

Story by Ching Lee • Photos by Matt Salvo

# Full circle



Nanette and Valentin Humer, left, run Napa-based Food & Vine Inc., which makes grapeseed oil and flour products under the brand Salute Santé, which means “to your health.”



The Humers obtain grapeseeds, above, from California vineyards after the grapes are harvested and used to make wine. The seeds are then dried, after which oil is extracted from them. What’s left over is later used to make flour, top right. The flour currently comes in chardonnay and merlot varieties.

## Grapeseed flour gives new life to overlooked leftovers

The Napa Valley may be famous for its wine, but there’s another food product coming out of the region that’s gotten the attention of bakers and food manufacturers: grapeseed flour.

Praised for its nutritional value, including as a source of antioxidants, fiber, calcium and potassium, grapeseed flour has been finding its way into a variety of baked goods and other foods as a means to boost their healthfulness.

Unlike flour made from wheat and other cereal grains, grapeseed flour is actually a byproduct of both wine and grapeseed oil. The seeds come from grape pomace, the pulpy remains of the fruit after it’s crushed to make wine. Oil is then extracted from those seeds, and what’s left is used to make the flour.

“In my country, everything gets used up,” said Austrian-born Valentin Humer, president and CEO of

Napa-based Food & Vine Inc., which makes grapeseed oil and flour under the brand Salute Santé.

Originally a chef, Humer has devoted more than 20 years to perfecting the methods of making cold-pressed grapeseed oil, which is done without the use of solvents. But in recent years, he and his wife Nanette have taken their passion one step further by making use of the entire seed.

“The flour is the next part because we already make this wonderful grapeseed oil, but I am only getting a drop,” he said, explaining that oil is about 10 to 12 percent of the seed, depending on the grape variety.

“The rest of the seed—all the life-force energy, all the antioxidants, all the fiber, all the potassium that’s so valuable to the seed and the plant—is what we get when we mill it into flour,” Nanette Humer added.





Baker Alexis Handelman, above, makes a line of gluten-free products with grapeseed flour. Baker Eli Colvin, left, also uses grapeseed flour in his breads, below.

Photos left and below courtesy of Food & Vine



### Just a bit boosts texture

Alexis Handelman, who operates Alexis Baking Co. and Cafe in Napa, has developed an entire line of gluten-free products with the Humers' grapeseed flour, which is available in merlot and chardonnay. She said she's known about grapeseed flour for years, but didn't start experimenting with it until last year.

One of the first things she made to gain a good sense of what the flour tastes like was pancakes, because pancakes don't have the amounts of sugar, chocolate and other ingredients as other baked goods and that could overshadow the grapeseed flour. Handelman substituted merlot flour for some of the regular flour in one of her pancake recipes.

"When we tasted it, we thought the flavor profile was extremely accessible and attractive," she said. "It's kind of nutty and it's kind of chocolaty."

Because grapeseed flour is not like grain flours and contains no gluten, the trick to baking with it is to use it with other flours rather than as a straight flour substitute. Use too much, and the cake or muffin will be too wet and won't hold up structurally, Handelman said.

"You're just using a little bit of it, because it's dense and goes a long way," she added. "You have to take a recipe and then play with it a little bit."

Because grapeseed flour has a grainy texture, Handelman said she likes it best in recipes already rich in other textures, whether it is nuts, bits of fruit or oatmeal.

"People have a notion about what certain foods should feel like in their mouth, and texture is a big thing in food," she said. "So when you're introducing something like grapeseed flour, which has an inherent texture to it, you have to be thoughtful about what you're adding it to, so that the texture blends in."

### Baker's secret

For bread maker Eli Colvin, who has been using grapeseed flour for several years, the amount he adds to his recipes depends on the type of bread he's making. For lighter breads such as ciabatta or baguette, he uses less. But for a rye bread that is dense and has a hard, heavy crust, Colvin said the sandy texture of grapeseed flour goes really well.

"It actually adds a nice flavor," said Colvin, of Revolution Bread in Petaluma. "Even just a little bit adds a chocolaty-nutty flavor to things. And it's subtle, so people can't figure out what that extra flavor is. It's a nice, little secret ingredient in that sense."

Aside from the flavor, texture and nutritional benefits the flour adds to his breads, Colvin said he's always been impressed with how the Humers have taken advantage of what is essentially a leftover from a region that produces massive supplies of it.

"They're making an awesome product out of something that other people are throwing away. How cool is that?" he said.

It was this "reuse and recycle" approach that first attracted Dario Sattui, owner of V. Sattui Winery in St. Helena and Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga, to the Humers' business, which obtains seeds from him and other California wineries. Sattui also owns shares of Food & Vine.

"It's a natural thing for us to do because we generate many tons of grapeseed each year," Sattui said.

Some of the pomace is composted and returned to the vineyard to add nutrients back to the soil, he noted. But often there's more than the vineyards can use, so they must pay to haul it away. He said it made more sense to turn that pomace over to the Humers.

## Grapeseed flour rises to the occasion

Discover for yourself the nutty, chocolaty note and toothsome texture grapeseed flour can impart to your baked goods. Napa bakery owner Alexis Handelman shares a recipe for a customer favorite that showcases the finer points of grapeseed flour, which is also packed with nutrients and naturally gluten-free. Handelman notes that the pancakes can be made gluten-free—she uses Cup4Cup gluten-free flour mix, but you can experiment with your favorite brand.

### WINE COUNTRY FLAPJACKS

**Makes 9 to 10 (6-inch) pancakes**

*2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour or gluten-free flour*

*3/8 cup merlot grapeseed flour*

*6 tbsp. granulated cane sugar*

*1 tbsp. baking powder*

*1 1/2 tsp. baking soda*

*1 1/2 tsp. salt*

*3 large eggs*

*4 cups 2 percent milk*

*1 1/2 oz. unsalted butter, melted*

In a large bowl, mix dry ingredients together. In a small bowl, mix eggs with milk and melted butter. Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and combine only until mixed. Do not overmix.

Drop by 1/2-cup measures onto a buttered griddle and cook until bubbles appear on the surface. Flip pancakes over and cook until the underside is nicely brown.



### MORE ONLINE

Dense, buttery sandies are similar to shortbread cookies. Handelman's recipe for apricot pistachio chardonnay sandies, at [www.californiabountiful.com](http://www.californiabountiful.com), might become a new favorite!



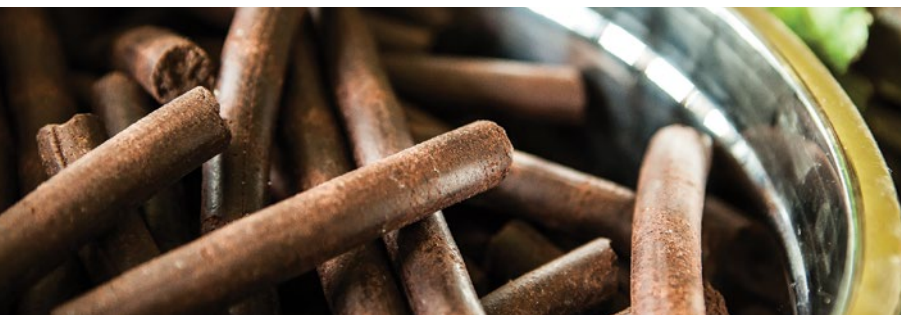
Goodies made with grapeseed flour at Alexis Baking Co. and Cafe, left, include dark chocolate cherry merlot brownies, chardonnay blondies with pecans and golden raisins, and chardonnay sandies with apricots and pistachios. Pancakes made with grapeseed flour come off the grill, right, and are served with candied pecans and strawberries, far right.







Grapeseed oil drips from a special press, left, and is caught in containers, above, while long coils of the seed residue squeeze out at the same time. The resulting press cake, below, is so hard that a machine breaks it down into smaller pieces before it can be milled to flour.



## Grapeseed oil: A powerhouse of versatility

After grapes are crushed to make wine, but before grapeseeds can be milled into flour, the tiny, hard kernels are pressed to extract cooking oil. Grapeseed oil is gaining popularity across the U.S., as cooks discover its neutral, light flavor and variety of uses. It emulsifies well and creates dressings and marinades that don't separate when chilled. With its medium-high smoke point, grapeseed oil can be a good choice for sautéing (pictured right). It's also a good source of vitamin E and can even be used in skin care.

“With a wine bottle, it's melted down and made into another one. So now we're reusing the seeds,” Sattui said.

### Completing the cycle

To get the seeds, equipment is used to separate them from the pomace. The seeds are then dried, making them nonperishable and allowing the Humers to use the seeds year-round for oil and flour production.

A special press capable of producing 8,000 pounds of pressure is used to coax tiny drops of oil from the seeds. As oil drips into a container on one end, long coils of the seed residue, called press cake, squeeze out of another end, much like a sausage coming out of a meat grinder and sausage stuffer.

The press cake feels warm to the touch and hard as a rock, too hard to go into a traditional grain mill, so a machine breaks it down into smaller pieces before it can be milled to flour. A ton of seeds typically yields about 35 gallons of oil and about 1,900 pounds of flour.

At the same time as many chefs and home cooks have come to embrace grapeseed oil in their kitchens, Valentin Humer said bakers and food manufacturers are “slowly waking up to the idea” that grapeseed flour can add valuable nutrients to their products. Wineries are also beginning to realize the potential of their vineyard leftovers.

“The fact that we can help the wine industry start utilizing their resources and complete the cycle rather than creating more waste is key to sustainability,” Humer said. 🌱

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