



# Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

When trying to find a unifying theme for the selections this quarter, I could only really come up with one; that you are unlikely to ever visit where these wines are produced. Unlike Burgundy, Bordeaux, Montalcino, Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape or Rioja, where wine tourism has become big business, the selections for this quarter are produced in little-known areas, far from any urban hub or must-see historical landmark. However they are brilliant wines, produced by rugged individualists and worthy of a spotlight, even if you never see where they are made.

## **2016 Antonio Caggiano Taurasi Vigna Macchia dei Goti - \$59**

This first selection comes from the hills around the tiny town of Avellino, northeast of Naples in Southern Italy. Avellino is an ancient wine region that was popularized by the Greeks in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., however there is significant evidence that wine was produced before their arrival. Many of you have probably traveled to the nearby Amalfi Coast, but there is little reason to drive 30 miles inland to visit Avellino unless you are pursuing the relatively famous wines of the area, Taurasi. For history buffs, Avellino was a significant battle during the Allied invasion of Southern Italy in 1944. It is also the mythical homeland of Tony Soprano, played by the late James Gandolfini from the HBO series *The Sopranos*.

The dominant quality red grape of the region is Aglianico, which history and local legend attributes to the Greeks, but modern evidence refutes. Neither the DNA evidence or linguistic logic support the idea, and the first mention of the grape was not until 1520. Most likely, the grape evolved from other local varieties, but neither parent has yet to be identified through DNA analysis. Aglianico is an interesting variety in that it buds early but ripens very late, often harvested in November, and is resistant to afflictions, except botrytis. The challenge for growers is that the variety is very vigorous, so the yields must be controlled in order to produce a wine of quality. For this reason, the best examples tend to come from the poor soils of higher elevations, such as those around Avellino, nearby Benevento and across the border in Basilicata. For our example, the vines farmed by Antonio Caggiano grow over 1,000 feet above sea level, high even by Taurasi standards.

Antonio Caggiano was born at this property and worked with his father until the 1970s. Then, in 1980, after the devastating November 23rd earthquake, he started a small construction company to help rebuild the region. After 10 years, he turned his attention back to wine and began construction on his incredible winery. Antonio is a very creative man, and with his son, Giuseppe, who is an architect, together they built a winery to which few compare. There are five underground stories, which wind like the catacombs to a grand hall buried deep under the Earth. As you make your way through the twists and turns, along with the aging wine barrels you also get to see Antonio's art, from paintings and photography, to carvings made from old vine trunks. Although I have not visited, my nephew Lee has, and calls the place "surreal."

Although the winery is impressive, it is really Antonio's dedication to improving the wines of Taurasi that is his achievement. In 1993, the Taurasi region was elevated to DOCG status by the Italian government, and Antonio joined a group of winemakers to visit Burgundy with local oenologist Luigi Moio. Moio, who earned his PhD in Dijon, exposed them to winemaking and aging techniques they had never seen. Upon returning, Antonio hired Moio as his consultant, which he remains to this day, and put many of his suggestions into practice. Most important was the use of new, 230 liter, French oak barrels, which were unknown in the region. He also picked and vinified his vineyards separately, reserving his best grapes for his flagship wine, Vigna Macchia dei Goti. For this wine, the grapes are hand-harvested, destemmed and fermented in stainless steel tanks. The wine is then moved to French oak, half new, where it is aged for 18 months.

When you are ready to open this wine, you will want to decant it for an hour before serving. Eventually, it delivers an utterly stunning and complex bouquet of new leather, old velvet, caramel, dried figs, cocoa powder, Maduro cigar wrapper, licorice and sage. On the palate it is very dense and muscular, but with a little fruit peeking out before the firm tannins wrap this wine up into the moderate finish. Drink with big proteins, like lamb or standing rib roast, from 2025 to 2050.

## **2015 JC Vizcarra Ribera del Duero - \$49**

In 2007, I had the pleasure to visit with Juan Carlos (JC) Vizcarra and spend the day with his wonderful, young family. For more than four generations, the Viscarras have produced wine at the far eastern edge of the Ribera del Duero, two and a half hours from the city of Valladolid. Although his family grew grapes and made wine that was sold primarily to

the local cooperative, JC realized that in off vintages, the more famous producers to the west, Vega Sicilia and Pesquera, would come and buy his family's wine to blend with their own. Recognizing they must have something special, he pursued an oenology degree, and in 1991, launched his own winery. When I visited in 2007, they were putting the finishing touches on the new facility, a gravity flow winery with a modern basket press, stainless steel tanks and underground aging cellar.

Visiting the Ribera del Duero is more challenging than most wine regions if you want to see the real source of the best wines. Leaving the region's capital, Valladolid, you wind down the river with vineyards on both sides. Although many famous wines are produced from these grapes, the past 20 years have shown the deepest and most powerful wines come from the northern and eastern edge of the region, near the town of Burgos. Most of the vineyards in this area are far from the river, at very high elevation. The vines for our feature grow at almost 3,000 feet above sea level in poor soils made up of clay, limestone and sand over gravel. At this elevation, the growing season is short and intense, which favors the late budding and early ripening Tempranillo grape, known locally as Tinto Fino.

Like Aglianico, there is a lot of misinformation regarding the origin of the Tempranillo variety. For centuries, the vine has been attributed to Cistercian monks who carried it from Burgundy in the first millennia. However, there is no DNA evidence to support this claim, and there is scant proof that either parent of this variety exist today. The earliest mention of Tempranillo dates to the 16th century in observations about wines from the region that is today Ribera del Duero. More specific mention is made a hundred years later about wines from the Rioja region. What is interesting is how different the wines are from both regions. Ribera del Duero wines tend to be darker and more powerful than examples from Rioja, which tend to be lighter and more aromatic. They both share substantial tannins, which makes this variety ideal for barrel aging.

For JC, it is important to handle the thin-skinned Tempranillo carefully. The grapes are hand-harvested into small lug baskets to prevent damage. The grapes are destemmed and flow via gravity to an impressive lineup of stainless steel fermentors, where the juice is left until dry. It is then pressed using a modern basket press, and the wine is drained to French and American oak barrels where it undergoes malolactic fermentation. He then racks the wine to clean barrels, half new, where it is aged for 18 months before bottling. He produces roughly 1,500 cases per year.

When you are ready to drink this wine, it will also benefit from an hour in the decanter. Once you pour a glass, it reveals a deep nose of dried red cherries, cooked cranberries, dark chocolate, cigar box, black pepper and smoked meat. On the palate, it is a very dense wine, with a big core of fruit framed by firm tannins from both wood and skins. There is really nice development, and this wine has a long finish for its youth. Drink 2021 to 2035 with a cocoa/coffee rubbed ribeye or country style ham.

## **2016 Chateau d'Or et de Gueules La Bolida - \$49**

This final selection comes from an estate I have loved for two decades, located in the Costieres de Nimes region of France's Southern Rhone Valley. Of our three features, this one is close to a place you may want to visit, the city of Arles, which was established by the Romans and boasts an amphitheater built in the style of the Colosseum. Otherwise, there is very little reason to make the hour-long drive from the city of Avignon unless you enjoy driving through farmland.

Chateau d'Or et de Gueules was established by Diane de Puymorin in 1998 when she purchased an old property called Domaine de la Petit Cassagne. This was a staple of the Bobby Kacher portfolio, so we were very familiar with the wines. She changed the name to Or et de Gueules to reflect the character of the region and to honor her family crest, which you can see on the bottle. She purchased this estate specifically because the vineyards lie at the southwest corner of the Costieres de Nimes appellation, the closest area to the Mediterranean and atop a deep layer of gravel. She believes the gravel absorbs heat during the day and in the afternoon releases it, and as it rises pulls cool breezes from the nearby water. For this reason, she believes her area can produce wines with more freshness than most Rhone producers.

There are several wines in this portfolio, and they are all great, but her flagship bottling is La Bolida, which means the "little cuvee" in Occitane. It is produced from a 20 acre parcel of 90-year-old Mourvedre vines, which are interplanted with a small amount of equally old Grenache. It is very rare to see Mourvedre vines as old as these in France, as the variety did not gain popularity until the 1970s. This is because Mourvedre is a temperamental variety, which requires a lot of heat to ripen late into the growing season, as well as very specific minerals to be present in the soil. For this reason, almost all Mourvedre plantings in Europe are within 50 miles of the Mediterranean, which fosters a mild climate perfect for this grape.

To make La Bolida the grapes are hand-harvested and destemmed before fermentation is done in stainless steel tanks. After fermentation, the wine is moved to small French barriques and aged for 18 months in a mix of barrels up to five years old. This is the most approachable of our features, and you only need to decant this wine for a half hour for the bouquet to blossom. It then delivers a knockout nose of cooked cherries and blackberries, milk chocolate, lavender and pipe tobacco. On the palate the wine is dense, with long, polished tannins. Drink 2021 to 2030 with braised lamb shanks or flank steak marinated in soy, ginger and garlic.