

NEW WINE TIME

Huddle up with some winter delights

I hunkered in my chair, rolling behind the desk, periodically gazing down through grimy windows 17 floors above Eugene's winter-wet streets. Derelicts and "travelers" huddled in the park, smoking, yakking, looking to score, ducking cops. Through the pebbled glass on the office door, I caught sight of a deformed shadow. The door creaked open.

Mole popped in, wearing a weird, two-faced mask: Janus, the Roman god whose name begot January. My own elf of the New Year. No cherub's diaper for my wacky sidekick; no, the Round Mound of Merlot rocks to his own rhythm. "Sleut," he piped — he calls me Sleuth — "we's gotta innerduce da peeps ta some great new vinos. It's da New Year 'n dey'll wanna partay wit new wines, right?"

I can rarely argue with Mole; he's the heart of our business and wine-people love the little guy, even if they can't remember seeing him at, say, a tasting gig. He might as



well be invisible, but they poured their secret stash for him, at no charge.

Besides, January is a fine time for wine: We're damp and cold and want to huddle up with a warm red, hot grub and a good read. Mole proffered a sample, **Foris Flyover Red** (\$10), a hearth-warming blend of mostly merlot (of course, Mole's fave film *Sideways* be damned) and cabernet sauvignon, plus just a spoonful (2 percent) of cabernet franc, soft, cozy, drinkable, affordable, nice flavors of black currants/cassis, plums, dash of pepper. Sip it or serve with roasts of various sorts. Mole grinned.

More than once, Mole has told me outright, "Sleut", youse a pinot-holic." And he's right — mostly — but pinot noir is a fussy grape, expensive to grow, tricky to vinify into really tasty glug and, as a result, it tends to be expensive at retail. We watch for drinkable pinots at \$20 and under, and rarely find them. But right now there's a boatload of good pinots in the market, many approaching affordable pricing.

For about a minute, we all might have a chance to score a bottle of **Ponzi 2012 Pinot Noir Tavola** (\$22), a superb bottling from a skilled vintner in a fine year, aromatic, flavor-

ful (black cherries, black raspberries, sweet-oak notes). This wine will disappear from shelves almost overnight. Get it while you can.

Last week, we drove out to Gimpl Hill Road and tasted through all 19 wines currently carrying the Noble Estate label, many of them just delish. We were particularly impressed with the **Noble Estate 2012 Petite Sirah** (\$29); even though very young, the (almost black) wine showed depth of flavors (ripe plums, blackberries and currants) and promises of long life as it matures. Only slightly over 200 cases were produced, so it, too, will be only briefly available: Grab some.

But there's no escaping Noble's most popular wine, **Noble Estate 2012 Muscat Semi-Sparkling** (\$18), so bright, so tasty, so friendly with white cheeses and fruity desserts.

One more local beauty that won't be long on our scene: **Benton-Lane 2012 Pinot Gris** (\$16) is just terrific for flavors (pears, apples) and balance. B-L has repeatedly garnered international praises and prizes for their pinot gris: Here's why. Taste, put in your cart.

"Winter's just beginning," Mole says, dropping his Janus mask back over his face, better to look into our future. "Weah gonna need lotsa good vinos. Dis is good woik, Sleut." ■

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FOOD MUSE

BY ROBERT CECIL

GOLDFISH STEW

A delicious, seafood-themed dish for the New Year

A seafood stew, cioppino or bouillabaisse can be an expensive and labor-intensive undertaking to put together, but with my recipe I present a different version of this extraordinary holiday entrée.

I wanted to make this easily accessible to a new cook but also offer an affordable dish (just under \$30) and wrap it up in about an hour. I'm calling it Goldfish Stew.

I think the only rule of thumb I followed was to shop for "fresh." Fresh seafood, that is, and it's not hard to do here in Eugene with Newman's, Fisherman's Market and Market of Choice all within a stone's throw of many of us. The proportions are all good places to start, but feel free to add a little more of your favorite and use less of your least. This should feed about six people.



In your stew pot, start by heating some olive oil to brown up those two sausages, leaving them whole for now. While they're browning, finely dice the vegetables.

You want the veggies minced small enough so that they easily disintegrate and season the broth — remember, the focus here is a flavorful seafood stew that is thin and almost watery, not chunky — a vegetable soup with some seafood.

GOLDFISH STEW

½ lb	shrimp (about 13-15)
½-¾ lb	steamer clams
1 filet	snapper or rockfish
6-8	small octopus or squid
2	Italian sausage links (Johnsonville, hot)
1 1/2	shrimp bouillon cubes (Plaza Latina Market, 1333 W. 7th Ave.)
2	large cloves of garlic
a pinch	red pepper flakes
1 tsp	smoked paprika (Long's Meat Market, 81 E. 28th Ave.)
2	small onions — minced
6	carrots — minced
6	celery stalks — minced
3 or 4	small yukon potatoes cut into ¼ in cubes
1	Bay leaf
1/8	of a preserved lemon (peel only)
1	28-32 OZ can of crushed tomatoes
½ cup	of red wine (you know, the one you didn't finish last week)

Now add to the pot the minced garlic, sauté it for a minute or two and then add carrot, onion and celery. Sweat these vegetables and almost caramelize them over a medium flame along with the sausage.

While this mixture is sweating/browning, go ahead and get the seafood prepped; cut the filet into bite-size pieces, clean the shrimp of shells and veins if you need to, rinse off the clams and cut up the octopus/squid, putting it all into one bowl and setting it aside. These ingredients will be the last thing you add to the pot.

Turning back to the vegetables, if it looks like they are starting to stick and turn a little brown, it's not a problem! Don't worry; it's a good sign. Those browned, caramelized veggies will add a sweet complexity to the final taste.

Next remove the sausage to cool. It doesn't need to be cooked thoroughly at this point because you'll be cutting it up into bite-size chunks and adding it later along with seafood for further cooking.

When the veggies are translucent and starting to caramelize and brown, add the red wine to deglaze and unstick the bits from the bottom and sides of the pot. Now add the tomatoes, water and crushed shrimp bouillon, bringing it back to a steady simmer.

You should be about 15 to 20 minutes into it at this point, and you have about that much longer to go before it's all done and ready to enjoy.

Now that it's simmering, add the chili flakes, potato, oregano and bay leaf. Cut the cooled sausage into bite-size pieces. Now take a break. Be patient: Let it all simmer for 10 to 15 minutes to evaporate some water, and then break down the veggies.

With only about 5 minutes before the hour is up, add the prepped seafood and sausage and, finally, throw in the smoked paprika and preserved lemon peel.

It is ready to serve when the clams have popped open and the shrimp are just cooked through.

This stew is full of flavors that you will want to soak up with a crusty fresh ciabatta bread and maybe enjoy with a glass of Brandborg Winery's 2013 Pinot Gris.

Cheers and Happy New Year! ■