



This month I actually worked backwards, selecting two recipes I really enjoy and then finding wines that work well with them. I hope you enjoy this change up and take the time to try both the wines and their pairings.

### Creamy Asparagus Pasta

I subscribe to a ridiculous number of both online and hard-copy food publications. I've stopped counting, but in my "Cool Food Sites" Google bookmark I have at least 40 that I visit regularly when I'm looking for new ideas. One of my recent favorites is *Milk Street*, created by Christopher Kimball.

Kimball also founded *Cook's Illustrated* and *Cook's Country*, also big favorites, but left a couple of years ago apparently in a disagreement with investors. For those of you who love cooking but have not checked out *Milk Street*, it is a really good food publication to help push you out of your comfort zone. Kimball and his editors take a more global look at food than during his tenure at *Cook's Illustrated*, but still approach each recipe through the lens of improving through technique and science. Because of this publication, I find myself preparing far more Asian- and African-inspired dishes than ever before, which are both way outside my Mediterranean comfort zone.

According to the unnamed *Milk Street* editor, the inspiration for this dish comes from a version served at the The River Cafe in London. This seminal restaurant was one of the first farm-to-table eateries, inspiring and training an entire generation of young chefs such as Jamie Oliver, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and April Bloomfield. This recipe is classic River Cafe fare, taking a single ingredient and casting it in the spotlight. If you want to make this dish a bit heartier, sauté two chicken breasts before making the sauce, cut into cubes, then stir into the pasta before serving.

**2 pounds asparagus, white ends trimmed and cut into 1 inch pieces**  
**Kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper**  
**8 oz. Tagliatelle or Fettuccine**  
**1 tbsp salted butter**  
**2 medium garlic cloves, chopped**  
**2 medium shallots, halved and sliced thin.**  
**1 c heavy cream**  
**1 tbsp fresh thyme**  
**¼ c finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese**  
**1 tsp fresh lemon zest, plus wedges for serving**

1. In a food processor, pulse the the asparagus until finely chopped, about 15 pulses. **Measure out 1½ cups chopped asparagus and set aside.**

2. In a large pot, bring 4 quarts water to a boil. Add 2 tablespoons salt and the pasta, then cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is al dente. **Reserve 1 cup of the cooking water, then drain.**

3. Meanwhile, in a nonstick 12-inch skillet over medium-high, melt the butter. Add the garlic, shallots and 1 teaspoon salt, then cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallots are softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the asparagus from the processor and cook, stirring

often, for 2 minutes. Add the cream, thyme and the reserved 1½ cups asparagus, then bring to a simmer over medium. Cook, stirring often, until a spoon drawn through the mixture leaves a 2-second trail, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the Parmigiano-Reggiano.

4. Add the drained pasta and ¼ cup of the reserved cooking water to the asparagus-cream mixture and set the pan over medium. Toss, adding cooking water 1 tablespoon at a time as needed, until the sauce is silky and clings to the pasta. Stir in the lemon zest, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Serve with additional Parmigiano-Reggiano and lemon wedges.

The wine that I have chose for this recipe is the **David Frost Sauvignon Blanc "Colene" (\$25)**. Some of you may be familiar with David Frost, as he is a professional golfer from South Africa. Less well known, he is also a direct descendant of the family that owns Saxenburg, one of the oldest wineries in South Africa. He produces a series of wines, including an inexpensive line called the Grand Slam series, and a couple of reserve level bottles. This Sauvignon Blanc is named for his wife Colene and is one of the reserve tier, made from grapes grown in the Elim wine region.

If you think that David's wines are nothing but another celebrity vanity project, think again. Producing wine in Elim is one of the hardest places in the world because the climate is so inhospitable. Located only 12 miles from Cape Agulhas, this region competes with nearby Elgin as the coolest of all the South African wine zones. The challenge is that being so close to the coast the region receives cool winds almost constantly from the Indian Ocean and Antarctica. As a result, only cool climate varieties, such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir ripen in this environment. In fact,

the climate is so severe that only a dozen wineries exist in the area, but what they produce is starting to really catch on, particularly with SB fans.

When you crack the cap on this wine and pour a glass, the nose immediately greets you with notes of pea shoots, lime zest, underripe pineapple and raw, shaved asparagus. On the palate this wine is surprisingly plump and generous to start, then the acidity rears up and shaves off the edges, focusing the fruit into a relatively long finish. I relate this wine closer to Sancerre than New Zealand in style, as the wine finishes so lean. Drink with the above mentioned pasta dish, grilled chicken topped with herbed goat cheese or shrimp scampi.

### **Chicken Cacciatore**

Speaking of my comfort zone, here is a Sunday night staple at my house. I love this because it is basically made entirely of pantry staples, and it is one of the only ways I can get my family to eat dark meat. If you don't have portobello mushrooms you can use anything you have and the results are almost as good. You can also serve this over pasta, polenta or with roasted potatoes or just veggies. Again, extremely versatile (I also find the leftovers better than the first day). Of course, being a dish I serve regularly, I no longer feel compelled to only serve with Italian wines. As you will see below, the dish is incredibly adaptable and works nicely with almost any medium-bodied, dry red wine.

**8 bone in chicken thighs (about 3 pounds), trimmed of excess fat**

**Salt and ground black pepper**

**1 teaspoon olive oil**

**1 medium onion, chopped**

**6 ounces portobello mushroom caps (about 3 medium), wiped clean and cut into 3/4-inch cubes**

**4 medium cloves garlic, minced**

**1 1/2 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour**

**1 1/2 cups dry red wine**

**1/2 cup chicken stock or low-sodium canned chicken broth**

**1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes, drained**

**2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves**

**1 piece Parmesan cheese rind (2 inches, about 1 ounce), optional**

**2 teaspoons minced fresh sage leaves**

1. Season chicken with salt and pepper. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking, about 2 minutes. Add four chicken thighs, skin-side down, and cook, not moving them until skin is crisp and well browned, about 5 minutes; using tongs, flip chicken and brown on second side, about 5 minutes longer. Transfer browned chicken to large plate; brown remaining chicken thighs, transfer to plate, and set aside.

2. Drain off all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot. Add onion, mushrooms, and 1/2 teaspoon salt; sauté over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until moisture evaporates and vegetables begin to brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Meanwhile, remove and discard skin from browned chicken thighs. Add garlic to pot and sauté until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in flour and cook, stirring constantly, about 1 minute. Add wine, scraping pot bottom with wooden spoon to loosen brown bits. Stir in stock, tomatoes, thyme, cheese rind (if using), 1/2 teaspoon salt (omit salt if using cheese rind), and pepper to taste. Submerge chicken

pieces in liquid and bring to boil; cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer until chicken is tender and cooked through, about 45 minutes, turning chicken pieces with tongs halfway through cooking. Discard cheese rind, stir in sage, adjust seasonings with salt and pepper, and serve.

The wine I have chosen to serve with this dish is the **2016 Ramos Alentejano Reserva (\$16)**. You may be surprised it is from Portugal, not Italy, but when I want a weeknight bottle under \$20, Portugal has become my go-to country. This bottling, from one of the elite producers, João Portugal Ramos, is an amazing value and incredibly versatile with food or without. Also, it is barely contained within the "moderate weight" category and should also appeal to those who like full-bodied wines as well.

The grapes for this wine grow in the Alentejano region, which encompasses much of southern Portugal. This area is well suited for agriculture as the climate is warm, sunny and dry. Vineyards usually lie on soft rolling hills, frequently bordered by wheat fields, olive groves or forests of cork trees. In this region Ramos farms 1200 acres of vineyards, with this wine being made from a selection of the best blocks within. Although he grows over a dozen varieties in this region, João uses only three for his Reserva: the indigenous Trincadeira and Aragónez, along with the globe-trotter Syrah. As acidity is a problem in this region, João only ages the wine in stainless steel tanks to preserve freshness.

When you open this wine, splash it into the decanter for a few minutes before serving. Once you do, the aroma of sage, dried cherries, raspberry jam, toasted pecans and herbs de Provence evolve quickly in the glass. The feel on the palate is soft and smooth, with only a modest level of tannins rising in the middle to provide a little frame into the moderate finish. Drink this wine with almost anything, from seared flank steaks to chicken Cacciatore or grilled sausages.