



# Tim's Wine Market

July 2024

By Tim Varan

This month our feature wines are both blends, with the lead component of each a lesser known variety. They are an interesting opportunity to taste wines from areas from which you are familiar, but unusual examples that are outside the box.

## **2022 Division Winemaking Company “Béton” - \$29**

I met Division co-owner Thomas Monroe a few weeks ago to taste through the most recent offerings from his winery. As the name implies he and his partner, Kate Norris, are crafting wines that are outside of the norm, but with a keen eye for balance and elegance. They work on both sides of the Columbia River, in Oregon and Washington State, and this is one of their wines where the grapes are sourced from both areas.

Having worked in the Loire Valley of France, the inspiration for this wine is Cheverny, a tiny appellation an hours drive from the city of Orleans. What makes this appellation unique is that the producers are required to blend their wines in a region where mono-varietals reign supreme. Thomas spent some time working in Cheverny and fell in love with the wines so he wanted to produce an American version.

It is apparent that the folks at Division got some serious windshield time putting this wine together. The core of the wine is Cabernet Franc (35%) grown in the Applegate Valley in southern Oregon, spitting distance to California. Then 32% is Malbec, but they found a French clone that uses the colloquial name Côt, in an organic vineyard in western Yakima Valley, Washington. The balance is Gamay (24%) and Pinot Noir (4%) from the Willamette Valley in Oregon, with the last 5% being Cabernet Sauvignon from the Columbia River Valley. Thomas and Kate were delighted with the 2022 since it was the first year since the inception of this wine, 2018, when all of the vineyards were harvested without rain, fire, hail or frost.

It has been my goal this year to not spend too much time on the winemaking details unless the winemaker is doing something truly unique. Again, based on that grape blend do you think this would be made by the numbers? No, the Cabernet Franc and Malbec are co-fermented, and whole cluster, which amps up the earthiness. Then the aging took place for six months in concrete tanks, *Béton* is concrete in French, while the other components were aged in old French oak barrels. Blending happens right before bottling and they produced 1242 cases.

When you open this wine give it a slight chill and decant for a half hour. Then the nose is a thought provoking mix of black peppercorns, chili pepper flakes, fresh blueberries, raspberries and tangerine peel. On the palate it is high toned and juicy, with a plump fruit quality. My notes say “very gulp-able.” Drink 2024-2025.

## **2022 Isenhower GSM “I-Series” - \$29**

We have a great relationship with Brett and Denise Isenhower and as a result they offer us a lot of small production wines they produce primarily for their tasting room and club members. Recently a goodie box arrived with a couple of tiny production wines and this one jumped out. My guess is that Brett is working with this winery to develop a particular block of Mourvèdre that will eventually become a staple in their flagship line, but for now he blends it into this new entry for their I-Series, which is their less expensive label.

This wine stood out from the recent offerings because it is a GSM, which is winemaker shorthand for a Grenache-Syrah-Mourvèdre blend. After tasting the wine I was intrigued so I flipped over to the back label to discover that more than half of this wine, 54% is Mourvèdre. Unusually, Grenache plays a minor role, 14%, with Syrah sitting at 32%. This is a very unusual blend for Washington State, and this category, so let's dig a little deeper into their choice to let Mourvèdre play the lead.

The Mourvèdre variety not unknown in Washington State, many grow it but it usually makes up tiny amounts of most blends. This is because Mourvèdre can be brooding and overbearing, easily dominating many grape varieties, particularly Grenache. In this case the Mourvèdre grapes come from the RKP vineyard, located in the Rattlesnake Hills sub-AVA of the Columbia River in Washington. This is an interesting vineyard, planted to 15 different varieties, including Nero d'Avola, Negroamaro and Sagrantino. In this case all the Mourvèdre comes from a 5 acre block planted at the highest point in the vineyard at around 1250 feet above sea level. Thanks to this location the variety can ripen slowly which tames the tannins while the grapes retain good acidity.

Decant this wine for a half hour or even more before serving and again, try to serve at cellar temperature, 55 degrees. Even with decanting there is a bit of a brooding nature to this wine, with reserved notes of fresh blackberries, black currants, black peppercorns and potpourri of dried sage, thyme and rosemary. On the palate it is fairly dense to start, then you get a nice pop of fruit before the tannins rise up and frame the finish. Good now this wine will get better for at least 5 years so drink 2024-2030.

## **Mushroom Bourguignon**

I wanted to show a recipe that works nicely with both wines but is also light enough for summer cuisine. While the flavors of this dish harken more to the fall it is not very heavy and does work great with either wine. Serve this over polenta, rice or noodles.

**4¾ cups water, divided**  
**¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided**  
**2½ pounds portobello mushroom caps, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**½ teaspoon table salt**  
**¼ teaspoon pepper**  
**2 carrots, peeled and sliced inch thick**  
**1 large shallot, chopped**  
**4 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled**  
**3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**  
**1 cup plus 2 tablespoons dry red wine, divided**  
**2 tablespoons white miso**  
**2 tablespoons soy sauce**  
**1 tablespoon tomato paste**  
**6 sprigs fresh thyme**  
**2 bay leaves**  
**1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed**  
**1 cup frozen pearl onions, thawed**  
**¼ cup minced fresh parsley**

Add ¼ cup water and 2 tablespoons oil to Dutch oven and bring to simmer over medium-high heat. Add portobello mushrooms, salt, and pepper. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms have released their moisture, about 10 minutes.

Uncover and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until pot is dry and dark fond forms, 10 to 12 minutes longer. Transfer mushrooms to bowl. Add carrots, shallot, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil to pot and cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables start to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Stir in flour and cook for 30 seconds. Whisk in 1 cup wine.

Add miso, soy sauce, tomato paste, and remaining 4½ cups water and whisk to combine. Add thyme sprigs, bay leaves, and porcini mushrooms and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain vigorous simmer and cook, stirring occasionally and scraping bottom of pot to loosen any browned bits, until sauce is reduced and has consistency of heavy cream, about 25 minutes.

Strain sauce through fine-mesh strainer set over large bowl, pressing on solids to extract as much liquid as possible; discard solids. You should have 2 cups sauce. (If you have more, return sauce to pot and continue to cook over medium heat until reduced. If you have less, add enough water to yield 2 cups.) Return sauce to pot. Stir in onions, portobello mushrooms, and remaining 2 tablespoons wine. Cover and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until onions are tender, about 20 minutes. Stir in parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve.