



Winedog Speaks

A Fresh Start for 2007

I've noticed that there's a fair bit of sadness around during the end of the Christmas holidays. The children are sad; they have to go back to school. In fact, I don't think sad is a strong enough word. My wife and her co-workers are a little sad. They drive school buses and they will be carting around sad children in the immediate future. They also have to get up at 5 a.m. again. Sad just barely describes how they must feel.

As for me, I'll watch my beloved wife head off to the trenches in the morning and I'll make sure she has a hot cup of tea in her special bus driver travel mug. I'll prepare her a healthy snack for later in the morning and I'll wish her love, luck and dry roads for her morning route. Just as she leaves, I'll scamper up to my 13 and 15 year old sons' rooms and gently rouse them to a hot, healthy breakfast so they can catch their buses and face their first day of school for 2007.

If this all sounds just a tad far fetched or perhaps a little too much like "Ozzie & Harriet" remember that we are starting a new year. We are allowed to believe that things will move in a generally more positive direction for the next year. The way the drill goes is that we make a list of "resolutions" for the New Year and this is our roadmap to a bigger and better life. Don't look at me that way; this process has been around way longer than I've been here.

This year my kids will stop arguing, do their homework and help out around the house with their chores. I hope my wife will be happier. She's pretty happy now but you can always afford to be happier. I want to be a good father and husband, drop some weight and figure out what life is really all about this year. Who knows, it could happen. But in the mean time and I can pretty much guarantee this one. I'm going to cook and share good food with people that I love. (I'm reasonably certain that the cooking part will help me to understand the meaning of life part.)

I hope you'll allow yourself the gift of optimism this year. I heard a news report that the fashion industry has started banning skinny models from their runway shows and are opting for models more in the size 14 range. I'd say that it's pretty clear some great things are coming our way.

One thing I want to make a high priority for 2007 is to enjoy more dinner parties with friends and family as part of my "back to basics" theme for this year. I've planned a special dinner for the end of January and the centerpiece will be rock Cornish game hens. Here's how I'll be preparing them:

Roasted Rock Cornish Hens

(1 hen per person)

4 Rock Cornish Hens (1 ¼ to 1 ½ pounds each)

Position your baking rack in the center of your oven and preheat the oven to 400°F. Prepare a baking sheet or shallow roasting pan by lightly oiling it with olive oil and your pan should be large enough to allow ample room between the birds. Remove the necks and giblets from the birds, rinse them thoroughly and pat them dry. Mix together, then rub into the body cavity and over the skin:



**1 ½ teaspoons dried thyme
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

Arrange the birds breast side up on your baking pan and brush the exposed skin with:

2 to 3 tablespoons melted butter

And place within the body cavity of each bird:

**1 small sprig of fresh thyme or rosemary
2 whole peeled garlic cloves**

Roast until the thickest part of the thigh exudes clear juices when pricked and registers 170° to 175°F on an instant read thermometer, 25 to 30 minutes for small hens and 5 to 10 minutes longer for larger sized birds.

Remove your hens to a platter and allow them to cool for about 10 minutes before serving. You're not done yet as you have the makings of a wonderful gravy or sauce from the drippings and here's how I'll be making mine:

**Cornish Hen Gravy
(Makes about 1 cup or 4 servings)**

After removing your hens to a platter, pour into your roasting pan:

¼ cup dry white wine, sherry, port or Madeira

Place the roasting pan on two burners set at medium-high heat. Bring your juices to a simmer and scrape up the browned bits of hen with a wooden spoon from the bottom of the pan. Pour the mixture into a short drinking glass, let the fat rise to the top, skim off the fat with a spoon and discard. Pour your mixture into a small saucepan; add the juices that have collected beneath your game hens along with:

¾ cup of chicken stock.

Bring to a simmer and add a bit of kneaded butter, which is simply one tablespoon of softened butter and one tablespoon of all purpose flour that has been blended with a fork or your fingers into a thick paste. The kneaded butter can be formed into pea-sized bits, which are then whisked into your sauce as a thickening agent. I like to add several drops of fresh lemon juice along with salt and pepper to taste before serving.



I'm not a stickler about white wines with poultry normally but I plan on offerings a lovely dry Gewürztraminer produced in northern Italy by the Elena Walsh Winery with this dish as a way to add just a little snap to our cold, dreary winter. The wine is beautifully crafted with modest fruitiness but plenty of the spice and floral tones you would expect from this grape.

Winter is the ideal time to bring out some of your full bodied red wines but don't feel as though you have to stick with tradition when your menu offers an opportunity to uncork a surprise or two.

Please let us know if you have any questions or comments. We love to hear from you and we can be reached at 888-288-0668 or online at www.winedog.com. Here's to a healthy and prosperous 2007. Cheers!

Jerry Allison, a native of Warren County in Southwestern Ohio, has been in the fine wine and fine dining field for 29 years in the South Florida and Chicago markets. He writes a weekly syndicated column, manages a fine wine business and is the executive chef for Winedog Fine Wines and Catering Services. You can visit his column archive at www.winedog.com and take your comments and questions directly to him at 888-288-0668 or email him at winedog@winedog.com. He has resided with his wife and two sons since 1999 in the country outside of Morrow, Ohio.

