

SAVORY FAVA BEAN & RICOTTA CANNOLI FOR ROBERT FOLEY PINOT BLANC

A rich, earthy dish for an Alsatian-style wine

BY DAVID KATZ

When it comes to bringing food and wine together, I look to the old world for inspiration. It's not because there is anything inherently better about traditional old world pairings, but most old world wine cultures have had generations to perfect pairing local ingredients and local wines. Once you understand the flavors, textures, aromas, and methods of preparation that make the local residents swoon, you'll have vital clues as to the body style, acidity, flavor, texture and feel of the foods they crave, and the wines which will make them shine, no matter what region of the world you are living in.

Alsace-Lorraine is one of those magic regions for wine and food. Paradigm dishes like rich Alsatian onion tarts and choucroute garni are a testament to the food and wine of a region growing inextricably together over time. These two classic dishes share a richness that contrasts well against the crisp white wines of the region, such as Pinot Blanc. Pinot Blanc grapes are grown and vinified in an array of styles in various regions throughout Europe. Here in California, the true Pinot Blancs are most often produced in the style of our most commercially successful Chardonnay. Robert Foley Pinot Blanc is a different animal, with a decidedly Alsatian spirit. This wine is built for food, with a full flavor and medium body style that does not rely on oak or malolactic fermentation, but rather on its focused pure, bright fruit.

So what to cook for this cool find? I say look to the old world. Don't try to replicate a classic old world pairing, but instead try to figure out what makes it so good, then use what's around you to hit a similar groove. Thinking of that Alsatian onion tart, I wanted to incorporate the textural element of pastry or a crust together with a rich, earthy feeling filling to complete the picture. That brought me to one of my favorite early summer hors d'oeuvres.

Fava beans are an early summer favorite at Panevino. They find their way into pastas, risotti, vegetable ragouts and hors d'oeuvres. The Foley un-oaked Pinot Blanc is a perfect partner for fava beans. It brings a refreshing counterpoint to the rich, sweet, mouth-filling texture and flavor of the puréed beans, ricotta and pecorino pepato mixture as well as the fried shell. At the same time, this Pinot Blanc has body



enough to stand up to the flavor and mouth-feel of this preparation without getting lost.

I love this dish because it highlights the seasonal flavors of our region, from local Meyer lemons and olive oil to the fresh beans. Sheep's milk ricotta and Pecorino Pepato from Bellwether Farms in Sonoma County also add to the regional flavor. Bellwether has been producing world-class cheeses since the 80's, and their sheep's milk ricotta is nothing short of perfect, producing a cannoli filling that is at once rich and light.

Fava beans are a bit of a chore to blanch and peel, but just

over a cup of shucked beans turns into a few dozen hors d'oeuvres, and it's well worth the effort. The yield from raw beans in the pod can be a bit unpredictable, so pick up at least 2 pounds to produce the recipe below. If you can't find fava beans, blanched fresh English peas can be substituted for an equally wonderful result.

David Katz is the managing partner of Panevino—Food for Wine, a catering and education company in St. Helena, CA. David has been on the faculty of the Culinary Institute of America, Greystone, for more than 5 years, and teaches Wine & Food Fundamentals and Advanced Food & Wine Pairing courses at the CIA's Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies. www.panevino-napa.com.

Savory Fava Bean Cannoli with Sheep's Milk Ricotta and Pecorino Pepato

Makes 40 cannoli, serves 10 as a first course.

FOR THE PURÉE:

- 1 ¼ cups shucked fresh fava beans, outer skins still on (about 2 pounds when in the pods)
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 ½ cups Bellwether Sheep's Milk Ricotta, or whole cow's milk ricotta, drained
- 1 ½ ounces Bellwether Pecorino Pepato, very finely grated
- ½ teaspoon finely grated Meyer lemon zest
- Fine sea salt, to taste
- ½ teaspoon granulated sugar, or to taste

FOR THE SHELLS:

- 40 fresh egg roll wrappers (available at most supermarkets and Asian markets)
- 1 egg
- 4 cups vegetable oil

To prepare the filling: Prepare an ice bath in a large bowl. Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add the favas and blanch for three minutes, or until deep green through. Drain the favas and immerse them in the ice bath for 5 minutes. Peel the outer skins by nicking the skin with your fingernail and squeezing the beans out into the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal chopping blade. Pulse the processor until the beans are very fine, scraping down the sides with a rubber spatula as needed. Add the olive oil and continue to pulse until the paste is very smooth. Add the ricotta, one half of the pecorino pepato and lemon zest and process to combine fully, but do not overmix. Season

with salt and sugar to taste, and transfer the mixture to a plastic piping bag. Refrigerate for up to three days, or freeze the mixture in the piping bag for up to one month.

To prepare the shells: Pour the oil into a 3-quart saucepan and heat to 325° Fahrenheit over medium heat. While the oil is heating, trim the wrappers into 2" by 2" squares. Beat the egg in a small bowl. Starting with one corner, roll each wrapper around a cannoli form or dowel. Dab your finger into the egg wash, and moisten the trailing corner before overlapping. Press firmly to seal. Repeat with the remaining forms, and then carefully lower the shells into the oil with a large slotted spoon. Fry the shells for 2 minutes, or until crisp and golden. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels until cool enough to handle. Carefully remove the shells and arrange on a baking tray lined with dry paper towels. Repeat as necessary with the remaining wrappers.

Note: Use either small metal cannoli forms or wooden dowels to fry these shells. We use 3/8-inch maple dowels cut to 3-inch lengths. We wrap each dowel with a six-inch square of heavy-gauge aluminum foil, twisting the ends like a candy wrapper, to provide a non-porous surface that release the shells easily.

To assemble: Cut a 3/8-inch tip on the piping bag and pipe the filling into each shell. Arrange the finished cannoli on a plate and sprinkle lightly with the reserved pecorino pepato.

Note: The purée freezes quite well for up to a month, and can be used as a simple spread for crostini, if you don't wish to fry the shells. We also use this purée as a stuffing for ravioli, cannelloni, and other fresh pastas.

Other suggestions

for lean and clean white wines for your summer enjoyment include...

Pavi, Pinot Grigio, Napa Valley 2008 \$18 100% Pinot Grigio, this wine is whole cluster pressed, 100% tank fermented, aged surlie for three months, and sees no malolactic fermentation. Rob Lawson is the owner/winemaker.

Mahoney, Vermentino, Carneros 2008 \$18 Very true to its Italian heritage, this wine exhibits white peach and citrus flavors, a hint of floral aroma and a distinctive minerality in its finish.

La Sirena, Muscato Azul (dry Muscat Canelli), Napa Valley 2007 \$30 Made by Heidi Peterson Barrett, this wine is unusual because most Muscat grapes are made into sweet dessert wine. Not this time. Here you have all the beautiful, perfumed, floral character of the varietal Muscat Canelli, without the sugar!

Rockledge Roussanne, Saralee's Vineyard, Russian River Valley 2006 \$40 Made by up and coming winemaker Mike Hirby, this limited production wine is barrel fermented in new French oak. It is bottled unrefined and unfiltered.

ROBERT FOLEY VINEYARDS PINOT BLANC: A LEAN AND CLEAN WHITE FOR SUMMER

Napa Valley 2008, \$25

By Karen Williams and David Stevens

Robert Foley is best known for production of world-class red wine. He began his career at Markham Winery in St. Helena before becoming the founding winemaker at Pride Mountain Winery on Spring Mountain where he garnered a reputation for making some of the finest wines in California.

Bob is very particular about the projects in which he becomes involved and continues to make wines for Hourglass, Switchback Ridge, Engel Family, and his own Robert Foley Vineyards label. These wines are almost all made from red grapes, with the exception of two still whites and a dessert wine he produced while a winemaker at Pride Mountain.

We have been huge fans of his wines since we first met him in 1997 while directing the wine program at Tra Vigne Restaurant, and have purchased every wine he has made since. If Bob made it, we want it. Period.

Bob's wines are far from timid. Long after most of the Valley vintners and winemakers have harvested their fruit and are sitting comfortably at home drinking a Pabst Blue Ribbon and catching up on American Idol, he continues to let fruit hang, waiting for the precise moment when sugars and full maturity of fruit connect. The results are lush, robust, mouth-filling wines that are highly sought after.

So why would he launch a single white wine into his own portfolio? Simple. He loves white wine, in particular Alsatian and Rhone whites, with Alsatian Pinot Blanc topping the list. He found a source for Pinot Blanc in the Napa Valley and opted to vinify with minimal vinification technique:

no barrel at all, harvesting before the sugars top out to keep the natural acidity high by preventing ML (malolactic fermentation), and bottling in a Stelvin (screw cap) closure. This ensures a crisp, clean, lean, zesty wine which delivers plenty of body and complexity without masking the character of the grape. It's all about the fruit.

Bob is also an accomplished musician who has recorded an album of original compositions. If we may speak of this wine in musical terms, his Pinot Blanc is what the Mamas and Papas were "Dreaming" of.

ABOUT PINOT BLANC

There is much confusion and debate about the origin of the Pinot Blanc grape. Although Pinot Blanc was first observed in Burgundy at the end of the 19th century, it has received its best recognition in the Alsace region of France where the grape is one of eight major allowed varieties. While genetically it is a relative of Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris, much of what was once thought to be Pinot Blanc is actually the grape known as Melon de Bourgogne (rhymes with alone, not Helen). Many producers pick this grape as ripe as possible and use barrel aging to give the wine more weight and texture, adding to the confusion between Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay.

David Stevens and Karen Williams launched the Cantinetta Wine Bar at Tra Vigne in 2000. In 2003, the friends opened Acme Fine Wines in St. Helena, a truly unique wine shop that specializes in eclectic local wines. David was one of the first three people to receive the Certified Wine Professional credential from the Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies at the Culinary Institute of America, Greystone. www.acmefinewines.com.



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