
FRIED CLAM CLUSTERS

BY GEORGEANNE BRENNAN

Highly chilled Vino Bianco (Tintero) cries out for crispy fried seafood. These easy-to-make clam clusters answer that call. The slightly chewy batter is one that my Italian neighbor in Provence used to make fried zucchini in the summer, which she dusted with sea salt, like I do here with the clams. Although these can be served at room temperature, hot out of the pan is best.

1½ pounds Manila clams	1 large egg
2 tablespoons unsalted butter	¼ cup reserved liquid from steamed clams (see below) plus ½ cup water
2 cloves garlic, minced	1½ cups flour
½ teaspoon coarse sea salt, plus extra for garnish	Grapeseed or canola oil for frying
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper	2 lemons, quartered
¼ cup minced flat-leaf Italian parsley	

Put clams in a large bowl and cover with cold water, adding 3 tablespoons of sea salt. Let them stand for at least 1 hour and up to 3 hours to remove any sand.

Drain the clams, discard any broken or open ones, and place them in a saucepan over medium heat to steam, adding nothing else. They will release their liquid as they steam. Cover and reduce the heat to low. After 5 minutes, increase the heat to medium-high, shake, and cook another 2 to 3 minutes, just until the clams open. Drain liquid through a cheesecloth-lined strainer to remove any sand or grit. Set clams and liquid aside.

When shells are cool enough to handle, remove clams. In a small saucepan over medium heat, warm butter and garlic. When butter foams, add clams, half the salt, and half the pepper. Stir, cooking just enough to season the clams. Add half the parsley and set aside.

To make the batter, in a medium bowl, whisk together egg, clam juice and water mixture, and half the salt and half the pepper. Gradually whisk in flour to make a lump-free and sticky paste. Stir in clams and their seasoned butter.

In a small or medium frying pan, pour in oil ½ inch deep. Over medium-high heat, bring the oil to 350°F. Using a spoon, scoop up a heaping tablespoon of the battered clams and push it into the hot oil. Repeat until the pan is full, leaving about 1 inch between clusters. Fry, turning once or twice, until the clusters are crispy golden on both sides, 2 to 3 minutes per side. With a slotted spoon, remove to a paper towel-lined platter. Repeat until all the batter is gone.

Sprinkle the hot clusters with the remaining salt and parsley and serve with the lemon wedges. *Makes about 16 pieces*



The James Beard award-winning cookbook author Georgeanne Brennan is also the author of the best-selling food memoir *A Pig in Provence*. She continues to write about food and cooking from her longtime homes in Provence and in Northern California, where she co-owns an aperitif wine bar. You can find more of her recipes at www.georgeannebrennan.com.

ADVENTURES

January 2026



**2024 VINO BIANCO
TINTERO**

Marco Tintero came up with such a brilliant trick when he imbued his refreshing *bianco* with just a whisper of sparkle that I often wonder why growers who excel in *aperitivo* whites don't turn to this style more often. It feels like a little luxury Marco decided we should have, and it always makes things feel more festive. The first time this Piemontese white blend put a smile on Kermit's face was about two decades ago in a red-brick-walled, underground trattoria in Alba.

While that setting and the wine itself may appear humble at first glance, Marco and his family have put a lot of thought, trial, and error into perfecting this *bianco*'s balance over many years. Once the Favorita, Arneis, and Chardonnay are fermented dry, Marco adds a splash of Moscato must to set off a secondary fermentation. Finally, just before bottling, he adds a tiny dose of finished Moscato, which imparts more aroma, balance, and liveliness to an already brisk blend. As jealous as I am of Kermit's experience coming across this beauty in that Alba trattoria, it still feels like a revelation every time I unscrew the cap in my kitchen. I pour a splash into my glass and a splash into a pot of risotto, a glass for my wife or some guests, and before I know it, the bottle is gone and everyone is happy.

—TOM WOLF

\$12.00 per bottle

\$129.60 per case



ABOVE Marco Tintero. © Jimmy Hayes







COVER Celebrating the holidays in the Loire. © Catherine & Pierre Breton

**2024 BOURGUEIL "TRINCH!"
CATHERINE & PIERRE BRETON**

Every year, the lively Breton family produces a dozen cuvées from their hometown of Bourgueil that show the terroirs of this appellation alone can yield a wine for just about every occasion. While they do make serious and age-worthy reds, the bottles my colleagues and I—not to mention the Bretons—probably turn to the most often are their more youthful and light-hearted reds, like this juicy, perfumed Cabernet Franc from the Loire's gravelly riverbanks. The name "Trinch!" comes from a German expression meaning "cheers," popularized by the poet and philosopher Rabelais. Like the Bretons, Rabelais was from the Touraine region and he, too, liked a good time centered around food and drink. Fast-forward half a millennium and the Bretons are some of Touraine's brightest stars today, inspiring us with not only the warmth of their *bon vivant* personalities but also the *joie de vivre* in their wines. In the convivial Breton spirit, open this at your next dinner party, book club, or snowy getaway. *Trinch!* —TOM WOLF

Pairs well with mushroom dumplings, herb-roasted lamb, and baked tuna steaks.

\$28.00 per bottle \$302.40 per case

					
2024 Vino Bianco Tintero	50% Favorita, 35% Arneis, 10% Chardonnay, 5% Moscato	30-year-old vines, on average Clay, limestone	Serve cold 48–52°F Do not decant	Almond, citrus zest, orchard fruit Lively, unpretentious, gently effervescent	Drink now
2024 Bourgueil "Trinch!" Catherine & Pierre Breton	Cabernet Franc	30-year-old vines Gravel	Serve cool 56–60°F Do not decant	Blackberries, graphite, earth Graceful charm, accessible fruit, hedonistic	Drink now through 2027

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