



# Tim's Wine Market

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France's Gascogne region has long been considered a hub of the country's gastronomy. Although, to be fair, this claim is made by every region of France. Here is the birthplace of both Armagnac and foie gras, as well as larger-than-life characters such as d'Artagnan and Cyrano de Bergerac. In English hands, this region became one of the first to export wine to the United Kingdom, and in French hands the final battles of the Hundred Years' War were fought and won here. With so much history and gastronomy packed into this southwest corner of France, it is phenomenal that the wines of the region now have a promoter in Alain Brumont to represent Gascogne on the international market.

Alain Brumont grew up in Madiran, one of the southwest's finest regions for red wine production. Long ago, this region was prized for its red wines, and in fact was regarded as being higher quality than that of neighboring Bordeaux in the 14th century. Unfortunately, after the wealthy merchants of Bordeaux passed a series of restrictive laws regarding shipping, the wines of Madiran were effectively shut off from the export market. Over time, the region began to fade into obscurity, with many wineries switching to livestock or fruit production and much of the surviving wines were distilled into Armagnac.

However, all was not lost, as a handful of proud local winemakers still produced wine using the techniques and grape varieties for which the region had been famous. When Alain returned to his homeland after studying winemaking in Bordeaux, he quickly acquired Chateau Montus, which was once known as the finest estate in the region. Replanting vineyards and fixing up the estate paid off, and critics and wine lovers alike praised the new wines from this forgotten estate. A few years later he would take control of Chateau Bouscassé, his family's winery, and implement similar changes. Today, Alain controls over 1000 acres of vineyard land, spread across both estates and consisting of several distinct terroirs and micro-climates.

## **2020 Le Blanc d'Alain Brumont Pacherenc-du-Vic-Bilh-Sec - \$22**

Though initially achieving fame for his red wines, Alain has always been interested in the native white wines of Gascogne. This category suffered greatly in the 20th century, with the majority of production being sold off to Armagnac distillers or made into cheap, easy-drinking examples. Brumont produces several excellent examples of dry white wines, starting with this exotic bottling.

Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh comes from the Béarnaise phrase "pachets en renc," which refers to the rows of vines that once carpeted the region. It is one of the only appellations designated exclusively for the production of white wine. Though the majority of production is sweet, Alain chooses to vinify this wine completely dry, hence the "sec" designation.

When selecting the fruit for this wine, Alain typically sources from both of his flagship estates, Montus and Bouscassé, as well as younger-vine plantings throughout the appellation. The majority of the fruit used in this vintage comes from the terraced clay and limestone vineyards at Chateau Bouscassé, which he prefers for the mineral-driven qualities it imparts on the finished wine. In addition, these sites see slightly less heat and sunshine than the rocky vineyards of Chateau Montus, which helps prevent over-ripeness. The finished blend consists mostly of Petit Courbu, an aromatic variety that requires plenty of sunshine, along with small amounts of Petit Manseng that are blended in to provide additional acidity.

When you open this wine, you will want to serve it well chilled, but not ice cold. In addition, I recommend decanting this wine as both varieties are quite aromatic. On the palate, this wine overdelivers with notes of fresh apricot, peach pit, candied lemon peel, peeled golden delicious apple, and honeysuckle. Drink now through 2025 with pate and homemade bread, grilled sea bass, or crab cakes.

## **2017 Bouscassé Pinot Noir - \$29**

Unlike the Pacherenc described above, this Pinot Noir is sourced exclusively from a single vineyard block at Chateau Bouscassé, re-planted by Alain in the mid-1990s. Though at first glance this may seem like an unlikely variety to grow one of France's sunniest and, indeed, warmest regions, there is some historical precedence behind his decision. The same

monastic orders that propagated Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Burgundy also carried those varieties throughout Gasconne, cultivating both throughout the region. Though the monks are mostly gone, one can find both of these varieties grown at higher altitudes throughout southwest France.

To make this wine, all fruit is harvested by hand as it is next to impossible to drive a tractor up the steep hillsides at Bouscassé! After hand sorting at the winery the fruit undergoes cold maceration before a warm fermentation in stainless steel. After 3-4 weeks on the skins, the wine is raked to gently used French oak barrels where it undergoes malolactic conversion. The finished wine then sees a brief maturation in predominantly new oak before bottling.

When you open this wine, similar to its cousins in Burgundy you will want to serve it closer to cellar temperature, about 55-57 degrees Fahrenheit. To achieve this, simply put the bottle in your refrigerator for 15-20 minutes before serving. On the palate, this wine is full-bodied but far from overripe, with notes of tart red cherry, dried raspberry, pink peppercorn, roibos tea, and smoke. Drink now through 2025 with duck breast, beef stew with pearl onions, or any sort of quiche.

### **Frisée Salad with Duck Leg Confit and Cranberry Gastrique**

This is a classic application of the Gasconne delicacy Duck Confit. However, rather than go into the process of how to make the duck confit itself, we pick this recipe up with how to use it, in this case a lovely winter salad. While you are certainly entitled to make your own duck confit, I prefer to buy mine pre-made from Wild Fork Foods, D'Artagnan or Whole Foods and crisp it up in the skillet. For those who do not like duck you can certainly substitute a dark meat chicken quarter, or chicken breast for that matter. Also, feel free to substitute extra olive oil for the duck fat in the salad dressing.

#### **Cranberry Gastrique**

**½ cup plus ½ teaspoon red wine  
vinegar, divided  
½ cup (2 ounces) frozen cranberries  
⅓ cup sugar  
¼ cup ruby port  
2 fresh thyme sprigs  
¼ teaspoon kosher salt  
¼ teaspoon pepper**

**FOR THE CRANBERRY GASTRIQUE:** Combine ½ cup vinegar, cranberries, sugar, port, thyme sprigs, salt, and pepper in small saucepan. Bring to boil over medium-high heat. Mash cranberries with potato masher and cook until mixture is thickened and reduced to about ¾ cup, 4 to 7 minutes. Off heat, stir in remaining ½ teaspoon vinegar. Let cool completely, about 1 hour. Sauce will thicken to a syrupy consistency as it cools. Discard thyme sprigs. (Cooled gastrique can be refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.)

#### **Salad**

**1 shallot, minced  
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
4 teaspoons Dijon mustard  
½ teaspoon table salt  
½ teaspoon pepper  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons melted duck fat  
1 head frisée (6 ounces), torn into bite-size  
pieces  
1 fennel bulb, stalks discarded, bulb halved,  
cored, and sliced thin  
1 Granny Smith apple, cored and cut into 2-  
inch-long matchsticks  
4 crisped duck confit legs**

**FOR THE SALAD:** Combine shallot, vinegar, mustard, salt, and pepper in large bowl. Slowly whisk in oil and duck fat until thoroughly incorporated. Add frisée, fennel, and apple to bowl with vinaigrette and toss until evenly coated with dressing. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Divide salad and duck legs evenly among serving plates. Serve with gastrique.