

The Press Democrat

Pairings: Delicata squash a good match for Pfendler pinot

- Michelle Anna Jordan, November 26, 2019

Our Wine of the Week, Pfendler 2018 Sonoma County Petaluma Gap Pinot Noir (\$55), comes from one of our newer, lesser known, and most precious appellations. Petaluma Gap lies within the Sonoma Coast viticultural areas and encompasses part of Sonoma Mountain and the Lakeville area within its embrace. You can taste it in the wine: On first sip, there's a hint of sea mist, a very subtle suggestion of seaweed and brine.

Flavors range from high notes of delicate violet, red raspberry, Santa Rosa plum and good black tea to a foundation of fresh tobacco, fresh herbs and milk chocolate. A middle layer suggests Red Delicious apples, Queen Anne cherries and sweet spices. The finish is long, the tannins smooth. It is beautifully balanced and delicately juicy.

The Lakeville area has always reminded me of Thomas Hardy country, of his fictional Wessex County, the dairy and farm country of his most famous novels. This is an elegant wine, a wine that one of his most vivid and memorable characters, Eustacia Vye of "Return of the Native," would love.

In a nod to this resonance, I should pair the wine with an English classic, steak and kidney pie, which would be a glorious match. But we are all busy right now and steak and kidney pie is a bit of a production, even for me.

The wine is also excellent with rare duck breast, roasted turkey, roasted chicken, sweet potatoes slathered with butter and black pepper, traditional sourdough stuffing and macaroni and cheese with bacon.

It is also excellent with winter squash, which brings us to today's recipe.

Serve this rich risotto neat or use it as a bed for seared Liberty Duck breast. You can also top it with chard that you've sautéed with garlic and olive. You can use any winter squash, though to pair with this wine, I recommend delicata.

Winter Squash Risotto

Makes 3 to 4 servings

2 small delicata squash

— Olive oil

— Kosher salt

— Black pepper in a mill

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons olive oil



6 cups homemade duck, chicken, turkey, beef or vegetable stock, hot

1 white or yellow onion, cut into small dice

1½ cups Vialone Nano rice

3 ounces (¾ cup) grated Vella Dry Jack

— Black pepper in a mill

3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley



First, prepare the winter squash and set it aside. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Cut the squash in half lengthwise and use a soup spoon to scrape out the seeds. Brush a little olive oil on a clean baking sheet and set 3 of the 4 pieces of squash on it, cut side up.

Cut the remaining half into 3/8-inch-thick crosswise slices and set those on the baking sheet, as well. Set on the middle rack of the oven and cook for 20 minutes; test for doneness by inserting a fork into the flesh of the squash.

If it is still tough, cook until it is done, testing it every 10 minutes. The half moons of squash will cook more quickly; transfer them to a platter when they are done.

When all the squash is cooked, remove it from the oven and let cool until easy to handle. Use a soup spoon to scrape the flesh out of its skin and transfer it to a wide mixing bowl. Mash with a fork or a vegetable masher. Leave the half moons as they are and set them all aside.

Put 2 tablespoons of butter and 2 tablespoons of olive oil into a wide deep pan, such as an All Clad saucier, and set over medium high heat. Add the onion and sauté, stirring frequently, until it is soft and fragrant, about 7 to 8 minutes. Do not let it brown.

Season the onions with salt, add the rice and cook, stirring constantly, until each grain is milky white.

Reduce the heat to medium, add 1/2 cup of the stock and stir until it is absorbed by the rice.

Continue adding stock and stirring until the rice is just tender, about 18 to 22 minutes. (If stock runs low, add water.) When there is about 1/2 cup of stock remaining, stir in the mashed winter squash, cover, and remove from the heat.

Working quickly, heat the half moons of squash in the oven or in a sauté pan until heated through.

Return the risotto to the heat, stir in the cheese and the remaining stock; the risotto should be fairly loose. Taste, correct for salt and season very generously with black pepper; stir in half the parsley. To serve, divide the risotto among soup plates and top each portion with two half moons of squash. Sprinkle with parsley, season all over with black pepper, and enjoy right away.

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