



Tim's Wine Market

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In the world of red winemaking, is bigger always better? The answer to this question is complex and largely depends on consumer preference, but this month we look at two examples of New World wines that manage to balance extraction with precision. The results speak for themselves, delivering full-bodied reds without appearing “clunky” or overly tannic. In addition, we look at several occasionally under-appreciated varieties well suited for this style of winemaking and the warmer climates of the Americas.

Drum Canyon Cellars GSM 2017 - \$25

The story of this winery project begins more than 40 years ago when Jim and Mary Dierberg purchased the historic Hermannhof Winery in the most unlikely of locations: Hermann, Missouri. Both Midwest natives, the Dierbergs were drawn to the winery for its pre-Prohibition history and extensive use of hybrid grape varieties. However, their curiosity and love of Old World wines eventually led them to Bordeaux and the Napa Valley to search for vineyard property in both regions. Finally, after touring Santa Barbara County and its fledgling wine industry, the couple decided to set up shop in this coastal growing region.

Establishing Dierberg Vineyards in 1996, Jim and Mary initially focused on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which were well-suited to the cool climate and high elevations of the Santa Maria Valley AVA. Popularity soon outpaced their limited production, however, and in just a few short years Jim and Mary were already searching for favorable land on which to plant a second vineyard. Fortunately, the Santa Rita Hills AVA just down the road had plenty of acreage up for grabs, and the Dierbergs purchased a steep hillside plot that would later be christened the Drum Canyon Vineyard.

There in the Santa Rita Hills, the California sunshine is mitigated by persistent coastal breezes and heightened elevation, which help to preserve natural acidity in the grapes grown there. Though Pinot Noir was an early staple at Drum Canyon, the Syrah grape flourishes in similar conditions, which quickly became a fan favorite (and Jim's favorite as well). Recently, and in part due to warmer growing conditions, other Rhone varieties have been planted in the vineyard, including Grenache and Mourvedre, and these three form the backbone of our first feature this month: the Drum Canyon GSM.

Since the planting of the Drum Canyon vineyard in 2003, a number of winemakers have purchased fruit from the Dierbergs, including Pankauski Cellars in the Anderson Valley. This particular bottling from Pankauski is minuscule, with only 175 cases produced, and consists predominantly of Syrah with younger-vine Grenache and Mourvedre adding ripeness and structure.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. On the palate, there is plenty to write home about, with notes of cooked black cherry, dried cranberry, sage, black fig and hints of caramel. Drink now through 2023 with steak tips, grilled chicken with asparagus or pasta with Bolognese sauce.

El Enemigo Bonarda “El Mirador” 2017 - \$29

Ask most consumers and they will tell you that Malbec is the staple variety of Argentina. However, if you ask Argentine winemakers what their favorite variety is to work with, the answer is frequently Bonarda. A large part of this is due to the grape's versatility, capable of producing fruit-driven, fun wines as well as complex, age-worthy examples.

Originally hailing from Piemonte in northern Italy, Bonarda is well suited to a variety of winemaking styles. The key is the vines must grow at high elevation, which in Argentina is easy as almost all the vineyards are planted more than 2,000 feet above sea level. In the case of this particular wine, the goal was to create a full-bodied, highly extracted rendition of Bonarda, the type which enjoyed immense popularity before the Malbec boom of the 1990s.

El Enemigo is a project of the legendary Catena family winery, whose wines have been featured in our New World Red Club on numerous occasions (including the “Tinto Historico” back in March). In this case it is Adrianna Catena, daughter of Nicolas Catena Zapata, who has created the Enemigo label, drawing on her own experiences and deep love of Spanish

and Argentine history to create these traditional-minded wines. Working alongside her is head winemaker, soil expert and animal lover Alejandro Vigil, who has scouted out the best vineyard sites to express their vision.

Among the sites identified by Alejandro, the El Mirador vineyard boasts several advantages, including calcareous clay soils and northwest-facing sun exposure, which facilitate the ripening of Bonarda. Many of the vines here are upwards of 50 years old, which decreases the grape's natural vigor, further concentrating flavor. In addition, a small amount of Cabernet Franc from the nearby Rivadavia and Gualtallary vineyard sites is used for blending to bolster acidity and complexity in the finished wine. Due to the extreme altitude and age of the vines, all harvesting takes place by hand, further cementing its "old-fashioned" nature.

To make this wine, the Bonarda and Cabernet Franc are harvested simultaneously and brought to the winery. After sorting and careful de-stemming, the two varieties ferment separately in neutral oak barrels, with an extended skin maceration to extract as much color as possible. Once fermentation is complete, the two wines are blended together and racked into a mixture of old and used French and American oak barrels. The final blend for this wine is 85% Bonarda and 15% Cabernet Franc. The finished wine sees an additional 18 months of maturation in barrel before filtration and bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour before serving. On the nose, aromatics of black raspberry, ripe blackcurrant, plum leaf and baking chocolate abound, with hints of sage and bay leaf from the Cabernet Franc. Drink now through 2024 with lamb chops, grilled skirt steak or pulled pork empanadas.

Easy Chicken Empanadas

When I visited Argentina in 2013, one of the many adventures the Zuccardi family planned for us was making empanadas, a traditional filled pastry that is eaten as a snack or meal. When looking at the day's itinerary, I noticed that the notes said to dress for outdoor activities, which seemed strange when we were told that we would be cooking after our morning tasting. Reading further, I discovered that an hour of "grape harvesting" was snuck in between the tasting and the cooking. Apparently not all in my party read as closely as I did, because several of the ladies in our group showed up wearing heels, which are not effective footwear for vineyard work, and one guy wore a suit sans tie (I still remember his smug look when I arrived that morning wearing my hiking outfit, and his horrified expression when he was explained the day's agenda).

After the tasting, they drove us to an old Bonarda vineyard where a few pickers gave us directions on how to harvest clusters of grapes. In front of us stood a half-ton harvest bin that looked like those you see in the groves during the citrus harvests in Florida, except those for grapes do not have side vents. The joke among the pickers was we needed to fill it before the cooking demonstration. After almost an hour, our rag-tag group of pickers almost covered the bottom of the bin, a humbling demonstration that probably represented a few pounds of grapes. Sadly, the cooking demonstration was cancelled, but we were greeted under the canopy of vines with hot-from-the-oven empanadas and the Zuccardi family's top sparkling wine. We enjoyed our pre-lunch snack while the pickers filled the bin in roughly 30 minutes.

This recipe is one I discovered when I returned, and it's perfect for weeknight meals since it uses store bought pie crust. While not terribly authentic, the results are delicious and you can have dinner on the table in about an hour. - TV

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 onion, chopped fine

2 jalapeño chiles, stemmed, seeded and minced

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 teaspoon paprika, preferably smoked

1 pound ground chicken, *not 100% breast meat as you need a little fat*

Salt and pepper

¼ cup minced fresh cilantro

¼ cup pitted green olives, chopped

¼ cup raisins

2 (9-inch) store-bought pie dough rounds

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and jalapeños and cook until starting to soften, about 2 minutes. Add cumin and paprika and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add chicken, ¾ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until no longer pink, about 4 minutes. Transfer chicken mixture to bowl and stir to cool slightly, about 2 minutes. Stir in cilantro, olives and raisins. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Cut each dough round in half. Arrange one quarter of filling on 1 side of each dough half, leaving ½-inch border. Brush edges of dough with water, fold dough over filling and crimp edges with fork to seal. Transfer to prepared baking sheet. Using fork, pierce each empanada twice to allow steam to escape. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve.