



Tim's Wine Market

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For the features this month, our educational theme is the use of stainless steel in fermentation, and in the case of both of these wines, aging as well. The grape varieties used for both wines are quite delicate and the winemakers want to preserve their fruit without masking them with the flavor of oak or even oxidation. Both are very interesting and obscure varieties that we hope you really enjoy.

Cantine Madaudo Barone di Bernaj Nerello Mascalese 2022 - \$18

The Madaudo family are 4th generation winemakers who have worked the land in their native town of Sicily since 1945. Back then, Rosario Madaudo's great-grandfather owned a small vineyard just outside Messina, where he bottled and sold wines made from heirloom varieties such as Grillo and Nero d'Avola. Over the years, each generation of the Madaudo family have added on to the family business but the most dramatic change occurred when Rosario went away to college in Milan. In his absence, the family purchased 45 acres of land on Mt. Etna. This purchase not only granted them land in one of Italy's greatest up-and-coming growing regions, but expanded the range of grape varieties used in the family's wines. Today, Rosario, his wife Alda, and their extended family produce terroir-driven wines from the northern slopes of Etna, the Agrigento province of Southern Sicily, and their original property outside Messina. In addition, they operate a wine bar in Messina that specializes in local sparkling wines. Though the family works with a wide range of local varieties, Nerello Mascalese remains a favorite due to its versatility and expression of terroir.

Nerello Mascalese is similar to Pinot Noir, which may surprise some readers who picture the climate of Sicily as very hot; hardly the ideal growing conditions for a light-bodied red grape. However, an important point to consider is that wine growing takes place at significantly higher altitudes on Etna, up to 3,300 feet above sea level. The cooler climate and higher elevation means that Etna's native varieties are different in character from the rest of Sicily, while the mineral-rich soils aid in the wines' expression of terroir. The Madaudo family's holdings include part of the San Lorenzo cru, a large single vineyard site whose soils are rich in iron and magnesium, which produces aromatic and terroir-driven reds.

Because of its high natural acidity and ability to express terroir, Rosario chooses to vinify this wine entirely in stainless steel. This variety is known for little color and high acidity, so fermenting in a vessel that would allow oxidation, such as oak tanks, would cause the wine to fall flat very quickly. In addition, this wine is also aged in stainless steel for the same reason, as the lack of oxygen reaching the wine preserves fruit quality, color and terroir characteristics.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour before serving. Once this wine has a little time to open up it delivers classic Etna notes of dried cranberry, redcurrant, dried strawberry, pipe tobacco, and campfire ash. Drink now through 2027 with grilled sausages and zucchini, brisket tacos, or chill it down and try it with seafood!

Plaimont Côtes de Gascogne Manseng Noir 2022 - \$30

There is a renaissance going on in France's Gascogne region, which lies southeast of Bordeaux and stretches from the Lot River to the Pyrenees and the Basque Country. Once prized for its age-worthy reds and luscious dessert wines, this region fell on troubled times due to a changing global wine market and pressure from its northern neighbor Bordeaux. Recently, however, many winemakers native to Gascogne have been producing wines of incredible quality and value, including our friend Alain Brumont, whose wines we featured in February 2023. Joining the ranks of our favorite growers from the region is Plaimont, a co-op founded in the 1970s to revive Gascogne winemaking. In addition to re-planting the vineyards of the historic Saint-Mont AOC, Plaimont did something unheard of at the time and rescued the Manseng Noir grape from extinction.

In many growing regions stricken by economic depression, native grape varieties fall by the wayside in favor of more recognizable options, such as Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon. In addition, a lack of demand leads winemakers to sell off their fruit in bulk, for distillation and cash flow. All of these problems came to a head in Gascogne during the 20th century, with native varieties being pushed aside and most fruit being sold to the region's Armagnac distilleries.

Winemaking moved from high-altitude growing sites to the flat, fertile plains, which were perfect for large production but gave very little away in terms of terroir.

In studying the history of Gascogne winemaking, Andre Dubosc, the founder of Plaimont, came across a number of grape varieties he did not recognize, such as Arrufiac and Manseng Noir. These were mentioned in documents dating back to the French Revolution but none of the co-ops in Gascogne were cultivating them. Andre traveled to Saint-Mont and discovered that a small amount of these varieties still survived with some of the vines dating back almost a century! He and his team took cuttings from these old vines and planted them across their own vineyard sites where they discovered that these native varieties are better suited for the region's hot summers and periods of drought. Before too long, varietal bottlings of Manseng Noir were produced by Andre's team, and today the growers at Plaimont cultivate well over 225 acres of this "lost" grape, all grown organically and dry farmed.

Given the above emphasis on terroir and sustainable viticulture, it should come as no surprise that this wine does not see any new oak. Lead winemaker Olivier Bourdet-Pées chooses to ferment and age his wines in stainless steel for multiple reasons, including the naturally low alcohol levels of Manseng Noir. In addition, Manseng Noir tends to oxidize quickly, and inert vessels such as stainless steel prevent oxidation. By omitting any sort of oak aging, he is able to preserve the grape's naturally low acidity. After fermentation under controlled temperatures, which blocks malolactic conversion, the wine spends roughly 7 months in stainless steel before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. In addition, this wine benefits from serving slightly chilled, about 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Once this wine is chilled down a bit it delivers notes of fresh blackberry, blueberry preserve, black pepper, and sugar snap peas. Drink now through 2026 with paté and French bread, grilled salmon, or a Cuban sandwich with extra pickles.

Butter Chicken

Butter Chicken is a ubiquitous dish to most Indian restaurants but from what I read it is not terribly authentic. Nevertheless, it is a delicious rich dish that works really good with lighter red wines, as the tomato accentuates their fruit. Two quick notes, you can substitute cut up breast meat instead of thighs but adjust cooking time, and I found the flavor better if you marinate the chicken for at least 2 hours. Serve with basmati rice and chutney.

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces and chilled, divided
1 onion, chopped fine
5 garlic cloves, minced
4 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
1 serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
1 tablespoon garam masala
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon pepper
1 ½ cups water
½ cup tomato paste
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons table salt, divided
1 cup heavy cream
2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
½ cup plain Greek yogurt
3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, divided

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, ginger, and serrano and cook, stirring frequently, until mixture is softened and onion begins to brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Add garam masala, coriander, cumin, and pepper and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add water and tomato paste and whisk until no lumps of tomato paste remain. Add sugar and 1 teaspoon salt and bring to boil. Off heat, stir in cream. Using immersion blender or blender, process until smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. Return sauce to simmer over medium heat and whisk in remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Remove saucepan from heat and cover to keep warm. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 4 days; gently reheat sauce before adding hot chicken.)

Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Combine chicken, yogurt, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt in bowl and toss well to coat. Using tongs, transfer chicken to wire rack set in aluminum foil-lined rimmed baking sheet. Broil until chicken is evenly charred on both sides and registers 175 degrees, 16 to 20 minutes, flipping chicken halfway through broiling.

Let chicken rest for 5 minutes. While chicken rests, warm sauce over medium-low heat. Cut chicken into ¾-inch chunks and stir into sauce. Stir in 2 tablespoons cilantro and season with salt to taste. Transfer to serving dish, sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon cilantro, and serve.