

FAMILY OWNED SINCE 1927



# PEDRONCELLI



## The Press Democrat

### From polenta to port, Pedroncelli Winery shares three generations of family recipes

By DIANE PETERSON, 9/12/2017

When you're part of a Sonoma County winery that dates back to the Prohibition era, it's not a big surprise when the Smithsonian National Museum of American History comes knocking at your door.

Still, when curators from the Washington, D.C. museum showed up at Pedroncelli Winery in the Dry Creek Valley in 2011, the family members were thrilled to hand over several historic artifacts, including the copper polenta pot from Italy used by winery co-founder Julia Pedroncelli, whose husband, Giovanni "John," bought the winery in 1927.

That copper pot—plus an antique grape box and wooden sign, a metal stencil for barrels and a photograph of a family barbecue—now belong to the Smithsonian exhibit, "Food: Transforming the American Table 1950–2000."

"There were a lot of Sunday gatherings when my dad was growing up here," said Julie Pedroncelli, a third-generation member who works in sales and marketing alongside her father, Jim Pedroncelli. "They also took a ledger from the 1950s that my grandmother kept that showed how much everyone made."

After the winery opened its first tasting room in 1955 in a corner of the cellar, you could fill up your gallon jug from a barrel for 50 cents. Even though the winery transitioned from a bulk wine producer into a premium winery long ago, Pedroncelli is still known for making high-quality reds like zinfandel and cabernet, plus whites like sauvignon blanc and rosé, all at affordable prices,

with the majority of the wines still priced at \$20 or less.

"The traditional dinner on Sunday was chicken roasted in the oven with potatoes underneath," Jim said during a casual luncheon with family members at the winery tasting room. "My mother would also make raviolis, gnocchi, Malfatti and polenta."

As the oldest family-owned winery in the Dry Creek Valley, Pedroncelli celebrated its 90th anniversary this summer with a dinner for friends and distributors that featured Italian favorites like Braised Chicken over Creamy Polenta—just like grandmother Julia would have made—paired with the Pedroncelli Mother Clone Zinfandel, one of its many award-winning wines.

Food has always been at the forefront of this Italian family, especially for Julie, who learned to cook from her two grandmothers—the savory side from Julia, and the baking from her Scandinavian grandmother on her mother's side. To help preserve the family lore, she has started to gather recipes from the first three generations in the hopes of publishing a family cookbook.

With harvest now underway at the winery, we asked the Pedroncellis to reminisce about some of their tastiest food memories and share a recipe from each of the three generations that have worked at the winery. There is a fourth generation now on board—Mitch Blakeley is a vineyard assistant—the historic winery is look ahead while keeping its feet planted firmly in its past.

Here are the key members of each generation, along with a recipe from one

person in that generation. Together, the dishes create a harmonious menu with for a harvest feast, with wine.

#### FIRST GENERATION

Julia and Giovanni, who later became known as John, both hailed from the same corner of northern Italy near the Swiss Alps, but came to American separately.

"Around 1906, my dad came to the U.S. and worked on the railroad in Dunsmuir," Jim said. "He was from the town of Madesimo...they didn't make wine but they drank wine."

Julia, who came from Morbegno, landed in Redding, where her father ran a boarding house for Italian immigrants. The two met when Giovanni, who also worked on a farm, would bring vegetables for sale to the boarding house.

After being drafted into World War I but only making it to Virginia before the truce was signed, he was able to get a veterans' loan and bought 90 acres of land, with a home and 25 acres of vineyard, for \$11,000.

"The winery was closed down...but you could sell to home winemakers who could make up to 200 gallons of wine," Jim said. "When Prohibition was repealed in 1933, my father was able to use the original bonded winery permit #113."

That was right before the Great Depression, and the family made ends meet by raising their own chickens, pigs and cows

and tending a vegetable garden, that they preserved for the winter. Julia made her own butter and cheese and turned them into Italian dishes like risotto.

"Her risotto is still fresh in my memory 50 years later," Julie said. "She ladled out the dish onto plates and warned us to blow on it to cool it down...her polenta with venison stew is also memorable."

But the memory that sticks with the most is watching her grandmother at the sink, kneading some cooked spinach over a colander to get all the moisture out of it so she could turn it into Malfatti, a spinach dumpling made with eggs and cheese and bread crumb, served with a brown butter sauce.

"Her arthritic hands continue to squeeze until all moisture is drained out," she said. "This made her dumplings light and fluffy—better than anything I have had since."

#### SECOND GENERATION

Jim Pedroncelli, the youngest of Giovanni and Julia's four children, was born in 1932, during Prohibition and in the throes of the Great Depression.

Growing up as the youngest of four children, Jim recalls taking over his older sibling's chores of milking the cow and feeding the chickens after coming home from elementary school in Healdsburg.

His older brother, John, took over as winemaker in 1948, and Jim followed his brother into the business in 1957 as part of the sales and marketing team. In 1963, the brothers bought the winery and vineyards from their father, who died in 1969.

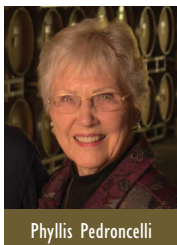
Jim met his wife, Phyllis through a mutual friend in a Healdsburg coffee shop, and in 1964 the couple moved to the winery, where they raised their four girls. At that point, Phyllis took over as the winery bookkeeper, following in Julia's footsteps.



Giovanni "John" and Julia Pedroncelli, founders of Pedroncelli Winery

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Phyllis Pedroncelli

With four children to feed, she also picked up her apron strings in the kitchen, learning from her mother-in-law and turning out classic dishes like Chicken Scallopini and Roasted Pork Tenderloin.

"Jim's mother cooked by the hand full and the fingers, that's how she measured things," she recalled.

Meanwhile, her own mother, Virginia Larsen, came to live with the family for several years, passing on her own Scandinavian baking skills to her granddaughters.

"Grandma Larsen did the baking, and I learned how to make cookies and pies from her," Julie said. "She used to roll out the extra dough and make dough boys with cinnamon and sugar."

### THIRD GENERATION

"Of all of my girls, Julie turned out to be the cook," Phyllis said. "In first grade, she'd get up, make the coffee, set the table and have everything for breakfast ready."

Julie loves to bake cookies with her grandsons and has recently experimented with panettone, an Italian sweet bread that is a favorite of her dad's.

"I love to cook whether it is for one or 22 people," she said. "It is my passion. I call it cooking by heart."

But it was her first cousin, Maureen Davison—the daughter of Christine Pedroncelli who is the widow of John—who decided to jump with both feet into cooking. She attended the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco and worked as a pastry chef for John Ash & Co., when it was still in Montgomery Village, and Madrona Manor in Healdsburg. She also worked for the Downtown Bakery for many years while raising her family.

Although she no longer bakes for a living, as the only pastry chef in the family, she is often called upon to bake desserts for large parties, such as the winery's "Refreshers, Reds and Ribs" harvest party coming up in October.

"My first baking experience was a blue, Easy-Bake oven with a lightbulb," Davison said. "For the harvest party, I'm



Maureen Davison and Julie Pedroncelli St. John

going to make a plum ice cream with port caramel sauce and a chocolate cookie or biscotti."

One of her most popular desserts is the Port and Chocolate Chiffon Mini Cupcakes with Port Ganache Frosting that showcases the winery's well known port, which is made from cuttings from their former neighbor, the late actor Raymond Burr.

"The recipe is adapted from the Tartine Chiffon Cake," Davison said. "The port gives it a little nuance."

With harvest now under way in earnest, the winery has already crushed some sauvignon blanc in their original winery building, built in 1904 of first-growth redwood. They have also picked some hilltop zinfandel for their rosé, which they have been making for 63 years. It was the first rosé made from zinfandel grapes in the state of California.

"We wanted to make a lighter wine to balance out the hearty reds and red blends," Jim said. "The block faces north and grows in crappy soil, which lends itself to making a rosé."

As one of the few families to undertake winemaking from Prohibition to today, the Pedroncellis continue to evolve, but sometimes that just means coming full circle. The winery recently was certified sustainable by the California Certified Winegrowing Alliance.

And, in a little corner of the property, they have provided land for their vineyard workers to grow their own garden, which they farm themselves.

"We have second and third generation employees who are part of our extended family," said Julie's husband, Ed St. John. "That's the Italian heritage. You work hard, but you take care of each other."

*This recipe comes from Julia Pedroncelli, first generation co-founder of Pedroncelli Winery.*

### Malfatti (Spinach Dumplings)

Makes about 35 1-inch balls

#### FOR DUMPLINGS:

20 ounces spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

4 eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 cup fine bread crumbs

1/2 cup grated parmigiano reggiano

#### For sauce:

4 ounces unsalted butter

4 cloves garlic, sliced

1 cup Parmigiano reggiano

Mix first five ingredients together. Scoop into 1-inch balls. Either steam malfatti on an oiled steamer basket in two batches for 10-15 minutes each, or cook in boiling salted water in two batches until rise to surface, 5-8 minutes.

Meanwhile brown butter and then remove from heat and add garlic slices. When first batch is done place on a platter & keep warm in a low oven. When second batch done, add to platter and pour melted butter over and



sprinkle generously with cheese. If desired, remove garlic slices before pouring butter over the Malfatti. Pair with a Pedroncelli chardonnay.

*This recipe comes from Phyllis Pedroncelli, wife of Jim Pedroncelli from the second generation of the family.*

### Roasted Pork Tenderloin

Makes 4 to 6 servings

1 1/2 pounds pork tenderloins, cleaned of silver skin

1 cup bread crumbs or panko

1 teaspoon dried basil

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

2 tablespoons fresh grated Parmigiano

— Fresh ground pepper and kosher salt to taste

1 large egg

1 large onion, slice into rings

4 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed

1/4 cup olive oil

Head oven to 425 degrees. Take a roasting pan and place onion and garlic in bottom and set aside. In a large dish, beat egg and set aside. Mix bread crumbs with dried herbs, parsley, Parmigiano, black pepper and salt in a small bowl. Pour onto a dinner-size plate and shake to make an even layer. Dip tenderloins, one at a time, into egg and then roll in bread crumbs so they are evenly coated. Place tenderloins on top of onions and pour olive oil over all.

Place in 425 degree oven. After 15 minutes, baste the tenderloins with olive oil from bottom of pan. Lower oven heat to 375. Roast for another 10 minutes and take out of oven. Tent aluminum foil over pan for 5 minutes. Slice into rounds and serve with rice pilaf, a crisp salad and a Pedroncelli merlot or red blend.



*The following recipe was adapted by Maureen Davison, a third-generation Pedroncelli.*

### Port & Chocolate Chiffon Mini Cupcakes with Port Ganache Frosting

Makes about 36 2-inch cupcakes

#### FOR CUPCAKES:

1/2 cup + 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1/4 cup cocoa, unsweetened

3/4 cup granulated sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

3/8 teaspoon salt

1/4 cup melted, unsalted butter

3 egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/2 cup Pedroncelli Port

5 egg whites (2/3 cup)

— Pinch cream of tartar

2 tablespoons sugar

#### FOR GANACHE FROSTING:

1 cup Pedroncelli Port

6 ounces semi sweet chocolate

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons Pedroncelli Port (not reduced)

2 tablespoons reduced port

**FOR CUPCAKES:** Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Sift the flour and the cocoa together. Mix in the granulated sugar, baking powder and salt. Mix in the melted butter, egg yolks, vanilla and port. Beat the egg whites cream of tartar and sugar to soft peaks. Fold the egg white mixture into the flour-egg mixture.

Pour into paper-lined mini muffin-cupcake pans and bake about 15 minutes or until it springs back when touched. Remove from oven and cool.

**FOR FROSTING:** Reduce the port to 2 tablespoons over medium heat. Melt over a bain marie (water bath) the chocolate, heavy cream and the not reduced port. Then add the reduced port. Let cool until ready to spread or at piping consistency. Decorate.