



# Tim's Wine Market

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*I promise that these are the last features from the Iberian peninsula until at least the 4th quarter of this year. Due to some wines arriving late I have been forced to shuffle selections several times but things are finally back to normal. - TV*

This month we examine two wines from Iberia, both from ancient wine regions that are suddenly gaining worldwide acceptance. One comes from the mountains of northern Spain, where the vines are influenced by Atlantic and mountain climates. Then we move to Setubal, an obscure region south of the city of Lisbon in Portugal, where the vineyards also are impacted by the Atlantic and elevation. Both wines are perfect for early summer and can be served with a slight chill.

## **2016 A Portela Valdeorras - \$32**

As recently as 10 years ago, when talking about the wines of the Spanish region of Galicia, the conversation began and ended with Albariño from the coastal DO of Rías Baixas. However, there is more to the landscape of Spain's westernmost region than meets the eye. Further inland, traveling east along the River Sil, the altitude increases and the climate becomes drier and sunnier. Here, the cooling influence of the Atlantic Ocean is still present, but without the characteristic humidity of Rías Baixas. This is not the domain of Albariño but instead is known for its red wines, the greatest of which are made from the Mencía grape.

One of the most dramatic views in a region already known for its picturesque landscapes is the mountain DO of Valdeorras. The Cantabrian Mountains and the eastern Montes de León come together to create this narrow valley, which borders not only Castilla y León to the East but Portugal to the South. The Romans knew this region as the "Golden Valley," no doubt due to the red slate and clay soils which reflect the sun. Of course, the Romans also conducted extensive gold mining operations in the region, but its uniquely sunny micro-climate attracted winemakers as early as 2,000 years ago. These natural factors create ideal growing conditions for Mencía, a native Iberian variety often favorably compared to Gamay or Cabernet Franc. As in many other regions of Spain, focus has shifted from quantity back to quality in Valdeorras, with producers seeking out older vine plantings and practicing low-intervention techniques in the vineyard.

This particular bottling is produced by our friend Alberto Orte, one of the co-founders of the importer Olé & Obrigado, who brings in this wine and many of our other Spanish features. In addition to selecting wines and meeting with local producers, Alberto also produces his own wine across Spain, in regions as diverse as Andalucía, Galicia, and Rioja. Like many of the producers he represents on the export market, Alberto focuses on low yields, older vines, historical native varieties, and places an emphasis on terroir through his hands-on approach.

In the "A Portela" Valdeorras, we see all of these principles combined. A Portela is the name of a unique sub-zone on the banks of the Sil River which contains slate and granite soils. The vineyards here are so steep that any sort of mechanization is impossible, and many of these Mencía vines are upwards of 50 years old. Between the poor soils and older vines, this vineyard site actually produces one-third of the average yield per vine in Valdeorras! In addition, small amounts of other native varieties such as Godello and Merenzao are often co-fermented with the Mencía, a traditional practice which provides flavor and aromatic intensity. All fruit is picked by hand after multiple green harvests and ferments in stainless steel. Though this wine rests for 10 days on the skins post-fermentation, Alberto is meticulous in his work and the resulting wine is never over-extracted. Once dry, this wine spends 12 months in stainless steel and an additional 8 months in used French oak barrels before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. In addition, do not be afraid to serve it slightly chilled, around 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit. On the palate, notes of red cherry, cherry liqueur, bay leaf, dried orange peel, and forest floor make this an incredibly versatile food pairing red. Drink now through 2025 with roast chicken with mushrooms, salmon, or lamb chops.

## **2020 Pioneiro Vinho Tinto - \$17**

For all the talk of obscure Spanish growing regions and native grape varieties, they are light years ahead of their Portuguese neighbors who continue to face an uphill battle for recognition on the export market. Though the Douro Valley and Vinho Verde have achieved international acclaim, many of the country's southern regions are relatively unknown despite a history of winemaking dating back over 2,000 years. This feature comes to us from the Setubal Peninsula, an early Phoenician trading outpost where wine has been cultivated since at least the 7th century BC. Similar to Galicia, the landscape of this region varies from flat coastal plains to the sunny Serra da Arrábida to the East. The fruit used in this wine is sourced from the Palmela DO, located high in the Arrábida Mountains and produced by one of the region's oldest family owned wineries.

The Venâncio da Costa Lima winery, founded by a Portuguese winemaker of the same name, opened its doors in 1914. Originally exporting olive oil, cereals, and other foodstuffs, by the late 1920s Venâncio was able to shift his focus exclusively toward wine, and in the following decades would grow to become one of the region's largest producers by volume. After an eventful career, gaining fame for the quality of his dessert and table wines alike and even serving as mayor of Palmela, Venâncio passed away in 1956, bequeathing the estate to his nieces and nephews. Their descendants, the Vida family, still run the winery today and have introduced the "Pioneiro" label as a tribute to their ancestor, who frequently delivered wines up and down the peninsula in his ancient pickup truck.

Palmela is a region whose red wines focus around Castelão, a native variety which performs well in sandy soils and is naturally mildew resistant. Though this variety does make up the majority of the Vida family's red plantings, there are also international varieties grown on the property, a reflection of Setubal's past as a trading hub. These varieties include Aragonês, a local synonym for Tempranillo, and Syrah, both of which benefit from the region's elevation. The finished wine is a blend of 60% Castelão, 30% Aragonês, and 10% Syrah.

All fruit used in this wine is harvested by hand. In the winery, fermentation takes place in stainless steel at controlled temperatures. Once dry, the wine completes malolactic conversion and is racked to new French oak barrels for 5 months. When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour, and similar to the Valdeorras do not be afraid to serve it slightly chilled. On the palate, notes of fresh blueberry, tart blackberry, cinnamon, and black licorice make this a great summertime red. Drink now through 2024 with charcuterie, omelettes with goat cheese and onion, or this incredible blackened salmon recipe.

### **Blackened Salmon**

This recipe harkens back to the early days of blackening, the mid-1980's, when we all set off our smoke alarms in pursuit of the intense flavor of the process. For the best results make sure you buy salmon filets that are at least an inch thick so they do not overcook, and use the heaviest oven proof skillet you own. Serve with either wine this month.

**2 teaspoons paprika**

**2 teaspoons kosher salt**

**¾ teaspoon garlic powder**

**¾ teaspoon onion powder**

**½ teaspoon dried oregano**

**½ teaspoon dried thyme**

**½ teaspoon pepper**

**½ teaspoon white pepper**

**½ teaspoon cayenne pepper**

**4 (6 to 8-ounce) skin-on salmon fillets**

**1 to 1½ inches thick**

**Lemon wedges**

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Combine paprika, salt, garlic powder, onion powder, oregano, thyme, pepper, white pepper, and cayenne in a small bowl.

Place salmon in single layer on large plate. Brush salmon all over with 2 tablespoons of melted butter and sprinkle all over with spice mixture (use all of it).

Heat 12-inch cast-iron skillet over high heat for 5 minutes. Carefully place salmon in skillet skin side up (skillet handle will be very hot). Cook until very dark brown on bottom, about 1 minute.

Using tongs, carefully flip salmon; transfer skillet to oven; and bake until center is still translucent when checked with tip of paring knife and registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 12 to 16 minutes. Transfer to serving platter skin side down and pour remaining 2 tablespoons melted butter over salmon. Serve with lemon wedges.