



It has been another amazing year, and we thank you for the opportunity to share the ever expanding world of wine in the Explorers Club. On behalf of all of the franchisees, employees, and families of Tim's Wine Market, we wish you a safe and happy holiday season.

Tim Varan

Claude Manciat Cremant de Bourgogne (\$25)

When we pulled onto this property in April during my visit to Beaujolais and Burgundy, it was very surreal. I have sold the wines of the Manciat family for many years and their estate is not at all as I pictured in my mind. There is the perfunctory old building, brick covered with ivy, and of course a few old barrels used for planters in the parking lot. Beyond that, this is a very modern, ultra clean and dynamic estate that is not buried under the weight of tradition, but rather embraces the new to make better wines. This is a big statement because in my opinion the wines have been near the top of the heap in the Macon for decades, and bargains to boot. I also discovered they make sparkling wine! We actually tasted many on my trip, but this is the best, so I immediately bought almost half of the US allocation for our club selection.

Like many Burgundy estates this one was sold for many years in the US under a hyphenated name, Manciat-Poncet. When Claude Manciat married Simone Poncet, they combined their vineyard holdings to make one estate. Was it an arranged marriage? Possibly, for I can name one such union that occurred in the 1990's at now famous estate in Meursault. Currently it is run by their daughter, Marie-Pierre, who actually renamed the estate Clos Noly a few years ago. She did so because they own substantial holdings in one of the top vineyards of the region, Clos Noly. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on your perception, Clos Noly was recently designated as one of the new Premier Crus of the region, which means no estate can use the name as theirs exclusively. So this year, she is falling back on an older label they used to use, named for her father.

Marie-Pierre continues the tradition of tracing quality back to the vineyards first. Historically Claude was known as a meticulous farmer and nothing has changed. They own 56 acres divided among five communes, which they regularly crop at 20-30% less yield than legally permitted. As a result their wines over-deliver in a way that is rare in modern Burgundy. Also, most of their vines are 40-60 years as well, which adds to the dimension and concentration of the finished wines.

To make their sparkling wine, Marie-Pierre uses a combination of grapes from old vineyards, and parcels that are recently replanted. I should note that all of the grapes from vines under ten years old are sold off, so even their sparkling comes from mature vineyards. This wine is a blend of 30% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 20% Gamay and 20% Aligote, all traditional Burgundy varieties, but the blend is less common. It is fermented in the bottle, *ala method Champenoise*, for a year before disgorgement. While this may not be Champagne, it is one of the best *vin mousseaux* (the term for non-Champagne French sparkling wines that are bottle fermented) I have tasted in a long time.

When you pop the cork on this beauty, let it warm for just a few minutes on the counter before serving. Do this after you pop the cork or it may bubble over. Then it delivers a complex, fruit-driven bouquet of fresh cut red apples, pineapple, freeze dried strawberries, and jasmine. On the palate it is plump and generous, with soft edges and considerable length. Drink by itself, or with brie baked in pastry, eggs Benedict or crab cakes.

2014 Mairena Bonarda (\$18)

With such a dynamite sparkling wine to begin your holiday festivities, it make sense to follow up with a rich, slightly mature red wine. The standout of our pre-holiday tastings is this fantastic Bonarda, a grape that rare gets much attention today but has historically been very important in Argentina.

Currently the most popular variety growing in the Mendoza region of Argentina is Malbec, but until a decade ago the honor belonged to the Bonarda grape. This variety has its origin in the alpine vineyards of the Savoie region of France, where it is better known as Charbono. Today there are only a few dozen acres left in its home country, and even a few in California, but there are over thirty thousand acres planted in Mendoza.

Historically this grape has been very popular because growers can crop a very high yield per acre. Before Mendoza became a popular area for high quality, the wines sold for next to nothing, so yield was very important. I still remember visiting a Bonarda vineyard in Valle de Uco with tons of grapes dropped on the ground a couple of weeks before harvest. Sebastien Zuccardi told me they often drop as much as half the crop of Bonarda on the ground, a practice called green harvesting, to maximize quality. Then, as Malbec grew in popularity, the farmers stopped planting Bonarda, so today most of the really old vines found in the region are this grape.

Ironically, this deep and complex red is made by the Blanco family: Gabriel, Monica and their five kids. Theirs is a third generation estate located in the foothills of the Andes Mountains called Ugarteche, in the sub-zone of Luján de Cuyo. This area is high elevation, at more than 3000 feet above sea level. At this height the UV light is very intense, which causes a thickening of the grape skins. This results in deeper red wines with more power and tannin, capable of aging. Since it is available, I also bought some of the 2016 vintage for a weekly feature. If you have a chance try both, the difference of two extra years in the bottle is quite amazing.

When you open this wine we recommend decanting for a half hour before serving. The nose is a heady combination of fresh blackberries, red currants, boysenberries, cold black tea, and rose petals. On the palate this wine shows superb concentration, with a thick presence of fruit framed by long, integrated tannins. Drink over the next two years with fajitas, sirloin steaks or lamb chops. This month there is no room for a recipe for this wine, but you get the idea.

Time Consuming (but Totally Worth It) Crab Cakes

I love crab cakes, but only when I make them at home. Too often the restaurant versions are long on filler, short on crab meat, and way too expensive. Over the years I have tried many recipes and most of them are fails, either falling apart due to a lack of binder, or not crabby enough because of too much. Leave it to Cook's Illustrated to figure it out with this recipe. The only thing is there are a lot of steps, and the first time you make them you will probably say, "never again." That is until you taste the results. Also, if you find really fresh crab you can skip steps 1 and 4. If you use canned crab meat then take the extra time, it is worth it. Serve with bubbles or a crisp, high acid white wine.

1 pound lump crabmeat, picked over for shells

1 cup milk

1 ½ cups panko bread crumbs

Salt and pepper

2 celery ribs, chopped

½ cup chopped onion

1 garlic clove, peeled and smashed

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

4 ounces shrimp, peeled, deveined, and tails removed

¼ cup heavy cream

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

½ teaspoon hot pepper sauce

1 teaspoon lemon juice

½ teaspoon Old Bay seasoning

4 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Place crabmeat and milk in bowl, making sure crab is totally submerged. Cover and refrigerate for at least 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, place ¾ cup panko in small zipper-lock bag and finely crush with rolling pin. Transfer crushed panko to 10-inch nonstick skillet and add remaining ¾ cup panko. Toast over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer panko to shallow dish and stir in ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Wipe out skillet.

3. Pulse celery, onion, and garlic in food processor until finely chopped, 5 to 8 pulses, scraping down bowl as needed. Transfer vegetables to large bowl. Rinse processor bowl and blade and reserve. Melt butter in now-empty skillet over medium heat. Add chopped vegetables, ½ teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper; cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are softened and all moisture has evaporated, 4 to 6 minutes. Return vegetables to large bowl and let cool to room temperature. Rinse out pan and wipe clean.

4. Strain crabmeat through fine-mesh strainer, pressing firmly to remove milk but being careful not to break up lumps of crabmeat.

5. Pulse shrimp in now-empty food processor until finely ground, 12 to 15 pulses, scraping down bowl as needed. Add cream and pulse to combine, 2 to 4 pulses, scraping down bowl as needed. Transfer shrimp puree to bowl with cooled vegetables. Add mustard, hot pepper sauce, lemon juice, and Old Bay seasoning; stir until well combined. Add crabmeat and fold gently with rubber spatula, being careful not to over mix and break up lumps of crabmeat. Divide mixture into 8 balls and firmly press into 1/2-inch-thick patties. Place cakes on rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

6. Coat each cake in panko, firmly pressing to adhere crumbs to exterior. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Place 4 cakes in skillet and cook without moving them until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Using 2 spatulas, carefully flip cakes, add 1 tablespoon oil, reduce heat to medium-low, and continue to cook until second side is golden brown, 4 to 6 minutes. Transfer cakes to platter. Wipe out skillet and repeat with remaining 4 cakes and remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Serve immediately.