

The Rosengarten Report

ISSUE NUMBER 70 • RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2010

THE FOODS AND WINES THAT MAKE ME SWOON

THIS MONTH'S TASTING SCOOP

At Long Last, the OLIVE OIL REVOLUTION is Here!

In 2010, the Fresh Stuff is Actually Available in the U.S.!!!
Your Complete Guide to Bringing the Best and Freshest Oils
into Your Home...

I started getting serious about olive oil ten years ago or so, when I realized something of fundamental importance: olive oil is never better than on the bloomin' day it's made. It is not like wine (except for Beaujolais Nouveau, of course). It does not improve with age. If you don't drizzle your oil within 3-6 months, you're just not getting what you paid for.

And that's the dirty little secret of the olive oil industry. Olive oil merchants don't want you to know how



Now...and Ever After!

Inside this issue

<i>Killer Chinatown Noodles</i>	25
<i>The Greatest Grilled Fish of My Life</i>	27
<i>Rosengarten's Table Extra: Lobster of the Year</i>	29

important freshness is.....because then you'd balk at buying all that oily stuff sitting on store shelves two years after production!

We're not talking here about rancidity, or the appearance of flaws--which can also happen with a couple of years' time. Nope....we're just talkin' flavor. Good young oil is incredibly saturated with fruity, olive-y, herb-y, vegg-y flavors, that leap out at you at the olive mill....but one year later, when you use that same oil at home, the stuff is a ghost of its former self, with significant reductions in organoleptic pizzaz.

And we can't be having that, can we? Never reduce your organoleptic pizzaz! Not at \$45 a bottle!

And not when it would be so simple for everyone in the olive oil chain to help you on this, rather than fight you. Fight you is what they did for many years, by not even raising the issue...then by obfuscating it when it did come up.

Well, the reality is....there's still a whole lot of obfuscatin' goin' on.

But having spent the last month looking over and tasting 150 currently available olive oils, I can tell you with absolute certainty: there is an American Revolution in olive oil going on! A whole new day is dawning. If you know what you're looking for, it is now easy to keep yourself stocked in a continually freshened supply of fresh olive oil--as opposed to just five years ago, when it was practically impossible! *Keeping a fresh supply is the key to really having olive oil in your life.*

For one thing, good importers have recently discovered that olive-oil consumers in the U.S....have caught on! That'll cause a revolution right there. ("Oh no...now they're asking for *fresh milk!*")

The importers' attitude used to be: "they don't know the difference... so why should we limit the sales window of our product?"

Presto-changeo. The attitude of a

growing number of importers today is: "we better get on this freshness thing....the tastemakers are noticing!"

It all begins with a stepped-up effort to get oil much more quickly into the U.S. market. No one rushed before....why go to the expense? Well, well.....they're rushing now!....at least the good ones are.

There is so much fresh olive oil in the U.S. right now, that when I put out a call for this tasting a few months ago....

"Please send me oils ONLY from the 2009-2010 harvest (olives picked anywhere from October 2009 to February 2010) And only oils that are commercially available in the U.S.!"

....I was overwhelmed by the response. Approximately 150 spank-ing-fresh olive oils that met the criteria started showing up at my office in March, 2010! I had no idea there was anywhere near this much fresh olive oil currently available in the U.S.!

[Click here to see the olive-oil region that supplied the largest amount of fresh olive oil to me!](#)

For another thing....the importers and distributors are getting more serious about letting you know, at point of sale, the exact age of the olive oil in the bottle you're considering!

The systems are still the same, of course. They have two ways of letting you know:



1) The bottle may indicate that you should consume this olive oil by a certain date; or



2) The bottle may indicate the harvest date of the olives that went into this oil.

The new difference is: whereas many bottles failed to provide this info before, an increasing number of bottles are providing it now!

Let's look at the two kinds of timing info:

#1 Consume By Date

The "consume by" date is not my favorite.....because every producer may have a different standard! To me, you should consume oil within six months of production....maybe a year if the oil is holding well. So, along comes Mr. Tuscan producer, who pressed his olives in November, 2008.....and he writes "consume before November 2010" on the bottle. Well, if you consume that oil right now....you're consuming oil that's almost a year-and-a-half old! In fact, it's standard to use two years as the shelf-life measure...though, to me, that's way too long! Some producers use 1 1/2 years as a measure, and it's the rare producer who uses one year as a shelf life measure.

So you're smart. Can't you just look at a "consume by" date and figure out when the oil was made? Not always. For starters, you may not know the typical harvest date in the olive-oil regions of the world! So....some bottle from Greece you're considering says "use before February, 2011"....does that mean the olives were harvested in 2010? 2009? 2008?

As you do your detective work, it's helpful to know what the likely harvest month was. And that is why....I'm bringing you for the first time ever....a guide to the likely harvest windows of all the world's olive oils! This will help you get a leg up as you struggle with a label and begin to puzzle out when the oil in your hands might have been made:

ITALY		TUNISIA		SYRIA	
Liguria	Dec - Jan	Tunisia	Nov - Feb	Syria	Oct - Nov
Tuscany	Late Sept - Jan				
Umbria	Oct - Nov				
Sicily & Puglia	Mid Oct - Late Dec				
FRANCE		MOROCCO		SOUTH AFRICA	
Provence & Languedoc (south)	Late Aug/Early Oct - Late Dec/Early Jan	Meknes	Nov - Feb	South Africa	Feb - June/July
		Fez	Nov - Feb		
		Marrakech	Oct - Feb		
SPAIN		ALGERIA		U.S.	
Andalucía	Late Oct - Jan	Algeria	Late Aug - Oct	California	Oct - Feb
Cataluña	Late Oct - Feb			Texas	Mid Sept
Castilla & Extremadura	Late Oct/Nov-Early Jan/Feb				
GREECE		EGYPT		ARGENTINA	
Athens	Oct - Jan	Egypt	Mid Aug - Mid Oct	Argentina	Apr - May
Peloponnese	Late Oct - Jan				
Crete	Oct - Feb				
TURKEY		ISRAEL		CHILE	
Turkey	Oct - Feb	Israel	Oct - Dec	Northern Chile	Mid Apr - Mid/Late June
				Southern Chile	Late Apr - June/July
PORTUGAL		LEBANON		NEW ZEALAND	
Alentejo	Early Oct - Early Feb	N. Koura Reg.	Early Nov - Mid Dec	Northland	Late Mar - Early Apr
Moura	Early Nov - Mid Jan	N. Zgharta Reg.	Late Nov - Late Jan	Central Region	Late May - Late June
Beira Interior	Early Nov - Mid Oct	S. Reg.	Mid Oct - Late Nov	Southernmost	Mid June - Aug
Tras-os-Montes	Early Nov - Mid Jan				
Ribatejo	Early Oct - Early Jan				
				AUSTRALIA	
				Northern Region	Mar - June
				Southern Region	Mid Apr - Late July/Aug

Now you're informed!....and have a running start when you battle the bottle!

#2 The Harvest Date

The harvest date is better. It used to be that you'd NEVER see this; producers have had trouble switching over to the wine model, where the label almost always tells you the vintage. But the resistance is breaking. I was *so heartened* by the amount of harvest-date-bearing labels I saw in this tasting!

Of course, there's still trouble in the way it's being done. If you're buying a wine from Europe, and it has a vintage on it...except for German Eiswein....you can be certain that that vintage occurred between September and November of the year on the bottle.

'Taint so with olive oil!

The intriguing thing about olive oil in Europe is that olives can be harvested as early as September....but as late as February or so! So, if an olive-oil bottle right now, as you read this (May 2010) says "Harvest 2009"....you cannot be sure if that's a

spanking fresh oil that was harvested five months ago in December 2009.....or an older bottle that was harvested sixteen months ago in January, 2009!

Dilemma!

The best, of course, is when a producer gives you the harvest date with a month and year. Finally, they're starting to do that! Some scrupulous producers will even tell you the month and year in which the oil was bottled (e.g. "harvested November 2009, bottled January 2010"). That's clarity heaven!



So now you have a better perspective on what I went through. After we received the 150 olive oil samples, we checked all bottles to make sure the labels indicated that they were fresh. Only 30% of the labels, or so, gave me clarity (a much higher number than I would have found years ago!). Back we went to the phones, checking that every oil in the tasting *is actually* from the most recent harvest; in almost every case, the producers said yes, and we trusted them.

If an oil is in the tasting notes below, we at least have the producer's word that it's fresh.

When it came to rating the oils, I decided to break the oils into three categories....basically the unspoken categories that naturally exist in the world of olive oil. For a full explanation of those categories, and of my criteria in judging the oils, [click here](#) (it is a really good idea to look at this before you start reading my ratings below):



Here are the three categories I used in the judging:

<p>Category #1</p> <p>OILS IN THE UNDER-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p>	<p>Category #2</p> <p>OILS IN THE RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p>	<p>Category #3</p> <p>OILS IN THE MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p>
---	---	--

Each category in this tasting has its own full-range of winners: five-star oils, four-star oils, three-star oils, and some honorable mentions. You can read through all of the winners, and all of my notes below. Before we begin,

however...here's a cross-category list of the top-top oils, the five best in the whole tasting in descending order of preference. You can find acquisition information in the rating sections below.

The Greatest Fresh-Harvest Oils I Could Find in the U.S. in Spring, 2010

Apollo Olive Oil
UNDER-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE



Apollo Olive Oil, Gold Series Barouni, Premium California Extra Virgin, Oregon House, CA (\$1.57 per oz., \$19.95 for 12.7 oz. bottle)

★★★★★

Portico de la Villa
UNDER-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE



Portico de la Villa, Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra, Cordoba, Spain (NA, only available to members of the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club)

★★★★★

Valderrama
RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE



Valderrama Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra, Hojiblanca, Toledo, Spain (\$1.64 per oz., \$13.80 for 8.4 oz. bottle)

★★★★★

Merula
MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE



Merula Estate Bottled, Aceite De Oliva Virgen Extra, Merida, Spain (\$1.18 per oz., \$20 for 16.9 oz. tin)

★★★★★

Castelas
MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE



Castelas Huile d'Olive de la Vallée des Baux de Provence, Vierge Extra, AOC, Les Baux de Provence, France (\$2.22 per oz., \$37.00 for 16.7 oz. bottle)

★★★★★

**The Best-Value Fresh Oils I Could Find in the U.S.
in Spring 2010 (five-stars on down):**

<p>Butte View UNDER-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Butte View Olive Company California Ascolano Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Butte County, CA (\$0.71 per ounce, \$6.00 for 8.4 oz. bottle)</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	<p>Lucero MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Lucero, California Olive Oil, Arbequina Three-Star Blend, Corning, CA (\$0.83 per ounce, \$7 for 8.4 oz. bottle).</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	<p>Olivista RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Olivista Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Classic Selection, Unfiltered, CA (\$0.77 per ounce, \$13.00 for a 16.9 oz. bottle).</p> <p>★★★★★</p>
<p>Frantoi Cutrera Frescolio MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Frantoi Cutrera Frescolio, Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva, New Harvest, Chiaramonte Gulfi, Italy (\$0.66 per ounce, \$16.95 for a 25.4 oz. bottle)</p> <p>★★★★★</p>	<p>Casa Pareja MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Casa Pareja, Extra Virgen Olive Oil, Murcia, Spain (\$0.70 per ounce, \$17.95 for a 25.3 oz. bottle).</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Zoe UNDER-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE</p> <p>Zoe, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Spain (\$0.50 per ounce, \$12.89 for 25.5 oz. bottle).</p>

Please note: as you go through the oils below, you will find occasional food suggestions. These are important...because, ultimately, that's what olive oil is for!.....drizzling, mixing, blending, ennobling. [Please click here](#) for general discussion of olive oil with food.

**Category #1: Oils in the Under-Ripe-Olive-Style
(so-called "GREEN" oils)**

This is my favorite category of oil: green and grassy, with fire in the finish. ([Click here for full discussion of green-oil tasting criteria.](#))

Happily, the largest share of oils we received was in this category--possibly because it's popular, but possibly because these oils were harvested earlier (many in

October-November 2009) and bottled earlier than the oils in other categories.

And one more thing to think about: notice how many of my winning fresh oils were produced in California!

([Click here for more opinions about California oil.](#))

Apollo Olive Oil ★★★★★

Apollo Olive Oil, Gold Series Barouni, Premium California Extra Virgin, Oregon House, CA (\$1.57 per ounce, \$19.95 for 12.7 oz. bottle) Who'da thunk this crazy oil would end up on top? Yes, I tasted a number of top-quality olive oils from this excellent producer located in the hills of Yuba County, to the east of California's hot Central Valley (at the northern end of that Valley). But I was *blown away* by this one, made from

rare Barouni olives, which are native to.....Tunisia! Olive trees were brought from there to California about 40 years ago, and you'd be hard-pressed to find Barouni olives anywhere else.....except Tunisia and Yuba County! How do we do without? This was one of the richest and most flavorful oils in my entire tasting! Unctuous-looking green with gold hints. The nose reveals an exaggeration of the Tuscan bruised-fruit thing, with some fresh peaches lurking in the background, along with touches of herbs and metal. On the palate,

this elixir is so rich it's almost sticky--but never does it cross the line into greasy. Then, as you're getting over the texture stimulation, a bitterness-pungency storm kicks up--moderate on the bitterness, insane on the spice, which doesn't so much tear at your throat as spread electricity over your whole palate for a long time. If I were looking to sex up some *crudo* --maybe something full-flavored and full-textured, like yellow-tail --I'd go Tunisian in a heartbeat. Apollo also makes a fine Cal-Tuscan-style oil (Sierra), and a fine Provençal-style oil (Mistral).

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Oh baby...do I love this place. Here's what it says on the back label, printed *right on the glass*, so you can't

suspect a new label was glued on an old bottle: "Harvested and cold pressed in late December 2009." It doesn't get better much than this!!!

Apollo Olive Oil
P.O. Box 1054
Oregon House, CA 95962
877.776.0703

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at
<http://apollooliveoil.com>

Portico de la Villa ★★★★★

Portico de la Villa, Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra, Cordoba, Spain (NA, only available to members of the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club). My friends at the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club (see sidebar below) have done it again with this stunning oil from Cordoba, one of my favorite olive-oil areas within my favorite olive-oil region (Andalucia). It has the sublime taste of Picual about it, my favorite single variety--but intriguingly, there's no Picual in it, though it's made in the land of Picual! Instead, the Picuda olive supplies that fascinating, southern-Spanish tomato-stem quality--tempered by the high-class Hojiblanca olive, which adds an in-


credible roundness and luxury. Green, with a slight cast of orange. In addition to the crazy Picual-like tomato plant character, there is a delightful rush of watermelon rind, and some intriguing grainy, cedary notes in the finish. Thick and chewy, but not fatty. Some bitterness. Finishing spice, not too strong, that tingles tantalizingly. I'm thinking grilled bread, but rich grilled fish would also be great. I could even see a few slabs of Manchego marinating in this for a few days.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

You don't have to worry about this one, because it comes to you through the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club.

The Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club

As many of you know, ten years ago or so I was so frustrated by the lack of fresh olive oil in the U.S. market that, along with long-time colleague T.J. Robinson, I began my own club to import and sell to readers spanking-fresh olive oil. I have now passed that baton entirely on to T.J....in part because he's doing such a great job on his own! He has created the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club, and, to me, joining it is the surest way an American has of guaranteeing a steady, year-round source of fresh-pressed olive oil. Click here for a ton of info about T.J.'s efforts: www.freshpressedoliveoil.com

 Rosengarten's Table

**A FREE GIFT for
Rosengarten's Table!**

T.J. Robinson, AKA "The Olive Oil Hunter," has made a very generous and exclusive offer to Rosengarten Report readers. If you join his Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club now, he will send you, absolutely free, a bottle of the ultra-flavorful 2009-2010 Pórtico de la Villa, one of the five top oils in my tasting! And, he'll even pay for your shipping and handling. Here's the kicker...if you don't like the oil, and don't want to stay in the club....you can cancel your membership and not pay a dime. The bottle of oil will be yours to keep free, as a thank-you for giving the club a try. This offer's good only while supplies last; he only has around 90 bottles of this oil, and he's the exclusive US importer. To get your hands on your free bottle, you need to visit the following web address by May 31...

www.freshpressedoliveoil.com/aprr

Butte View ★★☆☆☆

Butte View Olive Company California Ascolano Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Butte County, CA (\$0.71 per ounce, \$6.00 for 8.4 oz. bottle) This oil, from a producer I had never heard of, flipped me out. It comes from Oroville, an old gold-mining site near the northern end of California's hot Central Valley--and yee-haw, they are up to something there. I'll resist most of the "gold" puns, but this one is clearly a gold-medal winner for me. In fact, it is one of the best Andalucian-like oils I've ever had from an American producer. We can, in part, credit the Ascolano olive (an important olive in days of yore for canned California colossals!).....which did so well in California oils throughout my tasting. This oil, a light gold with a green-ish tint, has lovely apple-y flavors--but the real excitement is a strong shot of Picual-like tomato-vine right at the center of things. Intense and delicious! Sexy-rich, but elegant, with a mildly bitter-peppery finish. I

can't think of another oil I'd rather drizzle on quiet carbs like grilled bread and warm white beans. By the way, this is no flash in the pan (OK, couldn't resist): I also tasted a lovely, off-beat Mission bottling from the same Butte Valley Olive Company with intriguing citrus tones (but no added citrus).

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

A bad, bad boy, I'm sorry to say. No indication at all on the label. Phone call was what I needed! Shouldn't have to do that!

Butte View Olive Co.
2950 Louis Ave
Oroville, CA 95966
530.534.8320

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase by phone, at 530.534.8320.

Laudemio ★★☆☆☆

Laudemio, Marchesi Frescobaldi, Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva, Florence, Italy (\$2.36 per ounce, \$39.95 for 16.9 oz. bottle) Yikes! This is some pricey oil! But I guess they deserve it--Laudemio oils have been the Tuscan standard for over 20 years now. Back in America's dark ages, the early '90s.....there was always Lonely Laudemio, a Tuscan consorzio dedicated to the highest standards. In Tuscany, there are multiple producers who belong to this Laudemio consorzio, and all use the same logo and bottle shape--but the name of each individual producer is just below the "Laudemio" brand name on the bottle. Marchesi Frescobaldi is the one brand that has always had the biggest Laudemio presence in the U.S. This current one is quite green, with wonderful wheatgrass-and-pine notes, plus a sexy touch of saliva-on-skin. The texture....wowsa! Amazing velvet, like sipping a Robuchon soup. Flavors are not full-bore intense, and it's only mildly peppery--but this is one lush package.

So if a Laudemio bottle says "Raccolto (harvest) 2009"--as this one does--Laudemio fans know that in spring, 2010 this IS the current Laudemio. But if you don't know that, you might worry: "did they harvest in January, 2009?"

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:
Manicaretti
5332 College Ave, #200
Oakland, CA 94618
800.799.9830

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.olio2go.com

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Well, if you know a few things, you're OK. To qualify for the official Laudemio brand, the harvest of the olives must take place by Nov. 30 of the production year.

Mardesich ★★☆☆

Mardesich Estate Extra Virgin Unfiltered Olive Oil, Paso Robles, CA (\$2.01 per ounce, \$25.50 for 12.7 oz. bottle) A lovely and powerful oil, really exciting....but marked down slightly for the center-stage position the bitterness takes. Light, clear greenish-gold. One of the richest aromas in all the California oils: wheatgrass, melon, marzipan, earth. Made from the classic Tuscan olive blend, and the flavors are intensely Tuscan. Super-rich mouthful which picks up bitterness early on--that's the problem--but then morphs into profound spiciness, which goes on for some time. If you have full-flavored and complementary food, this may be one of the top choices in California. But it'll shatter delicate fish, for example.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

It's a shame. Mardesich's literature is very precise:

"hand-picked late November 2009 and cold-pressed within hours of harvesting." But the poor consumer gazing upon the bottle has *no clue* whatsoever: it says NOTHING on the label about timing.

Mardesich Estate
5570 Rancho La Loma Linda
Paso Robles, CA 93446
805.226.0202

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:
Purchase by phone at the We Olive store in Paso Robles, or at the Long Beach, California store

We Olive 1311 Park Street Paso Robles, CA 93446 805.239.7667	We Olive 4725 E. 2nd Street, Long Beach, CA 90803 562.433.8000
---	---

Il Fiorello ★★☆☆

Il Fiorello, Il Fiorello Olive Oil Company, Sonoma, CA (\$1.96 per ounce, \$25 for 12.7 oz. bottle) One of the pricier California oils we analyzed....but so good! Made from 100% Frantoio olives (the Tuscan mainstay) in, appropriately, Green Valley, Sonoma. But this green-tasting oil has only glints of green in its mostly gold, light and clear robe. I love the deep blast of fruit that goes with the wheatgrass, suggesting kiwis and pears. Also impressive is the texture, a very Tuscan balance of velvety and light. Perfect scratch of pepper in the throat, just enough.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Book 'em. Bad showing. Nothing on the label. We picked up the harvest date (November 8, 2009) from accompanying literature.

Il Fiorello Olive Oil Company
2625 Mankas Corner Rd
Fairfield, CA 94534
707.864.1529

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:
Purchase online at: www.ilfiorello.com

Albereto ★★☆☆

Albereto, Extra Virgin Olive Oil Toscano, Badia a Coltibuono, Gaiole in Chianti, Italy (\$1.40 per ounce, \$23.59 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). A big, big Tuscan oil--with a little more grease, and a little more bitterness, than you might expect from a top Tuscan oil. Chianti mainstay Badia a Coltibuono--who had good oil in the U.S. market before that was a common thing--is still sending us top oil, and is still a reliable label. In 2010 however, it doesn't stand out from the pack the way it did in 1990. Badia a Coltibuono ships three oils to us every harvest, and this one--the Albereto, made at a small single estate from the three top Tuscan olive varieties--is always my favorite. The greenest of the Badia a Coltibuono trio in color, and fairly cloudy. A ton of correct Tuscan wheatgrass. If you're looking for punch, not elegance...go for it.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Among the very best! Back label says, prominently, "Harvest November 2009/Released Spring 2010." Bravo!!!!

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

De Medici Imports
One Atalanta Plaza
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
908.372.0965
info@demedici.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:
Purchase online at: www.amazon.com

Lucero Ascolano ★★ ★

Lucero Ascolano, California Olive Oil, Cold-Pressed, Extra Virgin, Corning, CA (\$1.90 per oz., \$16 for 8.4 oz. bottle) A great showing for Ascolano, from a great estate two hours north of Sacramento. Medium-yellow with a green tint. Lots of Picual-like, Sauvignon-Blanc-like aromas and flavors, particularly in the aftertaste. Very distinctive and sexy. Elegant body, with a kiss of bitterness. Lucero also produces two other very fine unripe-style oils: Anthony's Blend, and Manzanillo. PLUS: see Lucero's killer medium-ripe oil in the MEDIUM-RIPE-OLIVE-STYLE section below.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

All kinds of confusing stuff here. A white sticker that looks like something slapped on at a store says "best

before 2011." Uh.....when in 2011? January? December? The back label says "2009 Best in Show" at a California competition....uh.....the competition took place in 2009? The oils were *from* 2009? Then the front label says "Gold" at 2010 Yolo County Fair--the only designation that gives me confidence. But the others ruin it!

Lucero Olive Oil LLC
 P.O. Box 1018
 Corning, CA 96021
 877.330.2190

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:
 Purchase online at: www.lucerooliveoil.com

Oro Bailen ★★ ★

Oro Bailen, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Bailén, Spain (NA, only available to members of the Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club). Another kick-ass selection for Fresh Pressed, and another oil from my favorite olive-oil region in the world: Andalucia. This oil is produced right near Jaen, the heart of the storied region. A very crystal-clear green. Delightful bruised fruit, with wild herbal hints, and a perfume-y suggestion in the finish. Very rich palate that recedes into elegance. Somewhat bitter finish, but balanced with the fruit as tannin is in wine. Good all-purpose drizzle.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

You don't have to worry about this one, because it comes to you through The Fresh-Pressed Olive Oil Club ([click here](#))

Allure ★★ ★

Allure, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Templeton, CA (\$1.81 per ounce, \$23 for 12.7 oz. bottle). Great oil from the Paso Robles area of California's Central Coast, a hotbed for new olive oil production. Made from a range of Tuscan olives, like Leccino and Frantoio. I have a funny analogy: as Napa Cabernet (or Paso Robles Cabernet!) is to Bordeaux, so this oil is to Tuscan olive oil. It emphasizes the fruit--and the unpleasant tactiles also get kicked up. Mid-hue green. Huge Tuscan-style wheatgrass, with geranium and bruised green apple. Fat and a little greasy, not as elegant as Tuscan oil. The back-of-the-throat pepper comes with considerable bitterness, followed by a full-mouth kind of heat. Big stuff! Probably best as a *bistecca fiorentina* drizzle oil--as the bitterness of the steak's char will cut some of the bitterness of the oil. One of the more expensive California oils.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Nada on bottle. Nada. Really bad. It does taste incredibly young, but we had to confirm the harvest date by calling the company!

Allure Estates
 P.O. Box 659
 Templeton, CA 93465
 805.237.8063

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:
 Purchase online at: www.allureestates.com

Rosa D'Oro Vineyards ★★ ★

Rosa D'Oro Vineyards, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, 2009 Tuscan Blend, Kelseyville, CA (\$1.06 per ounce, \$18.00 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Another big oil from California...this one from northern California wine country....and at a very appealing price! It's another blend of Tuscan olives--but I love the specifics of the Tuscan flavor here, which is wheatgrass *plus* something like browned banana. Very rich and lively, with the rare sweet fruit quality that lifts the middle palate. Some bitterness, and major finishing pungency.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

A little scary. The only mention is on a tied-to-the-

bottle neck tag that carries the handwritten message "2009 Tuscan Blend." Was that tag put on for me? Do all bottles have it? Moreover....can we be sure the olives were harvested in fall 2009, as opposed to winter 2009? Why can't people be clearer?????

Rosa d'Oro Vineyards
3915 Main Street
Kelseyville, CA 95451
707.279.0483

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.rosadorowine.com

Zisola ★★ ★

Zisola, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Mazzei, Harvest 2009, Mont Iblei, Italy (\$1.71 per ounce, \$28.95 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Interesting hybrid here: a Tuscan family (the famous wine-making Mazzeis) making oil in the boom-region of Sicily--and in Mont Iblei, to boot, in the southeast corner of Sicily, my favorite part of Sicilia for olive oil (and gelato!...the oil press is just outside the gelato mecca of Noto!) Made from very Sicilian cultivars: Morseca, Ogliarola, Nocellara Etna. I love the useability of this fairly green oil. Lots of hay and brown-ish agricultural taste mixed in with the wheatgrass. Extremely light in feel, with lots of flavor. Some prickly heat in finish, but not too aggressive. Imported by the great Manicaretti of Oakland, CA.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

A good one! Says "Harvest 2009" right on the front label! But it'd be better if it said "Harvest 2009-2010," so you could be sure it wasn't, say, January 2009!

All DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

Manicaretti
5332 College Ave, #200
Oakland, CA 94618
800.799.9830

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.olio2go.com

Robbins Family Farm ★★ ★

Robbins Family Farm, California Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Tuscan Blend, San Luis Obispo, CA (\$1.42 per ounce, \$18.00 for 12.7 oz. bottle). Very good olive oils in general from Robbins Family on Central Coast....but this one's my fave. It certainly has the most flavor and most pepper of the trio I tasted. I assume the olives are the Tuscan classics....because, aside from the marketing name, this is a *very* Tuscan-tasting oil. Clear greenish-gold. Super wheatgrass, almost a little metallic like geraniums, bright young flavor. Lovely rolling-gentle texture. The streak of bitterness in finish (not too much) gives it appealing backbone.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Shame shame shame! No date anywhere on label....but they have the chutzpah to announce "most delicious if used within 12 months." TWELVE MONTHS FROM WHAT?????

The Robbins Family Farm
7170 Cerro Robles
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805.544.4077

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: <http://robbinsfamilyfarm.com>

Campo Corto ★★

Campo Corto, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Badia a Coltibuono, Unfiltered, Toscano, Italy (\$2.95 per ounce, \$49.95 for 16.9 oz. bottle). This is the most expensive of the Badia a Coltibuono oils....in fact, it's the most expensive oil in the tasting! Is it worth it? Lots of wheatgrass, ripe bruised-fruit character, and big finishing prickle. Plus....a kind of Tuscan version of butteriness creeps in. But the final effect is a little more flat-line than it should be, especially at this price.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Among the very best, as with all Badia a Coltibuonos!

Back label says, prominently, "Harvest November 2009/Released Spring 2010." Bravo!!!!

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

De Medici Imports
One Atalanta Plaza
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
908.372.0965
info@demedici.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at www.olio2go.com

Best of the Rest in the Under-Ripe-Olive-Style

These recommendations are anything but wan! This is a killer list of oils, any one of which, on another day, could have zoomed higher in the "medals" round. They appear in descending order of oil-lust:

Zoe

Zoe, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Spain (\$0.50 per ounce, \$12.89 for 25.5 oz. bottle). Wow! This cheap, cheap Spanish oil kept surprising me in the tasting, growing in stature with every tongue-coating! It will never be profound, big-league oil....but it's so drinkable and delicious. It's the price-quality ratio that puts it at the top of my list. Is this the Beaujolais of olive oil? Big apple-y taste, with green Picual undercurrent. Smooth, harmonious, then minor prickle in finish. House oil for proud householders!

Cru di Cures

Cru di Cures, Olio Extra Vergine Di Oliva, Sabina D.O.P., Lazio, Italy (\$1.77 per ounce, \$30.00 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Everything is right here for a green Italian oil....but I mark it down a notch for its lack of intensity. Absolutely lovely feel on palate. From the superstar importer of Italian goods, Gustiamo.

Olio Trevi

Olio Trevi, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, D.O.P., Umbria, Italy (\$1.96 per ounce, \$16.50 for a 8.4 oz. bottle). Fat, voluminous oil, with great apple-y flavor....though decidedly on the subtle side.

Pasolivo

Pasolivo, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Olio Nuovo, Paso Robles, CA (\$1.77 per ounce, \$30.00 for 16.9 oz. bottle). For several years, this was my go-to company for California oil. I love these guys! But there's a transition now: they're moving from their elegant square-shouldered bottles to tins, which will protect the oil better. A parallel change in the product? At least for now? I'm sure all will work out beautifully in the end. But their December 2009 Olio Nuovo, while excellent, doesn't have as much oomph as the oils I know from former years. Considerable bitterness in mid-palate.

Pacific Sun

Pacific Sun, Olive Oil, Extra Virgin, Unfiltered, Proprietor's Select, Gerber, CA (\$1.07 per ounce, \$9.00 for a 8.4 oz. bottle). Extremely light in texture with intriguing string-beany taste. Gentle finish. A gorgeous non-interventionist oil for drizzling on light fish, raw or cooked.

Olivina

Olivina, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Frantoio, Livermore, CA (\$1.57 per ounce, \$20.00 for 12.7 oz. bottle). Very green in color. Tuscan grass and bruised fruit. The best oil from high-quality producer Olivina, in the East Bay area--much richer than their Arbequina oil.

Olio Verde

Olio Verde, Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva, Gianfranco Becchina, Sicily, Italy (\$2.06 per ounce, \$34.95 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Very good green oil from western Sicily, lots of grass (and a little valve oil, in a good way!). Chief flaw for me: the striking flavor is short, not deep.

Owens Creek

Owens Creek, Quartetto Viola, Sicilian Style, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Menlo Park, CA (\$1.77 per ounce, \$22.50 for a 12.7 oz. bottle). Big come-on, quiet middle, bitter finish. Very California. A major-league oil, slightly out of harmony.

Badia a Coltibuono

Badia a Coltibuono, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Siena, Italy (\$1.42 per ounce, \$24.00 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Very Tuscan in profile, but very quiet and delicate. Least interesting of the three Badia a Coltibuono oils.

Colle Nobile

Colle Nobile, Olio Extra Vergine D'Oliva, San Marcello, Ancora, Italy (\$2.63 per ounce, \$44.50 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Interesting example of little-known local cultivar, Raggia....but rather bland throughout until big zingy, finish. Expensive.



Category #2: Oils in the Under-Ripe-Olive-Style (so-called "GOLD" oils)

We didn't receive the volume of oils in this category that we did in the other categories. Is it possible that later-harvesting means many of these ripe-olive oils are still being bottled and shipped? Does it mean

the producers make and/or distribute these oils less because they think the greener style is sexier to American olive oil aficionados right now? Don't know. In any case, click here for full discussion of gold-oil tasting

Valderrama ★★★★★

Valderrama Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra, Hojiblanca, Toledo, Spain (\$1.64 per ounce, \$13.80 for 8.4 oz. bottle). This is an oil you could bathe in--if what you're looking for is a heavenly, velvety spa treatment. The Hojiblanca olive delivers again, with one of the sexiest textures imaginable in this great oil. A soupy, hazy gold-green look. Gorgeous bruised-fruit aromas, with a slightly floral, lily-like note. Buttery, tremendously rich and savory oil--tasting it is like eating solid food!--with a Picual-style tomato-vine background. Not exactly Andalucian.....because it comes from Toledo, further north in Spain! Very soft ripe-olive oil finish, for those who can't take the heat of other oils. This is my fave of the very good Valderrama line I tasted.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Not helpful at all! "Best before 4-11" is stamped on back label. So when was the harvest? 4-09? That would not be good. We just don't know (other than the importer's claim on the phone).

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

Ibimco LLC
358 Eastern Parkway, #6
Brooklyn, NY 11225

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.valderramausa.com

Olivista ★★★★★

Olivista Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Classic Selection, Unfiltered, California (\$0.77 per ounce, \$13.00 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Wow....a new product from FoodMatch, a company that's heavily involved in food service (supplying restaurants and institutions)....that is really great, and very reasonably priced! Very clear oil, fairly green....but velvety-rich on the palate and buttery. What I like best are the subtle, specific flavors: if you really focus (like swirling it in a glass and sniffing), you can find chocolate, and miso, and smoke. The finish is remarkably smooth, with hardly any burn at all.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

They do not have this together yet: no indication at all. (Also notice there's no indication of where in California the olives were grown!)

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

FoodMatch
575 Eighth Avenue Fl 23
New York, NY 10018
212.244.5050
www.foodmatch.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

It's a wait-and-see on this one. The oil made a hit at the Fancy Food Show in San Francisco in January, and they're just starting to launch it into retail outlets. Worth watching for!

Columela ★★☆☆

Columela Unfiltered Arbequina, Santaella, Spain (\$1.30 per ounce, \$21.95 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Another fine oil from the Cordoba area of Andalucia--but, surprisingly, a very mellow, un-green one! This is the cloudiest, goopiest-looking oil in the whole tasting. My God...it's practically olive soup.....tasting for all the world like a thick purée with green peppers and string beans in it. But those are just background notes to the big buttery-nuttiness from the Arbequina olive. A soupçon of spice in the finish. I would love this oil just in a wide, shallow soup bowl, with some tomato pulp squeezed in, and a fresh herb sprinkle on top. Serve with crusty grilled bread, and coarse salt!

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Damnit. I was falling in love with this oil when I noticed....no dating attempt of any kind on these labels.

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

Source Atlantique
140 Sylvan Ave.
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632
201.947.1000
www.sourceatlantique.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at www.surlatable.com/home.do

Katz ★★☆☆

Katz, Rock Hill Ranch, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Suisun Valley, California (\$1.73 per ounce, \$22 for 12.7 oz. bottle). Excellent buttery oil, from olives grown 45 minutes inland from San Francisco, towards Sacramento (where the weather starts getting warmer!) The lead olive on the list is Taggiasca, responsible in Italy for some of the most buttery Ligurian oils. Medium-gold with green glints. Big buttery-fruity flavors, with a touch of nuttiness and spice. Attractively rich and round, with a little bitterness and a tiny scratch of pepper in the back of the throat.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Perfect: "Harvested November-December 2009" appears on the back label. That's what you want--except for the unfortunate tiny letters.

Katz and Comany
101 South Coombs, Y-3
Napa, CA 94559
800.676.7176
<http://katzandco.com/catalog/index.php>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.katzandco.com

Bava Family Grove ★★☆☆

Bava Family Grove, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Escalon, CA (\$1.50 per ounce, \$18.99 for 12.7 oz. bottle). With a little more flavor, this amazing oil, from the middle of California's Central Valley, in San Joaquin County, could have finished higher in the standings. What's the amazing part? THE TEXTURE!!! This is more like fatty chicken soup than oil: delicate, caressing, mild, with just enough floral flavor to keep things interesting. It's actually wonderful to drink, with almost a sweet note. As with the Columela, I like pouring it in a wide, shallow soup bowl, and mixing it with squeezed-out tomato pulp. Anchor with croutons, or a few beans, or tiny scallops.... garnish with herbs.....and eat with a spoon!

Bava Family Grove
18429 Brennan Rd
Escalon, Ca 95320
209.838.8566
<http://www.bavafamilygrove.com>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase by phone at The Dented Chef in Modesto, CA, or call Phil Bava (209.838.8566) and he will help direct you to the best source .

The Dented Chef
1018 13th Street
Modesto, CA 95354
209.238.3688

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

No complaints. A little strip on the bottom of the back says "HARVEST 12/09."

Texas Olive Ranch ★★ ★

Texas Olive Ranch, Arbequina Extra Virgin Olive Oil (\$0.89 per ounce, \$15 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Again, it's the quietness of the flavors that hold the score down. But in this lovely oil--from Texas, where olive-oil things are stirring--there are major-league flavors all around. It's just that you're being escorted through them in a plush, padded, protective coach. This is comfort-food oil that you should lap up lavishly. One of the softest finishes in the whole tasting, with an extraordinary parting shot of savory butter. Good value!

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Confusing. The producers swear on the phone that this

oil is from the most recent harvest...but the back label says "Bottled October 09." So....when were those olives harvested? Most oils set a spell (like my Texan?) before they're bottled. I'm just a damn yankee, but I have trouble doin' the math!

Texas Olive Ranch
6907 Old Preston Place
Dallas, TX 75252
214.325.5787

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.texasoliveranch.com

Regalo ★★ ★

Regalo, Ovaesita Marte, Caterina, Pure Arbequina, Ojai, CA (\$1.57 per ounce, \$20 for 12.7 oz. bottle). Good California oil, made entirely from Arbequina. Looks like frosty-cloudy Limoncello with a little green. Very sexy lip-sticky feel, but with light-ish farm-y flavors of almonds, hay, wheat and grain. A bit of bitterness-pungency in finish. Regalo also makes a good Tuscan-style oil called "Amelia."

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Aaaargh. Nothing on front or back label. It's a good

thing I've got a telephone. But I'd rather have an informative label.

Regalo Extra Virgin Olive Oil Inc
Omaggio Farm
Ojai, CA 93023
805.701.4145
<http://www.regalogift.com/>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.regalogift.com

Best of the Rest in the Ripe-Olive-Style

L'Estornell

L'Estornell, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Organic Farming, Catalonia, Spain (\$1.07 per ounce, \$18 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Light and savory, smooth, a little sweet.

Vittorio Cassini

Vittorio Cassini, Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva Taggiasca, Raccolta 2009-2010, Liguria, Italy (\$2.36 per ounce, \$39.95 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Lovely richness, quiet in flavor, kind of salty/savory.

**Category #3: Oils in the Medium-Ripe-Olive-Style
(so-called "IN-BETWEEN" oils)**

Lord knows I wanted to present only two categories in this tasting, green and gold. But the world don't work that way: there are lots of oils out there that are 'twixt

the two extremes. In fact...they were among the best oils in the tasting! [Click here](#) for full discussion of in-between oil tasting criteria.

Merula Estate Bottled ★★★★★

Merula Estate Bottled, Aceite De Oliva Virgen Extra, Merida, Spain (\$1.18 per ounce, \$20 for 16.9 oz. tin). Wow! There's intoxicating oil all OVER the south of Spain! This extraordinary one--which stays fresh as a daisy in a tin--comes from the region of Extremadura, conquistador country, near the Portuguese border. And the price ain't bad, considering the quality! I love the complexity of this oil (complexity's usually a green-oil thang).....juxtaposed with its accompanying buttery taste. Clear, bright, green-gold. Light-ish feel, but with subtle, exceptional flavors: mint, basil, tomato vine, even a whiff of vanilla. The slight bitterness in the finish is buffered by the butteriness! Another excellent choice from the wonderful Portland, Maine importer, The Rogers Collection.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Excellent choices by purveyor. A white sticker underneath the tin says "Harvest Date Nov. 2009," and "Best Before End Dec. 2011." Perfect.

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

The Rogers Collection
10 Dana St.
Portland, ME 04101
207.828.2000

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at:
<http://therogerscollection.com/Products/oliveoils.html>

Castelas ★★★★★

Castelas Huile d'Olive de la Vallée des Baux de Provence, Vierge Extra, AOC, Jean-Benoît Hugues, Les Baux de Provence, France (\$2.22 per ounce, \$37.00 for 16.7 oz. bottle). Provence is one of the world's great centers for late-harvest ripe olives.....and golden oil. This one sure has the right look: almost like a glass of Sauternes, with a fiery glow. But, intriguingly, the flavors seem to be somewhere between Provence and Tuscany. There's wheatgrass. There's pine needles. There's green in that thar oil. Of course, there's also the rich, rich, expensive feel of ripe oil, and more than a hint of butteriness. Very mild and satisfying finish. This is one of the finest gold oils you can find, especially if you're a lover of green!

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Not satisfying. The back label says "Released Fall 2009"obviously plagued with ambiguities.

Catherine & Jean-Benoît Hugues
Producteurs – Mas de L'Olivier
13520 Les Baux de Provence – France
Tel: 33 (0)4 90 54 40 86
info@castelas.com
www.castelas.com

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

De Medici Imports
One Atalanta Plaza
Elizabeth, NJ 07206
908. 372.0965
info@demedici.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.surlatable.com/home.do

Lucero ★★★★★

Lucero, California Olive Oil, Arbequina Three-Star Blend, Corning, CA (\$0.83 per ounce, \$7 for 8.4 oz. bottle). This company two hours north of Sacramento sure has caught my eye! I loved their Ascolano (see note in Under-Ripe section), and now....at half the price!....I like this one even better! It is 90% Arbequina (a good gold yielder), but 5% Koroneiki (my very favorite Greek olive for green oils), and 5% Arbosana. Looks very green, but tastes very gold....with a completely unusual character that I describe as something like pumpkin-butter! Rich but elegant, wending towards a remarkably soft, buttery finish, with just a wisp of astringency.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Too bad Lucero doesn't have its labeling act together.

As with the Ascolano oil, all kinds of confusing stuff here. Again, a white sticker that looks like something slapped on at a store says "best before 2011." Uh.....when in 2011? January? December? With oil this good....Lucero should be proud to tell us when it was made!

Lucero Olive Oil LLC
P.O. Box 1018
Corning, CA 96021
877.330.2190

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.lucerooliveoil.com

Marqués de Valdeuza ★★★★★

Marqués de Valdeuza Estate Bottled, Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra, Merida, Spain (\$1.65 per ounce, \$28 for 16.9 oz. bottle). Another Extremadura winner....and another winner from the Maine-based Rogers Collection. Clear, medium-deep greenish. Winning combo of Tuscan-style "fruit," and Andalucian-style herbs. Sexy, mouth-caressing oil, that unfolds from green notes, to butter, to minimal throat scratch. A little more muted than the other Rogers Collection oil from Extremadura, Merula, which took five stars in this category.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

OK, I see the pattern. The wise importers of this oil,

The Rogers Collection, are sending the memo to all their producers: date your U.S.-bound bottles of oil! This one, like the Merula above, tells you harvest date (Nov. '09), and "best by" date (Dec. 11). Olé!

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

The Rogers Collection
10 Dana St.
Portland, ME 04101
207. 828.2000

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: <http://therogerscollection.com/Products/oliveoils.html>

O Olive Oil ★★★★★

O Olive Oil, Extra Virgin, San Rafael, CA (\$1.32 per ounce, \$9 for 6.8 oz. bottle). I was a little suspicious from the get-go: very "designed" trendy bottles, lots of different ones, most with the dreaded "flavors" (like "lemon," etc.) But the basic "Extra Virgin" here is really good! Clear spring-green with a little gold. Lovely combo of fresh-mown grass, kiwi and tomato stem. Velvety, round, caressing, with lots of butter notes and a mild finishing kick. No grapes or style indication on label, but an interesting riff: "Spain for fragrance, Greece for richness, Tunisia for mystery, Italy for love, California for taste."

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Awful. No dates or indications at all.

O Olive Oil
1997 S. McDowell Blvd., Suite A
Petaluma, CA 94954
888.827.7148

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: <http://ooliveoil.com>

Dry Creek ★★★★★

Dry Creek Olive Co., Artisan Blend Olive Oil, Healdsburg, California (\$1.96 per ounce, \$25.00 for a 12.7 oz. bottle). Intriguing oil, made from older trees--Tuscan varieties *plus* Arbequina. Light-colored oil, remarkably "sweet"--but somehow lacking savoriness at the same time. Riper than usual Tuscan flavors, with something suggesting dairy, even white chocolate. Scratch of pepper. Right in the thick (and it is thick) of world-class goodness... for a price. A number of different oils from this company, but they have a family character. I like the T. Bucher Family Estate second-best.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Awful. No dates or indications at all.

Dry Creek Olive Company
P.O. Box 1002
Healdsburg, CA 95448
707.431.7200
<http://drycreekolivecompany.com>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at
<https://drycreekolivecompany.com/buy.php>

Il Trattarello ★★★★★

Il Trattarello, Olio Extra Vergine d'Oliva, Molise, Italy (\$1.67 per ounce, \$42.50 25.5 oz. bottle). An excellent oil from Molise, on Italy's east coast. Very fat oil, with interesting flow: morphs to watery in your mouth, then rich again. Lots of complexity, with notes of spice, watermelon and vanilla. Not so peppery in finish, but reasonably bitter--at a level I like.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

OK, Excellent coverage on the back label, though it's all in Italian (not that hard!). The "racolto," or harvest, was October 2009; the producer also suggests the oil be consumed by May 31, 2011 (how's that for specificity?) Very conscientious. Note: if the harvest was *late*

October, the suggestion is then: "consume within 17 months." Interesting. People usually call it at two years, maybe a year and a half. Seventeen months????

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

Gustiamo, Inc.
1715 West Farms Road
Bronx, NY 10460.
718.860.2949
www.gustiamo.com

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.gustiamo.com/cgi-bin/front_end/categorie?cmd=show&id=17

Frantoi Cutrera Frescolio ★★★★★

Frantoi Cutrera Frescolio, Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva, New Harvest, Chiaramonte Gulfi, Italy (\$0.66 per ounce, \$16.95 for a 25.4 oz. bottle). In addition to the southeast, there is another Sicilian region I love, west of Palermo: Chiaramonte Gulfi, a great source of full-flavored oils. Like this one! Glowering green-gold, with a ton of sediment in the rectangular, chiseled, old-fashioned bottle. Superb wheatgrass and bruised green apple, with a touch of dried fruit as well. Medium-body with some baby fat. Remarkable penetration of flavors from beginning to end, with some tingly pepper.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

The news is good, even great. The back label indicates that the harvest was done in October, 2009, the bottling

was done on Oct. 28, 2009, and the oil is good until November, 2011. The only problem: the info is given with an initial-letter code ("B: 28/10/2009") that can be confusing.

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

D. Coluccio and Sons, Inc.
1214 60th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11219
718.436.6700
<http://dcoluccioandsons.com>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Order by phone at: D. Coluccio (phone # above).

The Olive Press ★★☆☆

The Olive Press, Ascolano, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Sonoma, CA (\$2.14 per ounce, \$18 for 8.4 oz. bottle). This is one of the priciest oils in the tasting-related, perhaps, to the beautiful and delicate bottles that The Olive Press uses? Do note: there are better values out there. However, I am still quite impressed with this Sonoma oil. Dark-ish yellow, with an intriguing combo of Tuscan fruit, Picual tomato vine, plus lots of grainy, almost yeasty notes. There is a generous, velvety, buttery feel, and a pleasing pinch of pepperiness in the finish.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Send 'em to San Quentin: no date whatsoever on this

beautiful bottle! They take the space to tell you that the olives are "crushed immediately after harvest"--but they leave out the date of the harvest!

The Olive Press
24724 Arnold Dr.
Hwy 121
Sonoma, CA 95476
800.965.4839

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.theolivepress.com

California Gold ★★☆☆

California Gold Olive Oil Co., California Arbequina, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Oakdale, CA (\$1.49 per ounce, \$12.50 for an 8.4 oz. bottle). More proof that Arbequina does well in California! In fact, for me, the average quality of California Arbequina I've tasted is higher than the average quality of Catalan Arbequina I've tasted....and Catalunya is its home. Medium greenish-gold, with big green-apple aroma. Perfect down-the-middle oil, should be pleasing to everyone. Medium-rich, moderate-intensity flavors, just a little pungent and bitter for backbone. Grown approximately 15 miles northeast of Modesto (Gallo's home in the Central Valley!) at the base of the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Another olive press that doesn't get it: NO DATE OF ANY KIND ON LABEL!

California Gold Olive Oil
209.495.0461

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at: www.californiagoldoliveoil.com

Casa Pareja ★★☆☆

Casa Pareja, Extra Virgen Olive Oil, Murcia, Spain (\$0.70 per ounce, \$17.95 for a 25.3 oz. bottle). I generally love products from Murcia, near Spain's southeast corner....though I'm not so familiar with the oils. That has to change. This cloudy, thick-looking oil is a stand-out for its unusual flavors: fruity, yes....but also root-y, spicy, redolent of brown seeds. Love the texture, too: waves of thick tongue-lapping. It's a blend of north-south olives (Arbequina from Catalunya, Picual from Andalucia), and it works beautifully. Small bitterness price to pay. This is a great oil to showcase with something simple: let it overwhelm some warm white beans, and all will be happy (except the bean-grower).

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Just the usual "best before" cop-out. But that best-

before date is "January 2012," which generates some confidence in the possibility of a December/2009, January 2010 harvest date.

ALL DETAILS AVAILABLE THROUGH:

Forever Cheese
36-36 33rd Street
Suite 200
Long Island City
New York, NY 11106
718.777.0772

<http://forevercheese.com/default.asp>

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase online at:

<http://idealcheese.com/casapareja.aspx>

Val di Luna Farms ★★ ★

Val di Luna Farms, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Glen Ellen, CA (\$1.17 per ounce, \$10 for an 8.5 oz. bottle). This field blend of Italian olive varieties is an *exceedingly* mild oil from Sonoma County, the kind of oil that can slip by in a mass tasting. But I kept coming back to it: there's just something about it I like a lot. And if you prefer milder oils, this might well be your fave of all. Bright green-gold. Deep-down bruised fruit. Very lush and gentle, with an inexplicable lift that seems akin to sweetness. It's in my "mid" category because there is a little pepper-burn in the finish.

REPORT FROM THE LABEL POLICE:

Love it! Hand-written on *front* label: "Pressed late November 2009."

Val di Luna Farms
12800 Sonoma Hwy
Glen Ellen, CA 95442
707.933.8782

BEST STRATEGY FOR ACQUISITION:

Purchase via email: valdilunafarms@yaoo.com

Best of the Rest in the Medium-Ripe-Olive-Style

Olive Harvest

Olive Harvest, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Unfiltered, Premium Select, North Lebanon (\$0.60 per ounce, \$15 for 25.3 oz. bottle). One of the least expensive oils in the tasting. And a very buttery oil it is, with a little pepper kick. Interesting to see what Lebanon, a great wine producer, can do. Its score was brought down by just a trace of nail polish remover in the finish.

Dauro

Dauro, Aceite de Oliva Virgen Extra Extra Virgin Olive Oil, l'Emporda, Spain (\$1.42 per ounce, \$23.95 for a 16.9 oz. bottle). Tough price-quality ratio; tastes like a good-quality supermarket oil reaching up. Gentle and subtle.



#1 The Emergence of California!!!

When I last made my olive-oil rounds, about 8 years ago, I was focused almost exclusively on Italian oils, Spanish oils, French oils and Greek oils.....because they were the best in the world.

California oils? I was aware that there was oil ferment in California, and lots of new producers....but the oils I was tasting were not world-class. They usually didn't have much flavor, or the right flavors: many bottles seemed "off," "weird," "non-traditional," etc.....and not in a good way.

THOSE DAYS ARE OVER!! REALLY AND TRULY!! The California oils I tasted last month, scores and scores of them, were fantastic. You can see in my notes how many California oils got stars, even top rankings. They were duking it out, head-to-head with Tuscans, with Andalucians....and often winning. And winning on *the other guy's terms* by presenting oils that tasted Tuscan and Andalucian!

The sheer quantity of great California oil in this tasting made me realize something important. When in olive oil we focus on "fresh," it is theoretically preferable to have the "locavore" product.....is it not? Yes I know, if you live in Philadelphia, the Central Coast of California

#2 Tasting Criteria

To begin the adventure of tasting olive oil, one has to get past the oft-made mistake about the color of olives.

There are no "green" varieties of olives, or "black" varieties of olives.

It is crucial to realize that all olives are green as they start to develop on the tree. As they ripen, they will turn different colors: brown, purple, etc. When they're fully ripe, they'll be black.

The olive oil producer may pick his olives at any stage he likes, and make olive oil from olives at any stage

ain't exactly next door. But, especially given the government hold-up for imports, California oil is more "local" than, say, Italian oil. It takes much less time to get to us. When in February, at least, we have a hankering for "the new oil"....we should all be thinking a lot more about the "locavore" new oil from the west coast. This, perhaps, is where the California producers can really make their commercial mark: "Think of us before the winter's over!....while the oils from Tuscany are still on the water!"

One more note on California oil:

When they work, they work like crazy. But I was also looking for a "family" character in the California oils, something thematic across the board. Region is everything, of course....but I did find a whole lot of oils from all over the state that shared a profile....though these were not the best California oils I tasted. The wayward profile of 2010 was this: rich oils, with tons of bitterness and pungency in the finish, that were not buttressed with enough flavor in the middle. Big, tactile, hollow oils--strangely similar to some red wines from California! I think of this as a phase that's going on right now: young olive-oil-makers figuring out how to get the balance right. Give 'em a few years.....

of ripeness he likes.

That's the fact that opens up the whole world of olive-oil tasting!

Because just as surely as wines are divided by "white" ones and "red" ones, olive oils are divided by "under-ripe olive" olive oils, and "ripe olive" olive oils. And, of course (as in rosé!)....there's an in-between type, as well.

Let's look at the three main categories of olive oil:

Category #1: Oils in the Under-Ripe-Olive-Style (so-called "GREEN" oils)

These oils made from early-picked olives are the liveliest oils of all. When consumed young, they are bursting with flavors often described as "fruity" and/or "green." To me, there is a major dichotomy in "green," two different green flavor paths they can follow:

The Tuscan Path

Tuscan oils, or Tuscan-style oils, have, above all, the character of wheatgrass about them (smell it at a juice

bar...you'll see!). Wheatgrass smells like freshly mown grass, but has an interesting extra twist--something like fresh string beans or peas. Additionally, the Tuscan path includes lots of "fruit," which always reminds me of bruised fruit. Bruised green apples and bruised kiwi are particularly good descriptors.

The Andalucian Path

Oils from this great growing region in the south of Spain-

--my favorite olive-oil region in the world!--have a different type of greenness. You will smell grass in Andalusian oils--more like fresh mown grass than wheatgrass--but you will also smell something else: the greenness of fresh tomato vines. Spectacular! I'm not talkin' tomatoes....I'm talking about the stems and vines. It is intoxicating....and it comes with a constellation of other herb-y kinds of flavors....like basil, mint, etc. You will also find "fruit" in Andalusian oil but, typically, to a lesser extent than in Tuscan oil.

All right....let's merge the paths. In any olive oil made from under-ripe olives, you will get "the hostile tactiles!"

These are two flavors/feelings that are ready to assault your mouth, and they are found most strongly in under-ripe oils:

*Bitterness....which usually arises in the mid-palate, and persists into the finish.

*Pungency (the official word).....a kind of spicy, peppery heat that is often perceived late in the taste....it often registers on the throat, when it makes you start to cough.

Are these good things? Up to you....

Category #2: Oils in the Ripe-Olive-Style (so-called "GOLD" oils)

Oils made from blacker, riper, later-picked olives are almost entirely different from unripe-olive oils. Yes, they may still offer some fruity flavors reminiscent of green oils....but the focus here is on smoothness, mildness, rich-

ness. The outstanding descriptor, both for flavor and texture, is "buttery." Ripe-olive oils generally do not provide the bitterness and pungency that is the hallmark of under-ripe olive oils.

Category #3: Oils in the Medium-Ripe-Olive-Style (so-called "IN-BETWEEN" oils)

There are a number of ways in which "medium" oils can be produced. The grower can press green olives, save the oil, and mix it with black-olive oil later. Or he can strip the tree when it has various stages of ripeness, and press it all together. Or at mid-season he can harvest only olives that are in an in-between state, and press them.

In any case, you get an oil that's "in-between" the force of green oil, and the mildness of black oil.

I've tasted a number of oils in my life like this....that

failed. They seem neither here nor there, picking up the specialness of neither extreme.

But...I have tasted "in-between" oils.....and there were many, many in this tasting....that *do* retain the virtues of both extremes. You can have big "green" smells, tastes and pungency....mixed with an incredibly rich and buttery middle body.

This is the kind of oil that a master blender can knock out of the park.

All righty....so....putting it all together....here's what an olive-oil taster should be looking for:

COLOR.

Well, the hue is not so important; producers can make oil greener by dropping leaves in the vat. I like to look for clarity instead: more of it probably means filtering, less of it (like hazy, cloudy oil) probably means non-filtering (which I prefer).

FLAVORS.

The usual wine-style hunt for great adjectives and descriptors.

THE HOSTILE TACTILES.

How much bitterness and pungency you like is up to you. My threshold is high for these things in olive oil, but balance, to me, is all: if a hollow oil is only bitter, I don't dig it. Oils without any of it seem kinda flat to me--so a correct balance needs to be struck.

TEXTURE.

I love fat oil....as long as it doesn't seem greasy. And I love light oil as well....as long as it has lots of flavor, doesn't seem innocuous. Your taste.

#3 A Few Thoughts on Olive Oil with Food

Well, the major point is this: great olive oils, like the ones in this article, are for drizzling on food. Think of them as condiments, sauces. Great olive oil is not normally thought of as "cooking" oil.

That said, there are chefs.... particularly in the south of Spain....who argue passionately that frying in great extra-virgin olive oil makes a big difference in the dish. They say fried fish, for example....and I believe they're right....has an extra glow, richness, succulence....when it's deep-fried in good extra-virgin olive oil.

But that would be the exception to the rule. Here are some thoughts on the mainstream uses, on getting the best out of your extra-virgin olive oil drizzle:

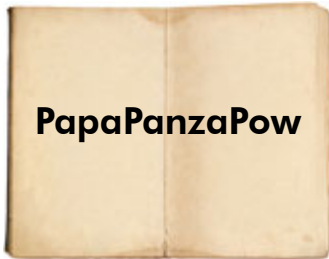
In this area, the old wine-with-food guideline of matching intensity with intensity works pretty well.

***Intense green oil** will overpower bland foods, like beans, bread, pasta. You may want that; you may want the oil to take center stage. But don't use oil like this if you

want the beans to be appreciated for themselves. You *can* use low-intensity green oils on such foods.

***For foods with bigger flavors**, try to match their intensity to the intensity of the oil. Deeply-flavored, well-seasoned fish on the grill, like swordfish, can be good with moderate-intensity green oils. Want to go all the way in green olive-oil intensity? Grilled steak with garlic and herbs, particularly with a crusty char, can be the ticket.

***With full-flavored green oil**, I also like all kinds of garlic-tomato-bread variations. Try this new dish I created, which I named for some of Italy's other rustic bread-and-tomato dishes:



makes two appetizer servings

1/4 cup spicy green oil

1 cup stale bread chunks, each an irregular 1" square

2 ripe medium tomatoes, cut into 1" chunks (about a cup)

1/4 teaspoon finely minced garlic

kosher salt

- 1. Place the oil in sauté pan over medium high heat. As soon as it sizzles, add the bread chunks. Sauté, tossing occasionally, until the bread picks up some brown color, about 3-4 minutes.**
- 2. Spill contents of pan into mixing bowl. Add tomatoes. Add garlic. Crush tomatoes into bread with your hands, squeezing well to soak the bread. There should still be many large chunks of tomato. Season to taste with salt. Let rest for 30 minutes to soften bread.**
- 3. Divide among two bowls and serve immediately. Drizzle with more oil if desired.**

*** The buttery-gold oils have a different set of rules.** I try to use them in situations that show off the thick, soupy texture of the oil. I like them on raw fish, raw meat--all mild things that could accommodate a puddle of oil in the plate. Try building cold "soups" out of buttery oil....compositions surrounded by oil, which you can lap up with a spoon.

*** Always be wary of losing gold olive oil's texture in the wrong dish.** Mashed potatoes are already rich; using gold oil in them will hide their special nature. Green's richness would also be masked....but green's piquant flavors would shout through.

Killer Chinatown Noodles....Good and Cheap (But I Mean.....Really Good and Really Cheap!!)

One of my great pleasures is gastro-wandering around Manhattan's Chinatown--where the restaurants have been going downhill for years, but the supply of real Chinese products in the grocery stores just seems to get better and better. And no more expensive!

I've been wandering again this spring, in search of new discoveries....particularly affordable ones....and what has me hot and bothered right now is noodles!

Whenever I do the noodle hunt I'm looking for two basic things:

* **Dried noodles**....so I can keep 'em in my cupboard for months, and spontaneously improvise great Chinese soups

* **Fresh noodle sources**....so I can bring some home for that night, but also dream about the next planned Chinese meal I'm making, and how I'll return to the source for special fresh noodles that will dazzle my guests.

Well, about the recent noodle walk: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED ON BOTH FRONTS!

Dried noodles first:

While hunting, I look endlessly at boxes of nested noodles from China, each little white or yellow "basket" inside inducing wild soup fantasies. Recently, one of my faves disappeared from the shelves I stalk, so I was desperately seeking a mother lode replacement. I found it....and I have great info too about its provenance.

The brand is Rain Dried Noodles, and they're "manufactured" in Fujian, China. A Brooklyn importer brings them in, and their "sole agent" is also in Brooklyn (see details below). Furthermore, you can always find them at a stocked-to-the-gills little grocery on Grand St., away from the main Chinatown action.

Are you ready for the reverse sticker shock? The price is \$1 a package (twelve ounces)! My cupboard has a

dozen of them, keeping me in mein until end of summer!

They come in nests, as the best dried noodles do....but these are a little funny in color....kind of an ivory color, not yellow at all, but definitely made from wheat flour.

At the store, I saw several products from this same company, in different shapes....but, in English, there is no differentiation on the label. They all say only "dried noodles!"

My favorite: I look for the one, in a bag framed with orange-yellow, that is much like linguine in shape, but slightly wider. I also like the ones in a package with a big gold circle on it: thinner, yellower, more like the Chinese egg noodles you get in a basic bowl of Chinese noodle soup....but let's stick to the linguine-like ones.

Do not dare to cook these noodles anywhere past al dente; a minute or so is all they need. Test frequently. If you pull 'em just right, you will have an extraordinary texture, wonderfully slippery, gleefully chewy, and very light. The downside is that the noodles are not loaded with flavor; the feel's the thing. But you can correct that with a wonderfully flavorful broth.

I've been serving them in pork broth, which has a very Chinatown taste. It couldn't be simpler. Buy 2-3 pounds of meaty pork neck. Just cover them with cold water in a soup

pot. Add only salt for seasoning (I like adding MSG too, but I will save my shocking, revisionist MSG rant for a future issue!)

Cook the pork eternally. Seriously, about 7 hours is good, at a gentle simmer, partially covered. I like it when the broth starts to get a little milky from the pork-bone breakdown.... just as it does in my favorite Japanese ramen dish, the one from Hakata.

If you like, in the last few minutes of cooking the broth, you can add a small amount of some kind of green: bok choy, gai lan, cabbage shreds, etc. Cook until it has the texture you like.

Here's a key for this dish: despite what any of your cookbooks tell you, boil the noodles **DIRECTLY IN THE BROTH!** Do not cook them in a separate pot of



Killer Chinatown Noodles.... (cont.)

boiling water! This not only gives more flavor to the noodles, but a little starch gets transmitted to the broth--which, in this case, is perfect, giving the broth even more of that creamy Hakata look. Two nests of noodles will serve two people, but I sometimes throw in an extra nest.

UND NOW...the fresh noodles!

I have been a chow fun freak for a long time: wonderful translucent-white fresh rice noodles, often as wide as papardelle (or more), with an extraordinary squeaky texture, oddly bouncy, heaven to chew. My favorite restaurants in Chinatown (decades ago!) used to sear them in very hot woks, which gave them an unforgettable "taste of the wok," a Maillard reaction of the Chinese gods.

Today, I'm sad to say, when you order "chow fun" in a Chinatown restaurant you usually get a tepid, oily, un-browned mess.

So I'd been looking for a good chow fun primary source to scorch my own noodles at home over the highest flame I have. And that's when I hit chow fun gold.

Not only does the Kong Kee Food Corp. in Manhattan's Chinatown (see address below) make excellent chow fun, but they make a variation on chow fun that blows my mind. It is

called "Hong Kong-Style Chow Fun," and it is made by rolling up wide chow fun noodles into little, multi-leaved packages. Each package looks something like the body of a smallish squid--and chews like the invention of a three-star chef.

I got 'em home to see if they were scorchable--and, with a little help from the chef (me), they more than restored my memories of brilliantly browned chow fun.

So....you buy 'em by the container at the store, where 12 ounces or so will cost you \$1.75. You can eat them right there, on the spot, at the rickety long table; they are already prepared, in a kind of carrot-celery stir-fry that doesn't add much.

But....what I like to do....is get 'em home, and then re-purpose them, as they say. In my wok, with my technique, I can re-create the brown glory days of yore....and add some interesting other flavors, too. The following is a brand new recipe using this great noodle, with some new techniques. The chicken part is optional: you can substitute other proteins (like shrimp), or just leave the proteins out.

For now....hie thee to Chinatown, grab the booty, and follow this recipe:



Fresh Hong Kong-Style Chow Fun with Shredded Chicken and Hot Bean Sauce

serves 2-3 as part of Chinese meal

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 4 large cloves garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
- 3 medium scallions cut diagonally into 2" lengths (about 1 cup)
- 1/2 small green pepper, seeded and cut in thin julienne strips (about 1 cup)
- 1 cup shredded cooked chicken with skin (preferably boneless thigh meat)
- 6 ounces fresh Hong Kong-style chow fun (about 1 cup)
- 3 tablespoons hot chili bean sauce with garlic (see *INGREDIENT NOTE)
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1/4 cup torn cilantro leaves

- 1 Place a large wok over very high heat. When it starts to smoke, swirl in the oil, spreading all around the wok. Add garlic, scallions and green pepper. Cover and sear for about a minute. Remove cover. Toss vegetables, then cook until vegetables start to brown, about one minute more. Add chicken and let cook for one minute more.
2. Push the vegetables and chicken up the sides of the wok, creating an empty space at center. Add noodles to that space. Find a plate that just fits on top of the noodles, position it, and press down heavily for about a minute. Remove plate, turn noodles, and press plate for one minute more.
3. While the wok contents are cooking, stir together the hot chili bean sauce with the water in a small bowl. Reserve.
4. Toss all the contents of the wok together. Remove them from wok, placing on a serving platter. Pour reserved sauce over all, top with cilantro, and serve immediately.

***INGREDIENT NOTE:** You can use any of the hot bean sauces with garlic and chili found in Chinese groceries. But the one I particularly like for this dish is the Hot Chili Bean Sauce with Garlic from the Hai Pao Wang company in Taiwan. The color (brownish red) and the texture (fairly puréed) are just right for this dish.

Killer Chinatown Noodles.... (cont.)

PRODUCT

Rain Dried Noodles (\$1 for 12 oz.)
Fujian Fuxing Industrial Imp/Exp Corp.
Fujian, China

Sole Agent:
Domega NY International
1916 West 13 St.
Brooklyn, NY 11232
646.388.3032 (tel)
718.499.2603 (fax)

Available at:
Ken Hing Food Market
247 Grand St., New York, NY
212.431.3103

PRODUCT

Hong Kong-Style Chow Fun (\$1.75 for 12 oz.)

Available at:

Kong Kee Food Corp.
240 Grand St., New York, NY
(corner of Grand and Bowery)

PLEASE NOTE:

As far as I've been able to make out, your only guarantee of acquiring these products is a trip to Manhattan's Chinatown. But you could try:

- 1) Finding these products in other Chinatowns across the U.S.; or
- 2) Calling the Brooklyn purveyors of the Rain Dried Noodles to see if they could recommend retailers near you.

The Greatest Grilled Fish of My Life

I spent a gastro-fabulous week in Portugal this spring, a truly remarkable feast through coast and mountain; the ROSENGARTEN REPORT will carry soon a complete guide to Portuguese food, wine and travel, with which I fell in love.

But first....a photo essay from the Portuguese restaurant that served me.....I'm not kidding.....the greatest whole grilled fish I have ever eaten.

I do not say that lightly, after thousands of fins in Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Turkey, Thailand, Sydney, Hawaii, Seattle, etc.



If you're going to Portugal this spring....you must run (or swim very fast) to restaurant Ribamar, in Sesimbra, a fisherman's village on the southwest corner of the Setúbal peninsula, about 20 miles south of Lisbon. This place goes in the books, along with El Kano (Getaria, Spain) and Hiona (Palekastro, Greece), as one of the most thrilling waterside seafood restaurants I've ever experienced.



The table is set by the sea--a group of writers, and the gracious hosts from nearby winery Quinta da Bacalhoa.



The bizarre Iberian specialty *percebes*, translated as "goose barnacles." They are shellfish, with long, soft bodies like the necks of geese, protected by hard shells that look like stained-glass windows, with "feet" at the bottom that attaches them to rocks. They are very expensive, but I jump at them in Spain whenever they're available--I love the sweet meat you extract, which tastes somewhere between steamer clam and lobster. This was my first brush with percebes in Portugal; when I noted to my hosts that they seemed smaller than the Spanish ones, the Portuguese pros responded: "Yes, but they're better in flavor." Certainly delicious with Quinta da Bacalhoa's crisp 2007 Cova da Ursa--a surprise for me, since it's 100% Chardonnay, and I am a card-carrying member of the ABC club (Anything But Chardonnay!)



The first wave of shells is consumed.



The guest of honor, simply grilled--an amazing fish (this one about 6 or 7 pounds), called *imperador*, or "emperor." When I asked what it was, I was told "it's red snapper." Ah, fish talk. This one may have red skin, but it ain't no red snapper: it's fatter, with a completely different head, including supernaturally large eyes. When I looked for it at a fish market in Lisbon, I found it among the other fish, which cost \$5 a pound; the *imperador* cost around \$20 a pound. I'm told that it's caught either in the Azores, or around Sesimbra; I'm also told that the Sesimbra ones (like this one) are better. It is worth noting that Sesimbra has a special status to experienced fish mavens; the village, remarkably, has a reputation for "best fish in Europe." You can go to the Sesimbra *peixeria*, or fish market, around 6AM, near the lighthouse, to see what the fuss is all about.

The waiter was into it! Here he is, cutting the fish into eight portions. (I'm sitting right near him, using body language and other skills to make sure I get a crispy, juicy piece).





Success! I could not believe the sweet, sweet fatty meat of this fish, nestled under a crunchy skin that had picked up the absolutely nostril-tickling, smoky aroma of a clean-but-veteran grill. Can grilled fish get any better than this--kind of the suckling pig of the fish world? No. And it was impossible to leave any of it over.



Except for the now meatless, cheekless, head of that critter...with its supernaturally large eye sockets!

Ribamar
 Av Dos Náufragos, 29
 Sesimbra, Portugal
Phone: 351 21 223 48 53
Website: www.ribamar.com.pt

Rosengarten's Table Extra: Lobster of the Year

Rod Browne Mitchell is a piscatory superstar. He lives on a little island off the coast of southern Maine, and putt-putts his way every day to his breathtaking emporium in Portland, named Browne Trading Company....which is not only a great food-and-wine shop, but the place where some of America's best seafood finds its way to America's best restaurants! Rod has orders constantly from New York (he's Eric Ripert's favorite provider at Le Bernardin), from LA, from Chicago, from Las Vegas, top restaurants all, paying top prices for American and foreign seafood. He has a special relationship with Daniel Boulud, for whom he selects and markets caviar and smoked salmon. And he has a special love for the local products of Maine.

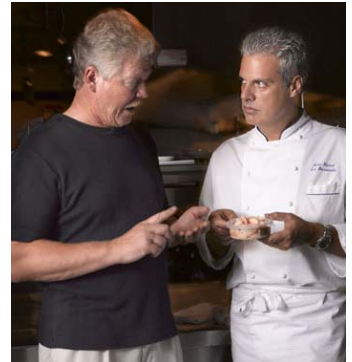
Do you think he might be a good guy to buy lobster from?

Now, ol' Rod and I were puttin' back some sushi in Portland last year, when he told me all about the May lobsters. "They are coming off the winter waters," he said, "and have predominately stayed in stasis, causing them to be 'fatter.'" Did you think summer lobsters were best? "In the warm water coming up," Rod said, "the lobsters begin to shed, develop softer shells, and tend to lose body mass. On the other hand, the May hard-shell lobster," according to Rod, "has firm, sweet, succulent, abundant meat.....the best of the year!"

And then there's Rod's lobsters.

The lobster supplier for the Browne Trading Company resides "two wharves down" from Browne, buys his lobsters directly from the local lobstermen (many of whom tie up right at the supplier's wharf to make delivery), and, most importantly, stores his lobster in a natural, recycling sea water tank for optimum condition and flavor. This is light years from the crappy tank conditions lobsters usually must endure. Local lobsters and short holding time--plus Rod's obsessiveness--add up to the finest lobsters available by mail!

And now the Rosengarten's Table deal: 10% off your order of live Maine lobster from May 15 through June 15. And Browne Trading's expert shipping costs you just \$30 for up to ten pounds of lobster. No internet orders on this one: Nicholas Branchina, Marketing Director, is taking your calls on his direct line, 207.766.2402, ext. 111. Simply give him your Rosengarten's Table ID number, and you're Daniel Boulud for a day!



Rod Browne Mitchell (l.) having piscatorial chit-chat with Eric Ripert of Le Bernardin.

COMING UP IN THE NEXT ROSENGARTEN REPORT:

* **The Definitive Guide to Paella....**

Its Definition (A Real Surprise!).....It Came from the Swamp: A Fascinating History.....Its Variations.....Best Places in Valencia.....An Authentic Version.....Surprising Facts for the Cook!

* **My Big Day in Lockhart, Texas:**

A Photo Essay from BBQ's Mecca!

* **Re-launch of Two Old RR Favorites:**

PRODUCTS I'M LOVING RIGHT NOW, and *David's wine column*, *WINE IN TIME*

.....and much more!

Rosengarten's Table

The Rosengarten Report will bring you up-to-the-minute information on the best products available, as well as details concerning the best restaurants, hotels and wineries around the world. But I'll bring you something else, too. With your subscription to The Rosengarten Report, you will automatically become a member of Rosengarten's Table; you'll receive your own serial number. When you read about great products, restaurants, hotels or wineries in The Rosengarten Report, you will sometimes see a special note, encouraging members of Rosengarten's Table to contact a specific individual when dealing with that product, restaurant, hotel or winery. This is your way of "sharing my table," and getting special consideration from that establishment; it could take the form of a discount on products, a reservation for a normally booked restaurant or hotel, an appetizer or glass of wine on the house, a special insider's tour, or anything else that the merchant can think of.

Remember: If you want to contact a person that you read about in The Rosengarten Report by phone, fax or e-mail, please

indicate your name and your Rosengarten's Table serial number to him or her. If your contact with the person is face-to-face (e.g. upon arrival for dinner), simply supply your number, along with a photo ID.

Offers are valid for current members of Rosengarten's Table only, and -- unless otherwise noted -- for one year only from the publication date of the issue in which the offer is mentioned.

Please note: I feature products and services in The Rosengarten Report only if they make my heart throb. Once I've decided to write about an establishment, I give them a call to say that I'll be featuring them in an upcoming issue of The Rosengarten Report, and I ask them if there's anything they can do to make my readers feel as though they're "sharing my table." Sometimes they say yes, but sometimes they are unable to do anything. The answer does not have an impact on coverage, because my object is to share great finds with you. Nor does the answer make a difference in my esteem for the product or service offered, or in the warmth of my recommendation. There is no quid pro quo when it comes to the companies that I write about on these pages. If I love what I tasted, I say so--no matter what.

THE ROSENGARTEN REPORT

PUBLISHER
Stanley B. Wolfson

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
David Rosengarten

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Claire Holzman

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Elyse Viner

DESIGNER
SalzMedia

WEBMASTER
Alex Stringel

CUSTOMER SERVICE
R. Bryan

For more information on THE ROSENGARTEN REPORT
ADDRESS: 2014 Seventh Ave., New York, NY, 10026
TELEPHONE: 646.461.6495
WEB SITE: www.rosengartenreport.com

@Copyright 2010 by USWA, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form is prohibited by law.