



# Tim's Wine Market

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It has been more than three years since I last selected a Côtes du Rhône for the Explorer Club so we are overdue for a feature. The reason is that I consider the red wines of the Côtes du Rhône to be something of a “universal donor” when it comes to food pairing. These wines, which have moderate body, tannin and acidity, work well across the foods of almost any cuisine, from Asian flavors like soy and hoisin, to European flavors like tomatoes and herbs. And of course these wines also work great with just about anything that has some char from being cooked over an open fire. Versatility be thy name.

This month we will sample two sides of the Côtes du Rhône category; the first a mature but hardly old example of a red. Then we turn our attention to an excellent bottle from the lesser known white Côtes du Rhône, made by one of our favorite estates in the region. Both are extremely versatile although space only allows for a recipe for the red wine. However, the recipe from last month, the Pasta alla Nerano would be excellent with the Espigouette Côtes du Rhône Blanc.

## **Jean LePetite Côtes du Rhône 2015 - \$16**

There is not much story about this wine as it is a proprietary label produced for one of my importers. Generally I do not select wines like this as there is not much to say about them, but this one is quite interesting for a couple of reasons. Due to the nature of why this wine is made, the source is protected by a non-disclosure agreement, which is quite common in these circumstances. Often times a winery with excess capacity will sell off the wines under a private label because they can charge more than selling the wine to cooperatives or brokers. In this case the importer was so impressed that he bought 2 containers, that is 2400 cases of the wine, to sell in Ohio and Florida. Unfortunately his enthusiasm was not shared by his sales force and the wine has languished in his temperature controlled warehouse. When I met with him in June I tasted the wine and think it is superb, especially since it is seven years old. It is a rare chance to experience a wine that is mature, but far from tired.

What we do know about this wine is that it is produced by a domaine that harvests each parcel separately, depending on ripeness. Like almost all Côtes du Rhône this wine is predominantly Grenache, with a heavy dollop of Syrah and small amounts of Mourvèdre and Carignan. In the Southern Rhône Grenache ripens consistently and produces a soft wine with plenty of alcohol. Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan are blended to build aromatics, structure and acidity. Fermentation of all these varieties is done in stainless steel tanks, then blending and aging in large oak foudre for six months before bottling.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. On the palate, this wine shows notes of full maturity with notes of cooked black cherry, dried black plum, raspberry preserve, dried herbs, black pepper, and clove. Drink now through 2023 with short ribs and mashed potatoes, charcuterie with plenty of olives, or casserole dishes with zucchini and summer squash.

## **Domaine de l'Espigouette Côtes du Rhône Blanc 2021- \$25**

Three years ago we were fortunate to meet Adrien Latour, and sample his range of southern French wines in the Orlando store. Tasting through this line-up was an insight into the traditional viticulture of the region, and needless to say the wines were a hit. However, one of the biggest surprises was the estate's white Côtes du Rhône, a category we had been searching for a good example of for some time. Since that time it has been a staple on the shelf in Orlando and it seems appropriate to introduce to everyone this month.

Founded in 1921, this small family winery is located in the commune of Violès in the southern Rhône. For 4 generations, the Latours have produced age-worthy red wines from numerous appellations, including Rasteau, Gigondas, and Vacqueyras. Since its inception, the Latour family have focused on low intervention vineyard techniques, much as the early winemakers of the Rhône did, including horse-plowing and debudding by hand. This attention to detail in the vineyard has long been considered a benchmark of quality. In addition, the wide variety of soil types present in the

family's vineyards bolster the complexity of the wines. Galet soils, the rocky types present in Gigondas and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, contribute additional ripeness and notes of dried herbs in the family's red wines.

For this white Côtes du Rhône the emphasis is on minerality and freshness, with different vineyard sites utilized to produce the best fruit. Sandstone-based soils in the family's outlying vineyards provide acidity and finesse, and most of the Grenache Blanc used in this cuvée comes from these slopes. The Viognier which makes up the majority of this wine is sourced from Galet soils, whose heat retention is essential for the ripening of this late-budding variety. The Viognier is harvested earlier in the season to prevent over-ripeness, and both vineyard parcels undergo manual green harvest in order to reduce yields and concentrate flavor. After harvest is complete, the fruit is brought to the family's cellar in Violès for sorting and de-stemming. Fermentation begins in stainless steel tank, with each variety fermented separately. Once dry, the Grenache Blanc and Viognier are blended together and spend 6 months maturing in concrete tank, where the wine undergoes malolactic conversion. The wine is then filtered and bottled. The final blend for the 2021 vintage is 70% Viognier and 30% Grenache Blanc.

When you open this wine, we suggest serving it closer to cellar temperature than ice-cold: about 55 degrees should suffice. In addition, this wine, as most aromatic whites, benefits from decanting for up to half an hour. On the palate, this is a full-bodied example of a Southern Rhône white with notes of white peach, apple blossom, pineapple, lemon curd, and wet stones. Drink now through 2024 with grilled sea bass, pork chops with butter and garlic, or roast chicken with rosemary.

### **Spice-Crusted Medium-Rare Beef Short Ribs**

Conventional wisdom in western cooking calls to cook beef short ribs low and slow, letting the connective tissues melt into a rich sauce while the meat becomes fork tender. Eastern cooking techniques treat this cut very differently, more like steak, with a process that calls for cooking until the meat is medium rare, then giving it a quick sear to develop a flavorful crust. This version combines the best of both techniques with a rich pan sauce served over thinly sliced, seared meat. It is the perfect accompaniment to the red Côtes du Rhône, or just about any medium to full bodied bottle.

#### **Short Ribs**

**1 tablespoon kosher salt**

**1 tablespoon pepper**

**1 tablespoon packed brown sugar**

**1 teaspoon smoked paprika**

**1 teaspoon ground coriander**

**½ teaspoon ground allspice**

**2 pounds boneless beef short ribs 1½ to 2**

**inches thick, 2 inches wide, and 4 to 5 inches long, trimmed**

**1 tablespoon vegetable oil**

#### **Browned Butter Steak Sauce**

**8 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**2 tablespoons minced shallot**

**1 garlic clove, minced**

**¼ cup Worcestershire sauce**

**2 tablespoons red wine vinegar**

**1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**

**1 tablespoon packed brown sugar**

**1 tablespoon soy sauce**

**2 teaspoons pepper**

FOR THE SHORT RIBS: Combine salt, pepper, sugar, smoked paprika, coriander, and allspice in small bowl. Pat short ribs dry and sprinkle all over with salt mixture. Transfer to large plate, cover, and refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to 24 hours.

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 275 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Evenly space short ribs on prepared rack. Roast until meat registers between 135 and 140 degrees, 50 minutes to 1 hour. Remove from oven and let rest for 10 minutes.

FOR THE BROWNED BUTTER STEAK SAUCE: Meanwhile, melt butter in medium saucepan over medium heat. Cook, whisking frequently, until milk solids in butter are color of milk chocolate and have nutty aroma, 3 to 5 minutes. Add shallot and garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Remove from heat and immediately whisk in Worcestershire, vinegar, Dijon, sugar, soy sauce, and pepper; set aside.

Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Sear short ribs until well browned on top and bottom, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to carving board and let rest for 5 minutes.

Reheat sauce over medium heat, whisking frequently, until hot, 1 to 2 minutes. Slice short ribs against grain as thin as possible. Serve, passing sauce separately.