

SEATTLE: *Staycation* is the buzz word for summer 2008. With Seattle's bounty of sights, activities and artisanal food markets, staying and vacationing in Seattle can be sweet. One of our favorite weeknight excursions on a sunny evening is to picnic in a scenic park. Or take a paella pan to a Forest Service picnic area and turn an outing into an adventure accompanied by the smell of the forest and wood smoke!

PAELLA OUTDOORS: Keep cooking it simple by prepping ingredients at home or use pre-prepared ingredients. Use frozen seafood and tuck it into a cooler next to a bag of frozen peas or green beans and a chilled bottle of rosado or vinho verde. Whatever you cook over, be sure the paella pan is level and can support its weight when the liquid is added. Here are some road-ready ingredients that do not need refrigeration or preparation:

Aurelias Chorizo: Made with smoked Pimentón de la Vera, it has the authentic flavor of Spanish chorizo and does not require refrigeration. Just slice it and add it to the paella pan.

Huerta Berciana Fried Onions: These Spanish Onions are precooked in olive oil until soft and sweet. Just dump them in right from the jar.

M&V Purple Spanish Garlic: A spoonful of this great tasting minced garlic adds character to any dish. A much better tasting variety of garlic than the silverskin variety commonly sold in stores.

Picuezo Piquillo Pepper Strips: Add the unique taste of Piquillo peppers. This jar of piquillo peppers are already cut into strips and ready to eat.

Roland Clam Juice: The contents of one of these big, economical tins will make a seafood paella taste rich and briny.

STAYCATION WINES

Here are some staycation wines to treat yourself to that taste even better than their price:

2005 Xavier Clua El Sola d'én Pol Tinto Terra Alta, \$12.99: We discovered this easy drinking gem last weekend. Unoaked and made from a blend of 40% garnacha negra, 20% syrah, 20% cabernet sauvignon, 10% tempranillo and 10% merlot, it has a dustiness with lively ripe red fruit and notes of chocolate. Nicely structured with an enjoyable finish, it was great with prawns in chipotle pepper sauce.

2006 Tinto da Anfora (Alentejo) \$13.99: This tasty blend of Portugese indigenous varietals and 5% cabernet sauvignon has a firm structure with complex and elegant flavors of black currant, kirsch and spice. Aged for 14 months in French and American oak, the flavors integrate nicely with a velvety and supple body of plum, black cherry and oak. Pairs well with any grilled meat dish!

2004 Mas de Leda Tierra de Castilla \$22.99: This massive, chewy and dense wine is made from 100% tinto fino (tempranillo) old growth vines. It has enough concentrated fruit and structure to age well and mellow over the next several years, although it's drinking very well right now! One night recently we had this wine with an assortment of cheeses and pizza and it was so delicious that I kept pouring a little more into my glass, and a little more.... and pretty soon it was all gone.

1999 Baron de Ona Reserva Rioja \$25.99: Made by La Rioja Alta, this is a single estate rioja and only available as a reserva. Barrel aged for 24 months in French and America oak, made from 95% tempranillo and 5% mazuelo, this elegant wine has deep black fruit flavors balanced with acidity, notes of toast and leather with a smooth, long finish. Delicious!

2004 Solpost, Montsant, \$23.99: "The poor man's Priorat", Montsant shares the schist soil, terraced vineyards and old vines of its pricier neighbor. "Voluptuous in texture, deep in flavor, this red shows vivid cherry, boysenberry, lilac, mint and mineral notes. Firm, well-integrated tannins underpin the plush palate, and the finish is fresh and long. Grenache, Carignane and Cabernet Sauvignon." - 92 points Wine Spectator

AMAZING WINES

For the price of a good bottle of wine at a restaurant, you can drink an amazing bottle of wine purchased at retail. Here are some wines we suggest splurging on (to drink for example on Father's Day, Sunday, June 15, 2008:

2004 Muga Reserva Rioja \$29.99: One of our favorite riojas is now back in stock! Made from 75% tempranillo, 20% garnacha, 10% mazuelo and graciano, aged 6 months in traditional Riojan oak vats, 24 months in small oak barrels and one year in bottle, this is a structured wine with ripe red berry fruit, minerality and smoke notes.

2003 Marques de Grinon, Petit Verdot, \$44.00: Valdepenas Customers have asking about the wines of Bodegas Marques de Grinon and they are finally available again! Aged 12 months in French oak, this petit verdot has explosive rich fig and black fruit flavors, tannins and toast notes which wrap up in an elegant smooth finish.

2004 Mauro, Tierra de Castilla y Leon, \$48.00: Renowned winemakers Mariano and Eduardo Garcia (Mariano was winemaker at Vega Sicilia for 30 years) are just outside the boundaries of D.O. Ribera del Duero. Their small production wines favor a style of powerful fruit with an ability to age well. The 2004 is a blend of 90% old vine tempranillo and 10% syrah has flavors of vanilla, licorice, and dry concentrated black fruit and flint. Well structured and tannic ~ 92 points Jay Miller

2002 Vega Sicilia Alion, \$57.00: Bodegas Vega Sicilia produces Alion from a separate vineyard. Made from 100% tempranillo and aged in new Nevers oak barrels for 13 months, "while 2002 was a lesser vintage, you would never know it from tasting the 2002 Alion. ... it offers up an exotic nose of coconut, espresso, herbs, black currants and

cherries. Rich and complex on the palate with lots of glycerin and layers of black fruit flavors, it has a pure long finish that goes on and on." ~ 94 points Jay Miller

TAPAS

We stock lots of simple tapas that travel well from marcona almonds to pickled carrot spears to marinated hearts of palm. Hard cheese like Manchego handle heat. In La Mancha where Summers are scorching, they marinate manchego in olive oil to preserve it and enhance its flavor:

MARINATED MANCHEGO

Traveling with friends, we had driven out of Toledo after breakfast and had been pattering about La Mancha all day visiting the famous windmills and the little towns Cervantes used as a setting when he wrote Don Quixote. Along the roadside, an old man had set up a stand where he was selling wheels of home-made manchego cheese as well as jars of manchego pieces marinated in local olive oil and wild herbs. In the distance, his grandson was tending to his flock of sheep

I use an old fashioned clamp-top canning jar for this recipe but any jar that seals tightly will work.

1 sprig Fresh thyme, or ½ teaspoon dry

1 sprig Fresh rosemary, or ½ teaspoon dry

¼ teaspoon Cumin seeds

12 Arbequina olives

1 pound Manchego, cut into wedges then the wedges cut into slices.

1 cup Extra Virgin Arbequina Olive Oil

Put the sprigs of thyme and rosemary in the bottom of a jar with a few cumin seeds and a dozen arbequina olives. Fill the jar with triangular slices of manchego cheese stacked in a spiral then top off with extra virgin olive oil. Allow to marinate for at least a week in your refrigerator. When you are ready to serve, bring to room temperature and fish out as many slices as you need. If you eat all the olives, but not all the cheese, replace them and put the jar back in the refrigerator for another day. Be sure the olive oil covers the entire surface.

~ from The Spanish Table Cookbook