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Rediscovering the ancient roman delicacy: Mulsum, the honeyed wine

How to recreate the ancient delicacy of honey-infused wine at home

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In the annals of ancient Roman culinary practices, Mulsum holds a distinguished place. This honey-infused wine, a staple among the elite of Greek and Roman societies, not only served as a testament to the Romans' ingenuity in wine enhancement but also played a significant role in their medicinal and gastronomical traditions.

The Romans, known for their expansive empire and rich cultural heritage, were not just warriors and statesmen but also connoisseurs of fine living. Wine, an integral part of their daily life, was often not up to the standards we appreciate today. To improve its flavor and quality, the Romans experimented with various additives, with honey being a prominent choice.



Roman fresco showing Mulsum consumption

Mulsum, thus born, was lighter than traditional wine and easier to consume. It was often used for its medicinal properties, providing relief for stomach pains, acidity, and reflux. Esteemed Roman philosophers and poets like Horace, Propertius, and Seneca often extolled its virtues, considering it a panacea for life's sorrows and an aid in alleviating melancholy.

The Art of Making Mulsum

The preparation of Mulsum has been a subject of historical interest, with varying accounts existing on its exact method. Columella, a renowned Roman author of the 1st century BC, suggested a technique involving mixing grape must with honey directly in the pressing vat, followed by a fermentation process lasting three weeks before decanting it into new bottles. However, a more common practice involved blending warmed honey into finished wine, preferably the esteemed Falernian wine.



A bottle of commercial Mulsum

Falernian wine, revered as the drink of the gods and produced in North Campania near Naples, has its own legendary status. The story goes that Falernus, a humble Roman farmer, was visited by Bacchus, the god of wine, who transformed his modest meal into an abundant feast of wine, leaving Falernus's mountain covered in vineyards.

Mulsum in the Modern Day

Today, the allure of Mulsum can be recreated in our kitchens. Its recipe is surprisingly simple and quick, requiring just three ingredients: a liter of good quality red wine, 130 grams of preferably thyme honey, and a tablespoon of ground black pepper. The preparation involves mixing these ingredients and allowing the blend to rest in the refrigerator for a few hours. The resulting beverage is a harmonious balance of sweetness from the honey and a spicy kick from the pepper, making it a unique addition to contemporary culinary explorations.



It's important to note that the amount of honey can vary based on personal preference and the type of wine used. Generally, a dry wine is preferred to balance the sweetness of the honey.

Tasting Mulsum to Its Fullest

To enjoy Mulsum at its best, it should be served cold, stirred well before pouring to distribute the pepper evenly. Some connoisseurs suggest letting it rest for at least a month and filtering it before serving to enhance its flavors.

This honeyed wine leaves a sweet yet spicy taste, offering a glimpse into the sophisticated palate of ancient Rome and providing a unique sensory experience to modern wine enthusiasts.

In essence, Mulsum stands as a testament to the Roman's culinary creativity, blending the simple pleasures of wine and honey into a drink that transcends time, continuing to intrigue and delight even today.