



If you follow me on Instagram (@timswinemarket) then you have witnessed first hand the Bordeaux that I have been pulling out of my cellar. Unlike a lot of wine people, who post one collector wine after another, I actually take more pleasure out of showing off the values. I fully expect a hundred dollar bottle of wine to age for a decade, but what about those that sell for a fraction of that? My most recent post is of a bottle of 2008 Chateau de l'Estang Cotes de Castillon, which we sold for less than twenty bucks. I lost this one in my cellar for at least six or seven years and when I found it, was sure it would be over the hill. To my surprise, it ended up being stellar! Only in the second hour after opening did the finish start to fall off, otherwise it was a perfectly lovely wine.

The key to why these wines age is no secret. Bordeaux is a cool, almost marginal climate for growing grapes. The region is blessed with lots of sunlight hours, more than 1400 during a normal growing season, with a diurnal temperature fluctuation that is often forty degrees. What this means is that the region enjoys a long, cool growing season, with the sun on the vines until quite late into the evening. Wine scientists will draw you all sorts of graphs to demonstrate what this means, but here is the Reader's Digest version. The slow ripening of the grapes preserves natural acidity and they achieve lower levels of sugar (alcohol) when they are physiologically mature. I believe that it is the combination of lower alcohol and higher acidity, along with a fair amount of tannins, that give the wines the ability to age so well. Of course, with modern winemaking I also believe they drink well young too.

This month I present to you two wines that will work great with Thanksgiving, or if you chose to put them away, will age for a few years. It will probably surprise a few of you that the wines are both based on the Merlot grape, but I caution you to draw any conclusions without drinking them. Understand that in Bordeaux Merlot is the grape that provides power and texture, while Cabernet Sauvignon is generally relegated to supporting roles of structure, color and aromatics. This is the opposite of what happens in California, where their considerably warmer and longer growing season allow for Cabernet and Merlot to both ripen to much higher levels of sugar, which is what becomes alcohol. The other side of the ripening curve is that acidity drops as the grapes mature, so acidity in California wines is quite a bit lower. This is why you would not generally age a California wine of this price for more than a couple of years.

So this month I present two outstanding values that will be great with Thanksgiving dinner, or any other meal you chose to throw at them. Of course, if you have patience you can also cellar these for a few years. Heck, buy a case and find out exactly how long they age! Whichever path you decide, I hope enjoy them this holiday with those you love and cherish.

2016 Chateau Moulin de Mallet Bordeaux (\$15)

We featured the 2015 release of this wine and it blew through the stores in a hot minute. When you taste the new vintage you will see why, this chateau delivers serious bang for the buck. It is no accident that this chateau delivers stunning values vintage after vintage. It is run with great attention by Serge and Julien Couderc a father and son dynamo who understand the potential of delivering great quality and value.

Their family has farmed this ninety acre vineyard since 1898, but it was not until 1985 that grapes and wine became their primary focus. The vineyards lie high on the plateau de Pujols, which is a rocky outcrop overlooking the Dordogne Valley, and facing the slopes of Saint Emilion. The soils are primarily clay and limestone, with much of the plantings on terraces built by five generations of the Couderc family. Serge assumed control of the estate in 1985 and immediately stopped selling their wine to negociants to focus on their own bottlings. He was joined by his son Julien in 1997, after he earned degrees in viticulture and oenology. Together they have since fully modernized the entire operation.

To extract such great material there is intensive work done in the vineyard to ensure optimum ripeness. They prune the canes of the vines to short lengths to limit vegetive growth, they perform a draconian green harvest to remove less than perfect grapes. Like most chateaus they employ a machine harvester, which allows them to quickly pick vineyard blocks at optimum ripeness. For quality control all grapes are hand sorted before going into the fermentor. The fermentation is done with indigenous yeasts and lasted three weeks. After the wine was racked to a combination of concrete and stainless steel tanks for a year before bottling. The blend of the 2016 is 80% Merlot, and 20% of Cabernet Franc.

When you are ready to open this wine, give it a half-hour in a decanter to open up. Once you do it immediately reveals a rich nose of chocolate covered cherries, strawberry jam, dried ancho peppers and pipe tobacco. The feel on the palate is nicely plump, with a good concentration of fruit and fine, smooth tannins. Drink over the next two to five years with mushrooms on toast, roast pork or turkey.

2016 Chateau Les Grands Marechaux Cotes de Blaye (\$22)

During my trip to Bordeaux in March, I visited eleven different negociants, who act as the middlemen of the business between the chateaus and the rest of the trade. They ranged from enormous companies, with hundreds of millions of dollars on inventory stored in state-of-the-art warehouses, to small boutique firms operating out of small industrial parks. I found Moulin de Mallet at Salin, one of the titans, but this little jewel came from one of the most boutique of the firms, appropriately called The Wine Merchant.

The Wine Merchant was founded in 1989 by Christophe Reboul, who started working in Bordeaux for another giant, Compagnie des Vins de Bordeaux et de la Gironde (CVBG) in 1980. During his tenure at CVBG, Christophe was in charge of their relationships with the Cru Classe estates, and through which he developed an encyclopedic understanding of the terroirs of the region. In 1997 he discovered this tiny jewel of an estate and purchased it, along with business partner, Etienne Barre.

What drew them to this area, which lies on the right bank of Bordeaux northwest of the city of Libourne, is the region of Blaye. (Pronounced bli). Located directly on the Gironde River, Blaye was historically an important military fortress, as it protected the city of Bordeaux to the south from marauders sailing down the river. In the past thirty years it has become an important wine area, as owners from nearby Pomerol and St. Emilion sought to expand their vineyard holdings. This region shares the same soils; clay and limestone, mixed with sand, but is warmer due to its location near the river.

Les Grands Marechaux is considered by many experts to be one of the premier estates of Blaye, and a spectacular value. Shortly after buying the estate the owners engaged Stephane de Renoncourt as their consultant. Derenoncourt rose to fame in the 1980's as a consultant to the *garagistes* of St. Emilion. These were a collection of tiny producers who developed cult wines outside of the grand chateau of the area. Some members may also remember de Renoncourt also consults for the von Neipperg properties, and their Explorer Club feature in October of 2017. De Reononcourt espouses extreme work in the vineyard to lower yields, and emphasize ripeness. While I find the wines at some of his consulting projects to be too heavy, here it strikes a nice balance between power and structure. The winemaking is similar to above, with fermentation in stainless steel tanks for approximately four weeks. A big difference, hence the price, is that this wine is aged in barrels, of which twenty percent are new, for a year and a half before bottling.

When you are ready to open this wine, decant it for an hour before serving. This is a surprisingly big wine and needs time to evolve. Once you do it reveals a nose of primarily red fruits; fresh cherries, dried plums and raspberry jam. There are hints of black licorice, pencil lead and tamarind that also waft around the fruits. On the palate this wine shows impressive concentration, with a rich core of fruit framed by firm, but well integrated tannins. Drink this wine until 2028 and serve with a standing rib roast, beef tenderloin or morel mushroom ragu over polenta.

Mushrooms on Toast

This is a fantastic, simple recipe that is perfect when you want a light snack to go with a bottle of wine. It is a David Tanis recipe, the author of Heart of the Artichoke and A Platter of Figs, two of my favorite cookbooks. Like all of the recipes from Tanis this one is not fussy. Use whatever mushrooms you have on hand, and if you don't have creme fraiche, use a little heavy cream, or skip it all together. The herbs are also interchangeable, so let your imagination go wild. I use this recipe for an appetizer and also as lunch, served with salad. It works wonderfully with any light red wine, in this case try with the Moulin de Mallet.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, more as needed
1 pound thinly sliced portobello (gills removed) or cremini mushrooms
1 teaspoon chopped thyme
2 small garlic cloves, minced
Salt and pepper
Splash of sherry or Marsala (optional)
1/4 cup crème fraîche
2 thick slices country bread, for toasting
2 tablespoons chopped parsley

Heat a wide skillet over high heat and add butter, swirling pan. When butter begins to sizzle, add mushrooms and cook, stirring, until lightly browned, 6 to 8 minutes.

Add thyme and garlic, and stir to coat. Season well with salt and pepper and continue to sauté for a minute more, then add sherry, if using. Add crème fraîche and let mixture simmer 2 minutes.

Meanwhile, toast bread slices until golden. Lightly butter them and place on individual warm plates. Spoon mushrooms and juices over toasted bread. Top with chopped parsley.

Strip Steaks with Balsamic Cream Sauce

I could not do it. Not another turkey recipe, or worse, one using leftovers. Sure, the wines this month work great with Thanksgiving dinner, but let's face it, within a day or two I am hankering for a steak. This recipe is a perfect pan sauce, or one that comes together quickly in the skillet where you cook the meat. I also made this recipe with eight ounce sirloin steaks and it turned out great.

3 strip steaks (10 to 12 ounces each), about 1 inch thick
Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 shallot, minced
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1/3 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives

Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned, 3 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to cutting board and tent with foil.

Add shallot to empty skillet and cook until softened, about 30 seconds. Stir in vinegar, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until syrupy, about 1 minute. Add cream and cook until slightly thickened, about 1 minute. Stir in chives and season with salt and pepper. Slice steaks and serve, passing sauce at table.