



# Tim's Wine Market

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This quarter I have selected three wines that have one thing in common, the producers glorify the wines of the Côte-d'Or, or Burgundy region of France. I have had the privilege of spending time with all three winemakers and learned first hand how they spent time in the Burgundy region, then took the knowledge back to their home wine regions and applied those techniques. While they all work with different grapes than Pinot Noir each strives to let the vineyard character, or *terroir*, shine through their wines.

## **2022 Thévenet Morgon Vieilles Vignes - \$56**

Since the inception of this club I have wanted to include a wine from the “Gang of Four”, a name coined by importer Kermit Lynch for his rockstars in the Beaujolais village of Morgon. Ok, rockstars is a bit hyperbolic but the wines made by Jean Foillard, Jean-Paul Thevenet, Guy Breton and the late Marcel Lapierre starting in the 1970's set the standard for a generation of producers in Beaujolais. It is not an exaggeration to say that they, and a few other producers, are the reason that this region is one of the most popular categories of French wine today.

To understand the importance of this wine we have to go back to the late 1970's and examine the farming practices that dominated the Beaujolais region. Prior to the WWII the wines of Beaujolais were made exactly the same as those of their neighbor to the north, the Côte-d'Or, except using the Gamay grape instead of Pinot Noir. After WWII the growers in the region saw a productivity boom when manmade fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides were introduced. This helped fuel the Beaujolais Nouveau craze, which was made possible by the large quantities of cheap grapes produced thanks to all the “improvements.” However, there was a local biochemist named Jules Chauvet who warned about the long term effects of so many chemicals on the land. Chauvet found an audience with a young generation of producers who included Jean Paul Thevenet and Marcel Lapierre, pushing them to produce wines in a classic style. Slowly they, and a growing group of disciples (many still imported by Kermit Lynch) returned to the old ways; farming organically, lowering yields and picking later at full ripeness. The results today are a collection of world class wines that rise far above the sea of commercial plonk sold as Beaujolais.

While their commitment to making wines in the classic style is important to this wine, it is also important to understand the unique conditions within the Cru village of Morgon, and particularly the most important part, the Côte de Py. Most of Beaujolais is covered with red granite, the result of underground volcanic activity from hundreds of millions years ago. The Côte de Py is unique because it was formed when a pocket opened beneath the ground that filled with magma then cooled. Over time the pressure metamorphosed the magma into schist, in this case tinted blue due to a high concentration of magnesium. This soil was eventually thrust up by the creation of the near by Alps, where it forms a unique mound that mixes with the more common pink granite. Both are very nutrient poor and friable, so the vines must send their roots deep to find moisture. The result is the wines made from the old vines have a unique minerality that cuts through their ample fruit expressions. For the flagship wine from Thevenet vines were planted in 1929, 1936 and 1962-63, pretty darn old!

To produce this wine the Thevenets only use whole clusters of grapes, no destemming, and the wine is fermented with native yeasts in stainless tanks. Once dry the wine is moved to large, neutral oak casks where it is aged for a year. When you open this wine decant it for a half-hour and chill to cellar temperature, 55 to 60 degrees. The nose is a stunning combination of crushed wild strawberries, black raspberries, Mr. Lincoln red rose petals and violets, as well as wet cut granite. On the palate this wine begins with a plush sense of fruit but then a soft veil of tannins wrap around the fruit and carry into a long finish. Drink 2024-2034 with roasted chicken or grilled salmon.

## **2022 Terre Nere Etna Rosso “20th Anniversario” - \$59**

The wines of the Mount Etna region of Sicily have always held a special place for me. In part because two producers for who I have immense respect both consider the area one of the most amazing terroirs in the world. The first is Eben Sadie, an elite South African winemaker who mentioned the region many years ago during a luncheon. He has never made wine

in the area but spoke of the unique qualities of soil, elevation and climate that create so much potential for the wines. The second, and the focus of this feature is Marc de Grazia, who I believe is the single most important importer for modernizing the American view of Italian wines. He also owns this estate, which he founded in 2002 because he too recognized the unique attributes of this amazing area.

Marc de Grazia is extremely important in the wine world because his first career was importing a cutting edge wave of Italian bottlings to the US. He initially started importing Barolo, working with a handful of now legendary producers who traveled with him to Burgundy in the 1980's to study their techniques. Then winemakers like Elio Altare, Enrique Scavino, Dominico Clerico and Luciano Sandrone returned home and proceeded to turn the Barolo region on it's ear by applying Burgundian approaches to their vineyards and cellars. After three decades importing these great wines Marc turned his attention to the region he calls the "Burgundy of the Mediterranean" and purchased this estate on Mount Etna in Sicily. Immediately he began to apply Burgundian concepts to his wines, bottling the first single contrade wine in 2002, from a vineyard called Guardiola.

It is hard to believe now, with so many great producers on Mount Etna, but in 2001 there were only 3 commercial wineries. Phylloxera dealt the first killer blow in 1881, and then wars, poverty and lack of consumer interest meant that most vineyards were fallow, or used by local farmers for their everyday wines. de Grazia was one of the first to recognize the potential of this area, and particularly their grape of choice Nerello Mascalese. Like Pinot Noir this thin skinned variety produces lightly colored wines but have great finesse and translate the character of the terroir.

For their 20th Anniversary bottling de Grazia chose to use a specific block of 20 year old vines from one of his "Grand Cru" holdings, Caldera Sottana. It is 100% Nerello Mascalese and the wine was aged for 14 months in a combination of different French oak wood pieces. Decant this wine for at least a half hour and it shows an exotic nose of dried hibiscus flowers, fresh tart cherries, lingonberry preserves and blood orange peel. On the palate it shows a lot more intensity than the color would indicate, with nice richness and fantastic restraint. Drink 2024-2032.

### **2021 Chioccioli Chianti Classico Fossivento - \$55**

To finish our investigation into single vineyard wines we dive into a category where there are a lot of examples and even some classification, but little consensus, Chianti Classico. For this wine I tasted with the owner of this estate, Niccolo Chioccioli Altadonna, in late March and I was incredibly impressed seeing as this is a relatively young estate. Then Niccolo let me know that his father is Stefano Chioccioli, who I know as one of the most celebrated agronomists in the world. This estate is their family property, managed by Niccolo and his siblings, under the watchful eye of their father. Unlike many examples of Chianti Classico single vineyards, and even Gran Selezione, their winemaking here is very transparent, allowing the site to shine.

Stefano established his estate in 2010, purchasing a 230 acre parcel outside of the village of Greve in the heart of the Chianti Classico district. Respect for their land is important so the family has only planted 40 acres and leaves the remainder as nature preserve and a buffer to their neighbors. They planted the Fossivento vineyard using a massal selection of Sangiovese which is important for complexity. Sangiovese is a very old variety with a lot of subtle differences between genetic material. A massal selection involves taking random cuttings from different vines, often from divergent sources, and propagating them to create genetic biodiversity at a single site. This helps build complexity in what is basically a mono-varietal wine.

The name of this vineyard, Fossivento, is taken from the works of a local poet and the line "if I was the wind." It relates to the steep slope of this vineyard that is exposed to the afternoon winds that lower the temperature and keep the grapes from over ripening. Harvest is a little earlier than most in the region, with the goal of retaining freshness and intensity. They then sort the grapes twice in the vineyard and a third time after destemming at the winery to ensure only the healthiest grapes make it to the fermentor. A portion of this wine is fermented in large clay amphora for 25 days on the skins and then the wine is aged in low toast, 500 liter French oak casks for 14 months.

Decant this wine for at least a half hour before serving and chill to cellar temperature. Once you do it displays a wildly complex bouquet of tart cherry preserves, cooked strawberries, black licorice, toasted pecans and balsamic saba. Then on the palate it displays a chiseled form, with a Burgundian delicacy that you do not find in this category. While very drinkable now this wine should improve nicely so drink 2024-2030.