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Lamb with DeLoach cabernet



By MICHELE ANNA JORDAN
FOR THEPRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Wednesday, July 20, 2011 at 3:00 a.m.
Last Modified: Tuesday, July 19, 2011 at 11:28 p.m.

Our Wine of the Week, DeLoach Vineyards 2009 California Heritage Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon (\$13) is earthy, spicy and and brambly yet delicate at the same time. There are threads of tobacco, new leather and dried blackberry leaves throughout the wine, with intermittent suggestions of black raspberry, blackberry fruit leather and pomegranate concentrate. Every now and then there are whispers of black pepper, allspice and clove. If the wine lingers on your palate for long, you will find yourself thinking of mint and cocoa.

Although you may sense a tiny bit of roughness on the outer edges of the tongue, the tannins are remarkably smooth. The wine dances lightly on the palate, as if it were wearing new satin slippers. And at this price, it is a wine that encourages you to kick up your heels. It's a good party wine, especially when paired properly at the table. Buy two bottles and invite friends to dinner.

The wine will work quite well with most grilled and barbecued meats, as you would expect. It's good with dark mushrooms,

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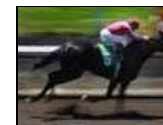
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especially portobellos, and is a happy match with traditional Italian ragouts and slow-cooked tomato sauces. It is also a surprisingly good match with green beans, provided they are cooked until tender; undercooked green beans will fight with the wine like a dog holding onto a bloody bone. Teriyaki beef (for added affinity, sprinkle lightly toasted sesame seeds over the meat), a Provençal daube, Korean steak and even a classic American hamburger with all the fixins will welcome this cab.

Even with the wine's broad appeal, which is signaled by its delicate impact on the palate, I keep thinking about eggplant. It is a match made in food and wine heaven. A traditional Greek moussakas, ratatouille, tomato-eggplant galette, eggplant Parmigiano and grilled eggplant with yogurt-tahini sauce are all elevated when this wine is served alongside.

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PAIRING

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FOR THEPRESS DEMOCRAT

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For today's recipe, I've taken inspiration from several sources, including a traditional Turkish lamb stew from "The New Book of Middle Eastern Food" by Claudia Roden (Knopf, 2000) and a traditional moussakas from "Flavors of Greece" by Rosemary Barron (Morrow, 1991). If you have leftovers, toss with pasta such as rigatoni, with more wine alongside, of course.

Ground Lamb with Creamy Eggplant Sauce and Warm Pita

Makes 6 servings

2 cups Bechamel sauce (see Note below)

2 large eggplant

— Juice of 1 lemon

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large white onions, cut into thin half rounds

6 garlic cloves, minced

— Kosher salt

2 pounds ground lamb

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground allspice

— Black pepper in a mill

1 cup red wine

1 cup chicken, duck, beef or lamb stock

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1 pound ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, minced and drained

3 tablespoons minced Italian parsley

2 tablespoons butter

6 whole pitas

4 ounces (1 cup) grated kasseri cheese

¼ cup fresh mint leaves, stacked and shredded

1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and minced

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

If you have not already done so, make the Bechamel sauce and set it aside. Set the eggplant on a baking sheet brushed with a little olive oil and roast in the oven until they are very tender (30 to 45 minutes, depending on size); turn them now and then as they cook. When tender, remove from the oven and let cool. Reduce the oven heat to 325 degrees.

Meanwhile, set a large saute pan over medium-low heat, add the olive oil and the onion and saute until the onion is very soft and fragrant, about 15 minutes. Add half the garlic and saute 2 minutes more. Season with salt. Increase the heat to medium high, add the lamb and cook until it loses its raw color, using a fork to break it up as it cooks. Stir in the cinnamon, allspice and several very generous turns of black pepper.

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