

Albariño • Chicken in Shrimp Dijon Sauce

So many Lodi wineries are now producing white wines from **Albariño** grapes (pronounced al-bah-REEN-yo) that this traditionally Spanish varietal has become “Lodi’s Chardonnay.” Even though Chardonnay is the most produced wine grape in California, and Lodi provides twenty percent of it, more Lodi wineries make an Albariño wine than a Chardonnay wine. Bokisch Vineyards pioneered Albariño production in Lodi with their first commercial vintage in 2001. The Albariño grape is originally from an area in Spain known for wet, foggy winters and mild summers. Lodi does have the wet foggy winters, but hot summers. However, Albariño thrives here. There are less than 300 acres of Albariño planted in the United States, but more than 40 wineries make an Albariño wine due to its exploding popularity. People love Californian Albariño for its tropical fruit and citrus aromatics without the harsh acidity of a Sauvignon blanc.

Origin: Albariño is a white grape variety that grows both in the Rias Baixas (Galicia) region in Spain and the Vinho Verde region of Portugal. Cistercian monks from Burgundy, France probably brought Albariño to Iberia (now Spain) around the 12th century. The name "Alba-Riño" means "the white from the Rhine," which is further evidence of its migration. DNA studies have failed to identify any parents or the origin of this varietal. In 1992, Santa Barbara farmer Brian Babcock planted the first known California Albariño cuttings taken from Adegas Morgadio, Spain.

Tasting and Serving: A glass of Albariño will have a light straw color with a tinge of green. The intensity of the aromas quickly reminds you of lemon, lime, pear, and grapefruit, with subtle mineral notes of freshly wetted granite along with a saltiness. In your mouth, you experience more of the citrus and mineral characteristic. The acidity leaves an aftertaste reminiscent of grapefruits and tangerines. Serve Albariño at 45 to 50 degrees (30 to 45 minutes in a refrigerator). Note that Albariño, more so than most wines, experiences a dramatic change in aroma and flavor as the serving temperature changes: from almost completely tasteless below 35 degrees; to citrus and mineral between 45 and 50 degrees; to richer apricot, pear, and apple above 50 degrees.

Pairing: Albariño is best paired with light to medium intensity dishes like white meat and light-colored sauces and especially with dishes that emphasize citrus or aromatic herbs. Its high acidity allows it to act as a palate-cleanser after eating oily or creamy foods. Albariño is a great choice for seafood dishes like ceviche, fish tacos, seafood pasta, and shrimp. I chose Bokisch 2016 Terra Alta Vineyard Albariño to pair with my Chicken in Shrimp Dijon Sauce. The bright acidity adds a little spiciness to the pan seared chicken and cuts through the cream sauce. The grapefruit-like, slightly salty finish of the wine is a perfect complement to the saltiness of the shrimp. Though fruity acidic white wines are not known for their bottle aging potential, in keeping with Lodi's culture of innovation, in 2017, Markus and Liz Bokisch set up a vertical (multi-year) tasting of nine vintages (2008 to 2016) of their Albariño from the Terra Alta vineyard. They found that Albariño ages very well in the bottle, developing more mellow fruit flavors like apricot and peach over time.

Chicken in Shrimp Dijon Sauce

As a kid growing up on a farm in California's Central Valley, we had two big treats. One was the push-up orange ice cream pops that Dad would buy us on the way home from the dump. The other was a shrimp cocktail. I'm talking about tiny sweet bay shrimp packed with spicy ketchup in those little tulip glasses with metal lids. Pop the lid off with a can opener, and you had gourmet in a glass. Living on the east coast and in the south for a lot of my adult life, I could only get these little babies when I visited California or Oregon. Now that I'm home in Lodi, I can add them to this already decadent chicken recipe and make it as much of a treat as those little bottled shrimp cocktails were.

Ingredients

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
1/4 cup Gold Medal Wondra flour
3 TBS canola oil
1/2 shallot, cut fine brunoise
2 cloves garlic, cut fine brunoise
1/2 cup Albariño wine
1/3 cup chicken stock
2/3 cup heavy cream
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1/4 pound bay shrimp



Preparing the Chicken (The Perfectly Cooked Chicken Breast)

The boneless, skinless chicken breast is the bane of gourmet chefs. It's tasteless without the skin and bones, almost always overcooked, and not as healthy as dieters think. One chicken breast has the same number of calories as, less protein than, and almost twice the fat of a New York Strip steak. Yet, most people love white meat and avoid other parts of the chicken. When the need arises, how do you perfectly cook a boneless, skinless chicken breast that actually has flavor?

Put the breasts on a plate with the smooth side up. The smooth side is the "presentation" side (the side that will face up on the serving plate). Sprinkle this side with salt. Turn the breasts over and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Dredge the chicken breasts in the flour (both sides) and pat to remove all but a very thin layer of flour. Heat a 10-inch fry pan to medium heat. When hot, add 2 tablespoons of oil. Slowly roll each chicken breast into the pan, smooth (presentation) side down. If you experience excessive splattering, use a splatter screen (page 69). Let the chicken cook until it's golden (about 5 minutes). Use a turner or tongs to periodically lift an edge of the breast to check, but don't let the breasts slide around. Turn the breasts over and let them cook until golden on the other side (about 4 minutes).



***Mise en place* is important for this dish. The breasts (smooth side up) are ready to season with salt and pepper and dredge in flour.**



After sautéing face down in the pan for 5 minutes, the presentation side is perfectly golden

Check the internal temperature of a breast at its thickest part. If it's less than 160 degrees, put the pan in the oven at 350 degrees until the internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. I use a digital readout thermometer with an alarm (page 136) to tell me when the breast reaches the correct temperature. Depending on the size of the breasts, this takes about 10-15 minutes. Remove the chicken from the fry pan and place it in a covered dish to keep it warm. Don't wash the pan! Be careful when handling the hot pan handle. You will read that the safe minimum cooking temperature for chicken is 165 degrees. If you take the breasts out of the oven at 160 degrees, they will retain more moisture, and carryover cooking will warm the interior at least another 5 degrees.



***Mise en place* for making the sauce**



Fond (brown stuff stuck to the pan) after cooking the chicken

Preparing the Sauce

This part goes quickly, so clear your social schedule for the remaining 20 minutes. Place the fry pan with the chicken fond (brown stuff) on a burner with medium heat. When hot, add just enough canola oil to coat the pan (about 1 tablespoon). Add the shallot and cook until fragrant (about 30 seconds). Add the garlic and cook until fragrant (about 30 seconds). Add the white wine to de-glaze the pan and stir until all the fond is dissolved. Cook, stirring frequently, until the wine is reduced by about half (about 5 minutes). Add the chicken stock. Reduce heat to just below medium. Stir until the liquid is almost but not quite gone (about 10-12 minutes, see photo on the next page). Stir in the cream and mustard. Simmer, stirring continuously, until the sauce is reduced by about a third and is thick enough to coat a spoon (about 5 minutes).



Cook wine and chicken stock until you scrape the spoon through the mix and the liquid doesn't run back into the spot where you scraped



The finished sauce is reduced, thickened, and strained. It coats the spoon and *slowly* backfills where you scraped the pan

Pour the sauce through a stainless steel fine mesh strainer to remove the garlic and shallot pieces and pour the liquid back into the fry pan. Reduce heat to low. Add shrimp and stir continuously for another 2 to 3 minutes. Serve immediately.

Presentation

Slice each breast across (against the "grain") with the knife twisted about 45 degrees ("on the bias," page 69) into 3 OR 5 pieces (an odd number). Pour half the sauce on each plate and set the chicken on the sauce, smooth (presentation) side facing up. Serve with my Easy Rice Pilaf-Wild Rice Style (page 205). Serves 2 people.

The California Ingredient

Bay or "Pink" shrimp are available in just about any food store on the west coast. Their "count" is usually 125/175, which means that a pound contains between 125 and 175 individual shrimps. They are already cooked and almost always "previously frozen." Don't let that turn you off. It's almost impossible to keep this type of shrimp fresh all the way from the net to the store. They perish quickly, so you should eat them within 48 hours of buying them.

Tips and Tricks

Timing each step and focus are important to ensure that the chicken is warm and the sauce is still liquid when your guest takes his or her first bite. You should start the chicken about an hour before serving. The breasts take about 5 to 10 minutes to sauté, about 20 to 30 minutes to reach the proper temperature in the oven, and 10 minutes or so to rest and finish carryover cooking. When you make the sauce, which takes about 20 minutes, you want that to be the only thing you have to do, because it requires constant focus to avoid burning or overcooking. You should cook the rice and put it in the oven before you start frying the chicken. The rice should be ready to pull out of the oven just when you are ready to put the chicken in. The rice will hold in the hot covered pot on a trivet for a half hour.

You will notice that we don't pour the sauce over the top of the chicken breast. You only do that when the meat is actually cooked in the sauce. When you make a pan sauce from the fond after cooking the meat, you put the sauce on the plate and serve the meat on top of the sauce.

If you want to serve four people, you have a couple options. You can make two batches at the same time using two fry pans. Depending on your guests' appetites and the size of the chicken breasts, you could also cut each breast in half and serve less meat with more rice.

Chef's Technique: Cutting "On the Bias"

Chefs use a cutting technique called "on the bias" to make long pieces of meat and vegetables cook (and often look) better. Cutting on the bias creates more surface area to brown the food and reduces cooking time. The thinner the cut and the more surface area, the shorter the required cooking time. You can do this with sausages, skirt steak, chicken breasts, carrots, celery, and any other ingredient that would benefit from more surface area or an angled appearance. It's pretty simple. The most common "on the bias" cut is with the knife rotated at a 45-degree angle. Notice how much surface area each piece of sausage has compared to just cutting a round slice.



Cool Gadget: Splatter Screen

One gadget that I use just about every time I pan fry something is the splatter screen. It has an extremely fine stainless steel wire mesh that keeps most liquid droplets in the fry pan, but allows the steam to escape, so the cooking process is not affected. I have a nice All Clad splatter screen that fits perfectly over my fry pans, sauté pans, and Dutch oven, but you don't need one that fancy. You can buy a good, functional splatter screen for about \$15.

