



Tim's Wine Market

December 2023

By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

For the holidays I like to feature classic wines, and this year we have a couple of stunning selections. Both wines are red Bordeaux and while I chose them because they are both exceptional, the difference in price is why I put them together. As a crow flies the two properties are only a few miles apart, but those lying in the Entre-Deux-Mers do not command the same price as “better” appellations, in this case Lalande-de-Pomerol. Yet one is almost twice the price, not because of quality or farming costs, it is almost exclusively because of the address.

Enjoy both of these selections with your favorite holiday meal, and on behalf of all of the franchisees and employees we wish you a wonderful holiday season. - **Tim**

2020 Château Bel-Air “Prestige Divine” Bordeaux - \$16

Like many Bordeaux producers, the Mourgues family can trace their wine-growing heritage back to the 18th century. However, the “renaissance” of the family’s winemaking career began in earnest when Angéline and Régis Mourgues took over the old family property in 1954, which at the time covered only 14 acres. The couple began estate-bottling and shifted their focus predominantly to red wines. In the late 1970s, their children Patrick and Joëlle joined the company and began enlarging the family’s vineyard holdings, which are now nearly 450 acres. Finally, the torch was passed to their son Jérémy, the current winemaker, in 2005.

Having literally grown up in the vineyards, Jérémy hit the ground running and began to implement some of his ideas, chief among them environmentally friendly practices such as natural fertilizers and regenerative agriculture. In particular, he has planted a “test vineyard” on the property where all vineyard work is done using biodynamic principles including allowing native flora to grow among the vines. If all goes well, he plans on gradually converting the rest of the family’s vineyards to traditional practices such as these.

What makes Château Bel-Air unique is that despite being located in the Entre-Deux-Mers, a large, flat growing area known for its white wines, most of their production is red. A generation ago, there were some plantings of red fruit here, but conventional wisdom dictated that the region was too cold to produce quality red wine. Nowadays, winemakers like Jérémy, faced with rising temperatures throughout the region, have discovered that this is no longer the case, and red wines are an increasingly common sight in the vineyards of the Entre-Deux-Mers. At Château Bel-Air, the vines are planted on clay and limestone soils, similar to the vineyards of Saint-Émilion to the East. As a result, the family are able to cultivate the same grape varieties used in the Saint-Émilion Grand Cru appellation, notably Merlot and Cabernet Franc.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for up to half an hour. Once this wine has some time to open up, it delivers a complexity that makes a compelling argument in favor of Entre-Deux-Mers red wines, with notes of fresh cherry, red licorice, dark chocolate, dried parsley, sage, and thyme. Drink now through 2026 with a selection of French cheeses, vegetable casseroles, or a hearty beef stew.

2020 Château Canon Chaigneau “Cuve 8A” Lalande-de-Pomerol - \$29

Romik Arconian and Marine Fontana may not have grown up in the vineyards of Bordeaux, but the couple are making up for lost time at this exceptional property. Once a Roman viticultural site, Château Canon Chaigneau sits on the limestone-rich Néac plateau. While that name may not ring any bells, the Néac is the geographical area where the appellation of Pomerol is located, home to such luminaries as Château Petrus and Château Clinet. This is prime real estate for any winemaker looking to make Cabernet Franc and Merlot, and is considered one of the greatest viticultural areas on the Right Bank of Bordeaux.

Romik, a former London wine merchant, and Marine, who has worked extensively in many viticultural regions of France, are very invested in traditional viticulture and preserving the legacy of this château. The property’s previous owners, the Marin family, have stayed on not only as shareholders but vineyard managers as well. Together, their vineyard philosophy

is what in France is known as *lutte raisonnée*, or “the reasonable struggle,” meaning that similar to Château Bel-Air detailed above they are working in as natural and sustainable a manner as possible. Chemicals and synthetic treatments are kept to an absolute minimum and virtually all work is carried out by hand. This philosophy meshes well with that of the property’s current winemaker, Thierry Garnaud. As the former winemaker at Château Cheval Blanc, Thierry has more than 3 decades of quality winemaking under his belt and continues to craft traditionally made Bordeaux with his new team.

To make this wine, Thierry’s characteristic low-intervention methods are used to great effect. After harvest by hand, the fruit is sorted and only partially destemmed, meaning some of the grapes are left on the stems for additional complexity. Fermentation takes place entirely in concrete; the name, “Cuve 8A,” is a nod to the massive concrete vessel this wine is fermented and matured in. After at least a year in tank, the wine is bottled only when Thierry deems it ready.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour, though a full hour is recommended. This is another wine that really over-delivers in the glass, with notes of cherry and blackberry preserve, candied orange, lavender, and dried sage. Drink now through 2030 with country style pate, grilled sausages and vegetables, or baked brie.

Short Ribs Braised with Wine

Ok, full confession, this is the same recipe I selected for the New World Red club this month. The fact is that it is such a great recipe for this time of year, and hearty red wines, that it works great. My argument also holds that it helps when entertaining to have a recipe that can be prepared ahead and pulled out when time to eat. Short ribs are the consummate example, as it is practically impossible to overcook them, and they really do not require that much effort to produce a dynamite dish. Here is my favorite recipe from *Cook’s Illustrated*, which works with both wines. I often make this a day ahead, and chill after cooking and leave in the pot. Then you can easily de-fat it and reheat the next day, straining the sauce and continuing the process. - **Tim**

**5 pounds bone-in English-style short ribs,
bone 4 to 5 inches long, 1 to 1 1/2 inches of meat
on top of bone, trimmed**

**Kosher salt and pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 large onion, chopped
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 teaspoon all-purpose flour
2 cups dry white wine
3 cups chicken broth
4 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
4 sprigs fresh thyme
2 bay leaves
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 2 pieces
and chilled**

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Sprinkle ribs with 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper; set aside.

Heat oil in large Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until lightly browned, 4 to 6 minutes. Add tomato paste and flour and cook, stirring constantly, until paste begins to darken, about 45 seconds. Add wine, increase heat to high, and bring to boil. Cook until mixture is slightly thickened, about 3 minutes.

Stir in broth, garlic, thyme sprigs, and bay leaves. Nestle ribs into braising liquid, bone side up (ribs may overlap). Bring braising liquid to simmer, transfer pot to oven, and cook, uncovered, for 1 1/2 hours.

Remove pot from oven. Flip ribs meat side up so meat is above braising liquid. Return pot to oven and cook, uncovered, until fork slips easily in and out of meat, 1 to 1 1/2 hours longer. Transfer ribs to serving platter and tent with aluminum foil. Strain braising liquid through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator; discard solids. Allow liquid to settle for about 5 minutes.

Strain off fat and return defatted braising liquid to now-empty pot. Bring to boil over high heat and cook until reduced to 1 cup, 4 to 7 minutes. Reduce heat to low and whisk in butter, 1 piece at a time. Season sauce with salt and pepper to taste. Pour sauce over meat and serve.