



Tim's Wine Market

April 2022

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This month I have selected two wines that while from different countries, are made only a hundred miles apart. I selected them because they are both wonderful examples of Mediterranean reds that can be served in warm weather. I would also suggest giving them a slight chill if you are drinking them on a hot day, as they both possess a certain lip-smacking deliciousness that makes them refreshing as well. - TV

Espelt Garnatxa Negra "Old Vines" 2020 - \$15

Our first feature comes from one of the summer playgrounds of Europe, the DO of Empordà in Spain's Catalonia region. The first vineyards here were established by the ancient Greeks, who founded the coastal trading post of Empúries in 575 BC, over 1000 years before the Grenache grape would be identified. After the usual Iberian rigamarole; Roman invasion, Carthaginian invasion, another Roman invasion, and the Moorish occupation, this became one of Spain's first region's to be liberated from the Moors. When Catalonia came under the rule of Charlemagne and his vast empire, the Diocese of Girona was tasked with overseeing Empordà and, like many religious orders of the day, practiced viticulture extensively. Though Grenache would originate in the neighboring province of Aragon and spread throughout Spain, Aragon's close ties to the Catalan kingdoms brought the variety to Empordà early, around the 13th century AD. Since then the variety has become almost ubiquitous to the wines of the region.

Our feature is produced by Anna Espelt whose family members have been cultivating vines in the region for hundreds of years. The family's non-contiguous vineyard sites produce radically different wines, despite being largely planted to the same varieties, and around the turn of the 21st century Anna made the bold leap to bottle each site separately in order to showcase these differences. This was a turning point in the Espelt family's business model, as prior to 2000 they would sell off their fruit to local co-op wineries. Today, Anna works with four different vineyard sites, ranging from the Mediterranean coast to the base of the Pyrenees themselves. Our feature this month hails from the latter.

The "Old Vine" Garnatxa Negra (the Catalan spelling of the variety) comes from the Rabós vineyard, and represents not only the oldest vines but also the highest altitude plantings on the estate. Located within the boundaries of the Alberes Nature Reserve, this vineyard is planted to Garnatxa Negra vines with well over a century of age, grown on sandy slate and granite soils and using completely organic practices to boot. To make this wine, the fruit is both harvested and destemmed by hand. After a 48-hour cold maceration, the wine ferments in stainless steel tank using native yeasts. Once dry, it is racked to neutral French oak barrels for 3 months before light filtration and bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. On the nose, this wine delivers textbook aromatics of Garnatxa Negra with a distinct maritime influence, with notes of dried cranberry, red plum, black raspberry preserve, dried herbs, black pepper, and earth. Drink now through 2025 with pork belly tacos, marinated skirt steak, or other chicken and rice dishes.

Chateau d'Oupia "Les Hérétiques" 2019 - \$15

Over the Pyrenees, yet still hugging the Mediterranean coastline, France's Languedoc-Roussillon region has more in common with Catalonia than one might think. Both regions came under the control of Charlemagne's empire during the 8th century, during which time viticulture flourished and monasteries were constructed. Much of the Languedoc-Roussillon actually belonged to the Crown of Aragon during the Middle Ages, meaning that winemakers here had much more in common with their Spanish neighbors than with the rest of modern France! The influence of Aragon meant that local varieties Grenache and Carignan were spread throughout the Languedoc-Roussillon, and to this day remain some of the widest planted varieties in the region.

Chateau d'Oupia is located in the heart of Minervois, a mountain region characterized by fierce winds, limestone soils, and very old vines. Until recently most Languedoc-Roussillon wine was sold in bulk, designed more for quantity than quality.

André Iché, founder of Chateau d'Oupia, never produced cheap bulk wines, but nevertheless sold off all his fruit to negociants until the 1970s when a visitor from Burgundy encouraged him to convert to estate bottling. André liked this idea so much that, in 1973, he became one of the founding members of the Minervois AOC! Purchasing ancient vineyard sites for pennies on the dollar, he embraced low-intervention winemaking after learning about the effects commercial pesticides had on the health of the vines (not to mention the people who worked with them). Though André passed away in 2007 after a lifetime of viticulture, his daughter Marie-Pierre has stepped up to run the estate, with old friends of her father frequently dropping by to advise and open a bottle or two.

“Les Hérétiques” is an old-vine cuvée named after one of the most infamous events in Languedoc history: the Albigensian Crusade, where a Gnostic group known as the Cathars was wiped out after the murder of a Papal legate in the 13th century. Many of the castles in the region, including Chateau d'Oupia, were built during and after the battles that took place and can be viewed and visited to this day. Though produced in Minervois, Marie-Pierre uses the broader “IGP Pays d'Herault” designation, essentially a rustic “country wine,” in order to have a little more freedom with her blending and fermentation techniques. Despite the looser regulations she still remains true to her father’s winemaking philosophy, with an emphasis on traditional methods, no chemical intervention, and older vines.

To make this wine, Marie-Pierre sources from high elevation parcels of Carignan and Grenache, all grown on limestone soils. The blend is approximately 80% Carignan most vintages, with Grenache making up the remaining 20%. After green harvests throughout the season, to reduce yields and increase concentration, the grapes are picked by hand and brought to the chateau. From there, the Carignan goes through a full carbonic maceration in stainless steel, where it remains to finish fermentation. The Grenache is de-stemmed by hand and fermented separately in concrete tanks. Both wines undergo full malolactic conversion before blending and bottling. The finished wine is lightly filtered with minimal added SO₂.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour, and do not be afraid to serve it slightly chilled! This wine delivers quintessential Minervois aromatics of wild cherry, dried strawberry, dried blackberry, fennel bulb, and herbs de Provence. Drink now through 2025 with roast chicken with rosemary, tomato vegetable soups, or ham croquettes.

Stuffed Mushroom Caps

24 large white mushrooms (1 3/4 to 2 inches in diameter), stems removed and reserved

1/4 cup olive oil

1/4 teaspoon table salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper, divided

1 small shallot, minced

2 garlic cloves, minced

1/4 cup dry white wine

1 ounce Manchego cheese, shredded (1/4 cup)

1 teaspoon malt vinegar

1/2 teaspoon fennel seed

1/2 teaspoon dried sage

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Since my youngest days when I would help my parents prepare for dinner parties I have always loved making and eating stuffed mushrooms. Now my wife and I eat less meat, so I recently served these with a salad as the main course and we loved it! This recipe is highly adaptable so do not run out to buy Manchego cheese. You can use sharp cheddar, Parmigiano-Reggiano or anything else you have in the refrigerator.

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Toss mushroom caps with 2 tablespoons oil, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Arrange caps gill side up on prepared sheet and roast until juice is released, about 20 minutes. Flip caps and roast until well browned, about 10 minutes; set aside.

Meanwhile, pulse reserved stems, shallot, garlic, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper in food processor until finely chopped, 10 to 14 pulses.

Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in 8-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add stem mixture to skillet and cook until golden brown and moisture has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add wine and cook until nearly evaporated and mixture thickens slightly, about 1 minute. Transfer to bowl and let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Stir in cheddar, vinegar, fennel seeds, sage, and pepper flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Flip caps gill side up. Divide stuffing evenly among caps. (Stuffed caps can be refrigerated for 1 day; increase baking time to 10 to 15 minutes.) Return caps to oven and bake until stuffing is heated through, 5 to 7 minutes. Serve.