

Wine- and spirit-based sauces make it easy to enjoy the rich flavors those libations add without the complicated and time-consuming recipes.

By Stephanie Hunsberger

# Sauces with Spirit(s)

Cooking with spirits is not a new concept — great chefs have used bourbon, whiskey, vodka and wine to enhance their sauces for as long as anyone can remember. The popularity of wine has grown steadily over the last decade in the United States, and manufacturers are realizing that consumers are looking for easy ways to enjoy wine other than by simply drinking it. From appetizers to desserts, wine is now featured in a variety of sauces and other gourmet products. Trendy cocktails like the mojito have worked their way into recipes, appealing to a more targeted audience. The driving factor behind the creation of these wine- and spirit-based specialties is convenience. With the products we've featured here, consumers can enjoy premium sauces without the complicated recipes and time-consuming reduction process these sauces require.

**Wine Country**  
California-based Made in Napa Valley (888/NAPA-VLY) offers a robust line of sauces, dipping oils, marinades and rubs, among which are the Herb Marinade with Merlot, Wine Country Simmer Sauce with Cabernet, Artichoke Fennel with Chardonnay Savory Sauce and Eggplant Rosemary with Merlot Savory Sauce. "Considering our location, it really makes sense," says Creative Director Julia Scannell of Made in Napa Valley's wine-based products. "I can see us definitely continuing to add sauces that will have wine in them."

Scannell attributes consumer interest in wine sauces to the rising popularity of wine and food pairings, but doesn't see wine sauces as just a fad. "Primarily, people who enjoy wine and food pairing tend to zoom in on the sauces that have wine in them," she says. "People who have cooked

with wine themselves can see the flavors that wines add to sauces. I think those types of sauces will continue to grow in the marketplace."

There are a lot of things consumers can do with Made in Napa Valley wine-based products. The Herb Marinade with Merlot makes a great baked mushroom side dish and can be spooned on top of a crostini as an appetizer. The company's simmer sauces can also be used as a soup base.

Another dinner solution benefiting from the products of California

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vineyards comes from Willow Oak Farms' (888/963-2767) l'Ortolano brand pasta sauces. Located in Yolo County, one of the largest tomato producing areas in California, Willow Oak Farms sources tomatoes and other fresh ingredients from the area to make a Tomato Zinfandel Sauce, Chardonnay Marinara and a Wild Mushroom Cabernet Sauce. "Other parts of the country produce beautiful wines, but we want to keep as much of California inside the product as possible," says Partner and Marketing Manager Kevin Sanchez. "It's who we are. We maintain excellent relationships with growers and producers around here."

The wines that go into the sauces are not cooking wines, but quality table wines from vineyards that Sanchez visits himself. "These sauces do express their true varietal characteristics," he says. The focus on wine flavor, however, doesn't mean there is no room for other vegetables in the sauce. "When you turn the mushroom sauce on its side, you see large leafy herbs, whole chunks of mushrooms. What's unique about

the Tomato Zinfandel is that we use whole-leaf basil as a seasoning, and sometimes you can see a leaf pressed right against the jar."

When it's not dressing up pasta, the Wild Mushroom Cabernet Sauce is a wonderful accompaniment to polenta, and the Chardonnay Marinara quickly becomes a tasty cioppino with the addition of shellfish and some broth. Sanchez suggests cross-promoting the products with items from these recipe suggestions to show shoppers the products' versatility.

"I definitely see a consumer interest," says Sanchez of his wine-based sauces. "It helps that chefs in this country are cooking with (wine) and emphasizing it. For the consumer who doesn't have time for the recipe, it's nice if they can find a product on the shelf with ingredients they desire."

Leaning Oaks Vineyards (210/364-6962) uses grapes from its own Hill Country vineyard in Texas, as well as from the Texas High Plains and California for its line of conserves and

**Leaning Oaks Vineyards**  
(210/364-6962 or [www.leaningoaks-vineyards.com](http://www.leaningoaks-vineyards.com)) created a line of wine reduction sauces from its very own vineyards. The line includes Zinfandel Wine Sauce, Chardonnay Wine Sauce and Cabernet Wine Sauce. These products give home chefs the opportunity to use wine-based reduction sauces without the time it takes to create them.

sauces. Available in Cabernet Wine Sauce, Chardonnay Wine Sauce and Zinfandel Wine Sauce, the products from Leaning Oaks Vineyards are reduction sauces that contain simply the wine and a bit of grape concentrate. "Unless you use a port, you're going to get a bitter tasting wine sauce," says Owner Anthony J. Fasano. "You have to add a sweetener to give it a little flavor."

Fasano notices people are cooking more with sauces and that the awareness level of wine among consumers has really increased over the last few years. "People like the fact they can enhance the flavor of their food with wine," says Fasano. "Most of them have no alcohol, and that's what I feel attracts them. It will infuse the flavor of wine into their foods and add a lot more flavor."

According to Fasano, the versatility of the Leaning Oaks Vineyards' wine sauces is limited only to the imagination. They can be used as a glaze, a marinade or a finishing



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sauce over meats. The red wine sauces are tasty over cheesecake or ice cream with chocolate shavings, and the white wine sauce complements fish. Fasano recommends any of the sauces over pancakes or waffles, and includes a recipe for a libation he calls a Cabertini on the website.

Because consumers can be intimidated with products like conserves and reduction sauces, it's helpful for shoppers to sample a variety of applications. These are also products that can be cross-merchandised in the deli or cheese section of the store.

### Mediterranean Mindset

The Mediterranean diet, a diet characterized by large amounts of fruits and vegetables, limiting fats to mono-

saturated fats like those from olive oil, low levels of dairy and low to moderate wine consumption, has become popular in the United States as a way of eating heart-healthy. The Mediterranean way of eating contributes to the popularity of cooking with wine.

When Jonathan Milo Leal, founder of Milo's Whole World Gourmet (866/589-MILO) hit upon the idea of wine-based pasta sauces with no added sugar, he knew he had a good thing. "Those [characteristics] became our calling cards," he says. "That makes a really unique product, definitely something that has been developed over time."

Healthy products are important to Leal, and for the parents of sworn vegetable-haters, Milos' alcohol-free sauces are a Godsend because they are not only full of fresh vegetables, but they are also delicious to eat right out of the jar. "You open it, you warm it, you're done," says Leal. "The kids will love it and not



A variety of spirit- and wine-based products are available from **Fischer & Wieser** (800/880-8526 or [www.jelly.com](http://www.jelly.com)), from Mom's Martini Sauce (pictured) to the Texas Port Wine Glaze to the Charred Pineapple Bourbon Sauce.



The recipe for Wine-Infused Leg of Lamb is from the **Made in Napa Valley** 888/NAPA-VLY or [www.madeinnapa.com](http://www.madeinnapa.com) "Gourmet Everyday" cookbook using Herb Marinade with Merlot.

even know they're eating healthy."

Leal recently added two new sauces to his line. The new Roasted Garlic Chianti is made from a big-bodied Chianti with fresh basil, parsley and, of course, garlic. Leal includes several simple serving suggestions for the sauce online, including using it with mussels, Portobello mushrooms or tossing with linguine and topping with seared salmon. The other new sauce from Milo's is the Four-Herb Malbec Marinara, which combines the richness of fresh, Ohio-grown tomatoes with Argentinean Malbec red wine, basil, parsley, fennel and thyme. Suggested uses for the Four-Herb Malbec Marinara include layering it into lasagna, using it as a pizza sauce or warming it as a bread dipper.

"Wine-based sauces are definitely here to stay, they're just becoming more mainstream," says Leal. Indeed, even large mass-market manufacturers like Bertolli have a line of wine-

based sauces. There is a difference consumers can see, however, among specialty wine sauce offerings. "We're an artisanal company and we hand-make these sauces in small batches," says Leal.

A point of pride for the company, aside from its gourmet products, is its customer service. Because Leal believes in the importance of in-store demos, the company offers a new demo kit that includes two small slow cookers, point-of-purchase materials and easy instructions on running active or passive demos. "We cannot keep up with orders on that because it spells it out in a way that makes demoing very simple," says Leal. "We charge \$30 for the kit, but we refund that on their next order because we know that it's going to result in sales."

Delicaé Gourmet's (800/942-2502) owner, Barbara Macaluso, also stands firm behind the powers of customer



Poised in the perfect location to create wine-based sauces, **Made in Napa Valley** 888/NAPA-VLY or [www.madeinnapa.com](http://www.madeinnapa.com) offers items like Wine Country Simmer Sauce with Cabernet (shown), Herb Marinade with Merlot, Artichoke Fennel With Chardonnay Savory Sauce and Eggplant Rosemary with Merlot Savory Sauce.