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Cooking

Barbecue Dishes: Recipes from the Vineyards of Northern California
Leslie Mansfield
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California's embarrassingly idyllic climate, fertile soil, and rich bounty of growing things echo some of the great wine-growing regions of Europe, but it's only in the last ten years that California wines weren't just wistful teenagers running to catch up. California wines have now grown into comely adults and are in close pursuit of their vivicultural parents.

Mansfield, a trained chef who lives in Napa Valley with her winemaker husband, would probably be one of those who say that California wines have surpassed their European forbears. She has gathered simple and elegant recipes from California's finest wineries. The vintners, their wives, chefs and families pair their wines with their favorite food, answering the often confusing question of "What wine and when?" It's as if she has finagled dinner invitations for the reader to winemaker's tables across Northern California.

Mansfield has written five cookbooks, four of which were for organizations like The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and The Oregon Coast Aquarium. Mansfield's first six cookbooks in this series of nine Recipes from the Vineyards of Northern California are Appetizers, Main Dishes, Desserts, Pasta with Red Wine, Pasta with White Wine and Asian Pasta. Last in this series are Barbecue, Vegetarian and Picnics.

Each of these three books has approximately forty recipes. A short piece on each vineyard and a wine recommendation and label photo accompanies each recipe. Mansfield peppers her short pieces with philosophy, history, and information from California winemakers. Readers familiar with Northern California wineries will have fun paging through to find their favorites.

Lovers of Robert Mondavi wines learn that the Mondavis are committed to producing wines of elegance that team with fine food. Their Italian caterer devised Eggplant Timbales with Gorgonzola Sauce and Tomato Sauce to team with their Pinot Noir for Vegetarian. The winery uses earth-friendly farming and treats their wines gently, with lots of love. Devotees of

Trefethen Vineyards find out in Picnics that the owners feel “Wine-making is part agriculture and part parenting.” A lot of worry and care goes into making what they “share with friends.”

In all, approximately sixty winemakers provide wines arm-in-arm with California cuisine that summer just naturally loves. In Barbecue, Kendall-Jackson winery offers a recipe for Spiced Chicken Breasts with Artichokes and Roasted Red Peppers. Mansfield relates how the winery was started. In 1974 Jess Jackson purchased eighty-five acres and by 1982 it was producing its first Chardonnay. She informs readers that Kendall-Jackson’s Chardonnay is a blend of grapes from four very different California counties, which gives them award-winning consistency and complexity.

In Picnics, Mansfield chooses a Sterling Vineyards Merlot paired with Caramelized Onion, Prosciutto and Brie in Puff Pastry. Sterling is Napa Valley’s most memorable winery, tall white monastic structures set high on a hill. Mansfield reveals to readers that the winery was built in the architectural style of Greece’s Mykonos Island. Vegetarian offers cooks a Petite Sirah from Frey Vineyards teamed with a Tomato Tart with Gruyere Cheese and Tarragon. Frey was one of the first organic vineyards in California.

This trio reads like a gourmet Junior League cookbook. Its focus is wine. Its sophisticated recipes come from mostly nonprofessional cooks. Occasionally cooking tips would help. In a recipe that calls for sambal olek Mansfield doesn’t tell the reader what it is, where to purchase it, or what could be substituted. On the whole the recipes are clear, easy to follow, and well-written.

More information (in perhaps the form of a chart) on types of grapes and wines produced in Northern California and how to pair them with foods would have rounded out this book nicely. The reader has to browse through the entire cookbook to get tidbits of information. Mansfield does include an exhaustive list of the wineries that contributed recipes making this book a good gift for someone who wants to visit Napa and Sonoma Valley wineries, but doesn’t know where to begin.

In this book Mansfield has given readers a chance to vote. With a lineup of the best Northern California wineries, their wines and the dishes they pair with them, the readers of her cookbooks can narrow the field and choose their favorites. The competition that California’s skilled winemaker’s have now is between each other.

Nancy K. Allen