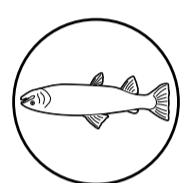


food

This week, how to fillet a fish, do the Tim Tam Slam and become a world-class vintner. Also, Bonnie Stern whips up a salad from the reddest of fruits and veggies, and Laura Calder in the kitchen

HOW TO

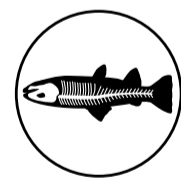
Fillet a fish
Sure, the fishmonger will do it for you, but what if you buy whole fish at discount, or your uncle drops off his latest catch of perch from an ice-fishing trip or the fishmonger is so intimidatingly rude that you lack the cajones to ask? Here's a simple technique to get your fillets without tearing the fish — and your patience — to shreds:



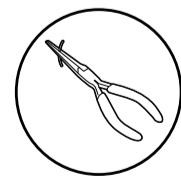
1. Positioning is important. Position the fish so its back is facing you and its head is on your right. It's important to see where your knife is going as you fillet along the back. Which knife? A fillet of sole knife with a flexible blade is best, but if you don't have one, use the sharpest one on hand.



2. Start from the tail. Make a long stroke along the back to separate the fillet from the rest of the body. Continue separating the meat with long knife strokes while lifting the flesh with your free hand. Make a perpendicular incision behind the gills along the whole width of the fish.



3. Let your backbone guide. Once you hit the main vertebrae, follow the bone. Angle your blade to trace along the bones of the fish. Think anatomically — that way, you'll leave less meat on the bone.



4. Don't forget the pin bones. Run your fingers along the section closest to the head to find remaining bones. Remove with tweezers to avoid performing the Heimlich manoeuvre on guest
Jason Chow,
Weekend Post



A student carries more than 80 kilograms of grapes in late September; Calla Dewdney looks for the pick of the crop; Chelsey Andrade sorts the grapes.



PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

BY ADRIAN HUMPHREYS
in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.

Walking past acres of vineyard heavy with fulsome grapes and into a wooden barn infused with the tang of fermenting wine, one finds what must be among Canada's most tempting of classrooms.

Here, at the Niagara College Teaching Winery, a new class of 35 students — many having just turned the legal drinking age — make quips about the school exploiting child labour as they plunge into the foliage with pruning shears in hand.

"This is what we're here for," says Tom Schulz, professor of wine and viticulture, as he pulls a dark purple grape from a long bunch, squeezes it gently and pops it in his mouth.

"Lovely," he says, smacking his lips. "This year it all looks so beautiful — just reach in and take everything," he tells the class. And they do, with remarkable enthusiasm.

"There's, like, an umbrella of grapes over my head back here," calls out James Tiraborrelli, 19, from Oakville, as he crouches into a baco noir vine. "This is the best damned Tuesday morning," replies Lucas Wade, 20, from Toronto.

While alcohol is something of a passion for many young adults, rarely is the fervour expressed at such an early point in a wine's lifecycle.

For these students, it is the start of both the harvest and a two-year-long learning cycle that will see them produce wine as part of their diploma course.

"Our students follow their grapes right through from the harvest to the bottle," says Terrence van Rooyen, professor of applied oenology.

From harvesting the 40 acres of vineyards, through to the bottling and retailing of a

A COURSE IN CORKS

The Niagara College Teaching Winery educates a new crop of vintners from vine to bottle — and pays for its programs by selling its students' nuanced products

list of vintages, the winery is a hands-on course in the heart of Niagara's wine country. The only such program in Canada, it is an entrepreneurial and bibulous delight: The wine is so popular that the teaching winery is a self-supporting commercial enterprise.

"The winery, itself, covers the costs of operation. All of the sales we have go right back into the winery and the learning centre," says Jon Ogryzlo, dean of the school's environment, horticulture and agribusiness programs.

"Quite frankly, we couldn't afford to do this if we weren't selling the wine."

The program is growing. Last month, construction began on its new home, a large winery and visitor's centre.

Steve Gill, the program's coordinator, says the goal is to tell its graduates: "OK, you can make wine, you can understand it, professionally analyze it, taste it — now go and make some money from it."

The results may surprise many oenophiles. The offerings are not bargain plunk but nuanced and well-crafted wines with a price to match.

The cleverly named Dean's List range (equivalent to the upper-level reserve category of traditional wineries) are

particularly impressive: The 2006 chardonnay, a richly gold wine with notes of hot-buttered toast, sells well at \$27.95; the 2007 sauvignon blanc, at \$18.95, is refreshing and expressive, described as a "magna cum laude wine."

One would swear that a cask of shiraz-cabernet franc icewine, still maturing in the winery's barn, has been infused with strawberry jam because of its delicious smack of sweetness. School officials are clearly proud of the wine but like to stress their primary commodity: "Our product is great graduates — our byproduct is great wine," Ogryzlo says.

About half of the current class is from the Niagara Region. The remainder comes from other parts of Canada, the United States, China and Korea.

Back in the vineyard, after hours of reaping, the students retain their high spirits.

"I really enjoy working outside in the vineyard and decided it was what I want to do with my life," says Augusta Westerhof, 19, from Hillier, Ont., near Belleville.

The students have dreams as diverse as the wines they make. Many seek to own their own winery; some said they plan to work in wine re-

gions around the world while others seek a job near their home. Some want only to better understand wine to help them succeed at importing, as a sommelier or chef.

While Ben Andrew, 23, of Woodstock, Ont., spoke of the "humbling, soul-satisfying" experience of harvest, Ian Banks, 26, of Halifax, looks at things with a more empirical eye.

"I was looking for something to do after my chemistry degree. I'm less a farmer than a chemist," Banks says. "What we'll do with these grapes is test for acidity and sugar levels — it's all chemistry."

Before that lab work can begin, however, the students haul tub after tub of plump grapes to the barn that houses the teaching winery. The fruit is dumped onto a stainless steel "shaker table" that mechanically jostles the grapes to weed out bugs, immature berries and other unwanted bits.

From there, more steel machines crush the grapes into an odiferous mass. As the students work to release juice of their own, the juices of students past are slowly fermenting behind them inside a series of large, stainless steel tanks and rows of heavy, oak barrels. Over time, these maturing wines are analyzed

and sampled several times. Shortly before the new students arrived for the school year, the final product of previous students was siphoned to a tractor-trailer that had arrived on campus. Externally unremarkable, it houses a complete bottling line inside.

The bottler, owned and operated by Grant Moore, starts with a clang as empty bottles are loaded at the back of the trailer and then — after snaking through the eight-step processing on the cramped, automated line — they emerge: filled, corked, labelled and boxed.

Production runs at about 4,000 cases of wine a year. Most of the wine makes its way to the on-campus store, where Sarah Jones, the sales associate, is waiting.

"I have a list of people I have to call to let them know the Dean's List Chardonnay is here," she says. "It's very popular."

In the vineyard, the students finish their work on the baco noir knowing that other varieties will soon be ready. Because of unusual weather, the harvest ran long this year, into November. Even though many were weary, their enthusiasm did not falter.

"You can learn all the theory about wine and wine-making but until you actually make it, you don't really know it at all," says Mackenzie Brisbois, 24, of Carrying Place, Ont., who is a recent biology and English graduate from Guelph University.

"This is very different from university where you learn in a classroom and become book smart. This is pretty intense." With that, she made a final pass through the rows of vines, looking for any grapes that were missed before joining the others at the fragrant classroom.

Weekend Post
ahumphreys@nationalpost.com

IMPORT • CANADIANS LEARN THE TIM TAM SLAM

Aussie expatriates rejoice: No need to smuggle Tim Tams in your luggage anymore, as the chocolate treats from Down Under have arrived on Canadian shores. Now it's time to spread your disgusting/delicious biscuit-slurping habits in a new country. Tim Tams, according to the press release, consist of "two layers of chocolate malted biscuit separated by light cream filling and coated in a thin layer of textured chocolate." They come in three flavours: Original, Chewy Caramel and Classic Dark Chocolate. Australians evidently consume said cookies employing a technique known as the Tim Tam Slam, the company's description of which reads like an advanced course in dunking. Based on YouTube evidence, there is indeed an established order of things. Natalie Imbruglia once showed ever-entertaining Irish-British talk-show host Graham Norton how to do

it. Here's how to eat a Tim Tam like a platinum-selling recording artist:
Step One: Prepare a warm drink (e.g. tea, coffee or hot chocolate; tea seems to be traditional). **Step Two:** Nibble off the corners of the biscuit. **Step Three:** Use your Tim Tam as a straw, sucking the drink through it ("This is the part where it gets orgasmic," Imbruglia says). **Step Four:** Just when you start to taste the drink, flip the cookie around and slam it into your mouth (quickly — Natalie Imbruglia warns us that the Tim Tam will be melting by this time). **Step Five:** Repeat as above. Whether or not you consider buying a package of Tim Tams and trying this for yourself at home, one thing's for certain: Dipping chocolate cookies in tea will taste much better than dunking them in Vegemite.

Adam McDowell, Weekend Post