

Alicante Bouschet • (Not So) Wild Boar Ragu

Though **Alicante bouschet** (pronounced ah-leh-COUNT BOO-shay) is the twelfth most widely planted red winegrape variety in France, you won't find many varietal Alicante bouschet wines in the United States outside of Lodi. Once plentiful in California, it has been so rare for so long that it only recently earned its own category at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. During Prohibition, Alicante was the second most planted grape in California, prized for its thick, dark skin that allowed the grapes to survive the train ride from Lodi to home winemakers in the East. Mohr-Fry Ranches in Lodi had one of the few remaining vineyards of Alicante planted in the 1920's. After repeal of Prohibition, its popularity quickly faded, and most plantings were replaced by more popular varietals. This 1921 vineyard produced award-winning wines until 2012, when the Frys had to pull it out and replace it due to disease and low production.

Origin: Henri Bouschet first cultivated Alicante bouschet in France in 1866 by crossing Petit Bouschet and Grenache. His father, Louis, created the Petit Bouschet grape from Aramon and Teinturier du Cher, so it was truly a family varietal. Alicante is one of the few teinturier (pronounced TAHN-tur-ee-yay) grapes that belong to the *Vitis vinifera* species. Virtually all red grapes have clear juice and pulp--all the color in the wine coming from the skins. A teinturier grape has red pulp and red juice. Its intense color made Alicante perfect for blending.

Tasting and serving: The first thing you notice about Alicante bouschet is its deep dark red, almost purple, color. The aroma is more intense than most red wines, slamming your nose with jammy blackberries, blueberries, black cherries, and plums, with added notes of baking spices like pumpkin, nutmeg, and vanilla (from the oak aging). In your mouth, the wine is silky smooth with just enough tannins to dry your mouth during its short finish. Serve Alicante at 58 to 63 degrees (15 minutes in a refrigerator).

Pairing: Alicante bouschet is fairly high in tannin and acid, so it pairs best with grilled red meats and tomato-based dishes. With wines high in acid, pairing acidity to acidity is important. I chose Harmony Wyneland's 2015 Alicante bouschet to pair with my (Not So) Wild Boar Ragu. The relatively mild acidity of this Alicante matches the small but noticeable amount of tomato in the dish. The fruity aromas round out the savory character of the meat, while the wine's tannins dissolve any fat remaining on the meat. In the late 1980's, our neighbor, Bob Hartzell, bought the pipe organ from the Castro Theater in San Francisco and built a rather large building in his vineyard to house the organ and all its pipes. In the early 2000's, Bob and his wife Linda started their winery in the building next door to the barn with the help of winemaker Chad Joseph, who had just left his corporate job with Gallo and moved to Lodi to start a consulting business. They zeroed in on Alicante bouschet made from Jerry Fry's ancient vine grapes as their signature wine. Linda's son, Shaun MacKay, moved back to Lodi in 2005 and studied under Chad for several years. He is now an award-winning winemaker in his own right.

(Not So) Wild Boar Ragu

Just about anywhere you have a "wine country," you see some kind of Tuscan theme. There's something about the rustic Italian countryside that evokes quintessential wine country images in most peoples' minds. Many of the newer high-end homes you see in Lodi vineyards have Tuscan architecture. It's only fitting that a book on Lodi Wine and Food has at least one Tuscan recipe, and there's nothing more Tuscan than the Tuscan national dish: Pappardelle Cinghiale (Wild Boar Ragu). Wild boars are plentiful in Tuscany. They feed mostly on grasses and root for grubs and acorns, though their favorite food is grapes. In the winter, Tuscans grab their guns and hunt wild boars. Local restaurants go crazy with all the fantastic fresh boar meat the hunters bring in. We do have wild pigs in California, mostly along the Central Coast, which are decedents of European wild boars, but their meat is harder to find than the property damage they cause. You can order wild boar meat on the internet from farms in the Midwest and southeastern US, but it can cost up to \$20 per pound delivered.

Luckily, British chef Elizabeth David came up with a method to marinate pork from domesticated pigs to make it taste similar to wild boar. She published it in her 1962 book, French Provincial Cooking. The wine and vinegar in the marinade impart a bitter fruit flavor to the meat. The carrots, juniper, and peppercorns add an earthy component. The parsley, thyme, and marjoram add grassiness. These are all the things that wild boars eat. The aroma rising from the pot when browning the marinated meat is intoxicating. Combine that with the best San Francisco pappardelle (pronounced pa-par-DAY-lay) and you have a great Central California version of the Tuscan classic. This dish takes 4 days to marinate and 4 hours to cook, but you only spend about an hour total actually working at the counter. Put this in front of your guests, and they'll say, "Come to Papa!"



Finishing the ragu with the pappardelle pasta



(Not So) Wild Boar Ragu with a piece of Spaghetti Dinner Bread and a green salad of romaine topped with Jeff's Croutons and True Ranch Dressing

Ingredients

Marinade

3 pounds pork shoulder (pork butt)
1-1/2 cups Jenner Family Estates Old Vine Zinfandel
1/3 cup red wine vinegar
2 carrots, sliced into 1/2-inch rounds
1 medium yellow onion, sliced thin
2 cloves garlic, cut brunoise
2 bay leaves
1/3 bunch parsley (with stems)
1/2 tsp thyme
1/2 tsp marjoram
2-1/2 TBS whole peppercorns
6 juniper berries, crushed
1 tsp coarse salt

Ragu

2 TBS Lodi olive oil
2 carrots
2 celery stalks
2 small yellow onions
1 tsp salt
1 tsp pepper
2 cups Jenner Family Estates Old Vine Zinfandel
1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes
4 cups vegetable stock
4 bay leaves
4 sprigs fresh thyme (tied together with string)
2 cups water

Finish

1 pound pappardelle pasta (12 ounces dried)
1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese

Making Tame Pork Taste Like Wild Boar

Combine all the marinade ingredients, except the pork, in a 4-quart sauce pan. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer for 5 minutes. Occasionally push the parsley and onions into the liquid. Remove the pot from the heat and cool to room temperature.



Mise en place for the Marinade



Scoring the pork butt to let the marinade in

Remove any strings from the pork. Score the fat on the pork about every inch or so to allow the marinade to seep in. Put the pork and marinade in a 2-gallon zip loc freezer-safe bag. Put the bag in the refrigerator for four days, turning twice a day. Be sure to keep a plate or pan under the zip loc bag in case it leaks. When ready to cook, pull the meat from the bag, scrape off all solid herbs and spices, and discard the marinade.

Making the Ragu

Cut the carrots, celery, and onions into large pieces (2 to 3 inches) and run them through the food processor to form a paste. If you don't have a food processor, cut the vegetables brunoise. Cut the marinated pork shoulder into approximately 1/2-inch by 1/2-inch chunks. Remove any peppercorns or berries that may still be on the pork and discard them. Heat a 7-quart Dutch oven or stock pot to medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to coat the pan. Add the pork pieces, about a pound at a time. You only want to add enough pieces to cover the bottom of the pot. You don't want them stacked up. Brown all pork pieces and all sides just until no raw meat is showing (about 3 to 5 minutes). Remove the browned pork to a bowl. Add the next batch of pork and brown. Repeat until all the pork is browned. The first batch will brown faster than the second and third. Dump any excess liquid from the pot but keep the fond (brown stuff stuck to the bottom).



Carrots, celery, and onion paste



Browning the marinated pork in batches

Keeping the pot on medium heat, add a tablespoon of olive oil to coat the bottom of the pot. Add the carrot, celery, and onion. Season with salt and pepper (1 teaspoon each). Sauté until the liquid is evaporated and the vegetables are slightly browned (about 8 to 12 minutes). Keep stirring, and don't let the vegetables burn. Add the pork back into the pot. Add the wine and stir to deglaze (dissolve the brown stuff stuck to the bottom of the pot). Simmer until the liquid is reduced and thickened (about 10 minutes). Add the tomatoes and enough vegetable stock or water to cover the meat with an inch of liquid. Add the bay leaves and thyme bundle. Bring to a boil then reduce heat and let the pot simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally. In a simmer, steam rises from the surface and a few bubbles pop on the surface every second. Check every half hour, and add vegetable stock or water as needed to keep the meat covered with liquid. After 2-1/2 hours, stop adding liquid and allow the liquid in the pot to evaporate and the sauce to thicken. Remove the thyme bundle and bay leaves and discard them. After 3 hours, turn the heat to low.

Cooking the Pasta

Fill a pasta pot (with insert) with water and add a tablespoon of salt. Bring the water to a boil, then add the pasta. Cook the pasta for about a minute longer than the maximum recommended time on the package instructions (usually 10 minutes). You want the pasta to be extra plump to absorb the ragu. Lift the pasta insert out to stop the cooking process. Save the pasta water.

Finishing the Dish

Using a ladle or spoon, remove about 2 cups of ragu from the pot and put it in a small bowl. Turn the heat under the ragu pot back up to medium. Add the pappardelle noodles to the ragu pot and stir. Add back some of the ragu you removed until you have approximately equal amounts of ragu and noodles. Add a cup of pasta water to the ragu/noodle mix. Bring to a simmer and allow the noodles and ragu mix to cook until most of the added water has evaporated (about 10 minutes). Remove the pot from the heat.

Presentation

Put about a cup of the pasta/ragu mix into each plate and top with a couple of tablespoons of the reserved ragu. The traditional way to plate pappardelle ragu is to grab a big clump of pasta/ragu mix with tongs. The noodles should hang down from the tongs. Twist the tongs as you let the noodles fall onto the plate. This will create a "pile" on the plate. Top with grated parmesan cheese. I serve this dish with my Spaghetti Dinner Bread (page 109) and a green salad topped with Jeff's Croutons (page 218) and True Ranch Dressing (page 217). Serves 6 to 8 people.

The California Ingredient

On December 16, 1913, Carl and Katharina Jenner purchased their first vineyard east of Lodi. One hundred years and four generations later, the Jenner family still produces Zinfandel grapes on the Alpine Road property. In 2013, we hand selected the best clusters from our 35-year-old vineyard block North of the house for a commemorative vintage. It turned out so good that we did it again in 2016. Zinfandel wine is perfect for this dish. Most red wine just adds a bitter component. Zinfandel rounds that out with a little fruit. You probably ask, "Why use expensive wine to cook with?" The general rule for cooking with wine is that you should not cook with a wine that you would not drink.

Tips and Tricks

A complicated as it sounds, this dish is actually one of the easiest recipes in this book. Preparing the marinade only takes about 15 minutes with very little cutting. Using a food processor, the prep time for the ragu is only about a half hour, again with very little cutting. Cooking takes a very long time, but you only spend a total of about 45 minutes at the stove. The key to a successful presentation is timing. You don't want your guests waiting an hour while you finish the dish. Just after your ragu hits the 2-1/2 hour mark, start heating up your pasta water. A big pasta pot can take 10 to 15 minutes to reach a boil, then the pasta takes 8 to 12 minutes to cook. You want your pasta ready when your ragu hits 3 hours.

Chopping raw pork shoulder is difficult, even with a sharp knife, because the smooth membrane can give a lot of resistance when you try to press the knife down. Also, the marinated meat is somewhat fluid and will spread out from under the knife when you push down. If you hold the pork firmly and use a sawing motion with your chef's knife, with very light downward pressure, the raw meat will cut like butter.

Pappardelle pasta is sold just about everywhere, but it may not be in your local grocery store. You may have to go to a specialty food store or order it online. You can make it yourself, if you have a pasta roller. Follow the pasta roller instructions to get a thin sheet that you would use for fettuccine, except cut it with a knife so that you get noodles that are 1 inch by 12 inches.