



# Tim's Wine Market

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As you know, we take the write-ups for our clubs very seriously, but this year we are determined to level up even more. Each month we are adding an additional teaching point to the theme covering topics from grape growing, winemaking and even distribution. Our goal is to help you take your appreciation to another level by de-mystifying many of the terms and techniques that make wine such a great beverage. This month we tackle the subject of conventional farmings versus farming with a minimum of man-made inputs with two amazing examples.

The whole subject of conventional versus sustainable and more natural methods of farming techniques is far too large to cover entirely in this write up. Therefore, the focus for the features this month is on the impact that less conventional winemaking practices have on the quality of the wine. Ironically, studies show that most consumers believe that the purpose of organic farming is to produce “healthier” wines. However, if you ask almost all producers it is about the overall quality of the final product. To understand why, we need to go back 100 years and the evolution of the wine industry.

Prior to the world wars, almost all wine was farmed organically, as chemical fertilizers were not invented until 1903. After the devastation of WWII, many European producers began using chemical fertilizers, later incorporating fungicides and pesticides, to boost yields. Although hard to imagine now, until the early 1980s wine was not a luxury item so bottle prices were very low. Since most wines after the war were produced by negotiants and cooperatives who purchased the grapes, growers were paid for quantity, not quality. Simultaneously, the wine schools of the new world, particularly UC Davis and Roseworthy (in Australia) taught their students that production quantity and shelf stability were the goals of winemaking, not the overall character of the wine. All of this led to the overuse of many chemicals and a fundamental degradation of soil health. The best example of this is Burgundy in the 1980s, when many experts referred to the region as “dying vines on dead soils.” Thankfully, the rise of winemakers like Bize Leroy, Nicholas Joly and Olivier Humbrecht, among others, began trumpeting the call for a shift to organic and biodynamic farming to help correct a half century of “progress.”

Today, only an estimated 5% of the wines produced in the world are farmed using non-conventional practices; sustainable, organic or biodynamic. Based on our selections you may find this surprising, as almost all of our features fall into one of these low input categories. This is not a dogmatic decision we make, rather our focus on quality inevitably leads us to these wineries. This month you will experience two wines from innovative and non-conventional producers, each offering incredible quality and value within their categories.

## **2022 Cantina del Morellino “Cala Civetta” Vermentino - \$19**

Long-time devotees of the Explorers Club may recognize Cantina del Morellino, as we have featured their wines on multiple occasions, both in the club and as part of our weekend tastings. Located in the coastal Tuscan commune of Scansano, the co-op of Cantina del Morellino is shared by 170 families, all of whom grow grapes for the winery and receive a share of the profits. The average family here owns no more than 8 acres of vines, and sustainable viticulture is considered the norm, much as it was 100 years ago. Winemaking itself is overseen by Paolo Caciorgna, who serves as both winemaker and head enologist.

Though the exact origins of the Vermentino grape are uncertain, most scholars place its origins along the western Mediterranean coast of Italy, as it is widely grown in Liguria and Sardinia. Although many wine lovers may not think of Tuscany as a “coastal” wine-growing region, there are significant plantings of Vermentino here as well, particularly in the commune of Scansano. To make this wine, the Cantina works with about 20 partner growers who cultivate Vermentino, spread out across roughly 150 acres. All fruit is grown organically and dry-farmed, which helps to reduce yields and concentrate flavor. In addition, the fruit is sourced from a variety of elevations and soil types, including limestone, shale, and clay.

When you open this wine, you will want to serve it chilled, but not ice cold, about 45-50 degrees Fahrenheit. In the glass, this wine displays notes of Meyer lemon, melon rind, Thai lemongrass, jasmine flowers, and wet stones. Drink now through 2026 with seafood pasta dishes, baked cod, or fish tacos.

## **2019 Marcelo Bocardo Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve - \$29**

Marcelo Bocardo grew up in his family's vineyards in Mendoza, learning about wine from his father and Italian grandfather. In 2014, he purchased his first organically farmed vineyard and impressed with the health of the vines, began to implement similar methods throughout his property. His current project, and the subject of our feature this month, was created when Marcelo's son Nicolas joined the family business in 2019. With 4 generations of Bocardo men working the vineyards, Marcelo wanted the family name featured prominently on their new label. Their goal of sustainable viticulture is to pass on to the next generation a healthy and thriving vineyard capable of producing world class wines.

All fruit used in the production of this wine comes from the Bocardo estate, sourced from young vines and grown at nearly 3,000 feet above sea level. Their vineyards are located in Maipu, one of the oldest sub-zones of the Mendoza region, located on the northern bank of the Mendoza River. Like Bordeaux, the soils are dominated by gravel and limestone which are ideal for producing wines made with Cabernet Sauvignon. In addition, the dry climate is ideal for farming without the need for pesticides or fungicides as there is little pressure from bugs or mildew. Consistent with organic and sustainable practices all of the fertilizer used at this property is composted material.

A number of traditional techniques are employed in the winery as well as the vineyard. Marcelo aims to steer away from the heavily extracted, oak-driven Cabernets beloved by certain wine critics, opting instead for a more Old World-inspired wine. To make this wine, all fruit is harvested by hand. In the winery, Marcelo chooses to employ partial whole-cluster fermentation, which contributes additional complexity and tannin. The wine ferments in concrete vessels where, once dry, it undergoes malolactic conversion. Once this process is complete the wine is then racked to used French oak barrels, where it matures for 10 months. The finished wine is bottled unfinned and unfiltered.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour, though if you can stand to wait, a full hour is ideal. Once this wine has some time to open up, it is quite long and complex with notes of black cherry, blackcurrant preserve, plum leaf, clove, and graphite. Drink now through 2028 with grilled skirt steak and vegetables, lamb chops, or braised short ribs with carrots and onions.

### **Cod with Crunchy Lemon Topping**

I am finishing this write-up on January 10th and I have to ask, how are those resolutions coming? Assuming that most are staring at a scale reflecting the enjoyment of a few too many holiday cookies I thought a recipe that favors the white wine this month would be preferred. Although this recipe uses a small amount of mayonnaise for binder, it is less than 400 calories per serving and packs a whopping 42 grams of protein. It is also easy, which I am thankful for since, if you're like me, it feels like you were in front of the stove for weeks on end in December.

On a side note, this recipe works with any flakey white fish, like haddock or halibut, and you can vary the herbs as well. I made once as directed and then a second time with dill and it was superb. - **Tim**

**1 tablespoon unsalted butter**

**24 Ritz crackers, crushed into coarse crumbs (about 1 cup)**

**2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves**

**3 tablespoons mayonnaise**

**2 small cloves garlic, minced**

**1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, plus 1 tablespoon juice from 1 lemon**

**4 skinless cod fillets, (about 2 pounds)**

**Salt and pepper**

**Lemon wedges, for serving**

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Grease baking sheet with butter. Toss cracker crumbs and 1 tablespoon parsley together in medium bowl. Mix remaining 1 tablespoon parsley, mayonnaise, garlic, lemon zest, and lemon juice together in small bowl.

Pat fish dry with paper towels, then season with salt and pepper. Place on buttered baking sheet, spacing pieces about 1/2 inch apart. Brush tops and sides of fish with mayonnaise mixture, then press cracker crumbs into mayonnaise.

Bake until crumbs are golden brown and fish flakes apart with fork, about 15 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges.