Chilled Asparagus Salad with Olives, Capers and Orange

4 TO 6 SIDE DISH SERVINGS

1 ⁄ 4 cup (60 ml) extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons (30 ml) orange juice

2 teaspoons freshly grated orange peel, divided

1 ⁄ 4 teaspoon salt

1 ⁄ 4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1 ⁄ 8 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 cup (100 g) chopped pitted niçoise or kalamata olives

1 tablespoon capers, drained, rinsed and chopped

1 large garlic clove, minced

2 pounds (900 g) asparagus, ends trimmed

Asparagus is an early crop that was held in high regard by Monet, and he made sure that his cook, Marguerite, prepared it two ways. For Monet himself, who believed overcooking was sacrilegious, the asparagus was lightly steamed to make it tender, but not enough to lose its crisp, nutty flavor. For his family, who preferred their asparagus well cooked, Marguerite would prepare a separate batch. Here the spears are dressed with an olive, caper and orange relish that Monet surely would have liked, as it is similar to the tapenade that he enjoyed on his painting trips along the French

Riviera. While we call for the asparagus to be chilled, you can also serve it warm or at room temperature. This dish is ideal for a light lunch—make sure to prepare extra relish to serve on the side with crusty bread—or an apt prelude to grilled lamb, chicken or fish. Pour a well-chilled rosé.

Place oil, juice, 1 teaspoon orange peel, salt, pepper and red pepper flakes in a medium-size bowl. Whisk well to blend. Add olives, capers and garlic and mix well. Cover and let stand at room temperature 1 hour. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper if necessary.

Meanwhile, steam or boil asparagus until tender but still firm to bite; time will vary depending on size of asparagus. Drain well and rinse under cold water to stop cooking process and set color. Transfer asparagus to a platter and pat dry. Cover and refrigerate until cold.

Spoon olive mixture over asparagus. Garnish with remaining 1 teaspoon orange peel. Serve immediately.