

**LATONA:** Last week we motored out to Eva Restaurant in Latona to visit our alumni wine manager, James Hondros and chef/wife Amy. James has one of the best palates around and a succinct, if sometimes acerbic, way of summing up wines. We curled up in the bar and let his opinions and wine flow. Here are two great Spanish wines currently on Eva's wines-by-the-glass list:

**NV Uriondo Bizkaito Txakolina, \$13.99:** This light Basque white wine is green-apple crisp, just on the edge of effervescence, with more body than a Portuguese Vinho Verde. Perfect with Amy's soup of the day, a creamy African Peanut, laced with exotic spices and garnished with slivers of carrot and cilantro. This wine is also delicious with Pena Corado, our newest Spanish blue cheese.

**2004 Glorioso Crianza Rioja, \$13.99:** This uncomplicated, easy drinking young Rioja has the acidity and light fruitiness to pair with meat or paella. We couldn't agree on whether it was more delicious with Eva's Lamb Burger or the Pork skewers with Tsatsiki sauce.

**COOKBOOKS:** When James was selling wine at The Spanish Table, Amy would often show up at lunch time with a plain paper bag, filling the store with exotic aromas from her latest ethnic hole in the wall discovery. On my visits to EVA, I always admire Amy's ability to draw on world flavors while keeping the cuisine her own. In search of exotic flavors and inspiration for our own cooking, we have expanded the range of cookbooks we stock. Look for recent arrivals on the cooking of such distant places as Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and the Philippines.

**EXOTIC INGREDIENTS:** Sometimes I take a new ingredient home and see what dinner will turn out to be, staging my own personal Iron Chef moment.

**Kolios Greek Feta, \$8.99/lb:** We have this rich, genuine Greek Feta back in stock after selling out of our first shipment. Slices of Feta sprinkled with oregano and drizzled with Extra Virgin Olive Oil was a typical meze we encountered traveling in Greece. Or stuff Peppadew sweet-hot peppers or olives with chunks of this cheese for a quick tapa with contrasting flavors in every bite.

**Yvane Manzanilla Olives, \$2.99:** I challenged myself to cook with these kosher olives from Israel, rather than just dumping them in a bowl and eating them. Using a medium cazuela, I brushed a cut up chicken with olive oil, sprinkled it with a tablespoon of Mustapha's Mélange #2 Moroccan spice mix, and added a coarsely chopped preserved lemon. I baked it for 20 minutes at 400° then added a jar of Huerta Berciana Spanish pre-cooked onions. After another 20 min, I added half a can of the olives and a can of Napoleon artichoke bottoms and returned it to the oven for a final 15-20 minutes.

**Cortas Seasoned Fava Beans, 89¢:** Favas are a traditional Middle Eastern side dish. From Lebanon, these come in two versions, seasoned with cumin or with chilies.

**Mid-East Date Molasses**, \$4.99: Use as a sweetener if you are baking date bread or scones or in a dressing for a green salad topped with nuts. Does the idea of combining the flavor of rosemary with dates inspire you in any way? One of our customers uses this in home made ketchup.

**Tukas Rose Petal Preserve**, \$3.49: Tea roses have prolific flowers and in Turkey the petals are used for this velvety jam. June and roses go together. I used Mid-East Garbanzos Wednesday night when I recreated Melissa Clark's recipe for lamb & garbanzo "falafel" meatballs and lemony Tahini for the accompanying lemony Tahini sauce:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/11/dining/111arex.html?ref=dining>

**TEN BUCKS AND UNDER:** Right now we have some really outstanding wines that are economically priced. Here are some highlights:

**2007 Grazioso**, Argentina, \$9.99: A new organic white wine just in time for summer! Produced from 30 year old vines and marrying 60% chardonnay with 40% Torrontés, it flatters the best flavors of both of these grapes. Medium bodied, juicy peach and ripe tropical fruit flavors with kiss of kiwi on the finish. If you have not tried a Torrontés yet, you should! They are great for those who like a fuller bodied white wine, or for white wine lovers just looking for something new.

**NV Porto del Sol**, Albacete, \$4.99: The perfect beach party wine is here and just waiting for summer to begin! This bright white wine with the port scene on the label has soft citrus and lychee flavors with a medium dry finish. A super value, it tastes way, way better than its price — which is about the same as a gallon of gas.

**2004 La Legua Crianza Cigales**, \$9.99: Produced in D.O. Cigales, which is one of the smallest and most traditional wine regions in Spain. Historically renowned for its roses but increasingly gaining attention for its Tempranillos, this affordable red is a perfect example of the region's enormous potential. It is made exclusively from 100% tempranillo grapes which are hand picked from the estate's property and aged in American and French oak for 12 months. Grown in a climate characterized by extremes, the flavors of ripe black currant, pie cherry and slight notes of balsamic and mint give this wine character and amazing versatility for food pairing. Decant this wine for 30-60 minutes before serving with spicy Italian pasta dishes, or flavor-filled Vietnamese recipes.

**2006 Marqués de Caceres Rosado**, Rioja, \$9.99: A very dry rosé with crisp strawberry notes, minerality and acidity that goes great with seafood, chicken dishes and paella. Delicious!

**2005 Campo Viejo Crianza**, Rioja, \$9.99: A medium bodied, traditionally styled Rioja, it is an extremely satisfying week night wine at a great price. Pairs well with pizza or burgers.

**RECENT ARRIVALS, RIOJA:** Even with the advent of flying, celebrity winemakers with their new oak barrels and ripe fruit extraction, the soul of Spanish wine remains the classically made tempranillo from Rioja. We continue to corner wines from the 2001 & 2004 Vintages. This week we were delighted with the reappearance of wines from Marqués de Murrieta, a pioneering winery established in 1878 near Logroño. Murrieta was a Peruvian who relocated to England, became a general and a wine lover and discovered the wines of Rioja when posted there during his military career. He returned in 1852 determined to introduce the wine making techniques of Bordeaux to Spain and succeeded. Logroño is an ancient walled town of which we have fond memories and a place you must visit if you travel to Rioja. Park outside and walk through the stone gates and back in time.

**2004 Marqués de Murrieta Reserva, \$23.99:** The wines of Marqués de Murrieta are back after a hiatus! The 2004 Reserva has deep flavors of Bing cherry and plum, currants and enough acidity to pair well with grilled red meats. Without overbearing tannins and an enjoyably long finish, this wine is also great for sipping.

**2000 Murrieta Castillo de Ygay, \$58.00:** One of the legendary Gran Reservas, this is “a blend of 87% Tempranillo and 13% Mazuelo, aged for 34 months in American oak barriques. Deep crimson-colored, it offers up an enticing perfume of cedar, pencil lead, earth notes, and black fruits. This leads to a supple-textured, layered wine with ample black cherry, spice, and blackberry flavors. The lengthy wine has excellent grip and enough structure to evolve for another 3-5 years. It should be at its peak from 2010 to 2022 ~ 90 points Jay Miller, Wine Advocate

**PULPO PLATTERS:** A new shipment of these versatile round wooden plates has just arrived from Spain. Traditionally used to serve octopus in Galicia, we have seen them used to serve cheese and charcuterie in Spanish tapa bars and we slip ours under a sizzling cazuela when setting it down on the dinner table. Several diameters.

***Remember to toast fathers everywhere with a good glass of wine this Sunday!***