

VIETNAMESE NOODLES ITALIAN GNOCCHI ARMENIAN PASTRY

SAVEUR

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IN CALIFORNIA'S WINE COUNTRY, THE ROBLEDOS COME TOGETHER EACH WEEKEND FOR THEIR MOTHER'S FINE MEXICAN COOKING—AND TO HONOR AND STRENGTHEN A DREAM

WINE

for the FAMILY


The Robledo Family Winery, above, in Sonoma, California, surrounded by chardonnay vines. Facing page, members of the Robledo family, gathered at the home of Reynaldo and Maria Robledo for Sunday lunch.

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his family, and the larger that family, it seems, the better.

ALL THE ROBLEDOS are deep into lunch now, at the long table next to the vines. Clusters of wine bottles and bowls of salsa are arranged for pairing with the fragrant dishes that Maria has made. For her tostadas, piled high with shrimp, crab, and avocado, Maria has set out the refreshing Seven

Brothers sauvignon blanc. Initially I'm skeptical about drinking the pinot noir with the posole: surely the earthy stew will trample on the wine, I think, but instead it brings out the deep cherry notes in the pinot, and the wine somehow broadens and mellows the spiciness of the posole. The chiles rellenos, crisp and light on the outside, meaty on the inside, find their match in the firmly tannic syrah. The

names of each person in the Robledo family and a brief definition: "Robledo (rō 'blā 'dō), *n.* 1. oak tree; strength, longevity and grace." It's a name that suits them, and their hopes. 

THE PANTRY, page 102: Information on the Robledo Family Winery and the wines in our Tasting Notes, plus sources for dried chiles, Mexican brown sugar, cotija cheese, and quail.



RECIPE

Guisada de Gullota

(Quail Braised in Tomatillo-Chile Sauce)

SERVES 4

In this dish the sour tomatillos add body and a tangy background to the deep, earthy chile sauce that the quail simmers in. See THE PANTRY, page 102, for a source for hard-to-find Mexican ingredients

- 1½ lbs. tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 12 dried árbol chiles, stemmed
- 6 dried cascabel chiles, stemmed
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ tsp. ground cumin
- Salt
- 6 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 quail (about 1½ lbs.), halved lengthwise, wingtips removed, rinsed and dried well
- 2 tsp. steak seasoning, preferably McCormick Montreal Steak Seasoning

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add tomatillos and boil until tender, about 8 minutes. Drain and set tomatillos aside.

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Working over a large piece of aluminum foil, break open chiles, spilling seeds onto the foil. Wrap foil over chiles and seeds to form a package and roast in oven until fragrant and darkened, about 15 minutes. Put chiles with seeds, garlic, and 1 cup water into a blender and purée until smooth. Add tomatillos, cumin, and salt to taste and blend just until incorporated, leaving tomatillos chunky. Set tomatillo-chile mixture aside.

3. Heat 4 tbsp. of the oil in a large deep skillet over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, cook quail on each side until deep golden brown, about 5 minutes per side. Transfer quail to a paper towel-lined plate and wipe skillet clean. Reduce heat to low, add remaining oil, and return quail to skillet. Sprinkle quail with steak seasoning and cook, covered, for 30 minutes. Add tomatillo-chile mixture to skillet with quail, stir to combine, cover, and simmer until falling apart and very tender, about 2 hours. Divide quail between 4 bowls and serve with warm corn tortillas, if you like.

quail, browned and then braised in a silky, forceful, brick red salsa, is fine with the syrah but also just plain good on its own, and even the little kids are sucking the meat off the bones, ringing their mouths with salsa.

In all the wines, the fruit shows through, which is winemaker Herrera's goal: "I like my wines to have concentration and richness, as long as they show the variety." Besides making wine for his father-in-law, he vinifies for four other companies and still has found the time to create a label of his own: Mi Sueño (My Dream). At the end of dinner he gives his children a tiny cup of wine, teaching them to drink it very slowly so that they can savor the flavors. After an hour or so, the family members have mostly dispersed, taking with them the tumble of little shoes and socks left on the front steps.

The Robledo Family Winery's website opens onto an illustration of an oak tree, superimposed with the



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BY MARGO TRUE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN FINK

EVERY SUNDAY afternoon, the children of Reynaldo and Maria Robledo gather at their parents' house in Napa for lunch. Maria makes a Mexican feast of giant proportions—spicy pork or chicken posole, homemade tortillas, tostadas, rice, beans, maybe chiles rellenos or a smooth, chocolatey mole, and some fresh salsas—for her nine children, ranging in age from 13 to 34, plus their spouses and her grandchildren. In good weather, they eat outdoors under the branches of a broad, leafy oak tree. The table stretches on and on: there are typically almost 30 people here, laughing and talking in both Spanish and English, passing around sweet-faced babies while toddlers and older kids scoot in and out of the grapevines planted right up to the house. This is the Robledo family, and the business it took Reynaldo 35 years to achieve, Robledo Family Winery, is for them.

As Reynaldo, his wife, and any of his children will tell you, they don't see the American dream as a mirage or a cliché. Three years ago, Reynaldo became the first former migrant vineyard worker in North America to own a winery. (Other Mexican-Americans

have since done the same; see sidebar, page 56.) Reynaldo and some of his relatives came to California from the Mexican state of Michoacán in 1968, when he was 16, with several of his relatives. He started out earning as little as \$1.10 an hour (most of which he sent back to his family in Mexico), living in a transient labor camp near Calistoga, and putting in 14- to 18-hour days pruning vines.

Now he has a vineyard management company with 30 to 45 year-round employees, as well as his winery, whose vineyards cover 220 acres (90 of them on long-term lease) in Sonoma, Napa, and Lake counties. He sells grapes to prominent wineries like Gloria Ferrer, Kendall Jackson, and Benziger and makes 10,000 cases of his own wine, a quantity that has doubled since 2004.

Over the past year, he has begun to release an ambitious array of new bottlings—pinot grigio, pinot blanc, barbera, muscato, and port—as well as the varietals he has already sold: chardonnay, merlot, pinot noir, sauvignon blanc, syrah, cabernet sauvignon. Several of Robledo's wines have won awards. His 2001 Reserve Chardonnay received a double gold medal at the 2004 California State Fair, and his 2003 pinot noir has garnered multiple honors (among them a gold from the 2006 Orange County Fair wine competition).

Satisfying though all this success is to Reynaldo, what pleases him the most is that each of his nine children works for the family businesses. Lorena, the oldest, helps keep the books

Facing page, Vianna Robledo, Reynaldo's granddaughter, holding a bowl of pork and hominy stew.

for both the vineyard management company and the winery and is married to the company's personable winemaker, Rolando Herrera—also Mexican-American and a former director of winemaking for Paul Hobbs,

RECIPE

Posole Rojo

(Pork and Hominy Stew)

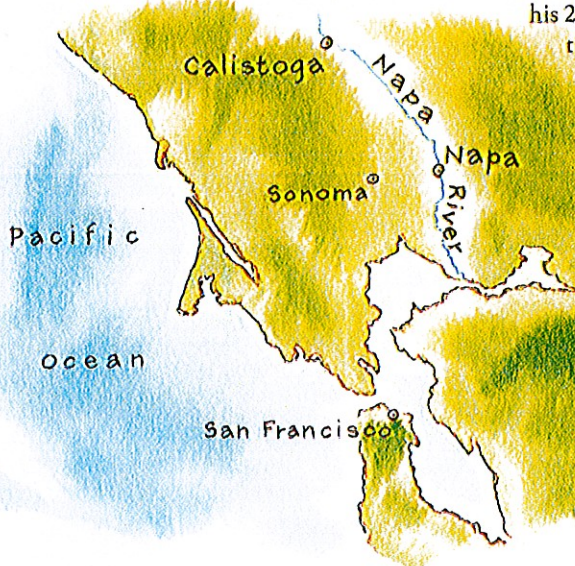
SERVES 8-10

In Michoacán, Maria Robledo's birthplace, posole is typically made with pork broth. The soup always contains hominy, dried corn kernels that have been cooked in an alkaline solution (such as slaked lime) to remove the hull. For a source for hard-to-find Mexican ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 102.

- 5 dried cascabel chiles, stemmed and seeded
- 4 dried pasilla chiles, stemmed and seeded
- 3 dried new mexico chiles, stemmed and seeded
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 15-oz. cans golden hominy, drained and rinsed (about 6 cups)
- 1/2 lbs. pork neck bones, cut into 2" pieces by your butcher
- 1 1/2 lbs. pork leg, cut into 2" pieces by your butcher
- 1 lb. pork spareribs, cut into 2" pieces by your butcher
- Salt
- 10 radishes, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 1 large white onion, roughly chopped
- 1/2 small head green cabbage, cored and thinly sliced

1. Put chiles into a small pot and cover with water; bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, until soft, about 20 minutes. Drain chiles; transfer to a blender. Add 3 1/2 cups water; purée until smooth. Strain through a medium-mesh strainer into a bowl. Purée garlic and 1/4 cup water until smooth. Set chile mixture and garlic purée aside.

2. Put hominy and 9 cups water into a large pot; bring to a boil over high heat. Stir in chile mixture, garlic purée, pork bones, leg, and spareribs, and salt to taste. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, until pork is tender, about 2 hours. Uncover and simmer until pork is very tender, about 2 hours more. Serve posole garnished with radishes, onions, cabbage, and three-chile salsa (see page 55), if you like.







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known for its fine single-vineyard wines. Vanessa, the other daughter, is the winery president, and although she's not yet 30, she has the grace and confidence of someone much older. The seven sons have all chosen niches for themselves: Rey Jr. is a specialist in vine grafting and in tending the family's 100 planted acres of olive trees; Jenaro is a vineyard manager; Lazaro is the tasting room manager; eager, 13-year-old Emiliano began driving an ATV at age five to scare away grape-eating birds, but harvesting is what he likes the best. "I think he has something inside already," says Reynaldo proudly.

ON A SUNDAY morning in October, Maria stands in front of an enormous stockpot, stirring boiling hominy (dried corn) for the posole (a pork stew) that

RECIPE

Calabaza y Camote

(Candied Squash and Sweet Potatoes)

SERVES 6-8

This hearty mixture of slowly simmered squash and sweet potatoes is bathed in a delicious syrup that is sweetened with the rich Mexican unrefined brown sugar known as piloncillo, which comes in the shape of a cone. For the best results, stir infrequently while cooking, to keep the squash and potatoes intact.

- 4-5 sweet potatoes (about 3 lbs.), scrubbed, halved lengthwise, and cut into 2" chunks
 1 butternut squash (about 2³/₄ pounds), scrubbed, trimmed, halved, seeded, and cut into 2" chunks
 1 lb. Mexican brown sugar (piloncillo, about 2 cones), cut into small pieces (see page 102)

1. Put sweet potatoes and 1 cup water into a large pot, cover, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, for 20 minutes. Add squash and sugar, stir to combine, and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until sweet potatoes and squash are soft, 1-1¹/₂ hours more.

2. Uncover pot and cook until sweet potatoes and squash are just falling apart and liquid has thickened, about 45 minutes. Transfer sweet potato-squash mixture to serving bowl and let cool to room temperature. Divide between bowls and serve at room temperature.



the family will devour in a few hours. Her roomy kitchen sits at the back of the house into which she and Reynaldo moved nine years ago, a big, two-story place with a red-tiled roof and numerous family portraits decorating the living room. She has the radio down low, but normally, says Vanessa, she cranks it up to full blast and sings along to Mexican folk songs.

"Siempre toma un poco de vino cuando cocino [I always have a little

MARGO TRUE, a former executive editor of *SAVEUR*, is the food editor for *Sunset*, in Northern California.

Above, a dish of calabaza y camote (candied squash and sweet potatoes). Facing page, left, a bottle of the Robledo winery's 2004 Reserve Cabernet; right, three-chile salsa and grilled tomato salsa.

wine when I cook]," says Maria; it helps her find a good wine to match with the food. For this posole, though, she already knows the right wine—it comes from the pinot vines framed in her kitchen window.

Every now and then she turns around to help Jocelyn, Vanessa's little daughter, work the tortilla press, exhorting her, "Fuerte, mi hija! Fuerte! [Press firmly, my daughter! Firmly!]"

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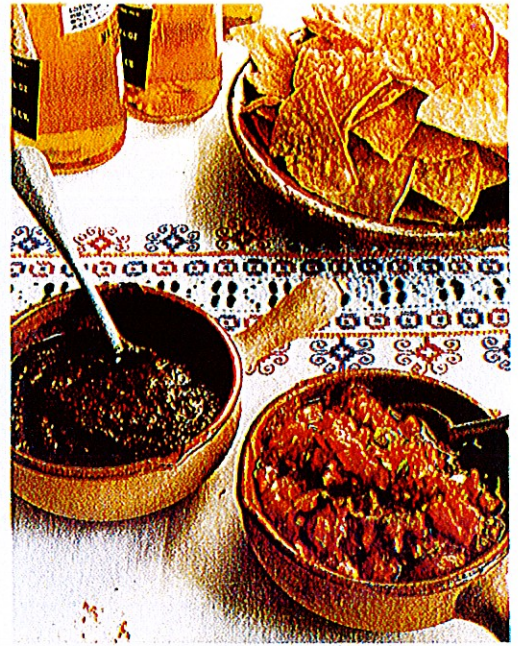


Rey Jr.'s wife, Erika, is at the kitchen island, pulling crabmeat from the shell for tostadas. Vanessa blends soaked dried chiles for salsa, sneezing from the fumes. Lorena sits on a stool with her new baby in her arms. Reynaldo is here too, in a handsome black cowboy hat, splitting quail in half with quick thunks of a knife.

When María joined Reynaldo in Sonoma in 1972 (they had been sweethearts in Michoacán and married in 1970), she started cooking in earnest, drawing on memories of her mother's hearty, country-style Michoacán food. She cooked not only for her growing family but also

for Reynaldo's cousins and uncles and grandfather, many of whom were living with them in a small house. The Robledos and their children moved frequently to be close to Reynaldo's place of work. Their last house stood on the same spot as the present one.

"I'd always know where to find my mother: in the kitchen," says Vanessa. "That old house! It had two rooms with an extension out the back, no closets, and was about a hundred years old and crumbling. You could practically see through the boards. We'd beg my dad, 'Please buy us a house!' And he'd say, 'Nope, I'm buying more land.'" By



METHOD

Three-Chile Salsa

This dark, almost chocolatey salsa would make a great accompaniment for seared steak or grilled pork chops. Take 10 dried cascabel, 10 árbol, and 6 pulla chiles (see page 102) and tear them into large pieces, discarding stems (discard seeds for a milder salsa, if desired). Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 6 chopped cloves garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until light golden, about 1 minute. Using a slotted spoon, transfer garlic to a blender, leaving the oil in the skillet. Add chiles with their seeds (if using) to skillet and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant and slightly darkened, about 3 minutes. Put chiles and oil, 1 tbsp. cider vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, and salt to taste into the blender and purée until very smooth, about 3 minutes. Serve this salsa with pork and hominy stew (see page 52), if you like. Makes about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

Grilled Tomato Salsa

Grilling the tomatoes and chiles imparts a lovely, smoky char to this salsa. Preheat grill to medium. Grill 4 fresh árbol or thai chiles, 3 large tomatoes, 2 serrano chiles, and 1 jalapeño chile, turning frequently, until well charred, 2-3 minutes for the árbol chiles, 6-7 minutes for the tomatoes, 4-5 minutes for the serrano chiles, and 7-8 minutes for the jalapeño chiles. Transfer each item to a plate when it's done. Core the tomatoes, stem the chiles, and roughly chop them along with 3 cloves garlic. Transfer all the ingredients to a food processor and pulse 3-4 times until well combined but still chunky. Transfer salsa to a bowl, season with salt to taste, and serve with poblano chiles stuffed with beef and cheese (see page 59) or tortilla chips, if you like. Makes about 3 cups.

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THE RISE OF THE VINEYARD WORKER

Like other vast human creations—the pyramids of Giza, Notre Dame, the Taj Mahal—the sweeping vineyards of California owe their being, in large part, to massive physical effort. The clearing of the land, the planting, and the endless pruning, irrigation, grafting, spraying, harvesting, and countless other tasks required to make millions of vines flourish are labors that have traditionally been (and continue to be) done primarily by Mexican migrants and their descendants.

The original migrants began arriving in the state in large numbers in 1942 under the *bracero* (guest worker) program, a collaboration between the American and Mexican governments originally intended to offset wartime labor shortfalls but continuing until 1964. It's probably no exaggeration to say that the modern-day California wine business wouldn't exist without their efforts.

Within the past two or three decades, Mexican-Americans have begun assuming higher-profile roles in the wine industry. They've become farm and vineyard managers, winemakers, and vineyard consultants and, increasingly, are opening wineries of their own. Manny Frias of Frias Family Vineyard in St. Helena and Michael Trujillo of Karl Lawrence Cellars in Napa made their first wines in 1991. Now there are at least a dozen established Latino-owned wineries in California, including Ceja Vineyards, Gustavo Thrace, Alex Sotelo Cellars, and Renteria Wines, and more are emerging. (Arturo and Ana Keller, father and daughter, of Keller Estate in Petaluma are apparently the only Mexicans—as opposed to Mexican-Americans—who own a California winery.) “We expect the number of Latin-owned wineries to grow exponentially within the next five years,” says Sandra Gonzalez, a Sacramento-based marketer, whose *Vino con Vida* communications company focuses on Latino wine producers and consumers. Most of these new wineries are family run, are built on decades' worth of savings and experience, and utilize the skills of the college-educated younger generation.

A burning issue in the wine industry these days is HR 4437—the proposed bill, otherwise known as the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, that ignited major protests all over the country this past spring. The bill would, among other things, impose stiffer penalties for illegal immigration and would criminalize as felons all illegal aliens. Even now, there are labor shortages in the vineyards, say vineyard managers. “The work remains tedious, and there aren't too many people willing to toil in the variable weather conditions year-round,” says Hector Bedolla, who sits on the board of the California Association of Winegrowers. “Although conditions have indeed improved in terms of there now being charities and other organizations that provide support to the workers, it is still very, very hard work.”

When I asked Vanessa Robledo how her family felt about the bill, she replied diplomatically, “We always express ourselves through our wine.” But on Mexican Independence Day (September 16) this year, they released a syrah-cabernet-merlot blend called *Los Braceros* (The Guests), 10 percent of the profits from which will go to Vineyard Workers Services in Sonoma, a charity that aids field-workers. —M.T.

the time their current home was finally ready, the relatives had moved out and most of the kids had gotten married and found homes of their own. “At last they built this house, and everybody disappeared!” says Vanessa, laughing.

It wasn't so easy to cook food that was inflected with the flavors of Michoacán in those early days, Maria says, because the ingredients were hard to locate. But she did her best to match what she remembered, making do with olive oil instead of lard and trying whatever chiles and beans she could find. When no tortillas were available, Reynaldo would come home from an arduous day in the fields and hand-grind corn so that she could make them.

Now she can get everything, even proper Michoacán cheeses and fresh Mexican crema, similar to *crème fraîche*, and the right pork cuts for *posole*—but her cooking reflects decades of adaptation to a U.S. pantry. She still likes olive oil, though, for its light taste, and isn't averse to using a dash of steak seasoning here and there.

She's using both right now, for a skilletful of her *chiles rellenos*—fat, chopped-steak-stuffed poblano peppers in a crisp, puffy casing of beaten egg. “It gives me much

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pleasure to cook," she says. She even organizes feasts for hundreds of people at a time, for special events and celebrations of Mexican holidays, at the vineyard's tasting room (the biggest, the harvest festival in October, is open to the public and features mariachis).

How on earth do they manage to get along, all 11 of them, as both relatives and co-workers? "Well, we don't always agree," Vanessa says. "But we always find a way to work things out. What keeps us together is knowing what my parents went through." They also learned to cooperate early on, by working the vines

together: every day after school and on weekends, the children were in the fields with their father; Vanessa began farming the vineyards when she was eight. And, she says, there's her mother's cooking. "Mom keeps us all together, and the way she does that is through her food." Should one of the children, all of whom live within a 15-mile radius, attempt to bow out of Sunday lunch, Maria is quick to get on the phone, cajoling him

or her into coming over. "Mom is the family glue," adds Everardo, the affable second-born son.

REYNALDO FINISHES cutting up pork ribs for the posole and suggests that we

Below, shrimp and crab ceviche on fried tortillas. Facing page, left, chardonnay vines on the Robledo family's Rancho Emilliano; right, Reynaldo Robledo Sr. cradling his granddaughter Victoria Herrera.

RECIPE

Tostadas de Ceviche de Camarón y Jaiba

(Shrimp and Crab Ceviche on Fried Tortillas)

SERVES 6

The word *tostada* means toasted in Spanish. In Mexico, *tostada* refers to a corn tortilla that's fried to a crisp. It may also refer to a dish that uses the crunchy tortilla as a kind of edible plate for all sorts of delicious ingredients, in this case a luscious shrimp and crab salad typical of Michoacán, the seaside Mexican state where the Robledos come from.

Canola oil

18 4"-5" corn tortillas (cut 6" tortillas with a round cutter, if necessary)

1½ lbs. cooked medium shrimp, peeled, deveined, and chopped

¾ lb. lump crabmeat

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

2 tbsp. chopped cilantro

1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and chopped

2 large tomatoes, chopped

1-2 jalapeño chiles, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped

1 small red onion, finely chopped

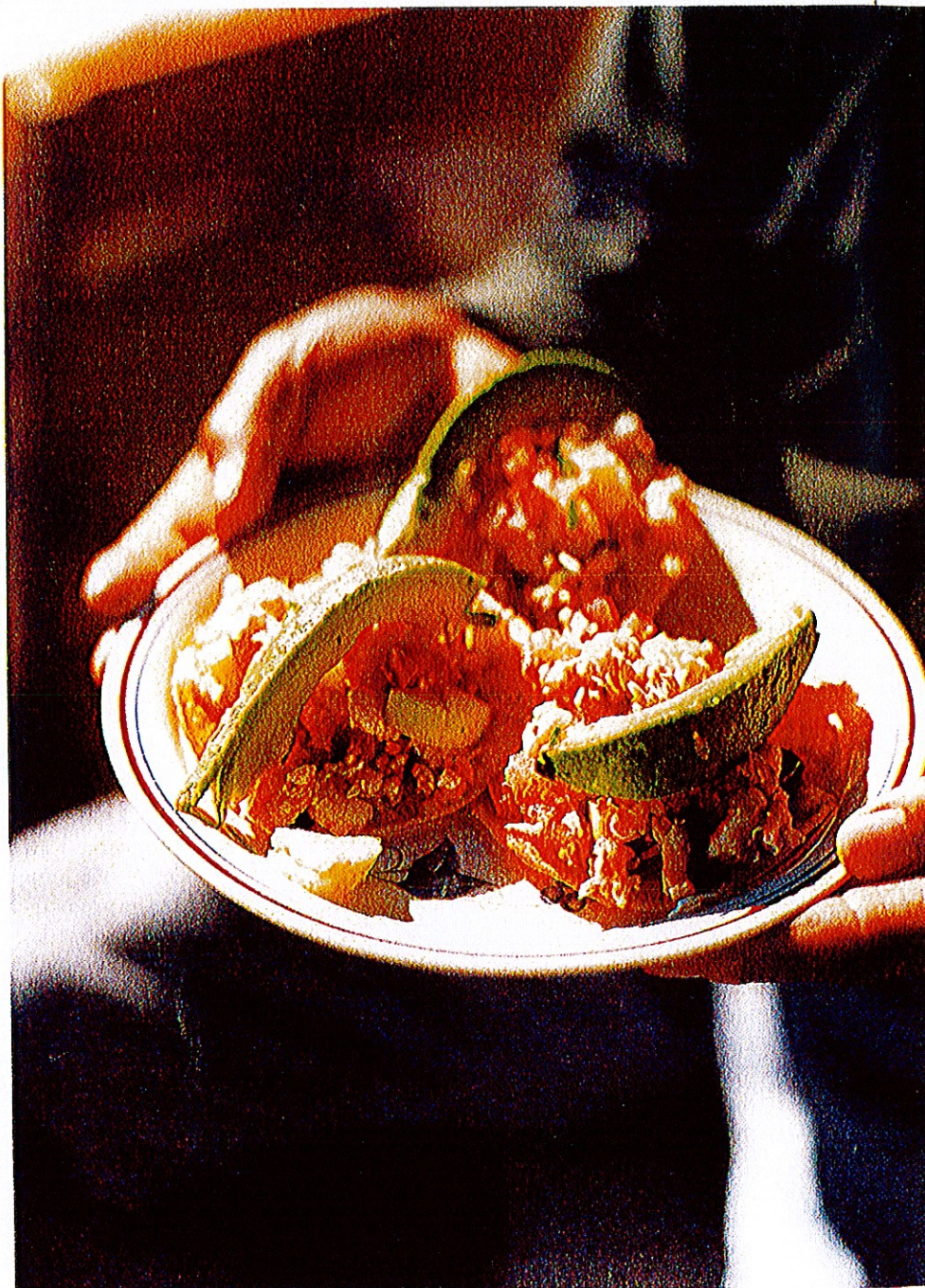
Salt

2 avocados, peeled, seeded, and cut into slices

2 limes, cut into wedges

1. Pour oil into a heavy medium pot to a depth of 1" and heat over medium-high heat until temperature registers 350° on a deep-fry thermometer. Working in batches, fry tortillas until light golden brown, turning once, about 30 seconds. Transfer tostadas to a paper towel-lined plate to let drain and cool.

2. Put shrimp, crab, lemon juice, cilantro, cucumbers, tomatoes, jalapeños, onions, and salt to taste into a large bowl and stir to combine. Spoon ceviche evenly onto tostadas, garnish each with a slice of avocado, and serve with lime wedges on the side.



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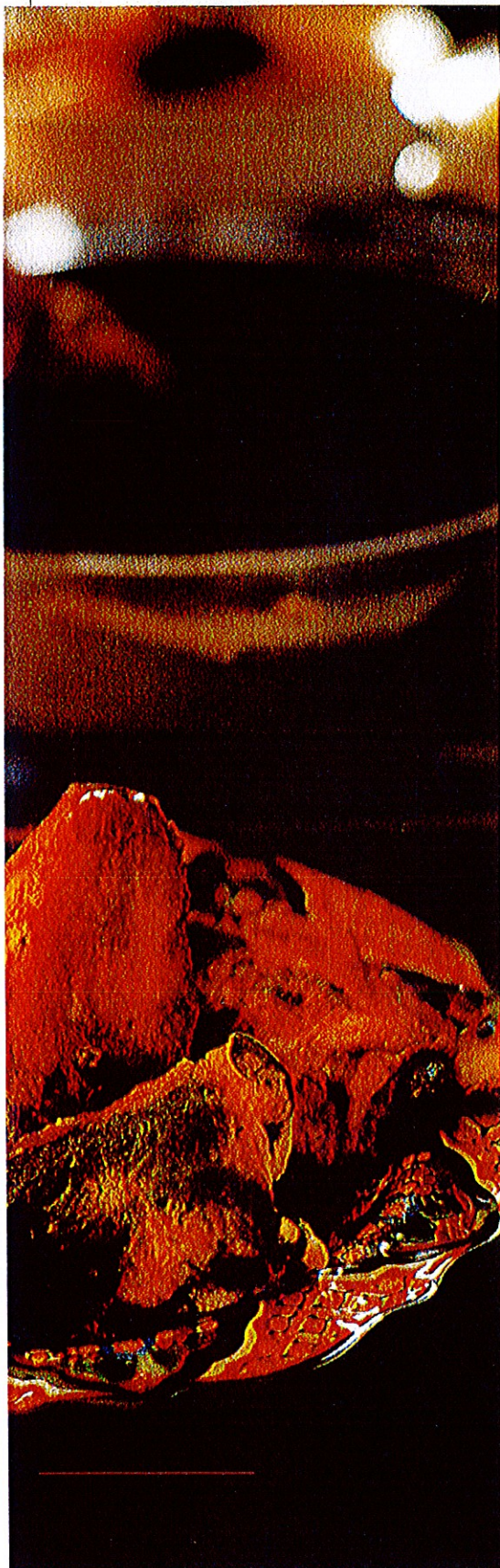
go outside for a grafting demonstration. Fall is actually the worst time to cut into a grapevine, he explains, because the sap sits low at this time of year; it must be flowing high in the plant to help the graft adjust to the rootstock. "I can do it now, but only because I know the plant," he says. With a thick, sharp knife, he snicks an angled cut into the top of a one-year-old trunk and then a slit into the angle itself, into which he inserts a short piece of three-year-old budwood, taken from the arm of another vine. He bandages the graft carefully. "This will produce next year," he says. He has, in essence, fast-forwarded the trunk, encouraging it to produce fruit three years sooner than it would otherwise.

Next we drive through the low, flat Rancho Los Hermanos vineyard, its chardonnay and pinot noir vines stripped of fruit now and the leaves turned golden green. As we bump along, pieces of his story emerge. I've already heard about his first days of pruning in Calistoga and how he proved to be such an exceptional worker that he was supervising a crew of 35 men—including his father—in less than a year. And I know that he went to work for Sonoma-Cutrer six years later as a vineyard manager, developing a reputation for an uncanny skill at growing grapes and especially at the delicate art of grafting.

"I tried to learn things on my own, without pay," he says now. He'd stay



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on after a full day at work, immersing himself in every aspect of viticulture, from driving farm vehicles to combating pests. Curtis Ranches, where he began working in 1982, even sent him to France to teach workers his time-compressing grafting technique. (The French scoffed at first but stopped two weeks later when the vines began to bud.) By 1984, he'd saved up enough to buy 13 acres of land in a debris-strewn field on a former landing strip in the Los Carneros area. "It was an

Clockwise from far left: Reynaldo Robledo Sr. demonstrating how to graft grapevines; a plate of chiles rellenos freshly fried by Maria Robledo; poblano chiles being scorched on a burner to remove their skins; Vanessa Robledo pouring from a bottle of her family's Robledo Los Carneros Chardonnay 2001.

RECIPE

Chiles Rellenos

(Poblano Chiles Stuffed with Beef and Cheese)

SERVES 4

Maria Robledo employs an interesting technique with her recipe: she leaves the seeds inside the chiles so that they'll mingle with the stuffing, adding a little spark of heat.

- 8 large poblano chiles
- 1/4 lbs. beef sirloin, trimmed and cut into 1/2" pieces
- 1/2 tsp. garlic salt
- 1 tsp. steak seasoning, preferably McCormick Montreal Steak Seasoning
- 1/4 cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup cooked short-grain white rice
- 1/2 cup cotija cheese, grated (see page 102)
- 1/2 cup monterey jack cheese, grated
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup flour
- 6 egg whites
- 3 egg yolks

1. Place a rack about 4 inches from the broiler element and preheat. Lay chiles on a baking sheet in a single layer and broil, turning once, until they just begin to blacken, about 5 minutes on each side. Transfer chiles to a paper bag and close the top (alternatively, transfer to a large bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap). Let chiles steam for 20 minutes. Peel charred skin off of chiles, leaving seeds and stem intact (discard skin). Using a small knife, make a 1"-long lengthwise slit near the top of each chile to form a pocket. Set aside.

2. Put beef, garlic salt, and steak seasoning into a medium bowl and toss to coat. Heat 1/4 cup of the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, brown the beef, about 5 minutes per batch. Transfer beef to a large bowl. Let cool slightly, then add rice and cheeses to beef, season with salt and pepper to taste, and stir to combine. Stuff each chile with about 1/2 cup of the beef mixture. Set aside.

3. Put flour into a wide, shallow dish. Put egg whites into a large bowl and beat until soft peaks form. Add yolks to whites and beat gently to combine. Heat remaining oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Working in 2 batches, dredge chiles in flour, shaking off excess, then dredge in egg mixture and transfer to skillet. Fry chiles until golden brown on all sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer chiles to a paper towel-lined plate to let drain; sprinkle with salt. Serve immediately, with grilled tomato salsa (page 55), if you like.

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airport before. I took 17 truckloads to the dump." With Maria and the children working beside him, he cultivated that land in his spare time after putting in full days as a vineyard manager. There the house now stands, and pinot vines thrive. Slowly, bit by bit, he found other parcels in Sonoma, often buying land others thought unworkable and making it produce. Rancho

Tasting Notes

We tasted a range of wines from the Robledo Family Winery and from Robledo winemaker Rolando Herrera's own Mi Sueño Winery. These were our favorites. See THE PANTRY, page 102, for sources.

MI SUEÑO RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY CHARDONNAY, ULISES VALDEZ VINEYARD, 2004 (\$38). An immediately appealing chardonnay, with a vaguely tropical bouquet, plenty of luscious fruit, and a mouth-filling richness, all in perfect balance.

MI SUEÑO NAPA VALLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2002 (\$60). Dark and dense in appearance, with berries and spice in the nose and black cherries and cassis on the palate; concentrated and nicely rounded.

MI SUEÑO EL LLANO NAPA VALLEY RED WINE 2003 (\$35). An unusual blend of cabernet (80 percent) and syrah, with lots of fruit and some Christmas-candy spice in the nose; fruity and peppery in the mouth, with dusty tannin and a pleasant finish.

ROBLEDO LAKE COUNTY PINOT BLANC 2005 (\$22). Young, crisp, and simple, with good varietal character and a slightly greenish aftertaste that is in no way off-putting.

ROBLEDO LAKE COUNTY PINOT GRIGIO 2005 (\$18). Light and agile, with citrus in the nose, followed by a citrusy, mineral-rich flavor. Less substantial than the best Italian pinot grigios but quite nice.

ROBLEDO LAKE COUNTY SAUVIGNON BLANC "THE SEVEN BROTHERS" 2005 (\$15). An intense varietal aroma leads into a tasty middle-of-the-road sauvignon blanc, fresh and sufficiently acidic but not at all green or vegetal.

ROBLEDO LOS CARNEROS CHARDONNAY 2003 (\$25). Aromatic and creamy but subtle in flavor, with medium body, attractive fruit, and good balance.

ROBLEDO LOS CARNEROS MERLOT 2002 (\$36). A good standard interpretation of the grape, soft and not overly perfumey, with hints of blackberry.

ROBLEDO LOS CARNEROS PINOT NOIR 2003 (\$28). Light and not very complicated, but easy to drink and unmistakably pinot noir.

—THE EDITORS

Los Hermanos was one of them. "People were saying it was no good, but I knew it was good."

Now we're crossing the Napa River, and Reynaldo talks about what has driven him for so long, his voice thickening with emotion. "I suffered a lot, and I don't want my family to suffer the same. I wanted to have at least ten acres for each of them, so they would all have a way to make a living. That was my dream, and I have passed that." Still, he worries. "I think, What if I don't make it? If I lose everything, I am too old to start again." He's depending on his family now, after all their years of depending on him.

Even out here on the land, Reynaldo's family surrounds us. This vineyard, Rancho Los Hermanos (The Brothers), is named for all his sons. Next to it is Rancho Los Quatez (The Twins), for Luis and Francisco. Other vineyards are Rancho La Familia, Rancho Maria, and Rancho Emiliano. From the winery itself are wines named after family: Two Sisters is a late-harvest sauvignon

blanc, dedicated to his daughters; Seven Brothers, a crisp sauvignon blanc with a hint of grapefruit, is his best seller. In 2004, the winery launched its La Familia Collector's Series, a reserve cabernet available only at the winery, labeled with Reynaldo and Maria's wedding photo. The 2005 bottling features a shot of the entire family. This year's release has a portrait of Lorena, the oldest, along with a brief biography. The series will continue, says Vanessa, all the way down to Emiliano.

Even the Robledo wine club, now with 1,200 members, is called La Familia and offers memberships on three different levels—*padrinos* (godfathers), *tios* (uncles), and *primos* (cousins). The funny thing, says Vanessa, is that some of the members actually behave like relatives, inviting the Robledos over for dinner and even to their own reunions. Reynaldo's world truly is

Below, the winery tasting room, outfitted with furniture from Michoacán. Facing page, right, Maria Robledo prepares lunch; far right, a party decoration; bottom, quail braised in tomatillo-chile sauce.

