

JAMÓN IBERICO DE BELLOTA IS HERE! (aka “pata negra de bellota”) Yes, the real thing! If you thought the paleta (front leg) of Spain’s native black-footed, acorn-grazing pigs was delicious, you must taste the back leg. Much bigger and fatter than the front legs, these hams take many months longer to cure – a minimum of 24 months total, often longer depending on the size of the leg. This added curing time means the flavor and textures have longer to mature, resulting in a richer, nuttier, even more amazing melt-in-your-mouth ham. Really, it’s incredible stuff. If it sounds like we’re babbling, you haven’t heard anything yet. Here’s a blog entry by a truly ham-obsessed gentleman. He’s so in love with his leg of jamón it’s a little nuts (and a tad politically incorrect, but then so is the whole concept of ham):

<http://papistrip.blogspot.com/2008/08/waiting-for-my-mail-order-bride-i-now.html>

As with all treasures, the supply of jamon de bellota is limited and expensive: 4-oz jamon iberico de bellota (sliced paper-thin): \$50.00

BARCELO’S LINGUIÇA: In addition to the fabulous jamón de bellota, we have another new product in the meat case: Barcelo’s Linguiça, from Tracy CA. Our Berkeley store recently made the acquaintance of Joe Barcelo, a native of Sao Jorge in the Açores. A sausage-maker for the past 15 years, Joe started making linguica in his garage as a hobby, and soon developed a following. He began making door-to-door deliveries around the Bay Area and Central Valley and this year expanded further, and you’ll be glad he did! Barcelo’s is a very lean sausage which does not flare-up over the charcoal grill. The little pig on the label tells you if it is mild or medium version. Two pack: \$7.99; Three-pack: \$10.99

PADRON PEPPERS FROM OREGON

We have just received our first shipment of padron peppers from Oregon. More flavorful than our California suppliers’, they are also lower in price!

TWO NEW SALTS: From Bevia, our Spanish sea salt purveyor, two new salts: Marcona Almond Sea Salt crystals and Smoked Paprika sea salt flakes. This is an easy way to add essential Spanish flavors to a dish or salad at the last second.

NEW WINES THIS WEEK: 2007 Condesa Eylo Rueda, \$12.99: This racy white, made of 97% Verdejo & 3% Sauvignon Blanc, has aromas of fresh grass and granny smith apple. Intense flavors of lemon peel and honeydew melon are weighty on the palate while the finish is light, lingering & dry. Saturday’s 80 degree weather will be a perfect time to enjoy this wine!

2007 Sete Cepas Albarino Rias Baixas, \$17.99: Very much a family project, Sete Cepas refers to the wine making team of 7 brothers. Produced near the coast, each sip has the tang of sea air with aromas of white peach and exotic tropical fruit flavors. Crisp and acidic with a lively minerality, it has a long finish with notes of pear and grapefruit. Sete Cepas is superb with any shellfish.

2004 San Felices Ermita Rioja Crianza, \$14.99: The Wine Spectator awarded the entire 2004 vintage a score of 92. Classic Ermita’s red fruit, cherry and cedar flavors scored high with us and will please the most traditional Rioja lover. Notes of toast and leather compliment the silky tannins. Medium weight, it has a clean, lasting finish. This one cries out for barbecued lamb!

2005 Altano Douro, \$8.99: I have to admit the \$8.99 price made me postpone tasting this in favor of higher profile wines. I finally popped the cork this week and was astounded by this hidden gem. Made by Symington Family Estates, producers of Grahams, Dows and Smith Woodhouse port wines, the Altano is a great value. Fresh cherry aromas with black plum and fig flavors, a hint of smoke and a long licorice finish make this versatile wine great for sipping or pairing with any type of roasted meat or vegetable dish.

2006 Arenal Carmenere, Colchagua Valley, Chile \$9.99: This terrific tasting Carmenere also has a stunning artistic label - great for a gift - and all for \$9.99! The Carmenere grape was misidentified as Merlot in Chile for decades and winemakers were picking it too early. When DNA tests proved it was Carmenere which needs longer hang time, winemakers were able to play up the strengths of this grape. Intensely dark, with bold flavors of ripe marionberries, smoke, a characteristic herbal edge, and pepper spiciness, this wine is ready to drink now.

2004 Quinta do Encontro Bairrada, \$8.99: The tide of modern new Portuguese wines keeps rolling in! Quinta do Encontro is made of 100% Baga and is "dense and chewy, with flavors of mocha, licorice and dark plum. The muscular finish has plenty of dark chocolate. Drink now through 2010." 85 points Wine Spectator & Best Buy

2004 Singularis Alentejo, \$14.99: This was a unanimous staff hit when we tasted it this week. Inviting floral aromas have smoky nuances and an earthiness with flavors of ripe Bing cherries and black currants. Notes of coffee are balanced by smooth tannins and acidity with a long and dry finish. This drinks like a \$25.00 wine!

2003 Delaforce Vintage Port special price! 375 ml \$26.99; 750 ml \$43.00: This week's cold, blustery weather made me want to light a fire and sip a glass of port. Never mind that the summer Olympics were on TV... "A fabulous nose of cassis and berries, with hints of licorice. Full-bodied and lightly sweet, with super sexy tannins and a long, long finish. Very classy. Superb for Delaforce. Best after 2012." ~ 95 points, *Wine Spectator*

Eggplant & Ajvar

We picked up some eggplant at the Farmer's Market this week. Intending to make Silver Palate's eggplant casserole, we invented a better version by replacing the tomatoes with Ajvar (a rich relish of roasted peppers and eggplant from Bulgaria).

- 1 large eggplant or 8 small Japanese eggplants
- 4 cloves garlic, cut in slivers
- 4 leafy stems of fresh basil
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large jar Ajvar
- 7 tablespoons grated Argentine *queso reggianito*
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Cut the stem off the eggplant(s) and quarter if using large eggplants or cut in half if small. Make a slit in the center of each eggplant half and insert a garlic sliver and small basil leaf. Place skin-side down in a cazuela. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste and drizzle with half the olive oil. Top with the remaining basil leaves and garlic slivers, Ajvar, and the grated cheese. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the top. Cover the cazuela with aluminum foil and bake for 45 to 60 minutes, until the eggplant is soft. Serve with a warm red wine. 4 servings.

