



# Tim's Wine Market

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By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

Working in a wine shop we do not have as much dirt under our nails as those who make the products we sell, but make no mistake we are selling an agricultural product. To that end we are acutely aware that wine is no stranger to the effects of climate change. While we can debate the cause of the changing climate, there is no refuting the facts that in the past 40 years the growing conditions have changed in most of the wine regions of the world. Whether it is consistent wildfires in Australia and Americas, or uncharacteristic late spring frosts and extremely high summer temperatures in Europe, the conversation with winemakers inevitably steers towards adapting to a changing climate. This month, we examine two varieties that are well suited for heat and humidity, Touriga Nacional and Barbera. When speaking with winemakers across the globe they are two varieties that pop up in almost every conversation. So this month we present two examples from their countries of origin and show what attributes make them so interesting for the future.

## **2020 The Messenger Touriga Nacional - \$24**

“The Messenger” is performing double duty this month, of sorts, as their Cabernet Sauvignon is also this month's New World Red Club selection. This label is one of many projects created by Rob Michaels, an Australian winemaker with a passion for Old World varieties, who currently resides in the Napa Valley. Together with his wife, Kat, Rob sources fruit from small growers across the globe, whether he has an Australian Shiraz or a domestic Cabernet Sauvignon in mind. However, his recent partnership with a family in Portugal has resulted in this Touriga Nacional, a variety whose importance in Portuguese winemaking cannot be overstated.

Portugal's Douro Valley, with its steep cliffs and ancient stone terraces, is one of Europe's oldest continually producing wine regions. This is where the wines destined to become Port are born, from red and white varieties grown on the banks of the Douro River. Heat and humidity are found here in abundance, with harvest temperatures regularly reaching over 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. Because of this, many native Portuguese varieties have adapted to the intense conditions, developing thicker skins while still maintaining their natural acidity. As dry wines from Portugal become increasingly popular, these factors have contributed to foreign interest in Portuguese varieties, particularly in regions that are experiencing warmer than average growing seasons. Bordeaux, for instance, has recently authorized the use of Touriga Nacional in the Bordeaux Supérieur appellation. New World winemakers are becoming increasingly enamored with this variety, and when the opportunity to purchase fruit from a Douro winegrower came up, Rob and Kat eagerly accepted. The McDonalds eventually plan on cultivating Touriga Nacional on their own property, Art & Farm, in the Napa Valley.

Due to a vague non-compete clause, the name of this Portuguese winegrower cannot be listed on the label, though in the past the family have sold fruit to Port houses such as Warre's and Ferreira. In this case, the juice is shipped to California in bulk, where Rob and Kat finish the vinification and maturation process for the wine on-site in Napa. The fruit is harvested by hand in the Douro, mostly out of pure necessity, as the steep incline and proximity to the river makes heavy machinery all but impossible to operate. In the winery, halfway across the globe, new oak usage is kept to a minimum, with the bulk of maturation taking place in neutral barrels and stainless steel.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. In addition, this wine benefits from being served at cellar temperature, or about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. On the palate, notes of tart black plum, black raspberry, plum leaf, dried violet petal, and anise abound after this wine is decanted. Drink now through 2028 with sausage casserole, vegetable stews, or pasta e fagioli.

## **2020 Vietti Barbera d'Asti “Tre Vigne” - \$24**

Founded at the end of the 19th century, Vietti is one of many Barolo producers headquartered in the ancient village of Castiglione Falletto. In addition to the quality of its Cru Barolos, the winery is also known for production of many other native varieties across a wide geographic area, including their Barbera d'Asti. The Barbera d'Asti DOCG is well known for

the quality of its fruit, often boasting slightly older vines and increased concentration when compared to Barbera based wines from other appellations in the region.

We chose this grape because Barbera is similarly resilient to heat, which has led to its increasing popularity in New World regions such as the Sierra Nevada foothills of California, and a surprising amount in Napa Valley. In addition, Barbera is naturally resistant to mildew and other hazards caused by uncharacteristic humidity. Many producers in Piemonte are placing increased emphasis on fine wines made from this variety, especially as warmer growing seasons become more frequent.

The fruit used in the production of the “Tre Vigne” is sourced from several villages in the hills surrounding Asti, with the bulk of production coming from east-facing vineyards in the town of Agliano Terme. Emphasis is placed on older, closely planted vines which naturally limit yields and concentrate flavor. After harvest by hand, the fruit is brought to the winery in Castiglione Falletto and de-stemmed. A brief cold soak is employed before fermentation takes place in stainless steel. Once dry, the wine undergoes an extended skin maceration before racking to a mixture of neutral oak foudre, new oak barriques, and stainless steel. This wine completes malolactic conversion in barrel, and is bottled after 12 months of maturation.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. In addition, you will want to serve it closer to cellar temperature, or about 60 degrees. On the palate, this is a classic example of Barbera D’Asti from a warmer vintage, with notes of ripe red cherry, strawberry leaf, cooked redcurrant, vanilla, and black pepper. Drink now through 2026 with marinated short ribs, mushroom ravioli, or pasta Carbonara.

### **Italian Sausage with White Beans and Kale**

This recipe hits for me in so many ways; I typically have all the ingredients on hand, it comes together easily and works with almost any red wine. For our feature the slight bitterness of the kale also plays nicely off Barbera and Touriga. Read the directions carefully as the first step ensures a rich broth. - **Tim Varan**

**2 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed**

**1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained**

**with juice reserved**

**1 cup chicken broth**

**2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**

**1 pound sweet or hot Italian sausage,  
pricked all over with fork**

**1 onion, chopped fine**

**2-3 garlic cloves, minced**

**1 tbsp rosemary**

**1 pound kale, stemmed and chopped**

**Salt and pepper**

Puree 1/2 cup beans, 1/2 cup tomatoes, reserved tomato juice, and chicken broth in food processor until smooth, about 30 seconds.

Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add sausages and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes; transfer to plate.

Add onion to fat left in pot and cook until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic and rosemary and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomato puree mixture, kale, remaining drained tomatoes, and 1/4 teaspoon salt, scraping up any browned bits. Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, until kale is wilted and tender, about 15 minutes.

Stir in remaining beans, then nestle browned sausages and any accumulated juices into pot. Cover and simmer until sausages register 160 degrees and sauce is thickened slightly, about 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve.