a fairly complex wine," says Leary, noting its fresh fruit flavor as well as its toasted oak and coffee components. "I don't like to prepare neutral foods to go with a big wine." The wine's acidity balances the richness of the main course, yet Leary also likes the way the subtle bitterness of endive and toasted spices in a warm salad of duck confit stand up to the wine (and vice versa). A caramelized pear tart topped with a dollop of Gorgonzola cream isn't too sweet (or too salty) for the Cabernet if you wish to continue drinking the wine with dessert.

WARM SALAD OF DUCK CONFIT WITH POMEGRANATE, HAZELNUTS AND RED ENDIVE

SERVES 6

Making duck confit is time-consuming but not difficult. You may also serve the salad without the duck; it is still a great first course with the Cabernet Sauvignon.

For duck confit

- 2 tablespoons coriander seed
- 1 piece star anise
- 3 cloves
- 1/2 tablespoon cumin seed
- 1/2 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 3 large (about 9 ounces each) whole duck legs (including thigh)
- Kosher salt
- 1 quart canola or vegetable oil, plus extra

For salad

- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup Cabernet Sauvignon
- Pinch sugar
- 1 bunch thyme
- 6 heads endive, preferably red
- 2 strips bacon
- 1/4 cup whole hazelnuts, lightly toasted, skinned and roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped parsley

For vinaigrette

- 2 tablespoons pomegranate concentrate or molasses
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 1/2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup hazelnut oil

For garnish

- Seeds from 1 fresh pomegranate (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. To make spice rub, combine all spices except cinnamon and toast in oven until fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Allow spices to cool briefly, then add cinnamon. Grind spices in a spice grinder or blender until fine. Set aside.
3. The day before serving the duck, lay duck legs skin-side down in a 13 x 9-inch glass baking dish and season flesh lightly with salt. Sprinkle a generous amount of spice mixture on top of flesh and press down firmly. Turn duck legs over and season skin side more heavily with salt and lightly with spice mixture.
4. Cover duck legs with plastic wrap, and place a plate on top of legs. Place in refrigerator and weigh plate down with a few cans of soup, a gallon of milk, or something similar. Allow duck legs to cure for 24 to 48 hours.
5. Preheat oven to 300°F.

6. Remove duck legs from refrigerator and place them in a pot just large enough so they fit in a single layer. Cover duck legs with canola oil and place in oven. Cook for 2 hours, checking occasionally to make sure that oil is at a very low simmer.

7. To check for doneness, remove a leg from oil and pull a little flesh away—if it comes away easily, leg is done. Remove pot from oven and allow oil to cool to room temperature (do not remove legs). When pot is thoroughly cool, place it in refrigerator for 1 hour or until legs firm up a bit. Remove legs from oil and place them in a colander to drain off excess oil.

8. Take each leg and lay it skin-side down on a cutting board and score along length of thighbone and drumstick with a small sharp knife. Remove bones with your fingers, making sure that cavity is free of any cartilage. Try to keep flesh as intact as possible. Put deboned legs on a clean plate, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate.

9. Prepare salad. In a small pot, combine red onion, red wine vinegar, red wine, sugar and thyme. Cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until most of liquid evaporates and onions are tender and dark red. Set aside.

10. Cut off bases of endive with a sharp knife and separate leaves. Bring 3 quarts of water to a boil, add a generous pinch of salt, then add endive leaves and cook for 30 seconds or until just wilted. Drain, shake off excess water and set aside.

11. Place bacon strips in a skillet and cook until crispy, reserving fat. When bacon is cool, break it up into small pieces and add back to pan, along with endive leaves, bacon fat, red onion mixture, hazelnuts, parsley leaves, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of lemon juice and salt. Taste for seasoning and stir well. Set aside.

12. Make vinaigrette. Combine all ingredients and whisk lightly.

13. To finish duck legs, preheat oven to 325°F. Add a few tablespoons of vegetable oil to a skillet over medium-high heat. When oil is hot but not smoking, add duck legs, skin-side down. When edges of skin start to brown, place skillet in oven for 7 minutes or until duck legs are heated through and skin is very crispy.

14. While duck cooks, warm endive mixture over low heat and spoon it onto 6 warmed salad plates. Spoon vinaigrette onto each

plate, then remove duck legs from pan and place them on a cutting board, skin-side down. With a sharp knife, cut duck legs in $\frac{1}{2}$, then place each $\frac{1}{2}$ on top of endive mixture, skin-side up. Garnish plates with pomegranate seeds and serve immediately.

RED WINE GLAZED BEEF SHORT RIBS

SERVES 6

Marinate the ribs overnight and serve with Flageolet Bean Purée with Pearl Onions and Swiss Chard (recipe follows).

- 2 cups Cabernet Sauvignon
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 rib celery, chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup veal stock or concentrated beef stock
- 6 beef short ribs (about 5 pounds)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Orange zest, for garnish

1. Pour wine into a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Once wine is boiling, use a long-handled grill lighter to ignite wine to burn off alcohol. As soon as wine stops burning (it will take 1 to 2 minutes), add onion, carrot, celery, bay leaves and stock and remove pan from heat.
2. Place short ribs in a glass dish and pour marinade over. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight, turning ribs occasionally.
3. Preheat oven to 325°F.
4. Remove ribs from marinade and strain liquid, reserving vegetables. Season ribs and vegetables with a light coating of salt.
5. Heat olive oil in a Dutch oven over high heat and sear ribs until evenly browned on all sides. Add marinade and vegetables, cover, and bake in oven for 3 to 4 hours until ribs are very tender. Transfer ribs to a plate and cover to keep warm.
6. Skim fat from cooking liquid with a large spoon and then strain liquid into a medium saucepan. Discard vegetables. Cook liquid over low heat until reduced by $\frac{3}{4}$. Remove as much fat as possible from liquid as it reduces.
7. Place ribs back into the saucepan and pour liquid over. Continue to reduce liquid, basting

and turning ribs frequently, until nicely glazed. Remove bones, if desired, and set ribs aside in a warm place until ready to serve.

8. To serve, divide bean purée among 6 plates and place ribs on top of purée. Place Swiss chard and onions next to ribs. Pour leftover glaze on ribs and around plate, garnish with a few slices orange zest, sprinkle with salt and pepper and serve.

FLAGEOLET BEAN PURÉE WITH PEARL ONIONS AND SWISS CHARD

Flageolet beans are a small French kidney bean with a delicate flavor. If flageolet beans are not available, substitute great Northern or navy beans.

- 1 cup dried flageolet beans
- $\frac{1}{2}$ white onion, diced
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt
- 1 orange
- 6 leaves Swiss chard, rinsed
- 1 cup pearl onions, peeled
- 2 tablespoons butter

1. Cover beans with cold water and bring to a boil. Drain, discard cooking water, and return beans to pot. Add onion and chicken stock, cover, and return to a simmer. Cook 2 hours or until beans are completely soft and most of liquid has been absorbed.
2. Drain beans into a colander set over a bowl to reserve liquid. Transfer beans to a





food processor and purée. Add olive oil and salt to taste. Use any leftover cooking liquid to bring purée to a smooth consistency.

3. Using a vegetable peeler, remove peel from orange; reserve orange flesh. Slice peel into thin strips and place in a small pan of cold water. Bring to a boil, then drain and set peel aside.

4. Extract juice from peeled orange, then add juice to bean purée and stir until incorporated. Set aside in a warm place.

5. Separate stems and leaves of chard by cutting lengthwise along stem. Peel stems with a vegetable peeler or paring knife and place stems and pearl onions in a small saucepan. Add a few tablespoons of water, butter and a pinch of salt and cook at low heat until soft, about 20 minutes.

6. While stems and onions cook, cut chard leaves in half, then add them to pan when stems are softened, about 5 to 7 minutes. Stir mixture until leaves are just wilted and set aside.

CARAMELIZED PEAR TART WITH GORGONZOLA CREAM AND BLACK PEPPER SYRUP

SERVES 6

For pear filling

- 7 ripe, firm pears
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter

For phyllo crust

- 7 sheets phyllo dough
- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar

For syrup

- 1/4 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons water
- 1/4 cup champagne or white vinegar
- 1 tablespoon black peppercorns, crushed or coarsely ground

For Gorgonzola cream

- 3 ounces Gorgonzola or similar blue cheese
- 1 1/2 teaspoons crème fraîche or sour cream
- Dash lemon juice

1. Peel, core, and thinly slice each pear. Toss in 1/2 of sugar and set aside.
2. Place 1 sheet of phyllo on a cutting board and brush it with melted butter. Sprinkle a little powdered sugar on top of butter, then add another sheet. Repeat process until all phyllo is used.
3. Select a plate that roughly corresponds to diameter of an 8- to 10-inch cast iron skillet or nonstick pan. Place plate upside down on phyllo. With a small knife, cut around circumference of plate. Discard excess phyllo. Carefully remove circle of phyllo from cutting board (it may stick) and chill in refrigerator.

4. Make syrup. Place sugar in a small saucepan, add water, stir well and cook over medium heat until sugar begins to turn brown. Carefully add vinegar, return to a boil and stir until sugar is dissolved. Reduce by 3/4, then remove from heat. When syrup has cooled slightly, add peppercorns, stir and set aside at room temperature.

5. Make Gorgonzola cream. Add all ingredients to a food processor and blend until smooth. Transfer to a small bowl and chill.

6. Preheat oven to 350°F.

7. Make tart. Place cast iron skillet or nonstick pan over medium heat. Add butter and remaining sugar, and, as they begin to melt, arrange pear sections in a circular pattern, starting from center and working towards rim, overlapping edges slightly. Make sure that pan does not get too hot or sugar will burn.

8. Transfer pan to oven and bake for 9 minutes, until pears are soft and slightly translucent. Place phyllo circle on top of pears, press down slightly, lower oven to 300°F and continue to bake until phyllo is crisp and golden, approximately 12 minutes more. Remove from oven to cool slightly.

9. When skillet is just warm (about 15 minutes of cooling), carefully place an inverted plate on top of phyllo, and turn skillet and plate over so that tart comes free and pears are facing up. It may be helpful to loosen edges of tart with a spatula prior to inverting.

10. Carefully cut tart into 6 wedges, place each wedge on a dessert plate and top with Gorgonzola cream. Drizzle a small amount of syrup around each tart and serve at once.

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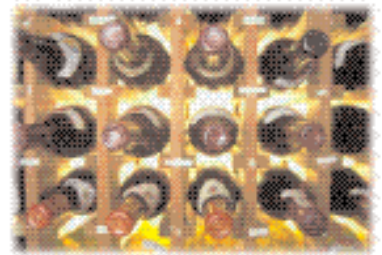
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