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## Wine and food partners simplified



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For wine and food lovers, a great meal is a well thought out orchestration, a partnership between wines and dishes that enhance and complement one another. At a recent three-course wine dinner at Tradition by Pascal in Newport Beach, chef-owner Pascal Olhats paired irresistible dishes with award-winning Crinella wines.

The Crinella Winery is located in Sonoma, but co-owner Dr. Frank Crinella has lived in Orange County for more than 30 years. Crinella is a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at UC Irvine. He moved from Sonoma County to Orange County in 1977,

when Gov. Jerry Brown assigned him to direct Fairview State Hospital. At that time he accepted an appointment to the faculty at UCI's College of Medicine, where he has been involved in clinical and research activities focusing on children with neuro-developmental disorders.

Frank and his sister, Ramona Crinella (the winery's co-owner and CEO), grew up on the 72-acre Sonoma County ranch that their immigrant Italian parents acquired in 1944. In 1988 they inherited the farmland and before long, started planting grapevines. They started with Sauvignon Blanc vines (their father Marino Crinella's favorite varietal), followed by Pinot Noir.

The 2003 Sauvignon Blanc, the first vintage from the Marino Vineyard, won several prestigious awards, as did the 2005. But the 2006 vintage Crinella Sauvignon Blanc (Russian River Valley, Marino Estate Vineyard, \$22) has garnered greater acclaim: a Gold Medal at the Orange County Fair, a Double Gold Medal at the San Francisco Wine Competition, and 91 points from the Wine Enthusiast magazine (where it was named the Editor's Choice, noting that it was "a real sommelier's wine").

Before dinner, Pascal demonstrated the fine art of cooking duck breasts, a technique that pan sears then roasts the bird, building flavor and creating a caramelized crust while

maintaining mouth-watering juiciness. (Later, I asked him to come to my house and film a video with me to demonstrate close-up each step of duck breast cookery – see it at [ocregister.com/food](http://ocregister.com/food)).

"Never cook without tasting the wine first," Olhats said, explaining that it was a key element in cooking dishes that complement the chosen wines.

The dinner's first course was Alaskan salmon in a chervil-scented nage, accompanied with the now-famous 2006 Crinella Sauvignon Blanc. Along with the perfectly cooked fish, the nage (a light, aromatic broth) was adorned with a colorful assortment of tender-crisp seasonal vegetables. Beautiful fresh green peas. Bright orange baby carrots. Tightly coiled fiddlehead ferns.

The wine's lovely acidity, minerality and dryness – with hints of lemon-like citrus and spicy figs – made an appealing partner with the delicate, subtle flavors in the salmon dish.

"Our theory is to interfere as little as possible; we want our Sauvignon Blanc to be a clear reflection of the grape," Ramona Crinella said.

Next, sliced duck breast, rosy-pink on the inside and crisp on the outside, was served

with a Grape Burgundy Sauce and a mound of scrumptious smoked cabbage augmented with duck leg confit (a savory French dish made by salt curing meat – generally duck or goose legs – then slow-poaching them in their fat).

I asked Olhats how he made the cabbage dish, and he said that he quartered Napa cabbage and smoked them on top of the stove in a perforated pan over smoldering hickory chips. Once smoked, the cabbage was cut into thin slices and sautéed in duck fat, then augmented with garlic, shallots, salt, pepper and that lip-smacking slivers of confit. Anyone who thinks they don't like cabbage ought to taste this concoction.

And it was delectable with the Pinot. Yes, the light-bodied, gentle black cherry-blackberry tones in the 2006 Crinella Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley, Family Estate Vineyard, \$40) were incredible. The food friendly finish offered hints of ground cinnamon.

"A Pinot should have a wonderful nose, not the lumbered up style," Frank Crinella said, giving his glass a good sniff. "The nose in this is like the fruit on a beautiful, big-old pomegranate tree – the pomegranates are bursting open, beautifully ripe. And it is wonderful with duck."

"The Pinot is subtle, with nice complexity," Olhats said. "But there is some earthiness

there, and I tried to find a dish that would make the fruit come up, because it is very nice fruit. I wanted to contrast it rather than matching."

Ramona Crinella said their Pinot vines are a winemaker's dream, each clone selected for a specific part of the vineyard.

"We've sold our Pinot grapes to the very best wineries: Merry Edwards, Dumol and Silver Oak," she said. "As for our own Pinot, this is our second vintage.

"My brother and I aren't interested in making good wine, we want to make the best wine," she said, explaining that their vines are pruned to remove as much as two-thirds, cutting off the top and bottom clusters.

As for the final course, it showed off four made-in-California raw milk cheeses: dry Monterey Jack from Vella Cheese Company, Humboldt Fog, La Panza Gold and Minuet. A mélange of poached seasonal fruits accompanied the cheeses.

The 2005 Glissando, Crinella's late-harvest Sauvignon Blanc (\$44), offered appealing honey, citrus and fig flavors. And as Ramona and I polished off the cheese, fruit and sweet, botrytis-kissed wine, I asked her what it is like being in business with a brother.

"He is a wonderful brother, it's like we are

still teenagers," she said, a big smile erupting between bites and laughter. "You couldn't find a better friend. I never have a bad time while my brother was around."

I suspect she never has a bad meal or a bad wine with him, either.

Have a look at their online cookbook that features family recipes with Italian roots at [www.crinellawinery.com](http://www.crinellawinery.com).

Pascal Ohlats says that he loves this recipe for duck breasts. He says that it is easier to make at home than the version he made at the Crinella Wine Dinner because you don't need demi-glace.

Recipe: [Pascal's Duck Breast With Caramelized Pear, Endive and Ginger](#)

Recipe: [Balsamic-Port Reduction](#)

### **George Bush Toasted Cheese Fingers**

At the reception before the Crinella Wine Dinner, Pascal Ohlats served some delectable grilled cheese canapés. He told me that he cooked for a private reception for George Bush a few weeks after he left office. He created the George Bush Toasted Cheese Fingers specifically because he had heard that President Bush loves grilled cheese sandwiches. Of course, he kicked the

concept up a notch, using both sliced cheddar and grated Gruyere, then augmented the filling with thin slivers of fresh basil.

And he uses a whole wheat bread studded with poppy seeds and flaxseed. He says that the seeds give the bread an appealing nuttiness and crunch. He buys the bread at a bakery in Tustin; Cream Pan (602 El Camino Real, Tustin, CA).

The sandwiches are toasted in a skillet in olive oil. Once they are sautéed, he says that he sprinkles on some truffle oil, then cuts the sandwich into 1/2-inch wide strips and served them hot. He advises that you can trim away the crusts from the bread if you like.

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