

The Vine Guy » **Scott Greenberg**

Calistoga earns its AVA

What if you grew up in a town that everyone knew where it was, but you could not put the name of the town on your birth certificate, your driver's license or even on a postcard? You would probably be a little frustrated, just like the winemakers in Calistoga, Calif., used to be.

While many California wine lovers know that the town of Calistoga is located at the northern most edge of Napa Valley, most probably did not realize that until recently, wines produced in or near Calistoga could not reference the area on the label. That's because Calistoga and the surrounding area was not recognized as a separate American Viticultural Area, or AVA. The wines were traditionally labeled as "Napa Valley."

An AVA is a specific geographic region that is demarcated by unique characteristics such as soil type, climate, physical landmarks (rivers, lakes, valleys) and elevations that clearly distinguish it from other surrounding areas. There is no physical restriction on the size of an AVA. It can be large or small and can cross political and administrative borders, such as county and state lines. A bottle labeled with a specific AVA must contain wine that was produced in the AVA from grapes — at least 85 percent — that were grown in the AVA. "Produced" means that the grapes must be crushed, fermented and vinified into wine in the AVA.

Bo Barrett, head winemaker at Chateau Montelena, spearheaded the campaign for Calistoga's AVA recognition back in 2003. When the AVA was finally granted for use in 2010, Bo was quoted as saying, "The wines that have Calistoga on the label ... have integrity. It's a unique and special place and that's what Calistoga AVA means."

To me, it means beautiful wines that are produced from grapes grown in an area that has large swings in daytime and nighttime temperatures and rich volcanic soils. To wineries in Calistoga, it means a place that they can finally call home. Retail prices are approximate.

Consulting winemaker August "Joe" Briggs knew that he could capitalize on his experience and contacts in Napa to produce exceptional wines, so in 1995

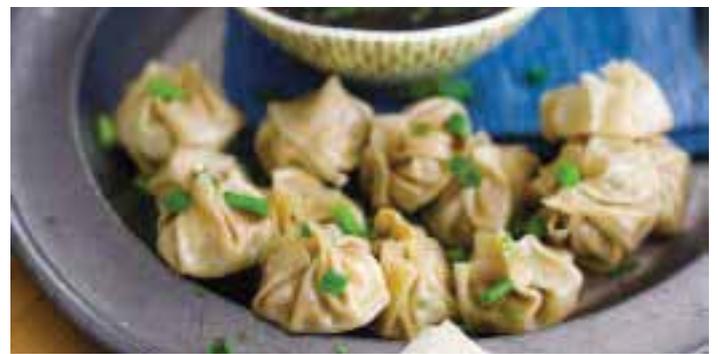
he and his wife, Sally, founded August Briggs Winery in Calistoga. Today, winemaker Jesse Inman carries on the tradition of producing hand-rafted wines. The **2010 August Briggs Zinfandel (\$33)** is a charming wine with balance and finesse. The fragrant nose of blueberry liqueur, blackberry and cherry is a tantalizing precursor to the full, ripe flavors of spicy cherry, raspberry and red plum.

The wine is kept in balance by loads of soft tannins and noticeable acidity. Characteristic notes of black pepper and dried sage slide in on the lengthy finish. **QPR 9**

In 2002, Randy and Lisa Lynch were looking to crush some grapes that they were growing on their second-home property when they stumbled on a facility for sale. They ended up buying the winery and naming it Bennett Lane Winery. Today, the Lynches own vineyards located throughout Napa Valley, but the **2008 Lynch Family Estate Cabernet (\$95)** is made exclusively from the best grapes grown on the 12-acre parcel surrounding their home in Calistoga. The wine possesses intoxicating aromas of dark red fruit, violets and cocoa. Richly textured flavors of blackberry, dark cherry and blueberry jam jump out on the front of the tongue while subtle notes of black plum and vanilla fill in on the supple, incredibly lengthy finish. **QPR 9**

Chateau Montelena is one of the most famous wineries in Calistoga. Jim Barrett, along with his son Bo, began making wines at Chateau Montelena in 1972 and quickly gained fame when their 1973 chardonnay was voted the best white wine over other famous French wines at a tasting in Paris in 1976. Today, Bo heads up the winemaking team and continues to produce world-class wines. The **2008 Chateau Montelena Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (\$140)** is definitely a big splurge, but the expansive flavors of cassis, dark plum and black cherry, and the powerful-yet-elegant finish is definitely worth the price. Lingering notes of dark chocolate and rich espresso complete the picture. **QPR 9.5**

Note: *QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.*



Wonton skins: What they are and how to use them

By **J.M. Hirsch**
The Associated Press

There's nothing wrong with showing a bit of skin. Especially if it's steamy.

Because while they may appear a rather mundane ingredient, wonton skins are an inexpensive and easy way to jazz up your cooking.

Let's start with the basics. Wonton skins (also called wonton wrappers) are thin sheets of dough made from flour, egg and water. That's basically the same formula as Asian egg noodles, and not all that far off from Italian pasta, except wonton skins are cut into round and square sheets.

You may never have bought wontons as a raw ingredient, but if you've ever had fried egg rolls or steamed dumplings in your Asian take-out, you've eaten them.

Because wonton skins essentially are vehicles for containing other ingredients, their strength is their versatility. They can be filled with just about anything, from ground or chopped meat and vegetables to cheese and sweet fillings.

They also can be cooked any number of ways — pan-fried, deep-fried, baked, steamed, even boiled. You also can cook them before you fill them.

For an easy party (or kid) food,

On the web

Steamed spicy pork dumplings recipe at washingtont Examiner.com/entertainment

coat a mini-muffin tin with cooking spray. Line each cup with a wrapper, spritz with more cooking spray, then bake at 375 degrees for about eight minutes, or until the wrappers are lightly browned and crisp. Once cooled, the wonton cups can be filled with whatever nibbles you like.

You'll find wontons in virtually every grocer, usually in the produce section next to the tofu and other Asian ingredients. They are available in a variety of sizes, though 3-inch squares tend to be the most versatile. The larger sizes can be a bit unwieldy once filled.

When using wontons to make dumplings, they need to be sealed shut after being filled. You can fold the edges over onto themselves (like folding a sheet of paper in half); you can gather the edges together over the center (like a purse); or you can place a second wrapper over the first.

However you do it, be sure to lightly wet the edges of the wrapper (dunking your fingers in water is plenty). This effectively glues them shut.

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