

UNDISCOVERED SKI RESORTS
No crowds, lots of serenity p. 27

Sunset

LIVING IN THE WEST

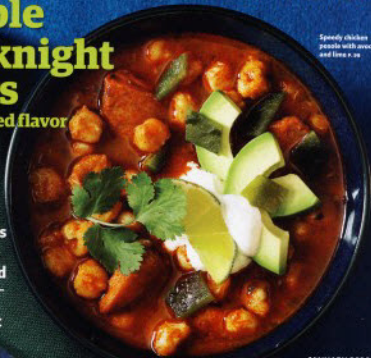
Simple weeknight stews

Slow-cooked flavor
in a flash!

Refresh
with paint
Best new
color combos

Comfort food
makeovers—
same taste,
70% less fat

Speedy chicken
peas with avocado
and lime p. 26



JANUARY 2010

**+ The 10 new
feel-good foods**

Merlot, the comeback kid

Once a darling, then condemned—the grape we love to hate deserves another taste **BY SARA SCHNEIDER**

FIVE YEARS AGO, a fictitious character shredded the reputation of one of the world's great grapes. No matter that there's more Merlot than Cabernet planted in France's legendary Bordeaux region. When Miles threw a tantrum in the movie *Sideways* at the prospect of someone ordering Merlot, a ton of us stopped buying it. Yet just a few years before that, the grape was golden.

There's the rub: A wine is "discovered" by

fans, gets planted in spades to chase the demand, and loses credibility because it really shouldn't have been planted in all those places. Even so, don't write Merlot off. More and more West Coast winemakers are turning out versions that defy the wine's wimpy reputation. We asked Jeff Smith, who recently launched a beautifully structured Merlot from his new Hourglass Bluevine Vineyard, in Napa Valley, just what he was thinking.



MEAT'S BEST FRIEND

"With supple tannins and spice, Merlot comes alive at the table—with roast beef, grilled lamb, Korean short ribs, pork belly ... It goes with protein with lots of flavor"

—Nelson Daquip,
wine director/sommelier,
Canlis Restaurant, Seattle



ASK THE EXPERT

Jeff Smith, *Hourglass Bluevine Vineyard*

What do you love about good Merlot? Merlot is one of the most seductive wines in the world. It relies less on power and more on finesse, drifting toward red fruits (dark or sour cherry, raspberry) rather than the black fruits of Cabernet. Most important, its delicate balance and structure make it an incredible food wine.

Obviously, you planted Bluevine long before the economy went south. Has it been hard launching

a vineyard now—and with such a maligned grape? We've been fortunate, probably because of committing very precious land to Merlot. It's a site with some of the best-drained soils (an ancient, gravelly, upturned riverbed) that in the hands of our winemaker, Bob Foley, produce truly magical wines. Our big challenge ahead has less to do with the economy and more to do with getting people over the hump to taste our Merlot. We're

working for that light-bulb moment when they say, "Wow, that's what Merlot is all about."

So you don't think Merlot deserved Miles's scorn in *Sideways*? Of course, the true irony is that Miles's Holy Grail wine [the bottle he chugs with a burger at the movie's end] is Cheval Blanc, a Merlot-inspired Bordeaux! The fact that most people missed the irony highlights that we have a lot of educating to do.



Serve pot roast with gently mashed butternut squash.

MERLOT MEETS ITS MATCH Pot roast with wild mushrooms and fresh thyme

SERVES 6 **TIME** About 4¼ hours

1 boned, tied beef chuck roast (3½ to 4 lbs.)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

About ½ cup all-purpose flour

3 tbsp. olive oil

1½ cups each coarsely chopped onions, celery, and peeled carrots

4 cups reduced-sodium beef broth

1 bottle (750 ml.) Merlot or other dry red wine

3 fresh thyme sprigs plus 1 tbsp. chopped leaves

2 tbsp. butter

¾ cup chopped shallots

2 lbs. mixed mushrooms such as chanterelle, trumpet, enoki, cremini, and/or button, rinsed briefly and cut into bite-size pieces

1 tsp. shredded orange peel

1. Preheat oven to 325°. Sprinkle roast lightly with salt and pepper; coat generously with flour. Pour oil into a large (at least 6-qt.), heavy oven-proof pot over medium-high heat. Add beef and cook, turning as needed, until browned all over, about 15 minutes total. Transfer to a plate.

2. Add chopped vegetables to pot and cook, stirring often, until beginning to brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Add broth, wine, thyme sprigs, and beef. Cover and bring to a boil, then transfer pot to oven. Bake until beef is tender when pierced, 3 to 3¼ hours, turning roast over once.

3. Meanwhile, melt butter in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add shallots and cook, stirring often, until beginning to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add mushrooms, increase heat to high, and cook, stirring often, until liquid has evaporated and mushrooms are beginning to brown, 12 to 14 minutes. Stir in thyme leaves and salt and pepper to taste.

4. Transfer beef to a platter; cover with foil and keep warm in a 200° oven. Pour braising liquid through a strainer into a wide frying pan. Skim off fat. Boil over high heat until reduced by about half, about 20 minutes. Stir in orange peel and salt and pepper to taste. Pour sauce into a bowl.

5. Cut beef into ½-in. slices and drizzle with a little sauce. Spoon mushrooms around meat and serve with remaining sauce on the side.

PER SERVING 583 CAL., 36% (212 CAL.) FROM FAT; 67 G PROTEIN; 24 G FAT (8.2 G SAT.); 25 G CARBO (3.8 G FIBER); 474 MG SODIUM; 129 MG CHOL.

Wine in the West

5 Top picks



FIRESTONE "DISCOV-ERIES" MERLOT 2007 (California; \$10). With tart red cherries, a touch of mocha, and chalky tannins, there's a lot of Merlot here for the money.



BUENA VISTA MERLOT 2005 (Carneros; \$18). Spicy dark fruit, mocha, herbs, and leather are set off by the lively acidity and good bones that cool temps create.



FRANCISCAN MERLOT 2005 (Napa Valley; \$22). Aromatic forest aromas surround minty berries and black cherries, with a touch of soft cocoa.



CHATEAU STE. MICHELLE "ETHOS" MERLOT 2006 (Columbia Valley; \$31). This is a plush, complex wine with lovely red fruit, vanilla, spice, herbs, and firm but velvety tannins.



L'ECOLE NO 41 SEVEN HILLS VINEYARD ESTATE MERLOT 2006 (Walla Walla Valley; \$37). Dark chocolate, dried herbs, and mint accent beautiful black fruit from this Merlot pioneer in eastern Washington. ■