

SEARED DUCK BREAST WITH FALL FRUIT AND BANYULS SAUCE

BY GEORGEANNE BRENNAN

My first encounter with the wine of Cahors was bottling forty liters of it with a friend in Provence. Inky, almost black, it was made from grapes grown not far from the wild gorges of the Lot River in Cathar heretic country. I stored my share of the bottles in my basement, bringing them up to serve with duck, like this richly sauced one, or with beefy daubes of wild boar. The sauce can be made while the duck rests, using some of the rendered duck fat, or it can be made ahead, using butter. I like to serve this dish accompanied by potatoes roasted in duck fat, sprinkled with coarse sea salt.

DUCK

2 duck breast halves, about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 pound total
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

SAUCE

2 tablespoons duck fat or butter
3 tablespoons minced shallots
1 cup seedless red grapes, $\frac{3}{4}$ of them halved

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sea salt
1 Bosc or other firm pear, seeded and stemmed, cut into scant 1-inch cubes
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, plus extra for garnish
 $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Banyuls dessert wine
1 tablespoon Banyuls vinegar
1 tablespoon butter mixed with 1 tablespoon flour

With a sharp knife, slice through the duck skin on an angle, into the fat, but stop short of slicing into the meat. Repeat the other direction.

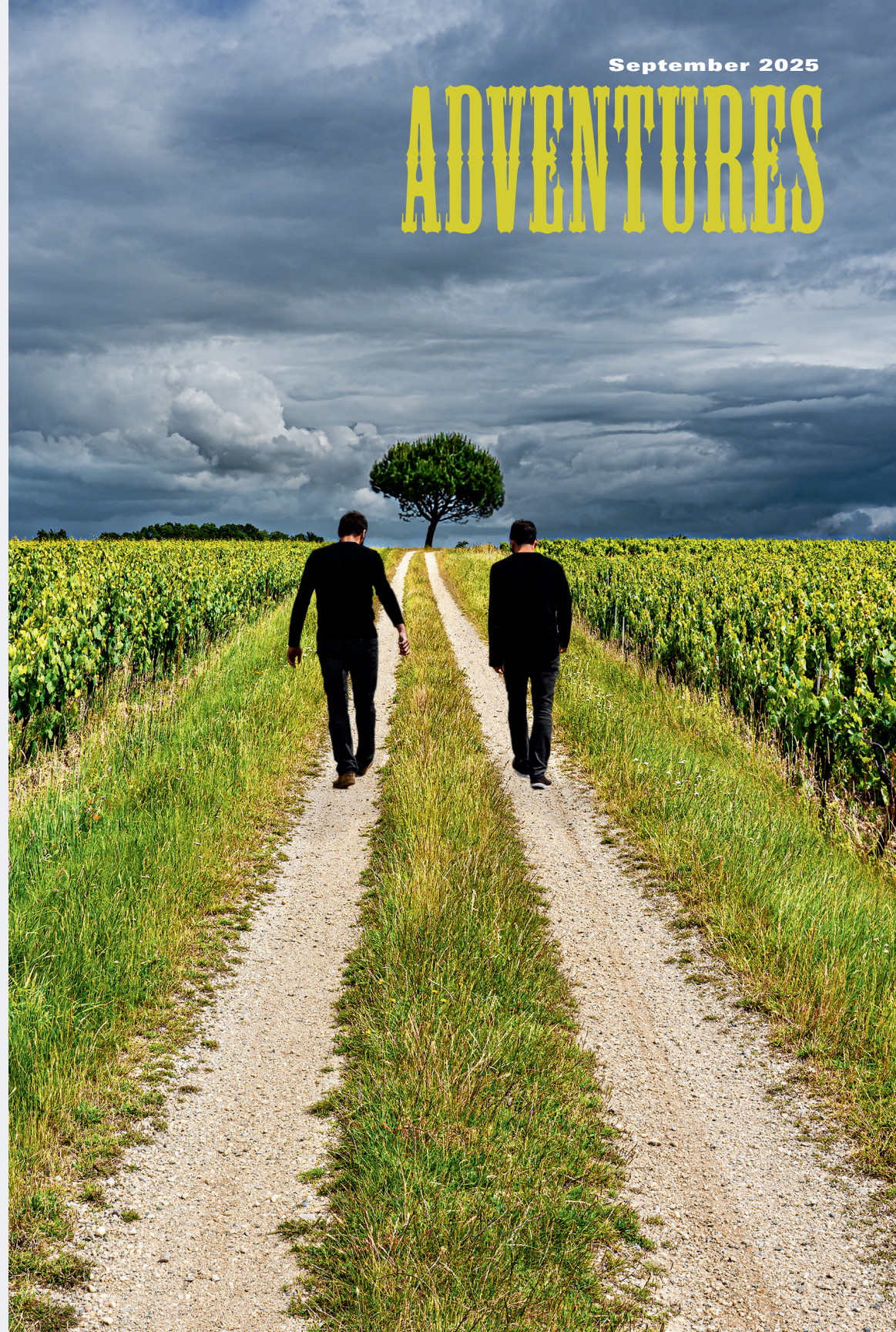
Season both sides with salt and pepper. Place breasts skin side down in a cold frying pan. Turn the heat to medium-high and sear. Once the skin is golden, 2 to 3 minutes, turn and sear the other side. Test: for medium-rare, 130–135°F; for medium, 135–140°F. If not to the desired temperature, reduce heat to low and cover the pan. Cook another 2 to 3 minutes. When done, remove to a cutting board and cover loosely with foil.

Remove 2 tablespoons of the duck fat into a small, clean frying pan. Over medium-high heat, sauté shallots until translucent, 1 to 2 minutes. Add grapes and sprinkle with salt. Stir, cooking until grapes have softened, about 2 minutes. Add pear, thyme, and stir. Once the pears are slightly browned, pour in the wine. Stir, scraping up any clinging bits, then add the vinegar. Cook, stirring from time to time, until the sauce has thickened slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the butter/flour and cook, stirring until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, 2 to 3 minutes. Taste for seasoning, adding more salt if desired. Set aside.

Slice the duck breasts on the diagonal into very thin slices. Divide equally between two plates and spoon some sauce over the duck. Garnish with a sprinkle of thyme leaves. Serve immediately, with extra sauce alongside. *Serves 2*



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.









**2024 VAL DE LOIRE CHARDONNAY
ERIC CHEVALIER**

If a subtle kinship has long existed between the white wines of Chablis and Muscadet, Eric Chevalier makes this link more palpable than ever in his Val de Loire Chardonnay. Eric is a native of Brittany's Pays Nantais near the Atlantic coast and the region's famed Muscadet courses through his veins, but he also spent some formative time in Chablis in the 1990s, having made his first wines there as an apprentice. Unsurprisingly, when he returned to his corner of the western Loire Valley, he was perfectly trained to make Chardonnay with a bracing, marine essence all while preserving the grape's inherently charming notes of citrus and orchard fruit. Eric does everything he can to highlight the Pays Nantais's maritime air and soil, vinifying the wine in neutral glass or stainless steel and stirring the lees—as is common in Chablis and Muscadet. The result is an outstanding candidate for your house white—refreshing and mineral while showcasing the generous, plump fruit.

Pairs well with a fish basket,
lentil salad, and pesto chicken.

—TOM WOLF

\$22.00 per bottle **\$237.60 per case**

					
2024 Val de Loire Chardonnay <i>Eric Chevalier</i>	Chardonnay	10- to 15-year-old vines Serpentinite, eclogite, quartz	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52°F Do not decant	Orchard fruit, citrus, stones Refreshing, mineral, extroverted	Drink now
2023 Cahors <i>Clos La Coutale</i>	80% Malbec, 20% Merlot	25-year-old vines Gravel, limestone, clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62°F Decant optional	Dark fruit, earth, spice Rustic, refined, succulent	Drink now through 2030

**2023 CAHORS
CLOS LA COUTALE**

If the South is France's best-known region—apart from Paris—looming large in many of our French fantasies, the Southwest may be its least understood. And yet, it is a swath of the country teeming with natural beauty, from the Pyrenees by the Spanish border to the Dordogne in the north. This region is also home to some incredible wines, which happen to deliver incredible value. None offers better value than Clos La Coutale's Cahors, which blends four parts Malbec with one part Merlot (underscoring Cahors's relative proximity to Bordeaux). If you peek inside the wine fridges and cellars of most KLWM staff, you will no doubt find this wine because it does so many things at once. Succulent and soulful, it shows a brilliant balance of fruit, earth, and leather; depth and approachability; country rusticity and refinement. A perfect wine for \$18? The only way I can think of this getting any better is if you open it alongside Georgeanne Brennan's seared duck breast with fall fruit and Banyuls sauce. —TOM WOLF

\$18.00 per bottle **\$194.40 per case**



ABOVE *Clos La Coutale*. © Christian Lauzin

COVER *Eric Chevalier with Anthony Lynch*. © Gail Skoff

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