



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

While we are all familiar with the famous rivers associated with European wines, the Gironde River in Bordeaux, the Rhone River and Loire in other parts of France and the Rhine and Mosel in Germany, are you familiar with those of the Iberian peninsula? The most famous is the Duero River, which stretches across the northwest half of Spain and is the foundation of the Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Toro wine regions. Once this river crosses the Portuguese border and drops down to the Atlantic, it becomes the Douro River, home to Port wines as well as a growing number of high-octane red wines.

Less well known to us is the Tagus River, or in Spanish, Tajo and Portuguese, *Tejo*. It is the longest river in the Iberian Peninsula, originating in the Montes Universales in central-eastern Spain. It flows 626 miles almost due west and empties into the Atlantic Ocean near Lisbon. The river is used extensively for transport, as well the source of drinking water in central Spain and Portugal. The wine producers in this region also depend on the water from this river and tributaries for irrigation of vines in their arid climates. It is thanks to this irrigation that we have our two selections from wine regions surrounding the Tejo River of Portugal.

2016 Cabeça de Toiro Tejo - \$18

In order to explain the importance of the Tejo River for our two features this month, I am going to work backwards from my normal process of white and least expensive wine first. The name of the wine region where this bottle originates takes its name from the Tejo River. However, prior to 2009, the full name of what we now call Tejo was *Ribatejo*. This simply meant *upper Tejo*. The name was changed to better represent the importance of the river to this area.

The soils of the Tejo vary depending on proximity to the river, with those closest to the water being mostly sand mixed with limestone. Tejo is separated from the ocean by the low coastal mountains, which allows for some cooling ocean breezes, but the interior of the region can be quite warm. White wines like our second pick tend to come from the vineyards farthest west, while red varieties dominate the central and eastern regions. The Cabeça de Toiro comes from the central part of the Tejo.

To make this wine, the grapes are grown on the historic São João Batista estate, located roughly an hour and a half northeast of Lisbon. This is one of the warmer sub-zones of the Tejo, so most of the 250-acre property is primarily dedicated to red varieties. This wine is made up of almost equal parts Syrah, Castelão and Touriga-Nacional grapes. Syrah is a well travelled international variety, and Touriga-Nacional is one of the highest quality grapes used across Portugal. Castelão, which is widely planted in central and southern Portugal, is quite prolific and provides roundness and mid-palate texture. This wine was also aged in French oak barrels for nine months before bottling.

When you are ready to serve this wine, please decant it for half an hour before serving. It then shows an intriguing combination of cooked black plums and fresh strawberries, caramel, red licorice, black tea and dried orange peel. On the palate it is moderately dense, with firm tannins and some length. This wine will improve for up to three years, so drink between 2021 and 2025. I recommend serving with foods with a little fat, like braised pork shoulder or heavily seasoned picanha.

2018 Quinta de Chocapalha Arinto - \$16

Moving farther south and to the east, the climate of Tejo cools, as the ocean's influence is greater. Quinta de Chocapalha is located in Alenquer, which is only a stone's throw from the Atlantic Ocean. This area was famous for wine as far back as the Romans and was one of the few places allowed to continue to produce during Moorish occupation. When phylloxera wiped out the vines in this region in the late 1800s, the producers replanted but

shifted production to high volume, poor quality varieties. Over time, the wines became less sought-after, and the region faded into obscurity.

In 1987, when Paulo Tavares da Silva and his wife Alice began looking for what they called their ‘family project,’ they were drawn to the land that would become Quinta de Chocapalha. They purchased almost 200 acres of land and began researching how, and from what, the old wines of the region’s heyday were produced. Systematically, they replanted the vineyards and orchards on the property with the goal of producing world-class wines. Today, they grow 14 different varieties, a mix of classic indigenous grapes and international favorites. Our feature is made entirely from one of the local varieties, Arinto de Bucelas.

The first reference to the Arinto de Bucelas grape was made in 1712 by Vincencio Alarte in the first written treatise on Portuguese viticulture. It is a very old variety whose parentage is not known and whose name creates lots of confusion in the wine world. The basic name Arinto is also used for other varieties in Portugal, including Loureiro to the north, but they are not the same variety. It is a grape that is well suited to the climate of the Tejo, it buds late, crops a good yield and retains high levels of acidity at ripeness. The Tavares da Silva family handles it well, direct pressing the grapes to tank, fermenting at low temperature and then allowing six months of lees contact to build richness.

When you open this wine, let it warm a few degrees on the counter before serving. When you pour a glass, you are quickly greeted by notes of ripe and dried apricots, fresh cut pineapple, fennel seed and touch of sea spray. On the palate it is bright and fresh, with moderate length. This is a great appetizer wine to serve with deviled eggs or mini quiche, and works well with simple pasta dishes with shrimp or clams.

Pastéis de Bacalhau

With room for only one recipe this month, I thought it would be nice to continue the theme with a classic Portuguese dish that will work really nice with the Quinta de Chocapalha Arinto. While a traditional dish for Portugal, it is also a common preparation in many other European cultures. My Italian grandmother made the same dish, calling it Baccala fritters. If you do not want to be bothered with salt cod, you can also use any cooked, flaky left over fish you may have, or even chopped shrimp.

When I prepare salt cod, I like to start around 6 p.m. the evening before by soaking the cod in cold water, in a bowl in the refrigerator. I then change the water before I go to bed, then again when I get up in the morning. You need to keep the fish refrigerated between the water changes.

When you are ready to make dinner, start by boiling the potatoes (preferably in their skins, so the potatoes don’t absorb water). Peel the potatoes and mash or sieve them. Set aside.

Meantime, simmer the cod in enough boiling water to cover until tender, about 20 minutes. Drain the cod, discard the skin and bones, and flake the fish as much as you can with your fingers or a fork to reduce it to threads.

10 ounces salted cod, preferably thick pieces, soaked overnight

14 ounces russet potatoes, unpeeled

1 small onion, very finely chopped

2 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

3 large eggs

Vegetable or canola oil, for frying

Mix the cod with the mashed potatoes and add the eggs, one at a time, and then the onion and parsley. Taste and, if desired, season with salt. You may not need to add any, as the cod itself retains quite a lot of saltiness, in spite of being soaked and boiled. The mixture should be quite stiff, enabling a spoon to stand up in it. If you find it excessively dry, add one or two tablespoons of milk. Allow this to cool completely before deep frying.

With two tablespoons, shape the fishcakes like large eggs and place in the hot oil (370°F), turning them three or four times to get nicely browned all over. When cooked, lift them with a big fork or slotted spoon and place them on kitchen paper to absorb excess fat. Continue molding and frying until you use up the mixture.