



# Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

Growing up like a lot of kids I played plenty of team sports; baseball, football, soccer, basketball, track, softball and volleyball, and with the exception of track, one cliché always held true, there is no “I” in team. I was also lucky to have played on several championship teams where one or two gifted players carried the rest of us with average skills, but in order to gain the trophy (no participation trophies in the 1980s) everyone had to contribute. This is expressed in Gestalt theory, which puts forth the idea that the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

In wine this is evident throughout the history of viticulture, as prior to WWII in Europe, and the 1970s in California, almost all wines were blends. Farmers planted a mix of grapes in their vineyards to insure against climate issues and with attributes to complement each other, and balance any deficiencies, in the production of the wine. This quarter we will explore how blended wines are made, either in the vineyard or the cellar, where the winemaker seeks to emphasize terroir and style through the use of multiple grapes.

## **2016 Marcelo Bocardo “Winemaker Selection” - \$59**

Although not well known in the US, Marcelo is a titan of the wine industry in South America, a third generation grape grower in Mendoza and a career that includes stints at one of the top names in Chile. After years building and running wineries for others, in 2001 he launched his own winery in Mendoza, Proemio, focusing on a vineyard first approach to elite level wine production. Thanks to Marcelo’s grandfather, he has a direct understanding of how important the quality of the grapes are to the final product.

It all started when Marcelo was 12 years old and his grandfather gave him two rows of the family vineyard to tend. His grandfather, an Italian immigrant, taught Marcelo how important tending the vines is, and how it connects the winemaker to his raw material. While this sounds elemental now, forty years ago most wineries in Argentina took a “harvest the most grapes possible and fix in the cellar” approach. To emphasize the quality of the grapes was unusual, but harkens back to his Italian roots.

When Marcelo started Proemio he used his contacts to find exceptional vineyards that would be farmed organically, or even using biodynamic principles. Although the winery is in Lujan de Cuyo, less than an hours drive from Mendoza, he contracts with growers as far south as the Uco Valley, 4 hours away. The variation in elevation, from 2600-3900 feet above sea level, and the different soil types combine to build a lot of dimension in his wines. All of the parcels are hand harvested, destemmed and sorted by hand to ensure only the healthy grapes go into the fermentor. In addition, all of the Marcelo Bocardo wines are fermented in concrete then aged in oak. For his “Winemaker Selection” selects the barrels he feels best create a balanced and age worthy wine. The blend for this wine is 50% Malbec, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Syrah and 5% Garnacha.

When you open this wine you will want to decant this for up to an hour before serving. Although quite deep and brooding it is only 14.1% alcohol so it is not a monster. The nose begins with notes of fresh black raspberries and blueberries, creme de cassis, maduro cigar wrapper, Herbs de Provence and milk chocolate. On the palate it is nicely dense and concentrated, with moderate tannins that are starting to break down, providing a soft frame into the long finish. Drink 2023-2029.

## **2021 Dancing Crow “Old Stake 1901” Field Blend - \$55**

If the blend above is a barrel selection, the modern way of crafting wines, this one harkens back to the old methods, where the blend was made in the vineyard by picking several different varieties and fermenting them together. In essence the winemakers would create their blend when planting the vineyard, mixing varieties that ripen at different times and contribute distinct attributes like acid, alcohol, color and tannin. In California many of these vineyards were planted by Italian immigrants who came for the various gold rushes of the later 19th century, and after busting, settled into farming. Our feature for this quarter comes from one such vineyard, located in the Kelsey Bench AVA of Lake County.

I have an emotional attachment to this wine on a couple of levels. The first is Dancing Crow is a winery owned by Tony Cartlidge and his family. When we first opened in Orlando, Cartlidge & Browne was one of our top selling brands for many years. Tony and his partner Glen Browne, operated a no-frills winery in the American Canyon of Napa Valley, churning out incredible quantities of high quality, varietal wines. In the mid-2000s they sold the brand to Vintage Wine Estates but Tony was not ready to retire. In 2013 he purchased land in Lake County, California, and along with his family launched Dancing Crow Vineyards. Today they farm 50 acres with a dedication to sustainable practices, recognizing the unique and fragile ecosystem of Lake County.

Tony's first wine under Dancing Crow was Sauvignon Blanc, which is a holdover from Tony's days with Cartlidge & Browne. Lake County is a very unique growing environment, benefiting from high elevations, volcanic soils and the cooling effects of Clear Lake. Located north and east of Napa, the temperatures each day start cool, thanks to the mountains, but heat up quickly after lunch allowing for plenty of ripeness of white and red grape varieties. Then, in the early evening the cool breezes start to blow off Clear Lake and bring the temperatures down, preserving ripeness and freshness. This very unique quality is accentuated by the iron rich volcanic soils which also imbue the wine with intense minerality. For our feature, the Old Stake 1901 vineyard benefits from all of these growing conditions.

The second thing that appeals to me about this wine is the vineyard is 120 years old and planted to 20 different grape varieties, including two or three that are unidentified. For the past thirty years this vineyard was owned by Jed Steele, the first true champion of Lake County wines, before he retired and sold it to Tony. Jed bottled this wine as Catfish Vineyard Zinfandel, although technically there are not enough Zinfandel vines to qualify for a varietal bottling (75%). To make Old Stake, all 7 acres are picked together at night, then crushed and fermented together. After a few months in older oak barrels the wine is bottled without filtration or fining to preserve all the natural flavor.

When you are ready to serve this wine make sure to decant it for a half hour to let the aroma develop. Once you do it has a charming nose of raspberry fruit leather, peach skin, strawberry preserves, black and white pepper, old leather and graham crackers. On the palate this wine is surprisingly powerful and rich, with the ample fruit framed by fairly obvious tannins that will need a couple of years to resolve. Drink 2025-2035.

### **2015 W.T. Vintners "Boushey Vineyard" Rhone Blend - \$56**

To finish our petite study of blended wines we travel to the Yakima Valley of Washington, and focus on a wine that like the Old Stake is a single vineyard bottling, but this time with a very intentional blend. W.T. Vintners is Jeff Lindsay-Thorsen, a former sommelier who's passion for wine grew far beyond just pulling corks. After years of working in the Pacific northwest restaurant scene he started W.T. Vintners with some partners, intent on making soulful wines that express their sense of place. For this bottling all of the grapes are farmed from the Boushey Vineyard, which is a site featured several years ago with our pick of Long Shadows Saggi, a Sangiovese.

The owner of this vineyard, Dick Boushey is one of the most revered farmers in Washington State, with a spectacular site that is relatively cool by Washington standards. Located between 800-1400 feet above sea level, Boushey is actually five unique vineyard sites all close to Dick's home. Thanks to the elevation and orientation the vineyards this area only receives 2600 degree days per year, cooler than most of the Columbia Valley, and making it an ideal spot for varieties that need to slowly ripen. For this reason Dick was one of the first growers in Washington to plant Syrah and other Rhone varieties in the early 1980s. The vines for this wine are also own rooted, meaning no rootstock.

Jeff started working with Dick in 2014, purchasing a couple of tons of Mourvèdre. When the opportunity came to buy these grapes he jumped at the chance. Similar to old world Rhone examples, the three varieties used to make this wine, Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, are from contiguous blocks in the middle of the slope of the vineyard, roughly 1100-1200 feet above sea level. Lindsay-Thorsen takes a very old world approach to producing this wine, starting with all of the varieties being picked separately and significant portions being whole cluster fermented, meaning with stems, using native yeast. Once dry the wine is racked to older French oak barrels, then bottled without filtration and fining. In 2015 they produced 207 cases.

Decant this wine for a half hour to let the bouquet develop, then prepare yourself for a treat. The nose is a complex and mature combination of dried black cherries and damson plum preserves, soy sauce, olive tapenade, fresh rosemary, salted capers and Szechwan peppercorns. The tannins are forward, with the demure fruit building into the finish. Drink 2023-2030.