



Tim's Wine Market

September 2021

By Tim Varan & JP Donnelly-Davis

One of the most common adjectives I hear customers use when describing the wines they enjoy is “spicy” and/or “peppery.” These attributes are common in some varieties, such as Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc, thanks to the presence of pyrazine compounds which are recognized by the aroma of bell peppers. Other wines, such as Syrah and Grenache, display aromas closer to those of actual peppercorns because of the presence of rotundone. This is the actual compound that creates the distinctive aromas of black and white peppercorns, but it is also found in those grapes. Finally, some winemakers ferment the grapes with some or all of the stems included, which adds an additional spicy, sometimes grassy or brushy smell to the wines. For this month’s selections, we focus on the Southern Hemisphere countries of Argentina and South Africa, and some spicy, peppery wines to demonstrate this category.

Antucura “Barrandica” Cabernet Franc 2019 - \$25

Initially, the owner of Antucura Anne-Caroline Biancheri moved from France to the Mendoza region of Argentina to open a publishing house. She focused on books about Argentine winemaking, the history and architecture of the region and the native flora and fauna. Gradually during this time, her passion for wine continued to grow, and before long, Anne-Caroline purchased a small vineyard in the town of Vista Flores. Located 4,000 feet above sea level in the Uco Valley sub-region, this is where the Antucura wines took shape.

Always invested in the scientific as well as the creative side of winemaking, Anne-Caroline brings both passions to the table at her estate. The soils at Antucura, a name which means “Sun Stones” in the indigenous Mapudungun language, are unique for the Uco Valley in that they consist mostly of pebbles and baseball-sized stones. Similar to Chateaufort in the Rhone Valley, many of the red wines grown in these rocky soils display notes of spice and dried herbs, which was one of the major contributing factors that led to the establishment of vineyards in the area. Additional ties to Anne-Caroline’s native France come in the form of the Cabernet Franc and Merlot clones planted at the estate, both of which were sourced from Bordeaux’s legendary Pomerol commune. She gave a further nod to her homeland by planting with a high vine density per acre, ala Bordeaux, which is uncommon in the dry, sandy soils of Mendoza. She could do this because all of the vineyard work and harvesting is done by hand.

To make this wine, the team at Antucura sources fruit from their oldest Cabernet Franc vines. Green harvests and regular pruning are carried out in the vineyard to maintain quality and regulate yields. As mentioned above, all fruit is harvested by hand and brought to the winery for sorting and destemming. The fruit sees approximately one week of cold maceration in stainless steel before yeast inoculation, after which fermentation takes place. All fruit is pressed using an antique wooden basket press. After malolactic conversion occurs post-fermentation, the wine is racked to used French oak barrels. A second racking is used for natural clarification, and only the tiniest amount of sulfur dioxide goes into the finished wine.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. In addition, serving at cellar temperature will bolster its flavors and aromatic complexity. In the glass, this wine displays notes of red plum, fresh raspberry, wild blackberry, grilled shishito peppers and black peppercorn. Drink now through 2025 with brisket sandwiches, flank steak with chimichurri or cedar plank grilled salmon.

David Finlayson “The Pepper Pot” 2018 - \$19

David Finlayson is a South African winemaker who works exclusively with older, high-elevation vineyards. The Finlayson family immigrated to the Western Cape from Scotland where David’s grandfather, Dr. Maurice Finlayson, was a well-respected microbiologist. After turning his talents to winemaking and vineyard management in the Stellenbosch region, Maurice was joined by his sons, their wives and eventually a slew of grandchildren by the early 1990s. Feeling a little bit cramped on the family estate, Peter Finlayson left the farm and worked for several other producers before purchasing the old Glen Carlou winery in Paarl, known for its old ungrafted vines. His son, David, joined him in the vineyard shortly after.

After a brief yet prestigious post-graduate stint working for Chateau Margaux, David returned to Glen Carlou to accept a position as head winemaker. Together, he and his father Walter revitalized the farm’s older vineyards, specializing in

French varieties such as Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. These wines were a callback to the early days of Stellenbosch winemaking, where many of the wineries in the region had a strong French influence. Today, the wines that bear David's name still have their roots in French viticulture, but are much more in line with the warm-climate wines of the Rhone. The Pepper Pot is therefore comprised of several southern French grape varieties, all of which are well suited for the South African heat.

To make this wine, David sources from his family's estates in both Stellenbosch and Paarl. A warmer-climate growing region, Paarl is an excellent source of older vine Rhone grapes such as Syrah, giving this blend some serious tannins and plenty of dark fruit characteristics. Meanwhile, the Stellenbosch fruit contributes plenty of acidity and savory components such as dried herbs and the pepper for which the wine takes its name. The final blend for this wine is predominantly Syrah, Mourvedre and Tannat, with small amounts of Grenache, Carignan, and Cinsault. Harvest in both vineyard sites takes place in early March and is carried out entirely by hand.

In the winery, most of the grapes are crushed and fermented in open-topped concrete tanks. The Syrah, however, is whole cluster fermented in stainless steel. The inclusion of the stems provides additional tannin and complexity to the finished wine. Post fermentation, the two batches macerate on the skins for an additional seven days before blending and racking to used oak barriques. Time in oak depends on the blend, which changes every vintage, but usually lasts for 8-12 months. This wine is fined but not filtered, and bottled with only minor amounts of added sulfur. Around 6,500 cases are produced each vintage.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant it for at least half an hour. Once this wine has a little bit of time to open up, it is quite dense and complex with notes of black plum, blackcurrant preserve, pipe tobacco, whole black peppercorn, bay leaf and dried redcurrant. Drink now through 2024 with beef and vegetable stew, short ribs, andouille sausage or Cajun cuisine such as jambalaya.

Cast Iron Steak Tips with Charred Peppers & Onions

Now that my wife and I are empty nesters, with our youngest starting college this fall, we have had to modify our own cooking habits. This, coupled with my own move away from eating as many carbs, has me searching for good recipes that can be repurposed, like this one, and served with salad or other veggies. This recipe comes from America's Test Kitchen and is perfect for getting a good sear without the hassle of firing up the grill.

½ cup vegetable oil
6 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 3 tablespoons juice
Salt and pepper
2 pounds sirloin steak tips, trimmed and cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
1 large onion, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano

Whisk ¼ cup oil, garlic, Worcestershire, lemon zest and juice, 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Measure out and reserve 2 tablespoons marinade. Combine remaining marinade and steak tips in 1-gallon zipper-lock bag and toss to coat; press out as much air as possible and seal bag. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour, flipping bag halfway through marinating.

Adjust oven rack to middle position, place 12-inch cast-iron skillet on rack, and heat oven to 500 degrees. Meanwhile, remove steak tips from bag and pat dry with paper towels.

When oven reaches 500 degrees, remove skillet from oven using potholders and place over medium heat; turn off oven. Being careful of hot skillet handle, add 2 tablespoons oil and heat until just smoking. Place half of steak tips in skillet and

cook until well browned on all sides and beef registers 130 to 135 degrees (for medium), 8 to 10 minutes; transfer to serving platter and tent with aluminum foil. Repeat with 1 tablespoon oil and remaining steak tips; transfer to platter. Let steak tips rest while making vegetables.

Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-low heat until just smoking. Add bell peppers, onion, ⅓ cup water and ¼ teaspoon salt. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until water evaporates and vegetables are tender and lightly charred, 5 to 10 minutes. Off heat, stir in reserved marinade, parsley, oregano and any accumulated meat juices. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve steak tips with vegetables and rice, pasta or salad.