



Keenan 2021 Mailbox Reserve Merlot

Spring Mountain District, Napa Valley

Atlantic Cod

Beurre Noisette · Fresh Garden Tarragon

"This was a true revelation for the series; the fish brought out the vibrant red fruit notes of the Merlot with absolute precision, showcasing a side of the wine nothing else quite has. Just amazing synergy."

— Van Potts, King Street Kitchen



Atlantic Cod · Beurre Noisette · Garden Tarragon · Ivy's Reserve Butter · Saffron Basmati · Roasted Vegetables

SERVES	PREP	COOK	METHOD	WINE
2	15 min	~10 min	Stovetop Baste + Broiler Finish	2021 Mailbox Reserve Merlot

Conventional wisdom says red wine with red meat, white wine with fish. Michael Keenan never read that rulebook. Neither did the fish.



A King Street Kitchen Production · Metabolic Wealth Investing Network · Cook With Intention

Van Potts serves as Eastern US Brand Ambassador for Keenan Winery. This pairing reflects his independent culinary judgment.



Why This Fish. Why This Wine.

THE FISH

Atlantic cod is not a delicate fish. It is substantial, dense, and — when it comes from the right place — deeply flavorful. Before refrigeration, cod fed entire continents. Salt cod built trade routes. The fish hanging above the Massachusetts State House door is a codfish. There is a reason for that.

When sourced fresh from the North Atlantic and cooked with intention, cod is one of the most satisfying proteins you can put on a plate. High protein, near-zero fat, clean flavor. It accepts butter the way a great wine accepts time — gratefully, and completely.

THE STORY

New Year's Eve, 2014. A good friend had gone fishing — way out, deep into the North Atlantic off Rhode Island. He and his friends caught a number of codfish. He called and asked if I wanted some cod. I said absolutely.

That afternoon, Michael Keenan called to wish me "Happy New Year" and catch up. I mentioned I was having cod for dinner. He asked about wine. I said I was thinking something white.

He said: "You should pair it with my Mailbox Merlot."

I gave him a carefully noncommittal murmur — the kind of polite, skeptical noise you make when a friend suggests something crazy, but you don't want to hurt their feelings. I had a white on standby.

"I opened the Mailbox Merlot. The Mailbox Merlot was finished. The white was not."

Michael Keenan is, in my observation after nearly two decades working alongside him, one of the most gifted tasters I have ever encountered. The man picks up nuance in a glass that most people would miss entirely. I have watched him do it too many times to call it luck.

I feel reasonably confident he could pass the blind tasting examination for the Master of Wine credential — where candidates must identify grape variety, region, appellation, and vintage from a glass alone. Roughly a 10% pass rate. Just over 400 holders worldwide. When someone with that gift tells you to open a Merlot with your cod, the correct response is not skepticism. It is compliance.

THE WINE



2021 Mailbox Reserve Merlot

Spring Mountain District · Napa Valley

92

James Suckling · September 2024

Violets and earthy spice on the nose. Chocolate creaminess with rich dark fruit — raspberries, cherries, blackcurrants. The finish is beautifully layered, deep, and very long. 500 cases. Drink now or hold for decades.

Alcohol:	14.3%
Acidity:	0.57 g/100ml
pH:	3.62
Residual Sugar:	Dry
Blend:	100% Merlot
Production:	500 Cases
Vineyard:	Estate, Mailbox

WHY THIS PAIRING

The conventional wisdom says white wine with fish. That wisdom is not wrong — it is simply incomplete. What it misses is the role of fat.

Beurre noisette — brown butter — is the bridge. When you baste Atlantic cod in brown butter with fresh garden tarragon and whole smashed garlic, you are no longer cooking a lean white fish. You are cooking a rich, aromatic, caramelized preparation that has far more in common with the Mailbox Merlot's dark fruit and chocolate depth than any unoaked Chardonnay does.

Choosing tarragon was a deliberate design choice. Its herbal profile beautifully locks into the wine's earthy spice, bringing out the high red fruit tones in perfect harmony. The brown butter mirrors the wine's chocolate character. The fish doesn't compete with the wine. It amplifies it.

Michael Keenan knew this in 2014. It took me one glass to agree.

Like many of the Keenan wines, the Mailbox Merlot is grown and produced to age for decades, not just years. This means buying at least 6, if not 12 when the opportunity presents itself. The wine is also available in Magnums and 3.0L. This is a wine to buy 12 bottles of 750mL, some magnums and a 3.0L for a special occasion.





The Method

Beurre Noisette · Garden Tarragon · Whole Smashed Garlic

INGREDIENTS — SERVES 2

COD

- Atlantic cod fillets *2 portions, 6–8 oz each*
- Kosher salt *generous — 30 min before*
- Cracked black pepper *just before the pan*

THE BASTE

- Ivy's Reserve Salted Butter *2 tbsp (generous)*
- Avocado oil *1 tbsp — high-heat insurance*
- Garlic, whole, peeled, smashed *3–4 cloves*
- Fresh garden tarragon *4–5 sprigs + garnish*

TO FINISH

- Lemon *half, at plating*
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley *chopped, garnish*

EQUIPMENT

- Stainless steel skillet *stovetop + broiler safe*
- ThermoPro TempSpike Plus *pull at 130°F internal*
- Fish spatula *thin, flexible*
- Basting spoon *large, for continuous baste*
- Broiler *finish — 2 to 3 min*



Ivy's Reserve Salted Farmhouse Butter — *they cream, award-winning, carbon neutral. The salt in the butter seasons the fish during the baste. Nothing was over-salted.*



Fresh Atlantic cod with garden tarragon — before the pan.

THE METHOD

1. SALT EARLY

Season cod generously on all surfaces with kosher salt at least 30 minutes before cooking. Pat thoroughly dry before the pan. Moisture is the enemy of a perfect crust.

2. BUILD THE PAN

Add 1 tbsp avocado oil to a stainless steel skillet over medium heat. When the oil shimmers, add whole peeled smashed garlic cloves. Let them perfume the oil for 30 seconds.

3. SEAR — 2:30 EACH SIDE

Place cod in the pan. Add 2 tbsp Ivy's Reserve Butter immediately. As it melts and foams, add tarragon sprigs. Cook 2 minutes 30 seconds on the first side, basting continuously — tip the pan, spoon the butter over the fish. Flip carefully. Baste another 2 minutes 30 seconds. Watch the butter: golden brown and nutty is the target. Dark brown is too far.

4. BROILER FINISH

Transfer the entire pan under a preheated broiler. Finish 2 to 3 minutes — this sets color on top and drives tarragon and garlic into the surface of the fish. Watch it closely.

5. TEMP AND REST

Pull at 130°F internal. The ThermoPro TempSpike Plus removes all guesswork. Rest 2 minutes — carry-over brings it to 135°F. The window between perfect and overdone is narrow.

6. PLATE

Plate the cod. Spoon all the brown butter, garlic, and tarragon from the pan over the top. Squeeze half a lemon. Finish with chopped fresh parsley. Open the Mailbox Merlot. Taste the fish with the wine before you do anything else.

VARIATIONS

Shallot: Add 1 medium shallot, thinly sliced, to the butter alongside the garlic — it caramelizes in the baste and adds a gentle sweetness.

Crème de Cassis: Add a teaspoon to the brown butter just before plating — it pulls the red berry fruit of the Merlot directly onto the plate. Lejay is the benchmark bottle.

WHAT VAN SERVED WITH IT

Saffron Basmati Rice, prepared in the Persian tradition — the tahdig method, where the rice forms a golden crisp crust at the bottom of the pot. Those who know it will recognize it immediately. Those who don't will want to look it up.

Broccoli: olive oil and salt, cast iron skillet, 4 minutes turning for char on all sides, broiler finish — still crisp, never soft.

Julienned red pepper: 90 seconds in the same pan, broiler finish. Color and char without losing the bite.



Atlantic Cod · Beurre Noisette · Garden Tarragon · Saffron Basmati · Roasted Vegetables.





Nutrition & Producers

KEENAN WINERY



Keenan Winery sits at 1,700 feet on Spring Mountain above St. Helena in the Mayacamas range. Michael Keenan farms eleven acres of estate Merlot in rocky, gravelly soils above the fog line. The winery was founded by Robert Keenan, who saw the potential of this mountain site when most of the wine world was still looking at the valley floor. That contrarian instinct turned out to be correct.

Michael's son Reilly is now gearing up to take the reins, carrying the Spring Mountain tradition into its next generation. The Mailbox Vineyard has been selected as the source for the Reserve Merlot for nineteen consecutive years. Only 500 cases of the 2021 produced.

keenanwinery.com
(707) 963-9177
St. Helena, California
Spring Mountain District · Napa Valley



2021 Mailbox Reserve Merlot · Spring Mountain District · 500 Cases

A note on buying: This wine was built to age. Purchase accordingly. Six bottles is a floor. Twelve is a commitment. Twenty-four is the move of someone who actually believes what they're tasting.

NUTRITION PANEL

Per 6 oz (170g) Cooked Atlantic Cod — Cod Only

Beurre noisette adds ~100–120 kcal and 11–13g fat per tbsp applied — present and accounted for.

MACRONUTRIENT	GRAMS	% CALORIES
Calories	~175 kcal	—
Protein	38g	87%
Total Fat	1.5g	8%
Carbohydrates	0g	0%

KEY MICRONUTRIENTS

NUTRIENT	AMOUNT	% DV
Vitamin B12	~1.3 mcg	54%
Niacin (B3)	~7.5 mg	47%
Vitamin B6	~0.6 mg	35%
Phosphorus	~440 mg	35%
Selenium	~44 mcg	80%
Iodine	~170 mcg	113%
Potassium	~500 mg	11%

MWIN — METABOLIC NOTE



Atlantic cod is one of the most protein-efficient foods that exists. Per calorie, it delivers more complete protein than almost anything you can put on a plate — including chicken breast.

The fat content is negligible — which is precisely why the beurre noisette matters. You are adding quality fat deliberately, with intention, from a known source. You see the butter go in. You control it. You taste it. That is metabolic transparency.

Iodine and selenium are chronically underconsumed in modern diets and critical to thyroid function. Wild-caught North Atlantic cod is among the best dietary sources of both. On salt: the fear that dietary sodium causes hypertension is more nuanced than the public health messaging suggests. For most people, the real driver is processed food sodium — not kosher salt on a quality piece of fish cooked with intention.

Source matters — not just ethically, but metabolically. Just like your protein, source matters for wine as well.

"Source the Best. Cook the Truth. Serve the Soul."



A King Street Kitchen Production · Metabolic Wealth Investing Network · Cook With Intention

Van Potts serves as Eastern US Brand Ambassador for Keenan Winery. This pairing reflects his independent culinary judgment.