

SERVES 12

2 cups ricotta cheese
 2 cups mascarpone cheese
 1 cup sugar
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1 tablespoon crushed fennel seed
 ¼ cup polenta
 1 tablespoon butter
 powdered sugar

WARM POLENTA CHEESECAKE WITH STRAWBERRIES IN RED WINE

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the ricotta, mascarpone, sugar, vanilla, and fennel until smooth. Add the polenta and stir to combine. Pour into a buttered springform pan. Bake for 1 hour and 20 minutes or until set. Place under broiler to lightly caramelize. Remove and allow to cool slightly.

Dust with powdered sugar and cut into serving portions. Serve over Strawberries in Red Wine (recipe follows).

2 pints fresh strawberries or raspberries, cleaned and sliced

¼ cup sugar

1 cup Cakebread Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon or other full-bodied red wine

STRAWBERRIES IN RED WINE

In a large bowl, toss strawberries with sugar. Adjust sugar to the sweetness of the berries. Cover with wine. Allow to steep for 1 hour. Transfer strawberries to serving bowl with a slotted spoon.

SERVES 4

1½ pounds assorted mushrooms, like shiitake, oyster, crimini, portabello, and chanterelles, cleaned, and trimmed (reserve stems), and cut into large pieces
 3 cloves garlic, peeled, 2 minced and 1 smashed
 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 2 sprigs fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dry salt and pepper
 ½ tablespoon walnut oil
 6 ounces mixed lettuce leaves, cleaned
 dry jack cheese (like Vella brand, or substitute fresh Parmesan cheese), shaved
 2 tablespoons chopped chives

ROAST WILD MUSHROOM SALAD WITH WALNUT OIL AND DRY JACK CHEESE

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Toss mushrooms in a casserole dish with the 2 minced garlic cloves, olive oil, soy sauce, and half of the thyme. Season with salt and pepper. Cover with foil and place in oven for 20 minutes, or until mushrooms have softened and have released their liquid. Meanwhile, place mushroom stems and trimmings in a small sauce pan with remaining thyme and smashed garlic clove. Sauté over medium-low heat for 10 to 20 minutes. Strain, reserving liquid. Discard trimmings.

Remove casserole dish from the oven and drain the mushroom broth at the bottom of the casserole dish into the small saucepan. Turn the oven up to 450 degrees.

Return the casserole to the oven, and roast uncovered for another 20 minutes or until lightly browned. On the stovetop, bring the mushroom broth to a boil over high heat and reduce by half. Whisk in walnut oil.

To serve, form a bed of lettuce on a large platter or divide among four plates. Top with roasted mushrooms. Drizzle with the warm walnut oil and mushroom broth. Top with dry jack cheese shavings and chives.

RIGATONI WITH SAUSAGE AND RED WINE

Heat a wide-bottom skillet over high heat and sauté sausage with olive oil, breaking sausage up with back of a spoon. Sauté until sausage is cooked through and well browned. Drain off excess oil and return pan to medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, and celery, and cook to soften, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic, tomatoes, and red wine, deglazing the pan. Simmer for 20 minutes to reduce and thicken.

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and toss immediately with sauce, Parmesan, and parsley. Serve in warm bowls.

SERVES 4

4 links Italian sausage
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 ½ onion, finely minced
 1 carrot, finely minced
 1 stalk celery, finely minced
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 14 ounces canned peeled tomatoes, seeded, and chopped
 1½ cups red wine
 1 pound rigatoni, penne, or fusilli pasta
 ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan
 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

AMERICAN ARTISAN CHEESE PLATE WITH FRESH FRUIT AND WHOLE GRAIN TOAST

Following the entrée, instead of a dessert, try a delicious alternative—a cheese plate using American cheeses.

Serve with grapes, pears, toasted nuts, and croutons or toasted whole grain bread.

Sonoma Dry Jack, California (cow)
 Bellwether Toscono, California (sheep)
 Great Hill Blue, Massachusetts (cow)
 Bellwether San Andres, California (young sheep)
 Matos St. George, California (cow)

