

Food and Wine: Pinot noir and Pepin's fort â€" quel fromage!

by *Ron_James*

THE CHEF

It's June and for many foodies, that means it's time for America's premier food event - the three-day Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, Colo. This upscale mountain town is taken over by food and wine lovers from around the world in search of a great culinary experience and a chance to meet a great winemaker or legendary chef. One of those legends seen at almost every event is Jacques Pepin.

JACQUES PEPIN - Legendary chef Jacques Pepin's latest cookbook is 'Chez Jacques: Traditions and Rituals of a Cook.' CNS Photo courtesy of Tom Hopkins. FROMAGE FORT - Fromage fort is a delicious but simple recipe from Jacques Pepin's latest cookbook that is good for everyday munching or as an elegant and delicious appetizer. CNS Photo. Pepin's energy belies his 71 years. His schedule includes cooking demonstrations with his daughter, Claudia, signing his latest cookbook and autobiography, "Chez Jacques: Traditions and Rituals of a Cook" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, \$45), and hosting Food & Wine magazine's 10 best new chefs at a cocktail reception - not to mention any number of special dinners and events.

Even the other superstar chefs invited to Aspen - Mario Batali, Bobby Flay and Giada De Laurentiis - treat Pepin as someone very special, in the same way they would respond to the late Julia Child, with whom Pepin worked for many years. For more than 50 years, Pepin has been a master chef and culinary celebrity. He was the personal chef of three French heads of state before he moved to the United States 48 years ago.

With more than 20 cookbooks to his credit, he is one of the most prolific and successful authors in the industry. He has won Emmy awards for his PBS television shows and taken home just about every culinary award possible, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the James Beard Foundation in 2005. He now lives in Connecticut with his wife, Gloria.

The Food & Wine Classic takes place mid-June every year. For more information go [here](#).

THE DISH

Fromage fort is a delicious but simple recipe from Pepin's latest cookbook that is good for everyday munching or as an elegant and delicious appetizer. It is a classic French cheese spread that can be made with assorted leftover cheeses. As a result, each batch will have a different flavor and texture profile. Be sure to trim any hard crusts or mold before you put the cheese in the food processor.

"When I think about my father," writes Pepin in the cooking notes, "I can still see the old earthenware crock that he used for marinating his fromage fort. Gloria makes a big batch and freezes it in half-cup ramekins. It freezes well, and is defrosted under refrigeration." If the cheese ends up being too dry, smooth it a bit with some cream or cottage cheese.

THE WINE

Because you can use any cheese for this spread, a wide range of wine would work wonderfully with it - from sparkling dry to bold reds. The stronger the cheese the bolder the wine should be. Take the middle road with a Sebastiani 2001 Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir (\$15), which will go with almost any cheese is a great value.

This affordable wine received 92 points from Wine and Spirits Magazine. The grapes are from Sonoma Coast, Russian River and Carneros vineyards. It has fruit-forward blackberry and cherry flavors with a spicy vanilla overtones.

TOAST ROUNDS TOPPED WITH FROMAGE FORT

1/2 pound of assorted leftover cheeses

2 garlic cloves

1/4 cup of dry white wine

Freshly ground black pepper

Salt, if desired

French bread, cut into 1/3 inch slices

Yields 4 servings.

Put cheese in bowl of food processor, add garlic, dry white wine and a big grinding of black pepper. Salt is usually not needed, but taste the mixture, and add some if desired. Process for 30 seconds or so, until mixture is creamy but not too soft, and then pack it into smaller containers. The fromage fort is ready to use now, either as a generous cold spread for bread, or you can run the coated bread under the broiler for a few minutes to melt the cheese, brown it, and make it wonderfully fragrant.

Variation: Serve with other refrigerator leftovers like olives, pepperoni or salami on the side.

- Adapted from "Chez Jacques: Traditions and Rituals of a Cook."

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