

# Wine-Paired Picnics

Lovely settings complement fabulous flavors | By Kim Cooper Findling

A warm breeze ripples the leaves of the Bartlett pear tree overhead as my husband, Karl, and I sip King Estate Winery's 2011 Signature Pinot Gris, savoring its green apple and white peach flavors. Pinot Gris grapes are ripening on the vine just 500 feet away, and we can see, in the distance, the rolling hills of western Oregon's Willamette Valley, treed with oaks, alders and firs.

We're sharing a seared-salmon and pear salad purchased at the winery's restaurant, and I lift a Bartlett slice, adorned with a perfectly toasted hazelnut, to my mouth. The hazelnut was grown in the Willamette Valley. The wild chinook salmon arrived less than a day ago from the Oregon coast. The pears were cultivated in the winery's orchards. The sweet slices—at the peak of ripeness—complement the apple, peach, lemon-lime and pineapple notes in the Pinot Gris, as do the salad's watercress and parsley. The salad is lightly dressed with oil and vinegar, with Roquefort cheese folded in. Tangy yet creamy, the dressing also enhances the pairing with the Pinot

Gris, while the hazelnuts provide a crunchy contrast. Food, wine and place have come together to create paradisiacal picnic pleasure.

We've spread our picnic blanket in the Pear Garden on the 1,033-acre grounds of the winery, which is located about 25 miles southwest of Eugene, Oregon. Founded in 1991, the winery is now the largest enological business in Oregon. It produces 230,000 cases of wine a year from the fruit of vineyards throughout the Pacific Northwest and from King Estate's own 465 vineyard acres, which lie at elevations of 800 to 1,200 feet. The grapes gently ripen thanks to cool late-afternoon-through-morning temperatures, with gradual warming to as much as 95 degrees by midday. The vineyards and the rest of the King Estate property have been awarded organic certification by Oregon Tilth.

Here in the garden, which is shaded by more than a dozen pear trees of various varieties, surrounded by a low hedge, the verdant smells of summer—flowers, fruit and grasses—waft around us, blending with the scents of the fruit and fish before us.

"Why does food always taste better outside?" Karl asks rhetorically.

King Estate is anchored by a 110,000-square-foot French Chateau-style winemaking facility and a visitor center that includes a restaurant and patio where guests can sit at tables to enjoy the seasonal farm-fresh cuisine of Executive Chef Ben Nadolny. But visitors like us who desire an earthier experience can purchase Nadolny's picnic fare, nicely packaged in containers, with disposable cutlery and plates, and loaned stemware.

The winery staff is happy to advise picnickers on the best wine pairings for their repasts. Today, our picnic includes a charcuterie plate, a smoked-chicken salad and a dessert plate of Oregon cheeses, in addition to the salmon salad. To accompany these dishes, King Estate recommended its award-winning top wines: the crisp 2011 Signature Pinot Gris and the rich, lively 2010 Signature Pinot Noir.

"Try this," Karl suggests, offering me a morsel of duck-liver pâté from the charcuterie plate. The pâté is smooth, melting on my tongue and marvelously distinct from the wine. King Estate has its own charcuterie kitchen, acquiring all of its meats from Willamette Valley suppliers, Nadolny told us when we picked up our lunch. "We are able to focus on clas-







sic, artisan recipes and experience how they complement the wines,” he said.

The German-style Thuringer sausage tastes best with the Pinot Noir, the spicy meat harmonizing with the wine’s eucalyptus/cherry/spice aromas and vanilla/cherry/pomegranate flavors. I also taste lavender, which draws my attention to the lavender plants we can see over the hedge, their purple blooms heavy in the summer heat.

The chicken salad includes mesclun and garden vegetables from King Estate’s 3-acre produce garden, and a dressing of apple-cider vinaigrette with white wine *verjus*. The chicken was smoked and then pan-roasted so that the skin became crispy while the meat stayed moist. The *verjus*—juice extracted from grapes that won’t be pressed to make wine—tames the acidity in the dressing for a clean complement to the Pinot Gris.

As we move on to the locally produced dessert cheeses, I note that La Mariposa Chubut has a subtle, mild creaminess that coats the palate without a strong aftertaste, making a lovely union with the light, citrusy Pinot Gris. The Fern’s Edge Goat Dairy Mt. Zion cheese has a toasted-nut flavor and fruity aftertaste, pairing well with the fruit, vanilla, leather and oak notes of the Pinot Noir.

The oak nuances also remind us that the Pear Garden is literally on top of the winery’s underground barrel room, which we toured earlier. Hundreds of barrels, many of them French oak, are maturing the winery’s next vintages beneath us.

After our meal, Karl and I lounge for much of the afternoon under the pear tree. The food, the wines and the setting have been a feast for the senses, and we want to linger as long as possible.

King Estate Winery (541-942-9874; [www.kingestate.com](http://www.kingestate.com)) hosts periodic special culinary events, and is also open for wine tasting, lunch and dinner (call for days/hours, which vary by season) and for picnicking, weather permitting; the recipe for Seared-Salmon Salad is available on the winery’s website through April. King Estate is one of the many wineries in the western United States where visitors can enjoy a scenic picnic. Below are just a few more of the options.

**L**ynmar Estate Winery, Sebastopol, CA; Russian River Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA); hosts periodic special culinary events, and is open daily for wine tasting and seasonally for picnics; 707-829-3374; [www.lynmarestate.com](http://www.lynmarestate.com).

Lynmar Estate—whose vineyards benefit from a

King Estate Winery has many inviting spots where visitors can enjoy excellent wines and gourmet dishes. The winery’s seared-salmon and pear salad, which can be packaged for picnicking, is shown at left.



diverse climate that balances wind, moisture, fog and sunshine—offers a four-course Picnic Pairing from May through October. A new menu is developed each year by estate chef David Frakes.

The picnic fare, paired with selected wines, is served in a garden courtyard and showcases produce from the nearby organic vegetable plots. Providing further ambiance is the view of Lynmar's Quail Hill Vineyard, where Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines were first planted in 1974. The courtyard also has a view of Laguna de Santa Rosa to the east, a 30,000-plus-acre ecosystem that is a sanctuary for more than 200 species of resident and migratory birds. The lake borders Lynmar Estate and is visible from all parts of the property.

The 2013 picnic menu will begin with organic popcorn tossed in housemade seasoned salt containing coriander and orange zest. The perky popcorn will pair well with the firm acidity of the 2010 Lynmar Estate Russian River Valley Chardonnay, which is characterized by hints of vanilla, white peach and orange zest.

The estate-garden salad course, also paired with the Chardonnay, will feature mixed organic lettuces, celery, English cucumber and heirloom carrots, with rhubarb vinaigrette.

The third-course gourmet sandwich will include organic Sonoma County chicken breast with São Jorge cheese, grilled Lynmar Estate-grown onions and housemade Thai curry paste. The sandwich will be served with Lynmar's complex 2010 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, which is spicy and fruity, with notes of rhubarb, cinnamon, allspice and ripe plum, and an impressive finish that connotes sarsaparilla and sour cherries. The full-bodied Pinot Noir—a double-gold winner at the 2012 San Francisco International Wine Competition—will amplify the flavors of the sandwich, and the wine's ruby color will evoke the red zinnias, penstemons and monardas that surround the courtyard, attracting butterflies and hummingbirds. The meal will conclude with strawberries grown onsite and housemade double-chocolate cookies.

Lynmar's picnic is brought to the table in a basket with plates and cutlery, and stemware for the wines, and is offered Wednesdays through Sundays, May 12–October 31. Reservations are required.

**Q**UAILS' GATE WINERY, WEST KELOWNA, BC; hosts periodic special culinary events, and is open daily for wine tasting, and for lunch and dinner in the onsite restaurant, as well as for picnicking, weather permitting; 250-769-4451; [www.quailsgate.com](http://www.quailsgate.com).

At Quails' Gate Winery, located above 136-square-mile Okanagan Lake in south-central British Columbia, you can purchase wines and picnic items at the Allison House, a log cabin built by pioneers John and Susan Allison in 1873. The cabin is now a



Scenic Lynmar Estate Winery offers a four-course Picnic Pairing option from early May through the end of October.

shop that also sells works by local artists, and artisanal products.

The Stewart family purchased the homestead property in 1956, and the first grapes were planted here in 1961. Some of the vines are now among the most mature wine-grape plantings in Canada. The winery's numerous Okanagan vineyards include the Quails' Gate and Boucherie vineyards on a south-facing slope below the extinct volcano Mount Boucherie. The soil in this area is a mix of volcanic rock, clay, gravel and glacial till, with minerals contributing to wines that Quails' Gate describes as having depth, strength and character.

After purchasing your picnic food and wine at the Allison House, stroll down to the lake, past rows of established Merlot vines, until you reach a grassy escarpment called the Harvest Gathering Site, which overlooks plantings of Riesling and Chardonnay. The site offers spectacular views of the lake; the peaks of the Okanagan Highlands, often snowtopped even in summer; and the overarching deep-blue sky. Spread out your blanket and unpack favorites from British Columbia companies, such as Lesley Stowe's Raincoast Crisps, SeaChange's smoked salmon pâté, Taste of the



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Okanagan's peach salsa and Caramoomel's all-vegetable antipasto. Enjoy these items with Quails' Gate's sophisticated Pinot Noir, delightfully silky and flavorful, with intense ripe-red-fruit flavors such as plum and red cherry, and nuances of spice and truffle. The wine is an excellent counterpoint to the salty crisps, the smoked salmon, the peachy salsa and the unique antipasto, which includes a smoky-sweet Canadian maple syrup.

Next try Quails' Gate's 2011 Chasselas–Pinot Blanc–Pinot Gris, a silver medalist in the 2012 BC Wine Awards. This popular and versatile wine has a luxuriously plump texture, with notes of ripe pear, banana and tropical fruit, as well as a subtle musky quality. The finely balanced wine heightens enjoyment of simple but delicious B.C. products such as Maasdammer Swiss-style cheese from Gort's Gouda Cheese Farm, Canadian Cheddar & Chive crackers from Gone Crackers, and a crab pâté from SeaChange.

Quails' Gate will loan picnic baskets as well as providing disposable plates, cutlery and cups, or you may bring your own picnic supplies. You can sit at picnic tables at the Harvest Gathering Site or in front of the Allison House, or bring a blanket.

**W**ATERBROOK WINERY, WALLA WALLA, WA; the winery is located in the Walla Walla Valley AVA, and most of its grapes are grown in the Columbia Valley AVA; it hosts periodic special culinary events, and is open daily for wine tasting and also for picnicking, weather permitting; gourmet tacos, prepared by a Waterbrook chef who is a native of Mexico, are available Fridays and Saturdays, from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M., year-round; 509-522-1262; [www.waterbrook.com](http://www.waterbrook.com).

Waterbrook Winery sits on 75 acres of tranquil grounds in the undulating hills of the Walla Walla Valley, where native grasses such as wheatgrass, bluegrass and ryegrass flourish. The sweeping vistas include the picturesque Blue Mountains in the distance. Many of the grapes come from the winery's vineyards in the eastern part of the warm, dry Columbia Valley AVA, where the terroir results in hardy vines, and grapes with ideal fruit-acid balance for wines ranging from Chardonnay to Merlot.

Enjoy your picnic at a table on the tasting room's patio, across from a contemporary wine-production facility whose architectural details include oxidized metal accents, concrete flooring and wood beams. The patio overlooks a pond, about 20 yards away, that's framed by pampas and other



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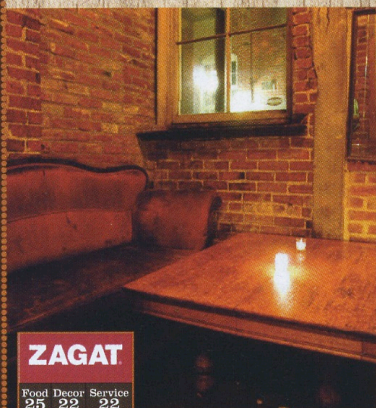
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ornamental grasses. If you prefer, you can carry your meal to the pond's edge.

Waterbrook will prepare made-to-order picnic platters with artisan meats and cheeses. You can nosh on a Rosé-enhanced salami crafted by artisan producer Volpi Foods, while sipping Waterbrook's 2012 Sangiovese Rosé, which boasts strawberry and melon flavors, with a spicy kick that complements the charcuterie.

The crisply fruity Rosé also goes well with Cypress Grove's piquant Purple Haze goat's-milk cheese, containing wild-fennel pollen and lavender. The lavender in this wonderful cheese might draw your gaze to the 300-plus lavender plants that encircle the Waterbrook lawn.

Rogue Creamery's Lavender TouVelle Cheese, crafted in Southern Oregon, is another outstanding selection. Pair this cheese with Waterbrook's 2011 Chardonnay, which layers its mellow, lightly buttery flavor over the cheese's floral and brown-butter notes, and finishes with a caramel-and-spice flavor that leaves the palate clean. The winery says the 2011 Chardonnay will be touted next month as a *Wine Enthusiast* best buy. As you bite into the whole-grain crackers providing a platform for the cheeses, you might be reminded that Washington is one of the country's top wheat-growing states.

Waterbrook will provide disposable plates, cutlery and cups for picnicking, or guests can bring their own. Visitors want-

At Waterbrook Winery, guests can enjoy a picnic on the tasting-room patio or at the edge of the pond.

ing to dine on the lawn should bring their own picnic blanket or chairs. If visitors are purchasing tacos, a picnic platter or tasting-room items from the winery and choose to sit at a table on the patio, traditional plates, cutlery and stemware will be provided.

**C**HATEAU STE. MICHELLE, WOODINVILLE, WA; Ste. Michelle's vineyards are located in the Columbia Valley AVA, while the winery is in the Puget Sound region; the winery hosts periodic special culinary events, and is open daily for wine tasting and for picnicking, weather permitting; 425-488-1133; [www.ste-michelle.com](http://www.ste-michelle.com).

Washington state's founding winery, whose history dates back to 1934, is located on 105 gorgeous wooded acres in Woodinville, 15 miles northeast of Seattle. The stately grounds, which include an expansive lawn, towering pines and a French Chateau-style production facility, include prime spots for a leisurely picnic.

Ste. Michelle's Wine Shop carries a selection of local and imported cheeses, meats and smoked salmon, and Le Petit Terroir bistro ([www.lepetitterroir.com](http://www.lepetitterroir.com)),



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a Mediterranean-inspired restaurant just minutes from the winery, assembles picnic spreads, breads, charcuterie and cheeses in a bright-red thermal container you can carry to the winery's grounds. Le Petit Terroir's breads, dips and charcuterie are all housemade with fresh local ingredients.

At the winery, you can purchase a bottle of chilled 2011 Chateau Ste. Michelle Dry Riesling—a gold medalist in this year's San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition—to go with your meal. Chateau Ste. Michelle was among the first wineries to plant Riesling vines in Washington state, and the winery rocketed to nationwide fame when its 1972 Johannisberg Riesling won the Riesling blind tasting sponsored by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1974. Chateau Ste. Michelle wines benefit from the sunny days and cool nights in the Columbia Valley AVA.

With your wine and food in hand, the challenge becomes choosing from the many picnic-site options. Perhaps you'll want to dine under the huge redwood tree on a grassy lawn where visitors watch concerts in the summer. The site has a view of the ornamental vines that line the winery's long driveway. Another particularly noteworthy site is the lawn by the romantic 1912 Manor House, which is near a garden and a pond.

Unfold Le Petit Terroir's basket into a festive checked tablecloth, and get ready to applaud your alfresco banquet. The Riesling's fruit and floral notes and crisp, cool finish make the wine a splendid companion to the robust flavors of the trio of spreads—garlic hummus, roasted pepper, and Castelvetrano-olive tapenade—which come with pita. And the dry, refreshing Riesling also holds its own amid the charcuterie of pancetta, prosciutto, coppa and duck-liver mousse, accompanied by cornichons and fresh crostini.

Or, perhaps you'll want to try the rich, powerful, fruit-forward 2010 Indian Wells Red Blend. The jammy boysenberry of the Syrah and the mellowness of the Merlot are sublime in conjunction with the bold, spicy flavors of the cured meats and the mousse. The fruity red wine also fraternizes well with artisanal cheeses such as a vintage cheddar accompanied by grapes and assorted berries.

If you're attending an evening concert at Chateau Ste. Michelle, you might finish your meal with something that evokes the emerging sparkle of stars in the dusky sky. The elegant 2006 Luxe Vintage Sparkling Wine, produced in the French tradition of Champagne, with small bubbles and a



slightly floral bouquet, will correspond to your festive mood.

Le Petit Terroir's picnic container includes disposable plates, utensils and cups. If you're purchasing deli items from Chateau Ste. Michelle's Wine Shop or bringing your own picnic fare, you'll need to have your own plates, utensils and cups. Also bring your own blanket.

**S**TE. CHAPELLE WINERY, CALDWELL, ID; Snake River Valley AVA; hosts periodic special culinary events, and is open daily for wine tasting and for picnicking, weather permitting; 208-453-7840; [www.stechapelle.com](http://www.stechapelle.com).

Ste. Chapelle sits on a hill overlooking the Snake River Valley, where orchardists cultivate fruit such as Bing cherries, Golden Delicious apples and red plums, and viticulturists tend grapes such as Riesling, Chardonnay and Merlot, taking advantage of a four-season climate that creates ideal growing conditions.

The winery is named for France's La Sainte-Chapelle, a chapel built in Paris by King Louis IX as the court chapel, and the architectural elements of the tasting room—such as the high, cathedral-style windows—were inspired by the French chapel. The tasting room includes a retail area that offers picnic foods you can carry to a gazebo with picnic tables, expansive views and an afternoon breeze off the river. You're also welcome to picnic at various other



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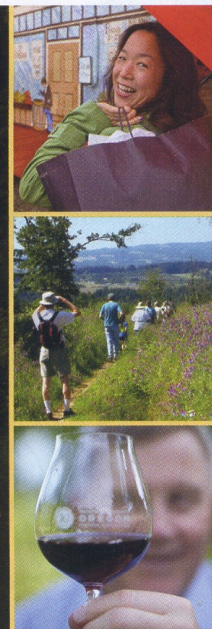
spots on the 40-acre grounds, such as the 2.5-acre Vineyard Park, which hosts the Ste. Chapelle Winery concert series on Sundays, June through October.

Ste. Chapelle staff members suggest pairing goat cheese—and-red pepper dip with the 2011 Wine-makers Chardonnay. The creamy texture of the dip is complemented by the cream notes of the wine, whose pear and apple flavors mingle well with the roasted red peppers.

For an unusual treat, pair the 2010 Special Har-

Le Petit Terroir bistro assembles picnic fare in thermal containers that can be carried to the grounds of nearby wineries such as Chateau Ste. Michelle.

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vest Riesling with Sugared Pineapple Dip, whose sweetness intensifies the pineapple, apricot and honey aspects of the wine. Yet the wine's crispness keeps the combination from being too cloying.

The 2009 Winemakers Syrah is a particularly good complement to tomato-bacon dip on spicy chile crackers. The wine has flavor nuances of blueberries and blackberries, with aromas of cloves, spicy oak and leather, all combining brilliantly with the smoky bacon and spicy tomato in the dip.

The zesty crackers also go well with chipotle-black bean dip and the 2010 Chateau Series Soft Red, a gold medalist in the Idaho Wine Commission-sponsored 2012 Idaho Wine Competition. Boldly fruity, with concentrated flavors of cherries, raspberries, plums and licorice, the wine is an agreeable culinary comrade for the zippy chipotle.

Ste. Chapelle will provide disposable utensils and plates on request, and a keep-sake glass is provided with a \$5 tasting purchase. Bring your own blanket if you choose not to picnic in the gazebo or are attending a concert. ■

Kim Cooper Findling lives in Central Oregon.

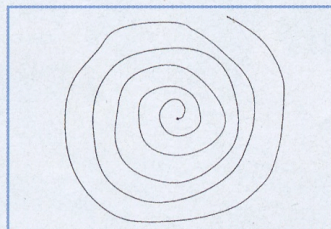
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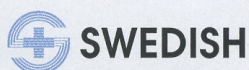
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