



Tim's Wine Market

October 2021

By JP Donnelly

When a customer in our Orlando shop asks for “red blends,” chances are we will inevitably steer them towards France, Spain, or any of our favorite Old World wine regions. This is simply due to the fact that most European wines are blends of multiple native varieties, a practice dating back to the early days of the Roman Empire. However, there are also several European wine regions whose reputation hinges solely on one native grape- Burgundy is a very good example of this, though far from the only one. This month, we will focus on two Old World wine regions and the varieties that have grown to define them.

Mary Taylor Cahors 2017 - \$18

Though Malbec is often associated with Argentina, the grape actually originates in France, on the rolling hills overlooking the Lot River in the region of Cahors. Located east of Bordeaux, almost equally distant from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, this rural part of France is heavily forested, and enjoys the favorable aspects of both bodies of water; hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. The river Lot, which cuts through the region, serves to moderate both of these extreme seasons. Vineyards in Cahors are planted on gravel and limestone terraces, some dating back to the Roman occupation, with the finest vineyard sites lying on the plateaus, called *causses*, at a significantly higher elevation.

The wines enjoyed immense popularity in the Middle Ages and beyond, with French luminaries such as Charlemagne and Cardinal Richelieu enthusiastically praising the “Black Wine of Cahors.” From the port of Bordeaux, they were shipped as far away as England and modern-day Ukraine. However, the merchants of Bordeaux eventually levied a crippling tax on the wines of their inland neighbors, even refusing to ship them until all Bordeaux from that vintage had been sold. No surprise, this crushed the Cahors wine industry and the wines began to drift into obscurity. This began the “dormant” period of the region of Cahors, further exacerbated by the phylloxera epidemic of the 1880s and a devastating frost in 1956. However, in the ruins of the vineyards came opportunity- the local Malbec grape, with its thicker skins, proved itself to be more frost-resistant, and during a massive campaign of re-planting quickly grew to become the dominant variety of the region, a position it enjoys to this day.

This wine is sourced and imported by our friend Mary Taylor, a modern-day negociant (wine merchant) who sources fruit from many of Europe’s smaller appellations. Mary works exclusively with small family-owned vineyards, with a special appreciation for low-intervention and biodynamic viticulture. In the case of this Cahors, she works with local winemaker Didier Pelvillain in the tiny village of Albas. The label bears his mother’s name, Odile Delpon, who took over the family farm in the late 60’s and shifted production from saffron and tobacco back to wine made exclusively from Malbec.

To make this wine, Didier sources the majority of his fruit from the family’s original vineyard holdings in Albas, which underwent extensive replanting in 1989. Additional fruit comes from his newly-acquired vineyards in neighboring Preyssac, where the concentration of limestone in the soils is slightly higher. Like many French winemakers we think of as “natural,” the winery has abstained from chemicals or mechanization since its inception, Didier has taken that one step further and is currently applying for biodynamic certification. All fruit is harvested and sorted by hand before spontaneous fermentation using native yeasts. The wine is then racked into used French oak *foudre* for 12 months before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant it for at least half an hour in order to realize its full potential. Once you do, this is a complex, aromatic style of Malbec with notes of fresh blackcurrant, black plum peel, menthol, dried lavender, and wet earth. Drink now through 2023 with marinated short ribs, brisket, or roast chicken with heirloom tomatoes.

Potente Montsant 2019 - \$19

If Cahors is defined by the Malbec grape, then Montsant is defined by Garnacha. Located in Catalonia, this mountainous region of Spain is very similar to its well-known cousin Priorat, with traditions dating back to the Middle Ages and the Carthusian monasteries which introduced viticulture to the area. Though the monks have long since

departed, the valuable techniques put in place centuries ago remain, set against the dramatic backdrop of the Montsant mountain ranges.

In a region where summer temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, high elevation vineyards are practically a necessity in order to prevent over-ripeness. Producer Eva Lopez exclusively works with growers located in the Capcanes mountains in the northern portion of Montsant, known for the balance and natural acidity of their old-vine Garnacha. Eva has spent years developing wines in Catalonia that focus on indigenous varieties - despite the popularity of old vine Garnacha from this ancient region, in recent years it has ceded some ground to French varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Similar to regions such as Corsica and Sardinia which have experienced a “renaissance” among younger winemakers, Catalonia has embraced not only native grape varieties but traditional viticultural techniques, and the Potente is a fantastic example of both.

To make this wine, all fruit is selected through traditional “field blend” techniques. This means that, rather than cultivating specific blocks of certain varieties and blending the finished product together, many native varieties are cultivated within the same vineyard area. Each cluster is hand-harvested at optimal ripeness, though fortunately in Montsant the majority of red varieties ripen at the same time. The approximate blend for the Potente is 65% Garnacha, 15% Merlot, 10% Samsó (Carignan), and 10% Syrah. After harvest, this wine spends several weeks in cement tanks before fermentation is complete to allow for maximum color and flavor extraction. From here, the wine is racked into a mixture of new and old French oak barriques for 9 months before filtration and bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. Upon decanting, each variety contributes to the palate although Garnacha is very much in the driver’s seat. Notes of strawberry preserve, cooked redcurrant, black plum, black tea leaf, and baking chocolate characterize the finished wine. Drink now through 2024 with chili con carne, ham croquettes, or beef stew.

Pasta with Radicchio & Walnuts

- 1 tbsp olive oil**
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled but whole**
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes**
- 1 small head radicchio, 8-10 ounces**
halved, cored, and thinly sliced
- 8 ounces pasta, I used Busiati, but any other shape will work. Penne or fusilli will be fine.**
- 1/2 cup walnut halves, toasted in a 350F oven**
to 10-15 minutes, then chopped
- 1/4 cup shredded Gruyere cheese**
- 1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese**

Currently I have two conflicting events happening, and this is how we get to this recipe. The first is I am watching Stanley Tucci’s *Discovering Italy*, a series he released earlier this year on CNN. I missed it the first time around so am now watching on HBO Max, and let me tell you, it is fantastic. As you can imagine, each episode revolves around food and in the first few episodes pasta is a consistent theme. Concurrently I am trying to eat less animal protein, on the recommendation of my doctor. Also, as an avid reader of all things Michael Pollan and Mark Bittman, I feel like I make a small contribution to a healthier planet with each vegetable bite I take. So in my effort towards a healthier lifestyle, and pursuit of interesting pasta dishes, here is one that I really love. The bitterness of radicchio is tempered by cooking it first, but the lingering bite works nicely with both Malbec and Garnacha. - TV

1. Cook the pasta according to directions for al dente. Reserve 1 cup of pasta water.
2. Add the olive oil to a 12 inch skillet and heat. When the oil is shimmering add the two cloves of garlic and move them around until they are brown on all sides, then remove and discard.
3. Add the pepper flakes and move those around for a second or two, then add the radicchio. Allow it to sit, without stirring for a couple of minutes until it begins to brown on the edges and soften. Stir once or twice and cook until soft.
4. Add the toasted walnuts and stir for a few seconds to incorporate. Add the cooked pasta and continue stirring until the radicchio is evenly distributed. Stir in the Gruyere cheese and add 1/4 cup of the pasta water. Stir until the sauce is smooth and creamy. Add extra water 1/4 cup at a time if the mixture is too dry.
5. Plate into warm bowls and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese to serve.