



## Old Concept— New Twist

Chefs have been cooking with wine for hundreds of years. The unofficial practice has been to *never cook with a wine you wouldn't drink*. For obvious reasons, most restaurants select lower end wines for cooking including whites, reds, sherries, ports madeiras and spirits. Circa, the early 1980s, the 18 liter pneumatic pouch became a popular cooking wine container because it was low in price and prevented oxidation, as the wine content was transferred into smaller user friendly bottles. The pneumatic sacs are used for red and white wines. Gallon jugs and smaller bottles are used for other types of wines and spirits. Restaurants that use wine in their cooking usually have one type of red and one white wine (varietal or blend), one port, perhaps two sherries and a brandy. This might be referred to as the old concept.

At the December dinner of



The Chefs Association, Casey Cobb introduced a new twist in cooking wines. Mr. Cobb founded a new company which he named **Academie**. The idea behind this company is to provide *quality wines for cooking*. With a name like Casey Cobb, one might think he is an old baseball player. On the contrary, he is a young academic with a very sensitive palate.

Born and raised in Southern California, Casey Cobb got a degree in computer science from the **University of California, Riverside**. After graduation, he traveled around the world visiting 32 countries in a two year period. During this time, he worked as a computer engineer in Bolivia and, then, as an English teacher to working professionals in Beijing. He is fluent in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese.

When he returned to the United States, Cobb moved to Walnut Creek and took a job as a brand manager for **MoreFlavor, Inc.**, a company that provides ingredients to make wine, beer and coffee. He became immersed in the world of flavors and became a professional coffee taster.

Not being a wine expert, Cobb always found it frustrating to find a good wine for cooking. Most recipes called for a *dry red* or *dry white* wine which seemed so vague for him. He read many books, tasted numerous wines, asked friends and consulted with chefs while researching what makes a good wine for cooking.

After conducting an extensive online research survey, Cobb

was surprised to find that 40% of the respondents said they were intimidated when it came to cooking with wine. Most people reported that they steer away from *cooking wines* because of low quality and the, often, unwanted addition of salt. The availability and/or search for appropriate quality wines for cooking seemed to be a difficult task.

Casey Cobb saw a new calling and set out to create the world's first premium cooking wine through a brand of quality wines sourced from the Napa, Sonoma and Lodi areas and blended specifically for certain types of cooking. With personal savings and funds raised from family and friends, Cobb started his winery in Concord, California and named it **Academie** (*to imply culinary —style education*).

Cobb does not crush any grapes or make the wine, but, with his keen palate, sources wines from established northern California wineries and blends them to achieve flavor profiles for cooking specific types of dishes.

**Academie** produces four wines, distributed mostly through northern California supermarkets. The wines are attractively packaged in different colored labels which include: **Blend #1**, orange label for red sauces and meat dishes (lends depth and complexity); **Blend #2** for seafood, poultry and pork (lends acidity and brightness); **Blend #3** for beef and poultry marinades (lends savory & fruited spice); **Blend #4** for game bird [sic] fish and lamb (lends a refined sweetness).

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At the aforementioned CAPC dinner prepared by **Chef Aaron** at the **Lake Merced Golf Club**, the guests were served all four of the **Academie** wines to accompany the specific courses. It was not determined if the same wines were used in the preparation of the corresponding courses. It can be said that the repertoire of **Academie** wines were all eminently drinkable, with blends #2 and #3 being the favorites at the wine editor's table.

At this time, the emphasis of distribution seems to be through the supermarket. If **Academie** wines prove to be popular with consumers, President Casey Cobb may seek to expand his cooking wines into restaurants where there could be a dual use—for cooking and as a *house* wine for drinking. One final thought—for one who is fluent in Mandarin, wouldn't it be tempting to formulate a cooking wine for specific Chinese foods and use language skills to promote the product among the largest Chinese city population outside of China?

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## Fascinating Facts

Removing the skin from chicken can cut the fat content by three-quarters and the total calories by half. Still, the dark meat chicken (such as thighs or wings) without the skin has two to three times as much fat as skinless breast, and 25% more calories. In fact, some well-trimmed, lean cuts of beef or pork (look for the word *loin* or *round*) have no more fat, ounce for ounce, than skinless dark-meat chicken.

Don't overlook canned vegetables and fruits. Thanks to improved technology, canned produce retains most of the food's vitamins and minerals. The heating process of commercial canning partially destroys certain vitamins, but some nutrient loss is inevitable whenever a food is prepared. *Fresh* vegetables and fruits are not necessarily more nutritious, since many are harvested before they're ripe, trucked thousands of miles, and stored for long periods in which case nutrient losses can be great. Canned beans, pumpkin, corn, pineapple, spinach and beans, to name a few, are actually quite nutritious. But, watch out for one unwanted extra; lots of sodium.

While palm oil and palm kernel oil are two of the most highly saturated fats, and thus should be avoided, hearts of palm are nearly fat-free. Also known as swamp cabbage, this delicacy is from the interior of a palm tree, usually the cabbage palmetto of Florida. The oils are made from the fruit of a different palm tree (*Elaeis Guineensis*) that grows in Malaysia, Africa and Latin America.

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