

sips along the way

Warmer Weather Means Easy Wines and Food

by *Doc Lawrence*

July is hot enough, and with the dog days of August looming, this is hardly the time for robust, alcoholic red wines. Food and seasoning need rethinking. The lighter things are easier on the body. Condiments, whether sauces, splashes, rubs or blended seasonings, play a big role in taste and how a dish pairs with wines. This is the season for chilled bubbly and great white wines like viognier, Sancerre, Gruner Veltliner, Sauvignon and white wine legends from Alsace.

I asked my favorite gastronome, Melanie Yunk, co-founder and president of *Melanie's Fine Foods* and creator of the award-winning *Big Acres Gourmet Sauces*, to prepare dinner for Atlanta gourmets using her fine products and impressive summer recipes, pairing everything with some nice wines. A lifelong foodie and a seasoned global traveler, Yunk, who lives in San Carlos, California and is a frequent visitor to Atlanta, has acquired a discriminating palate for a multitude of different tastes and a passion for experimentation.

Her mission is to produce healthy, great-tasting gourmet sauces. Big Acres Gourmet Sauces are all natural and preservative- and MSG-free. Several years back, Yunk introduced me to her products, and I remain a believer, using them almost every time I prepare dinner.

We agree that cooking should never be grueling. Julia Child taught Americans that cooking was fun. Go ahead and uncork a bottle of Laurent-Perrier Alexandra rose and chop, slice, measure and stir. Kitchen work is always easier with Champagne.

We decided to prepare two dishes. "I'm all about easily made gourmet meals," Yunk says. "With this recipe using our Big Acres smoker bag, everything cooks in the bag. Just cut it open, serve and throw the bag away."

Melanie's stellar lamb chops with veggies

Serves four

- 1 SAVU Smoker Bag – alder (a Big Acres product)
- 6 to 8 lamb chops (1 to 1 1/2 inches thick)
- 2 to 3 tablespoons Big Acres Stellar Steak Spice & Rub
- 1 green bell pepper cut in pieces
- 1 red bell pepper cut in pieces
- 1 yellow bell pepper cut in pieces
- 1 cup broccoli heads
- 8 fresh asparagus spears (hard part cut off)
- 12 small potatoes cut in pieces
- 14 baby carrots cut in pieces
- Small garlic cloves cut in half to taste

Preheat grill to 475 degrees. Rinse meat and pat dry. Sprinkle Big Acres Stellar Steak Spice & Rub over chops and place in smoker bag. Add vegetables over and around lamb chops, seal bag tightly and cook for 15 minutes in preheated oven or grill. Then reduce heat to 350 degrees or medium heat and cook for another 25 minutes. Remove bag from oven or grill and allow to rest for 5 minutes. Cut open and serve immediately.

Pair with the Louis Martini 1996 "Sonoma Gnarly Vines" zinfandel. This isn't one of those overripe monsters, but a wonderful red wine from 115-year-old, dry-farmed, head-pruned vines. While Yunk's recipe is quintessentially California, it's nearly perfect for summertime dining in Atlanta. Another red wine that works is Norton from North Georgia's Tiger Mountain Vineyards, available at Whole Foods and Sherlock's.



"Always enjoy good wine while cooking or grilling," advises Melanie Yunk, president and founder of Melanie's Fine Foods, producer of Big Acres products. Condiments ranging from sauces to rubs and seasonings are important considerations when preparing a meal and have a direct bearing on wine selection. Here, Melanie, an advocate of healthy dining, serves one of her special recipes to Doc Lawrence who has the wines open and ready to pour.

Photo by Bill Childs Studio

Spicy Asian chicken peanut chipotle salad tostadas

Serves six

- 12 yellow corn tortillas or your favorite store-bought tostada shells
- Peanut oil
- 2 medium tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 3/4 cup green onions, sliced
- 1/2 cup fresh pineapple, diced
- 2 cups Napa cabbage, shredded
- 1 cup jicama, shredded
- 1/2 cup red peppers, julienned
- 1 bottle Big Acres Chipotle Peanut Sauce
- 1 1/2 pounds grilled chicken, cut into strips
- 1 cup crumbled queso fresco or mild feta
- 1/4 cup chopped roasted peanuts

Lightly fry tortillas in peanut oil and drain on paper towels. Set aside. (Note: Store-bought tostada shells are already fried.) Mix half of the tomatoes, half of the green onions, pineapple, cabbage, jicama and red peppers. Toss with half a bottle of peanut sauce and set aside. Place warm chicken in large bowl and toss with remaining peanut sauce. Divide vegetable and fruit mixture evenly and place on tortillas. Place chicken on top of the vegetables and fruit. Sprinkle remaining ingredients in the following order: tomatoes, onions, cheese, peanuts and serve immediately.

Variation: Use mini corn tostada shells to create tasty appetizers.

For wine, we both opted for Gewurztraminer, the magnificent white from Alsace that blends beautifully with Asian flavors. (Strangely, you almost never see appropriate wines on any Atlanta Asian restaurant wine list.) Another white wine that works beautifully is albarino, the popular white wine from Galicia that is beginning to appear on better local restaurant wine lists.

You can purchase Big Acres products at all metro Atlanta *Fresh Markets* and at *Savor* on Roswell Road. You also can order online at www.bigacres.com.

When it comes to enjoying great wine and food, don't forget that seasoning, weather and quality products are key. Your best bet is to employ common sense, but never stop experimenting. It works for Yunk.

Doc Lawrence is recognized as one of the country's top observers of wine and its unique relationship with the cuisine of the New South. Doc is the director of wine for the International Food, Wine and Travel Writers Association founded in Paris in 1954. His popular column for the Piedmont Review, now in its 12th year, is Georgia's oldest. Doc welcomes comments at doclawrence@docsnews.com.