



## BRAISE YOURSELVES FOR A GOOD TIME

By Brian Cohen

As I mature, there are fewer ways to make me look good without a lot of effort. Wearing a pair of well-molded jeans (with just enough room to sit comfortably), having my beautiful wife on my arm, and presenting a braised dish for dinner are my go-to's for ego enhancement.

Why braising? Because it's the easiest method for showing off the flavor and tenderness of your meat and poultry. Basically, it's a

two-step process: sear and caramelize the surfaces, then pan-roast in hearty sauce for rich flavors and tender mouth-feel. As leaves, rain and snow fall outside, the house warms up and smells wonderful as a Dutch oven performs magic. Upon the first bite, everyone sings praises to me. What can I say? I like the strokes.



So, as an early November cold front imposed its chill on Crozet, a town at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, it seemed a good time for my family to bring a warm, savory feast featuring a braised pork shoulder with apples and brandy to friends to mark the beginning of autumn and the holiday season. I had also prepared garlic mashed potatoes and green beans sautéed in ginger butter.

On paper, the dinner's anticipated flavors were hearty with some edge (yes, this was the first time I ever made this recipe. But I liked my odds, and if you can't experiment on your friends...well...what are friends *for*?). The pork's fruitful braising liquid included peach brandy and apple cider, with the late addition of homemade bacon bits, Dijon mustard and tart Honeycrisp apples simmered until tender, then served over the meat. The buttery green beans were infused with fresh ginger root. The potatoes—mmm—had just the right amount of lumps and garlic to appease everybody.

I kept my options open with two wines: a Blenheim 2013 Viognier and Pollak 2013 Pinot Gris. Both promised light body and bright fruit to match the braising sauce and the green beans, as well as prevent the meal from feeling too heavy on the palate. I like to break things up sometimes a bit with a little contrast.

The Viognier was, indeed, refreshingly dry and crisp. The apricot, pear and honeysuckle tones, along with the light body and some minerality, dovetailed nicely with the green beans but were overwhelmed by the flavor and texture of the pork, apples and potatoes. The Pinot Gris,



however, fared much better. Its nose and palate were more intense and complex than the Viognier. Although it showed the same stone fruit elements, this bottle leaned more toward tropical characteristics, which stood out, yet complemented the entrée and sides. The Pinot's light creaminess gave the impression of a bit more substance than a stainless steel fermented wine would ordinarily provide.

Soon after almost finishing both bottles, a chocolate cake and a discussion about this year's upcoming high school musical, we came to the sober realization that it was still a school/work night. There were no leftovers, a sign that my recipe gamble had paid off. Both families retired with full bellies that night with two issues on their minds as they lay in bed, listening to the chilly breezes bending the trees outside: (1) gauge the remaining leaves to rake and (2) count the number of days before Christmas.

*Brian Cohen publishes a wine and food pairing blog at [CrozetGourmet.com](http://CrozetGourmet.com), caters on occasion and generously pours and tours at Veritas Vineyard and Winery in Afton, Virginia.*