

California Wine and Food



California food and wine, restaurant recipes, seasonal chef menus, wine reviews, culinary events, and food facts, for hospitality and the foodservice industry.

TV's Biggest Food Personality Debuts Own Wines

By Dan Clarke

There were two Emerils at Fetzer Vineyards last weekend. The high-energy guy from the Emeril Live show on The Food Network gave the cooking demonstration to 850 fans Saturday morning. Perhaps less familiar to that group was the Emeril who spoke quietly and gently Friday evening of his foundation for disadvantaged children and of the fun he'd been having preparing a magnificent meal with Fetzer's Culinary Director John Ash and his staff.

One might conclude there are really several more Emerils out there, as the accomplishments attributed to him seem too many for just one man, even a very busy one.

Emeril Lagasse stars on two television shows, Emeril Live and the Essence of Emeril. He has authored seven cookbooks. He owns six restaurants. Spice blends, salad dressings, pasta sauces and even a line of cookware bear his name. He is a marketing juggernaut. He's also a hell of a chef.

The September 14th event at the winery in Hopland was his second annual appearance there. It served as a forum for launching the Emeril's Classics line of wines. The project has been three years in the development as the New Orleans-based chef has worked with Fetzer winemaker Dennis Martin to create the blends for a white wine and a red that he feels will best complement his cuisine. The wines will retail for a suggested \$12.99. The white is primarily Chardonnay (75%), with the aromatics of Viognier (25%). The red wine is primarily Cabernet Sauvignon (85%), with a substantial Syrah component (12%) and also some Zinfandel (3%).



"We're trying to get people a little more interested in food and wine. We wanted something that had the right balance, the right match for our food."

Both wines were served, along with other Fetzer wines, at a \$250 a plate Friday night dinner dubbed "Emeril Under the Stars." Proceeds from this event and the following day's "Emeril in the Harvest Sun" benefited his foundation which funds organizations he feels promote the inspiration and well being of children.



"When you have deep flavors it's really not a problem to add a little olive oil and drizzle it on like so."

The celebrity chef demonstrated his preparation of two dishes in an hour-long presentation for his devotees on Saturday. One dish, a crusted redfish using what he called "a basic Portuguese sauce," included olive oil, onions and Linguica sausage. He poured olive oil from an unusual blue bottle which turned out to have been provided from one of the artisan producers offering samples in the garden earlier that morning, Olivas de Oro. He advised his Northern California audience, "You guys are so blessed. You have so much great olive oil here," and he acknowledged the winery's organic garden, saying "I've never seen a tomato crop like what's out here at Kate's (Kate Frey, Garden Director) garden at Fetzer." After rendering down the Linguica, he engaged his audience with banter about how much fat to drain off. Getting into a topic often heard on his TV show, he said "It's a pork fat thing and I just can't get enough of it." The audience begged him to "kick it up a notch." He obliged with the familiar "Bam!" as he added more spice. It was good cooking instruction, but it was becoming good theater, too.

In preparing a "strudel" with crabmeat and hearts of palm (see recipe below), he explained that he believes there can be savory strudels, as well as the more familiar sweet versions, such as apple strudel. "Yes, and we've been doing savory cheesecakes at the restaurant for about 12 years now," he said.

As he paused to take a sip of wine, a question was called out from the floor. "Is it pasta?" the woman asked. No doubt she was referring to the phyllo dough, but Emeril used just enough pause to turn her inquiry into *non sequitur*. "Is what pasta," he responded, "the dough or the wine?" He then advised her to "have another glass of wine and figure it out." It was just the sort of almost-smart alecky comment that is part of his television personality. Sitting in a TV studio or under a tent in Hopland, his fans love it.

Emeril gave his thanks for his audience's attention and their support of his foundation. They wouldn't let him off the kitchen stage until he promised to return to Fetzer a year hence for the next harvest festival.



"Oh yeah, we're really cookin' here and we ain't giving any bad stock advice."

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