

# PLANET OF THE GRAPES

VOL.

3

WINE COCKTAILS



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# ABOUT THIS SERIES

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A new way to look at wine for a new generation, *Planet of the Grapes* is an ongoing series of wine guides from Jason Wilson, award-winning columnist and author of *Boozehound*, which Anthony Bourdain called “superbly informative, entertaining, and yet deeply subversive.”

Each quarter, a new volume of *Planet of the Grapes* will be released at a modest price. Each volume will focus on a specific topic or theme from the world of wine, such as Alternative Reds, the art of wine tasting, Great Whites, or the definitive guide to rosé wines. Here's what critics say about Jason Wilson:

*“Wilson has never been one for 100–point scales and tasting notes. For him the best drinks are trips down memory lane.” Wall Street Journal*

*“Wilson may just be the best virtual drinking buddy you’ve ever had.” Barnes & Noble Review*

*“A natural storyteller” Wine Enthusiast*

Volume 1: Alternative Reds

Volume 2: When Wine Talk Gets Weird

Volume 3: Wine Cocktails

Volume 4: Drink Pink (Coming Spring 2014)

Volume 5: Great Whites (Coming Summer 2014)

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**WHY WINE COCKTAILS?**

# MAKE LIFE MORE OMBIBULOUS

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“I’m ombibulous,” H.L. Mencken famously wrote. “I drink every known alcoholic drink and enjoy them all.” Mencken wrote this, of course, during simpler times: Namely, Prohibition. In those dark days, a drink was a drink was a drink. Still, I’ve always appreciated Mencken’s notion of the “ombibulous” person as an ideal drinking companion, someone with an open mind and an open heart.

Nearly a century after Prohibition, we could really use more self-identified ombibulous drinkers. That’s because our era has become the domain of the specialist, the narrow-focused, the geek. In my years of writing about drinks, I have learned one bedrock truth: There are Wine People and there are Cocktail People. And the chasm between the two is wide and deep, with only a shaky rope bridge spanning the divide.

I will never forget, for example, being at The Symposium for Professional Wine Writers in Napa Valley. I’d been chosen as a fellow and I was anxiously awaiting my first book to be released within months. On the first day, I met one of the well-established wine writers after a panel he’d just led. Someone introduced me to this guy by referring to my book, which was about spirits and cocktails. “Cocktails?” said the esteemed wine writer, with a sniff. “I don’t drink cocktails. I’ve never had a good cocktail in my life. I stick with wine.” He literally waved away the idea of cocktails, banishing from conversation.

When I told this to my friend Dave Wondrich, our foremost historian of the American cocktail, he shrugged. “Well, what do you expect?” he said. “Wine People suck.” Though I believe he was joking that’s still a harsh, knee-jerk sentiment.

Yes, too many Cocktail People still live by the cliché that wine is stuffy. And too many Wine People live by the misguided idea that cocktails are gauche. This volume of *Planet of the Grapes* will attempt to bring together the two camps.

I don’t believe that we’ll soon see Wine People and Cocktail People holding hands at the bar and singing Kumbaya. But I think wine cocktails are a safe place to start a dialogue. Wine People might learn to loosen up a little bit and see that it’s not heresy to mix a little wine with some spirits. Cocktail People might learn to embrace wine...if for no other reason than that you simply can’t drink cask-strength whiskey, absinthe, and 110-proof green Chartreuse every day. (Trust me, I’ve tried.)

Using wine in cocktails is a surefire way to scandalize the serious wine aficionados in your life. Which is always fun. Once, at a little get-together, I prepared one of my favorite wine-based drinks. I opened a decent bottle of Rioja, poured some into a highball glass filled with ice, then topped it with an equal measure of Coca-Cola. Those watching were aghast. “That’s like a hobo drink,” said my friend Erin.

In fact, that drink is called a Calimocho and is a tippie of choice of Spanish youths. It is also a perfect use of leftover red wine from the previous evening, as well as extremely delicious and refreshing on a hot afternoon. (We’ll get to the Spanish soda-plus-wine cocktails in a few pages.) From the basic Calimocho, we’ll range in these pages far and wide in more than 40 recipes from classic to postmodern, with varying degrees of complexity.





When I think of wine cocktails, my first thoughts almost always drift toward Spain and Italy, where there are serious traditions of mixing with vino. Here in America, however, the wine cocktail trend has slowly been building. But it's really just a return to the early days of cocktail-making, when wines such as port, sherry, Champagne, Madeira, and Sauternes were standard ingredients.

Wine cocktails are what I serve to people who say "I don't like cocktails," and I have converted more nonbelievers to the pleasures of cocktails with the drinks in this volume than just about any other. Wine-based cocktails seem to speak to many Americans' jitters about drinking hard liquor. "It has to do with lighter palates, people wanting something a little lighter," said my friend Duggan McDonnell, owner of Cantina in San Francisco as well as Campo de Encanto pisco. "I'm all for lowered alcohol, and it's often a nicer overall experience. I don't always want to taste heat on the palate. I want balance."

A few summers ago, I met a mixologist named Trudy Thomas, beverage director for the Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, Arizona, who told me she was consulting for Yellow Tail, developing cocktails using the company's wines. "Yellow Tail isn't afraid to try something like this," Thomas said. "They already dominate the wine market. Where else are they going to go but into cocktails? It's the next evolution."

Now, one thing that both Wine People and Cocktail People can agree on is that they both hate Yellow Tail.

For instance — and this is sure to offend some friends — but I must be honest: When I come to your home for a party and the only thing to drink is a big ol' liter-and-a-half of oaky Yellow Tail

chardonnay (or worse, you show up at my doorstep with Yellow Tail's jammy shiraz) a little part of me dies inside. First of all, you're making it clear you don't read my work. Second, you will never, ever be drinking any of my good stuff from the Special Cabinet.

Sneered at by drink aficionados and loved by just about everyone else, Yellow Tail has achieved a ubiquity that has been well chronicled. It has been blamed for the rise of low-quality "critter" wines, the crisis of Australia's premium wine industry and the general downfall of the American palate. All of which has had little effect on its massive sales.

With that in mind, I received a handful of the 40-plus cocktail recipes that Thomas created. I had a surprising amount of Yellow Tail lying around my cellar: unused housewarming gifts or perhaps leftovers from my wife's book club. So I decided to experiment.

Readers, I wanted to hate these cocktails. I really did. But I simply cannot be a hater. For reasons I have yet to wrap my head around, I found several of these cocktails to be inventive and tasty. Thomas deserves some sort of special Mixology Achievement Medal.

Who would have believed that equal parts bourbon and Yellow Tail shiraz, along with a little lemon juice and simple syrup, would make such an interesting Manhattan variation? Would you have guessed that Australian riesling would blend with pear brandy, amaretto, and lemon juice into a wonderful autumn afternoon cocktail? And who would guess that a Yellow Tail cabernet blend, rum, bitters, and ginger beer would make a terrific variation on the Dark n' Stormy?



After fooling around with Thomas' recipes, I felt even more convinced about the possibilities of wine as an ingredient. "You really can't duplicate the flavors of wine and what they bring to a

cocktail,” she said.

Of course, you can — you should — make these drinks with wines other than Yellow Tail. And Yellow Tail is not the only big wine company that has recently leapt into the winetail market. Around the same time as my Yellow Tail experiments, I received a bottle of Croft Pink, touted by its maker as the “world’s first rosé porto.” It is “intended to be served on the rocks or chilled” and “steps out of the ‘after-dinner’ category to the bar menu.”

Now, it may or may not make sense for a distinguished port house, founded in 1588, to be chasing the kind of drinker who would be interested in a \$19.99 pink port. But as Adrian Bridge, chief executive of the Fladgate Partnership, Croft’s parent company, explained in a news release, “Innovation will raise awareness in the industry of porto as a contemporary product.”

Allow me to interpret that: Port is seen as a stuffy, clubby drink for old men. And the good stuff is expensive, to boot. In fact, port enthusiasts are dying off faster than they’re being replaced. Meanwhile, 20- and 30-something female drinkers — the ones who drive most drinking trends, the ones so many liquor companies covet — almost never consume port.

Croft Pink by itself doesn’t have a whole lot to recommend it. But here’s the thing: Like many wines, it definitely brings a unique element to cocktails. Neyah White, former bar manager of Nopa in San Francisco, mixed Croft Pink in an ice-filled highball glass with gin and orange bitters, then topped it with ginger beer. Jim Meehan of New York’s PDT made a unique cocktail called Pretty in Porto with the unlikely combination of pink port, kirschwasser, grapefruit juice, and Peychaud’s bitters.

This is not to suggest that one should use middling or bad wine in cocktails. Quite the contrary, as you’ll see in the recipes to come. Just as with spirits, a good recipe that calls for a mediocre wine only improves when you improve the wine. Consider for instance, the trio of riesling cocktails in this section. Each calls for two ounces of riesling, so you’ll definitely want to find a quality bottle from Germany or Alsace. Perhaps not your most expensive aged bottle of riesling. But a good-value selection nonetheless.

I look forward to the continuing experiments with wine cocktails. On my end, I know I’ll no longer whine when I see that big liter-and-a-half at a party. I’ll just make sure I’ve brought some good booze (and a shaker) to mix it with.



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# STORMY WEATHER

This is a wine variation on the classic Dark 'n' Stormy. Australian shiraz, California syrah or Rhone blends work best here. Though originally created for Yellow Tail, I find that it works better (surprise!) with better wines. For the rum, I recommend something with a bit of age, like Flor de Cana 7-year, Chairman's Reserve or Appleton V/X. The bitters add a nice structure to the drink, but it's also nice without them.

## INGREDIENTS

Ice

1½ ounces dark or aged rum

1½ ounces shiraz or cabernet shiraz blend

½ ounce freshly squeezed lime juice

¼ ounce agave nectar

1 dash Angostura bitters (optional)

Ginger beer

## INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a shaker halfway with ice. Add the rum, shiraz or cabernet shiraz blend, lime juice, agave nectar and bitters, if desired. Shake well, then strain into an ice-filled Collins glass. Top off with ginger beer.

*Adapted from Trudy Thomas at the Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, Arizona*



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# HARVEST PEAR

A classic German riesling *trocken* works much better than the Yellow Tail that this was originally created for. The key is choosing one that has a higher alcohol content (over 10% ABV or higher) and has a touch of residual sugar. A domestic pear brandy such as Clear Creek or Aqua Perfecta or any poire Williams eau de vie works well.

## INGREDIENTS

Ice

1½ ounces riesling

1 ounce pear brandy or pear eau de vie

¼ ounce amaretto

½ ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 teaspoon **simple syrup**

1 pear slice

## INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a shaker halfway with ice.

Add the riesling, pear brandy or pear eau de vie, amaretto, lemon juice and simple syrup. Shake well, then strain into a chilled cocktail (martini) glass. Garnish with the pear slice.

*Adapted from Trudy Thomas of the Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, Arizona.*



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# MIRROBALL

The second of our trio of riesling-based cocktails again shows how well fruit eau de vie — in this case apricot — plays with the grape. When working with egg whites, always be sure to first do a brief “dry” shake, without ice, then add ice and shake profusely. Get creative dashing your bitters in the foam.

## INGREDIENTS

2 ounces riesling  
1 ounce apricot eau de vie, preferably Blume  
Marillen  
½ ounce honey syrup  
½ ounce freshly squeezed lime juice  
1 egg white  
Ice  
Angostura bitters

## INSTRUCTIONS

Combine riesling, apricot eau de vie, syrup, lime juice, and egg white in a shaker. “Dry” shake without ice, then add ice and shake profusely for at least 30-60 seconds. Strain into a chilled coupe. Top with a line of Angostura bitters.

*From Adam Bernbach at 2 Birds 1 Stone, Doi Moi, Estadio and Proof in Washington, D.C.*



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# CRISP HERBAL RETREAT

Celery bitters and absinthe are two ingredients with which one must exercise restraint. But here, they complement the riesling and vermouth to create a cocktail that drinks light, but delivers big, complex aromas. Again, look for a riesling that has higher alcohol and a little residual sugar, such as a kabinett with over 10% alcohol by volume.

## INGREDIENTS

Absinthe to rinse the glass  
Ice  
2 ounces riesling  
1 dry vermouth, preferably Dolin  
2 dashes celery bitters  
Lemon peel twist

## INSTRUCTIONS

Rinse the inside of a chilled cocktail glass with absinthe until coated, and pour out excess.

Fill a mixing glass halfway with ice. Add riesling, vermouth, and bitters. Stir vigorously, then strain into the rinsed cocktail glass. Twist lemon peel to express oils then drop in drink to garnish.

*From Otis Steven Florence at Pouring Ribbons and Attaboy in New York*

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# CINDERELLA, OR THE GLASS SLIPPER



In my opinion, Sauternes makes everything better, and this unique old cocktail, from the 1867 guide *American Barkeeper* by Charles Campbell, proves my adage true. The float of ruby port on top keeps the noble-rot wine and orgeat concoction from tilting too far into the realm of sweet. For orgeat, look for the artisan Small Hand Foods or Torani or make your own ([see appendix](#)). This works on the rocks, too.

## INGREDIENTS

Ice  
½ ounce orgeat syrup  
4 ounces Sauternes, Tokaji, or other botrytized wine  
1 ounce ruby port  
Pineapple wedge

## INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a shaker halfway with ice. Add orgeat and Sauternes. Shake well, then strain into chilled highball glass. Float port on top. Garnish with pineapple wedge.

*From David Wondrich, foremost expert on the American cocktail and author of *Imbibe!* and *Punch*.*



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# SPICE KING



Pisco, Peru's famed spirit, is distilled wine. So it's no wonder that it mixes so well in wine cocktails. Here, malbec keeps the concoction in South America, and blends well with the spicy dashes of bitters. A spicy shrub can work in lieu of bitters, such as Bittermens' Hellfire Habanero Shrub.

## INGREDIENTS

Ice cubes  
2 ounces malbec  
1 ounce pisco, preferably Campo de Encanto  
½ ounce freshly squeezed lime juice  
½ ounce simple syrup  
2 dashes "hellfire" bitters  
1 dash mole bitters, preferably Bittermens' Xocolatl Mole Bitters  
Orange peel cut into shape of a crown

## INSTRUCTIONS

Fill a shaker halfway with ice. Add all liquid ingredients. Shake well, then pour into large balloon-style wine glass filled with ice. Garnish with orange peel crown.



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# LIGHT GUARD PUNCH



The ultimate *Planet of the Grapes* punch, with sherry, Sauternes, sparkling wine, and brandy. This recipe, meant to quench a regiment's thirst, comes from Jerry Thomas' seminal 1862 *The Bar-Tender's Guide*. For the sparkling wine, Champagne works best, but you could also use a dry, crisp, not-too-sweet cava or crémant. For a more pineapple-y twist, you can experiment with gently muddling the pineapple before adding the brandy and wines. The base mixture needs to be refrigerated for at least 2 hours.

## INGREDIENTS

1 pineapple, peeled, cored and coarsely chopped  
750-milliliter bottle fino or manzanilla sherry  
750-milliliter bottle cognac or Armagnac, preferably VSOP  
750-milliliter bottle Sauternes (or Tokaji)  
Ice  
Three 750-milliliter bottles sparkling wine  
4 lemons, cut into thin slices

## INSTRUCTIONS

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Combine the pineapple, sherry, cognac and sweet wine in a large mixing bowl or pitcher. Transfer to the refrigerator and chill for at least 2 hours.

Just before serving, fill about one-third of a punch bowl with ice, then pour the mixture over the ice. Add the sparkling wine. Stir gently; garnish with lemon slices.

VARIATION: Instead of pouring the sparkling wine into the punch bowl, pour a ladleful of the mixture from the punch bowl into each glass (about 2 ounces), then top each with sparkling wine.

*Adapted from The Punch Bowl by Dan Searing (Sterling Epicure, 2011)*

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SPANISH-INSPIRED

# WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT SANGRIA

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If I say “wine” and “cocktail,” most Americans will jump immediately to one thing: Sangria. In fact, they might even exclaim something like this: “Woohooo, sangria!” No discussion of wine cocktails can truly begin until we discuss sangria. So I may as well start with a full confession: I do not like sangria.

In fact, I do not like it so much that I originally believed I’d put together this wine cocktail tome to convince people to leave their lame old sangria behind. But soon enough, I realized this was silly on my part. I mean, who am I to tell you not to drink sangria? If you happen to like soggy fruit soaked in cheap wine, by all means, enjoy yourself.

My problem with sangria is two-fold. First, it’s almost always made incorrectly. For the record, sangria is not simply chopped fruit dumped into wine. No, true sangria should always have a significant portion of brandy and also possibly a small amount of liqueur. Ask what they put in your sangria at your local happy hour and most likely it will make you sad.

Meanwhile, sangria is sold to us as something that hot-blooded Spaniards slurp down like water during hot Spanish summers. This is very much stretching the truth. In Spain, tourists drink sangria. Sangria was actually introduced to Americans at the World’s Fair in New York in 1964. In reality, Spanish people drink a whole panoply of wine and soda cocktails, which I will discuss at length in a moment, but generally not sangria.

This is not to say that all sangria must be bad. If you get creative, use quality wine, and don’t forget the brandy and other liqueurs, sangria can occasionally be something special. So while I am resolutely anti-sangria, I realize I cannot in good conscience present you a book on wine cocktails without including one recipe. So I will leave you with this decidedly non-Spanish example. It’s a Tuscan Sangria, but it’s not Tuscan in the same way that a Tuscan Chicken sandwich at Subway is. This punch’s ingredients are all Italian — Tuaca, limoncello, Punt e Mes, sangiovese wine — and it is transcendent.

It was created by Duggan McDonnell, owner of Cantina in San Francisco, as well as the Campo de Encanto brand of Peruvian pisco. McDonnell likes to push the definition of sangria: Basically, anything can be sangria as long as it’s two parts wine to one part brandy or liqueur, and features an interplay of spice and sweetness. “My interest is in refining balance in sangrias,” he says.



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