



Tim's Wine Market

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La Ronciere Cabernet Franc 2018 - \$25

The wines made from Cabernet Franc grape variety are having a moment right now, with a popularity that I would equate to that of Brussels sprouts a decade ago. Remember when no one ate Brussels sprouts because of a bad experience from their childhood, typically involving a school cafeteria? Then around 2010 they became the new hot veggie, and now you cannot go to a restaurant that does not have their spin on this maligned vegetable. Cabernet Franc is enjoying the same moment. For years most New World winemakers only used Cabernet Franc as a blending variety, like the spicy notes it contributes to Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Now this variety is gaining a lot of new fans as winemakers have learned to produce examples that are not dominated by the variety's vegetal green aromas.

At the core of all Cabernet Franc is the presence of a family of compounds called pyrazines, which have the smell of green bell peppers. While good examples display a lovely, faintly verdant note to otherwise ripe fruit, bad example smell like weeds. I should note that these compounds are also found in Cabernet Franc's progeny, Cabernet Sauvignon, but in lesser quantities. In the mid-1990's winemakers discovered that pyrazine compounds degrade in UV light, so they began practicing leaf stripping to expose the grape bunches to sunlight right before harvest. Within a few days most of pyrazines disappear and the wines lose their dominant herbaceous qualities. It is rare to ever smell bell peppers in domestic Cabernet Sauvignon, and now many winemakers use the same technique on Cabernet Franc. However, the issue is that exposing the fruit to more sun does have a few problems, one of the most relevant being the wines can become overly alcoholic. In sunny, but cooler climates this is less of a problem, which is why I selected our feature wine, the Ronciere Cabernet Franc from Lincanten, Chile.

I have written this a few times, including last month with our feature of the Matetic EQ Pinot Noir, but I believe that Chile has one of the most dynamic wine scenes in the New World. After decades of churning out price point, humdrum wines from fertile vineyards planted in their vast Central Valley, there is a new generation of winemakers focused on quality, not quantity. Many are looking outside the traditional growing areas, into the foothills of the Andes and the coastal regions seeking cooler, less fertile areas. Consequently they are pushing quality to new boundaries and experimenting with lesser known varieties with great success. The EQ is a great example, but wait until you taste this Cabernet Franc.

The La Ronciere winery was founded in 1949 by the Orueta family, who since have built a wine empire, farming 750 acres in the Central Valley of Chile. Looking to the future the third generation of the family began prospecting for new, exciting terroirs and found a unique site located only 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean near the city of Curico. They have planted 500 acres near the Mataquito River, on ancient soils of granite and slate. Early examples of the wines from this estate are so compelling that in 2018 the region was granted a DO, the Chilean equivalent of appellation status.

Typically I categorize Cabernet Franc based wines in two camps; those that emulate the lighter styles of the Loire Valley of France, and the higher octane versions of the New World that pick later to remove as much pyrazine as possible. This wine somehow lands nicely in the middle, with fairly high toned notes of fresh black currants, boysenberries, Sencha tea, creme caramel and celery seed. This wine was entirely barrel aged, with 25% new French barrels, so on the palate you will immediately sense the frame of oak, which accentuates the long, sinewy tannins and adds to the length. Drink 2023-2026 with slow braised pork ribs with gremolata or flank steak with chimichurri.

The Hunting Lodge Pinot Noir 2020 - \$35

It is hard to overstate the popularity of Sauvignon Blanc from the Marlborough region of New Zealand. According to Jancis Robinson's website, it makes up 67% of all the country's production of 87,000,000 gallons. Lost in the tidal wave of Sauvignon Blanc is the increasingly important production of Pinot Noir. Over the past three years I have tasted many compelling wines from the area of which this is one of the best.

The Hunting Lodge is a winery, glamping area and restaurant complex located a half hour northwest of the New Zealand capital of Auckland. The property is home to the original Sauvignon Blanc grapes planted in the country over 40 years ago, and an incredibly diverse agriculture that includes gardens for the restaurant. Passionate about diversity, the current owners, Brent and Denise Sutton produce wines not just from their estate vineyards, but other biodynamically farmed sites across the country.

Although The Hunting Lodge lies on the North Island, within the Hawke's Bay wine region, this wine is produced from a single vineyard in Marlborough. Seeking maximum ripeness in this cool climate they chose a protected site in the Southern Valleys sub-zone of Waihopai. Unusually, the grapes for this wine are hand harvested, which is very expensive in New Zealand due to a lack of agricultural workers. Winemaker Pete Turner has the fruit destemmed but 60% of the grapes are left intact for the start of fermentation, which takes place over almost two weeks. Once the wine is dry it is racked to French oak barrels, 25% new, for nine months aging.

Since this wine is bottled under screw cap you will definitely want to decant it for a few minutes before serving, and the ideal temperature is around 55 degrees. After a few minutes it offers a lovely combination of lingonberries, dried cranberries, dried hibiscus flowers, oolong tea leaves and toasted bread. On the palate it shows good concentration, with tannins that are integrated and nicely polished, giving frame to the long finish. This is a savory example that will be best consumed from 2023-2025 with grilled pork tenderloins with a dried cherry glaze or salmon with a green peppercorn sauce.

Salmon with Green Peppercorn Sauce

The rich, spicy and slightly verdant flavor of this sauce is an ideal complement to either wine selection this month. Classically this sauce is applied over steak, and you can certainly pair either wine with such, but I also feel they both work great with salmon. The key to the success of this, and all pan sauces, is to develop some fond on the pan while cooking the protein. For this recipe do not use a non-stick pan, but rather make sure there is plenty of butter/oil under the salmon to prevent sticking, and cook skin side down first.

Cooking salmon in a regular pan, meaning not one that is non-stick, is not as daunting as some believe, but you need to set yourself up for success. First, always pull the salmon from the refrigerator and let it warm to room temperature before cooking. Not all day, but 30 minutes before you intend to eat. Second, season the fish immediately upon taking out of the refrigerator and let it rest. The result is meat that is seasoned at a deeper level than simply salting before cooking. Next, before you put the fish in the pan, dab the skin with a paper towel to make sure it is totally dry. This will keep the skin from steaming and you will get a much crispier result. Finally, make sure the pan and oil/butter are very hot, but not burned. This will ensure the skin crisps quickly.

4 - six ounce salmon filets, skin on, deboned

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons olive oil, divided

3 tablespoons finely chopped shallots

1 cup white wine

1/2 cup heavy cream

1/4 cup brandy

2 tablespoons green peppercorns in brine, drained

1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme

Kosher salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat a 12 inch sauté pan over medium high heat and add 1 tablespoon of oil. When the oil begins to shimmer add the butter and quickly swirl the pan to melt. Once the foam subsides add the salted salmon filets skin side down. Cook until the skin is crispy with the time determined by the thickness. Flip the filets and finish cooking until the flesh is slightly translucent and gives slightly with the tip of a knife.

After removing filets from pan, turn heat to high, add olive oil and heat until shimmering. Add shallots and cook until softened and lightly browned, about 2-3 minutes.

Add in wine and bring to a boil, scraping browned bits off bottom of pan with a spoon. Let boil until reduced to around 1/4 cup, about 4 minutes.

Add in heavy cream, brandy and green peppercorns and cook until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes. Add in thyme and season with salt and pepper to taste; use immediately.