

# Harvest Is Celebration Time!

*Michael's Menu Pays Tribute To Season's Bounty, Special Friends*

By Michael Dotson

**THE EARLY FALL IS SIMPLY MY FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR TO HAVE A CELEBRATION DINNER.** The days and nights are getting shorter and cooler and the harvest is well underway. So as the good earth's bounty is brought in off the vines and from the fields, let's celebrate this special time of year!

For me, harvest is not only a time to show appreciation for what the vines and crops have given; but also an opportunity for me to pay tribute to special people in my life. This month's menu was created for such a special dinner and those in attendance were a great influence in creating the menu.

To start, a warm gazpacho of heirloom tomatoes and corn is a perfect way to say farewell to warm summer days and the addition of the foie gras crouton makes the shorter, cooler days that lie ahead seem, at least for now, less menacing.

Leg of lamb has always been the ultimate Sunday dinner for me—evoking great memories of braised leg of lamb at my Grandmother's house. So a leg of lamb stuffed with one of my favorite flavor combinations is both a celebration and my way of paying homage to her with my own contemporary twist.

Lamb goes so well with a number of things but I could think of no more appropriate side dish than a seasonal ragout of summer string beans and fresh shell beans with a mint and parsley pistou.

As I walked through the market thinking of the harvest looking for an inspiration for dessert, I came upon a bin with a variety of grapes. I simply began bagging the different types and started thinking of a fresh grape compote. I decided to pair it with a sweet olive oil cake and earthy black pepper crème fraiche on my way past the wall of boutique olive oils.

With the menu decided and the invitations out the only thing left was to determine which wines to serve. I thought that rather than make this decision myself before dinner, we would open a number of bottles and share the journey. Half way through dinner we discovered to our surprise, considering the range of high quality Pinots on the table, that there was one wine that stood well above the others and went exceptionally well with all courses except the dessert. Gary Francioni's Roar Wines Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2001, an incredible wine on its own, took to the earthy flavors in the soup with a silkiness that was hard to beat. With the lamb, the Roar was about as close to perfect as it gets.

There is no better occasion than the changing of seasons to reflect and tell a few people how much they mean to you than with a thoughtful menu and a warm, inviting dinner.



M E N U

FALL HARVEST

MENU

**Warm Gazpacho with  
Heirloom Tomatoes,  
Sweet Corn and Foie  
Gras Croutons**

**Grilled Stuffed Leg of  
Lamb with Oil Cured  
Olives, Figs and  
Braised Onions**

**String and Shell Bean  
Ragout with Mint-  
Parsley Pistou**

*Roar Wines Santa Lucia  
Highlands Garys' Vineyard  
2001*

**Olive Oil Cake with  
Fresh Grape Compote  
and Black Pepper  
Crème Fraiche**



**Merry Edwards**

**Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Windsor Gardens Methode a l'Ancienne 2001**

Medium-deep ruby purple color; subtle, closed, spice, black cherry and earth on nose; big, full, rich on palate with lots of black cherry, spice, earth and even a touch of lavender; great structure, balanced despite the intense flavors, long and intense on the finish. This is a big, complex Pinot that has a lot of time ahead of it. Unfortunately the 30+-year-old Windsor Gardens vineyard is on the verge of becoming a new tract of houses. This is a Pinot to buy while you still have the chance.

**200 cases made \$54 Score: 94**

**Merry Edwards**

**Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2001**

Deep ruby-purple color; slightly closed on nose, spicy, black cherry, lavender and vanilla notes; concentrated black cherry and plum flavors, great depth, touch of lavender, incredible structure, complex yet very silky on the palate; balanced with a long finish. This Pinot from Merry Edwards should be in every Pinot lover's cellar. It's not only great Pinot, but the incredible \$27 price means you should try to get a case.

**1,480 cases made \$27 Score: 93**

**Roar Wines**

**Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Garys' Vineyard 2001**

Medium-deep purple ruby color; deep, intense aromas of black cherry, smoky bacon, earth; big, rich and lush flavors, black cherry, plum, smoky bacon, spices, deep and intense flavors, great structure, long finish. When Pinot lovers (like me) find a beautiful, seductive wine like this Roar Garys' Vineyard bottling, we just want to put everything else aside, take our time and explore this terrific wine.

**252 cases made \$44 Score: 95**

**Roar Wines**

**Pinot Noir Santa Lucia Highlands Pisoni Vineyard 2001**

Deep purple ruby color; jammy, berry and cherry aromas with a hint of pepper and spice, dense and slightly closed on nose; dry, big, full and intense; very deep cherry and berry flavors with lots of tannin; good structure with a very long finish. WOW! In keeping with the character of the Pisoni Vineyard this is one big mutha Pinot. It's not overdone, it just needs some time both in your cellar, but also in your glass.

**180 cases made \$48 Score: 93**

**Sanford Winery**

**Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills La Rinconada Vineyard 2001**

Deep ruby purple color; spicy, complex, mint, herbal, black

cherry notes; deep, complex, black cherry, plum and spicy, toasty oak notes; great structure, balance and long finish. WOW! La Rinconada is such an intense Pinot that you would expect it to be overpowering on the palate. Not so. Credit Richard Sanford and Bruno D'Alfonso with keeping this terrific wine in balance and a stellar Pinot experience.

**4,500 cases made \$50 Score: 95**

**Sanford Winery**

**Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills Sanford & Benedict Vineyard 2001**

Deep ruby purple color; deep and concentrated black cherry aromas with meaty, smoky bacon notes; deep, complex, concentrated black cherry and plum flavors, smoky bacon, sage, spicy, tannic but very well balanced; great structure and a long finish. The Sanford & Benedict bottling is an interesting contrast to the La Rinconada—where the La Rinconada is intense, the Sanford & Benedict is silky and complex. This wine is truly beautiful.

**2,200 cases made \$43 Score: 94**

**Sanford Winery**

**Pinot Noir Santa Rita Hills 2001**

Deep ruby purple color; deep black cherry and plum notes; big and rich, lots of very nice black cherry and plum flavors, spicy, toasty oak, long finish. Each year this bottling from Sanford seems to be less a generic Santa Barbara County Pinot and more an terrific and tasty entry-level introduction to the Santa Rita Hills style.

**19,000 cases made \$26 Score: 90**

**Siduri Wines**

**Pinot Noir Russian River Valley Sapphire Hill Vineyard 2001**

Medium-deep purple ruby color; spicy, berry, toasty oak aromas on nose; big, rich cherry and berry flavors; good structure, some spicy, toasty oak notes, long finish. A big and bold Pinot with a lot of flavor and a lot of character to match with a wide range of foods.

**188 cases made \$45 Score: 90**

**Truchard Vineyards**

**Pinot Noir Carneros 2000**

Medium ruby purple color; slightly spicy, smoky notes, cherry and berry aromas; silky on the palate with sweet flavors of cherry, strawberry, spice and smoky oak; nicely balanced and a lingering finish. This is a beautiful example of how silky and refined Carneros Pinot can be. The Truchards have been working their vineyards for a long time and it shows.

**2,979 cases made \$32 Score: 92**

[PNR]