



# Tim's Wine Market

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This month I thought it would be interesting to examine one of the most important aspects of winemaking, the art of blending. While not as celebrated as the actual making of the wine, the skill of blending wines made from different grapes, vineyards and processes is what separates the average winemakers from the best. This month we look at two really interesting examples and the way the winemakers create harmony and complexity in each wine.

## **2019 Dove & Stone Petit Verdot/Merlot - \$23**

I have been keeping this wine in my back pocket for a couple of years waiting for the right month to use it as a feature. Part of my hesitancy is that it breaks my rule about only featuring wines from brick and mortar wineries, but I have enough background on this one to craft a good story. While I cannot reveal who makes this wine I can say that it is a winery that has been featured in the New World Red a few times before and their wines are always well received. While this blend may be a bit unusual it is a blockbuster that I am sure you will enjoy.

The grapes for this wine come from the Chalk Hill AVA of Sonoma, which lies just north and east of the city of Healdsburg. Most consumers are surprised to learn that Chalk Hill is a misnomer, and that the soils of this area are actually fine, white volcanic ash, not chalk. The appellation lies between the cool Russian River and the warm Alexander Valley, but at higher elevation. As a result the vineyards are in a Goldilocks zone where farmers can grow Chardonnay in the cooler parts of the AVA, and heat loving Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Petit Verdot in others. The ash soils also retain moisture well so even in the hotter, drier conditions of the past few years the vines in this area thrive.

For Dove & Stone the blend is quite unique, utilizing the powerful Petit Verdot variety softened with Merlot. Historically there have not been many wines bottled exclusively from Petit Verdot because the variety is considered to be extremely finicky by grape growers. If left untended, the vine will produce way too many clusters of grapes, so it is hard to get them all ripe. To fix this problem, most producers "green harvest" up to half the clusters. This is a process where vineyard workers cut off a portion of the grape clusters from the vine mid-way through the growing season. This lets the vine focus more ripening energy on fewer clusters. Unfortunately, the grape clusters of Petit Verdot are small relative to Cabernet Sauvignon and especially Merlot. So the yield per acre is about half of that of Merlot and sixty percent of Cabernet. This makes it a very expensive grape to grow since the per acre farming costs for Petit Verdot are higher than Cabernet and Merlot. However, it is such a powerful variety that a small amount can often dominate a blend, even with Cabernet Sauvignon, so as more than one winemaker has told me, a little goes a long way.

For this blend our winemaker chose to balance the power of the Petit Verdot with the softer tannins of Merlot. A lot of consumers think of Merlot as a light variety, but in fact it usually achieves higher alcohol than Cabernet Sauvignon if grown in the same site. However, the tannins of Merlot are softer and less drying, making it the perfect foil for grapes with a lot of structure. Here the blend is 66% Petit Verdot and 34% Merlot, with both varieties aged together in a mix of 33% new French oak barrels for 16 months.

When you open this wine I urge you to decant it for at least a half hour before serving and give it a slight chill to cellar temperature. When you pour this wine take a moment to examine the color that stains the glass and the legs of the wine, which are almost violet in color. This is the hallmark of Petit Verdot along with the exotic nose of cooked black currants, lavender, dried ancho chili, vanilla wafer, cocoa nibs and cigar box. On the palate this wine is quite powerful and concentrated, with the oak being more obvious on the palate via firm tannins. Drink this wine from 2023-2026 with grilled steaks or the amazing pork tenderloin recipe this month.

## Wit Cellars “We’re In It Together” - \$35

Wit Cellars, which is an acronym for Whatever It Takes, started after the near implosion of the Kestrel Winery in 2015. Kestrel’s longtime winemaker, Flynt Nelson, along with the assistant winemaker Cat Warwick and tasting room manager Gina Adams-Royer decided they had enough of working for others and launched their own project just in time for the 2016 harvest. We were big fans of Flynt’s work during his years at Kestrel, and he also worked at Hogue Cellars, Columbia Winery and Apex Cellars before that. Thanks to his history with growers in Yakima and the Columbia River Valley, they were able to buy some amazing fruit which launched them quickly as a Washington brand to watch. I was excited when a broker suggested the wines to me and while all the wines they sent were dynamite, the best choice for this club is their unusual blend. Coincidentally, I chose their 100% Petit Verdot for a Reserve Club selection this quarter. If you like the Dove & Stone above you may want to check it out.

Looking at the list of new releases from Wit Cellars it is staggering how many wines they bottle. The list includes four single vineyard bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon, 2 of Syrah and varietal bottlings of at least a dozen other varieties, including reds and whites. We’re In It Together is the small quantities of wine left from each cuvee after the team make their final blend. Much like the Isenhower “Last Straw”, a feature from August, this wine is basically a kitchen sink blend of the leftovers. However, unlike the Last Straw which is pieces from a single harvest, Flynt rounds this wine out with some older wines as well, which is why it carries a non vintage designation.

When you open this wine you will want to splash it in the decanter for a few minutes to let the bouquet develop. The nose is a heady mix of cooked cherries, cranberry sauce, cedar, milk chocolate, caramel and graphite. On the palate this wine shows impressive texture and concentration, with a fair amount of oak providing plenty of frame into the finish. Drink this wine from 2023-2025 with smoked brisket, ribs or this pork tenderloin.

### Panko Crusted Pork Tenderloin

I found this recipe from America’s Test Kitchen a couple of months ago, looking for a new way to prepare a pork tenderloin I had defrosted from Wild Fork. Most of the work for this recipe is prepping the panko crumbs for the crust, which is incredibly flavorful. I cut the recipe in half to accommodate one tenderloin and it worked fine. Make sure to let the tenderloin rest a few minutes before cutting so the crust does not peel off.

**5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

**¼ cup whole-grain mustard**

**1 ½ tablespoons white wine vinegar**

**2 garlic cloves, minced**

**2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary**

**¾ teaspoon kosher salt**

**½ teaspoon black pepper**

**Pinch cayenne pepper**

**1 ½ cups panko bread crumbs**

**¼ cup all-purpose flour**

**3 large egg whites**

**⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

**2 pounds pork tenderloins (2 loins, 1 to**

**1 ¼-pounds each), trimmed**

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Whisk melted butter, mustard, vinegar, garlic, rosemary, ¾ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and cayenne in bowl until combined. Stir in panko until fully combined.

Spread panko mixture in even layer on rimmed baking sheet, breaking up any clumps. Bake, stirring every 5 minutes, until golden brown, 15 to 18 minutes. Transfer crumbs to 13 by 9-inch baking dish and let cool completely, about 10 minutes. Break up any large clumps with your fingers. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees.

Set wire rack in now-empty sheet. Place flour in shallow dish. Whisk egg whites together in second shallow dish. Stir Parmesan into cooled crumb mixture. Pat tenderloins dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

Working with 1 tenderloin at a time, dredge in flour, shaking off excess; dip in egg whites to thoroughly coat, letting excess drip back into dish; then coat with crumbs, pressing gently to adhere. Transfer tenderloins to prepared rack. Bake until pork registers 140 degrees, 25 to 30 minutes. Let tenderloins rest on rack for 10 minutes. Slice ¼ inch thick and serve.