



Tim's Wine Market

June 2023
By Tim Varan

By now most members should recognize that I am a card carrying member of the “acid freak” style of wines. No, this does not mean I am a disciple of the late Timothy Leary, but rather that I like wines that are high in acidity. Most of my selections are in this style, and thank you for following along. This month I went in a different direction, with selections that feature white Rhône grape varieties, a group of grapes that generally produce richer, lower acid wines. I like to shake it up occasionally and this group of wines is really interesting way to do this. Never fear, even by Rhône variety standards there is plenty of acid with these selections. Otherwise, it would not be a Tim's selection.

2016 Domaine du Grand Tinel Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc - \$69

The history of Grand Tinel begins in 1770 with the purchase of property in Châteauneuf-du-Pape (CdP) by François Establet. Georges, his son, acquired land in the Gardiole section of the zone in 1846, greatly expanding the size and quality of the estate. In 1906, Charles Establet, the grandson of Georges, built the first cellar and began bottling wine under the label La Petite Gardiole. In 1972, the Domaine de Grand Tinel was formed with the marriage of Pierre Elie Jeune and Christian Establet. Their children, Chrisopher, Beatrice and Isabella are now running this estate, building a tasting room, upgrading the winery and adding administration offices in 2005

Prior to the 1980s almost all of the vineyards in the southern Rhône Valley were interplanted with several grape varieties, all harvested at the same time. Lacking the fermentation technology of today, the wine was effectively “blended” in the vineyard with the belief that the sum was greater than the individual parts. (This is true for both red and white wines.) Some grapes would contribute body, i.e., alcohol, while others would add acidity or aromatics to the final blend. Today the modern vineyards are often planted in blocks by variety, which allow the winemaker to monitor each separately, pick and vinify when perfectly ripe, then craft the final blend in the cellar.

This is exactly the way this wine was produced. It is a blend of 70% Grenache Blanc, with 10% each of Clairette, Bourbelenc (for aroma), and Roussanne. Each variety was harvested separately, then fermented in stainless steel tanks at low temperature. They also blocked the malolactic conversion to help retain freshness in the wine. After 4 months on the lees, with weekly stirring, the blend was assembled and bottled.

The reason I chose this CdP is due to the age, as this 7 year old wine is at the apex of drinkability. When you open this wine it is best to decant it for at least a half hour before serving, although up to an hour is fine. The nose shows a rich combination of dried green apples and apricots, dried baby's breath, bees wax, OB honey and even a subtle note of petrol. On the palate this wine shows superb concentration, with the fruit framed by moderate acidity, a vein of minerality and some earthiness on the finish. Drink 2023-2024 with poached salmon with a saffron beurre blanc or grilled pork tenderloin with shallot, white wine and rosemary reduction.

2019 Terminim Cépages d'Or - \$55

It was tasting this wine that started me down this rabbit hole theme, a fantastic example that is the collaboration of two celebrated winemakers, Donald Patz and François Villard. Donald is well-know as one half of Patz & Hall, a very important producer of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from California for the past two decades. Villard is a rock star in the Rhône wine circle, and a chef-turned-winemaker who is legendary for producing beautifully intense wines that levitate above the category known for clunky examples. Their Venn diagram intersects in the hills of Mendocino County at the famed Alder Springs Vineyard, from which they produce 275 cases of this wine.

I taste a lot of Rhône inspired wines from California and most are passable for varietal correctness but almost never exciting. However, there are two vineyards that consistently stand out above the rest, Stolpman and Alder Springs, as the source for exceptional wines. Both vineyards have an extensive list of clients to whom they sell grapes so it is possible to

taste examples made in many different ways. This version, from Patz and Villard is one of the best I have experienced and attribute to the exceptional quality of the Alder Springs site.

It is no coincidence that both Alder Springs and Stolpman vineyards are located in cool, extreme climates and farmed with incredible attention to detail. Stolpman lies in the central coast of California while Alder Springs is in Mendocino County, directly north of Sonoma. Their 141 acres of vines are planted at over 2500 feet of elevation, on steep hillsides, only 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean. They employ a full time vineyard crew who pass over all 315,000 vines many times each year, working meticulously to ensure that each grape harvested displays uncommon intensity. They proudly proclaim that while most vines in California produce up to 50 pounds of grapes each year, theirs average only 2.5, which is only enough for one bottle of wine.

To produce this wine the dynamic duo of Patz and Villard use a blend of 54% Marsanne, 22% Roussanne, 12% Viognier, and 12% Picpoul, but there is so much more to the story. Each of these varieties bring a special element to the blend and the way they handled them in the cellar is the real story. Due to the steep slopes all of the grapes are hand harvested and whole cluster pressed directly to barrel. This is important because whole cluster pressing creates more complexity and dimension in the final wine, but it takes much longer than destemmed grapes and they yield even less juice. After pressing all four varieties are barrel fermented, with only 10% new oak, and left on the lees without stirring. Once malolactic conversion is complete the blend is made and the wine is returned to barrel for a few months before bottling.

If the CdP above shows the complexity that only develops with age, this wine practically jumps out of the glass with youthful exuberance. The nose is a heady combination of orange creamsicle, lemon curd, honeycomb, honeysuckle and dried lemon peel. On the palate it is rich and concentrated, with the fruit framed by a little bit of oak tannins and some acidity at the finish. Although good now this wine will improve for 1-2 more years, so drink 2023-2025.

2021 Mullineaux Old Vines White - \$49

The first two feature wines are composed of classic Rhône white varieties and are typical of the way these grapes are used in harmony to craft complex and balanced wines. This example, from the Swartland of South Africa, uses a base of very old vine Chenin Blanc, and then winemaker Chris Mullineaux blends small parts of Rhône varieties to build aromatic and textural complexity in the final blend. While this wine is not exactly a perfect fit for our theme, I think it is one of the best wines I have tasted in months and am excited to include it in this set.

I first discovered this wine at Chris's winery, Mullineaux and Leeu, when I visited South Africa in 2016. They are located in the Swartland, a vast area an hour outside of Stellenbosch that is the source for almost all really old vines in the coastal region. What struck me as we drove to the winery is that most of the region is actually wheat fields, which cover the soft rolling hills. However, the savvy farmers of the area long ago planted grape vines on the crowns of the hills where the soil was too thin to support cereal crops. They sold the grapes to the massive growers cooperative, the KWV, as a way to insure income in case the wheat crops failed in a season. After apartheid many young winemakers flocked to the Swartland to farm these old vines including Adie Badenhorst, Eben Sadie, and Chris Mullineaux. While the wines of the Stellenbosch are often sited as the Napa of South Africa wine lands, many critics feel the most exciting wines are produced from the black slate soils of the Swartland.

For this wine Chris starts with a base of 62% Chenin Blanc from vines as old as 100 years, grown on all three soil types of the area, those rich in granite, schist, and iron. Old vine Chenin Blanc is truly one of the world's great wines, displaying at times the same qualities as Grand Cru Chablis and Grosses Gewachs Riesling, while holding true to its varietal signature. To give this wine a unique character he blends in several other grapes in small quantities, mostly white Rhône varieties. So the final composition aside from the Chenin Blanc is 10% Clairette Blanche, 9% Viognier, 7% Grenache Blanc, 6% Semillon, and 6% Verdelho. Like both wines above, this one is whole cluster pressed, then fermented with native yeasts. For aging, Chris uses older French oak barriques except for one new 2000L foudre. The wine is aged for 11 months in wood then blended and bottled.

Decant this wine for at least a half hour, and up to one hour and serve at cellar temperature. The nose is complex but restrained, with notes of dried apricot and green apple, honeysuckle, yellow grapefruit and fresh ginger. On the palate this wine is quite dry with high intensity, as the minerality just shoots through the wine like lightning into the finish. Drink 2023-2028 with salmon, swordfish or an equally rich dish.