



# Tim's Wine Market

**March 2023**

**By Tim Varan**

The theme this quarter is the opposite of the classic real estate mantra, location, location, location. Yes, a great location for any business is almost always a requirement, however, there are times when close is good enough. In the case of our selections the locations where they are produced have historically hindered the success of these producers, but perseverance and a dedication to quality ultimately allowed them to overcome.

## **Jean-Baptiste Jessiaume Santenay Blanc Le Forge 2021 - \$59**

It is only a nine minute car ride from the village center of Puligny-Montrachet to that of Santenay, and even quicker as the crow flies. However, the difference in the way the wines of these villages are perceived by the wine drinking public is far more vast. Thankfully the bias against the better wines from Santenay are helping to close the gap, with producers like Jean-Baptiste Jessiaume leading the way.

Santenay is the second-to-last village on the southern end of the famed Côte d'Or, or "golden slope" which is the geological formation that defines the Burgundy region of France. Starting just south of the city of Dijon, the slope of limestone and clay faces almost due east, which is important because the vines receive the maximum amount of sunlight, from the break of dawn through the later parts of the afternoon. Moving south from the village of Beaune the slope shifts slightly, so the vineyards of Meursault, Puligny and Chassagne are oriented south-east. South of Chassagne the slope curls, with the vineyards of the Santenay, the next village, facing almost due south. Just below the village of Santenay lies Maranges, and then the slope disappears and the vineyards then sit on the rolling hills of the Côte Chalonnaise. For years the vineyards of Santenay were considered lesser than those of nearby Chassagne, but climate change and a new generation of serious winemakers is changing that perception.

Our feature this quarter is a white wine from the up-and-coming estate of Jean-Baptiste Jessiaume. Although Jean-Baptiste is the 6th generation of this family to grow grapes in the village of Santenay, he is the first to produce wine under his own label. In 2012 he purchased an additional 30 acres across the Côte de Beaune, giving him a wide range of both white and red wine offerings. At the heart of his production are the wines from their vines in Santenay, for which he takes extreme pride. Le Forge is his flagship bottling from Santenay, produced from vines at the higher elevations. The grapes are hand harvested, destemmed and pressed directly to barrel for fermentation. After the wine is dry, 70% is racked to French oak barrels and 30% to stainless steel to preserve freshness. I suggest decanting this wine and serving it at 55-60 degrees. Once you do the nose delivers a rich combination of buttercream, lemon curd, lemon verbena, white pepper, vanilla wafers and chamomile. On the palate it has good concentration, with a rich texture complimented by a thin veil of oak and persistent minerality into the finish. Drink 2023-2026 with roast chicken, broiled salmon or fettuccine Alfredo.

## **Movia Veliko Belo 2015 - \$60**

If you have been a member for more than a few months then you have experience with the wines from Slovenia as I selected a Chardonnay from Aleks Simčič last summer. This quarter one of the standout wines I tasted comes from one of his neighbors, the Movia family, produced primarily from the favorite local variety Rebula. This grape is also known as Ribolla Gialla in the Italian region of Colli Orientali, which happens to lie just a few hundred yards from their vineyards. Although the politics of Slovenia have been very complicated since the mid-1800s, there is a rich winemaking history that has lasted through many regimes. This includes almost 50 years behind the iron curtain, when the Soviets arbitrarily established a border with Italy near these wineries. If this area would have fallen on the Italian side of the border the wines would be considerably more famous today. In the three decades since the wall came down the producers have taken advantage of access to modern winemaking equipment and expertise to now produce some of the most interesting white wines in the world.

The producers of this valley, the Brda region of Slovenia, are blessed with a combination of a Mediterranean climate in the mountains, allowing for the production of very intense, ripe, and interesting wines. If there was a benefit of a Soviet State

run wine industry it was that the region's winemakers could not afford to replant their vineyards every 20 years, which was the standard in the West after WWII to keep production levels high. Consequently, their vineyards are dominated by very old vines, which today gives them even better wines thanks to the natural concentration.

Winemaking in this area, and the Colli Orientali, is closer in style to that of Austria than other parts of Italy. The grapes they favor are picked later, lending to richer texture and riper flavors. It is also very common for winemakers to allow for some skin contact before fermentation, giving the wines deeper color than those pressed immediately after harvest. Movia's Veliko is named for the single vineyard where the grapes are grown, and is a blend of 70% Ribolla, 20% Pinot Grigio and 10% Sauvignon Blanc. Each variety is fermented separately after harvest, with the Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc macerating for a day on the skins and the Ribolla spending 5 days on the skins. Fermentation occurred with native yeasts and once dry the components were racked to barriques and aged over year. For this wine the final blends changes a little each year but is always dominated by Ribolla.

I strongly recommend decanting this wine for a half hour before serving to allow the complexity of the bouquet to develop. It is also imperative you serve this wine with food and at cellar temperature, not ice cold. The color is slightly amber and the nose is a complex combination of dried fruits; apples and pineapple, with beguiling hints of bees wax, persimmon, dried straw and white tea. On the palate it is dry and savory, with an almost red wine texture and incredible length. Serve with braised sausage and lentils, a garlic studded pork roast or swordfish cooked sous vide with olive oil and lemon.

### **Azores Wine Company Branco Vulcanico 2021 - \$49**

The Azores are a chain of 9 islands located in the North Atlantic Ocean, which are an autonomous state of Portugal and roughly 900 miles from the city of Lisbon. Discovered by Portuguese sailors in the 14th century, this archipelago became an important stop in the journey across the Atlantic for boats to resupply, although never as popular as the Madeira Island which would become known for producing America's wine. It did not take long for the locals, assisted by local Carmelite and Franciscan monks, to begin planting grape vines, as no sailor is really interested in drinking water, and the wine trade began shortly after. Being a tropical climate with nutrient poor, volcanic soils, the grape varieties that thrived in the region are unique, making for profoundly interesting wines.

As a wine region the Azores were very important during this time, producing more than 13 million liters of wine per year by the mid-1800s. Much like the wines of the Madeira Island, the wines of the Azores were very common in the US although only a small fraction were fortified, like those of Madeira. Then in 1854 the island was afflicted with powdery mildew, accidentally introduced from the Americas, which had a devastating effect on the vineyards. Followed shortly after by the equally destructive downy mildew, and then coup de grâce of phylloxera, by the 1880s production dropped to almost nothing. Today, wine is only produced on 4 of the 9 islands, with most of the production on the island of Pico. Vines are planted inside small walled parcels, called a *curral* that are built using basalt rocks. These walls, called *traverses*, serve 2 purposes. They protect the vines from strong winds and salt spray from the ocean, and were built from the rocks that prevent the soil from supporting vines. It is worth doing a Google search on the topic of vineyards of Pico to see this system as it is quite interesting.

There are a total of 33 different grape varieties authorized for use in the Azores. Much of the wine we initially tasted from the islands was a mix of local varieties and international varieties, such as Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Discouraged by the producers use of these varieties, renowned Portuguese oenologist António Maçanita, economist and hospitality industry expert Filipe Rocha, and fourth-generation winegrower Paulo Machado, founded the Azores Wine Company, promoting the local heritage and historic grape varieties. Our selection is their flagship white wine, which is an enticing introduction to this fascinating category.

The Vulcanico Branco is a blend of 85% Arinto dos Açores and 15% Verdelho. Arinto de Açores is a grape unique to the Azores, with DNA research suggesting it is an offspring of Verdelho. It is not related to the Arinto that grows on the Portuguese mainland. Verdelho is a very old variety brought to the Azores from Madeira in the 16th century. Fermentation for both of these varieties was done in stainless steel, using indigenous yeasts, and then aged on the lees for 8 months. When you serve this wine I suggest a quick splash in the decanter. Then the nose reveals a wildly complex combination of dried apricots, peach skins, fresh Fuji apple, sea salt and graphite. On the palate this wine is quite dry and very sheer, with intense minerality driving through the middle of the fruit and carving a deep path. The finish is persistent, with the lingering notes of smokiness from the volcanic soils. Serve with shrimp scampi, grilled oysters or fried cod.