



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

In 1972 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) began to designate places with “outstanding universal value” as world heritage sites. To date they have bestowed this honor on 1,223 locations in 168 countries across the globe. This month all three selections come from world heritage sites, in part for their natural beauty and the incredible wines they produce.

2022 Cà du Ferrà Colline di Levanto Bianco “Bonazolae” - \$69

This is a rare selection from the picturesque Italian region of Cinque Terre, located on the Ligurian coast of Italy mid-way between Genoa and Pisa. The region, designated a World Heritage Site in 1977, has a long history that dates back to the 11th century. It is believed that people settled the area today known as Cinque Terre to escape the plague, but today it is the jewel of the Italian Riviera, where tourists flock to enjoy the beautiful scenery and weather. It is no surprise that wine is a major component of the culture, but almost all of the production is consumed locally. However, I found this excellent example a few months ago and while expensive I thought it was the perfect wine to end the summer.

What makes the Cinque Terre region so captivating is how the mountains appear to drop into the Mediterranean Sea in a dramatic fashion. The coast of Liguria was formed as the African tectonic plate crashed into the European plate during the Miocene period, roughly 5 to 23 million years ago. Most of the Alps had been formed earlier so this event created the Apennine Mountains, which run the spine of Italy stretching into the coast of Provence as well. For this reason the relief of this part of Italy is striking, as mountains rise more than 3000 feet in less than 3 miles from the coast. Being relatively young soils there are also still vivid terraces and clefts in the rock, where the farmers of the region now plant vineyards. Italians call the winemaking in this region “heroic farming” as the work is difficult and the soils are poor making grape yields quite small.

Our feature producer, Cà du Ferrà, is a second generation estate that was founded by Antonio Zoppi and his wife, Aida Forgiore three decades ago. Antonio grew up in the region and his wife Aida comes from a winemaking family in Campania. They began purchasing land and planting vineyards, finally establishing the winery in 2000. They purchased an existing building and named the estate Cà du Ferrà, which means “blacksmith’s house” in the local dialect. Today the vines around their winery are where the horses were kept while waiting for new shoes. In 2006 their son, Davide took over the operation of the winery along with his husband Giuseppe.

To produce this wine the family farms over 200 individual parcels, ranging between 60 and 750 feet above sea level. It is a blend of 65% Vermentino, 30% Albarola and 5% Bosco. The blend is indicative of modern wines from Cinque Terre even though it is not entitled to the Cinque Terre designation. This is because the law requires wines labeled under the DOC to contain at least 40% Bosco. As popular as the variety is, because it crops a high yield, the wines it produces are dull. Modern producers emphasize Vermentino, a far more interesting variety, even though the regulations deny them appellation status. The family leaves the grapes in contact with the skins for a few hours before fermentation to also amplify the aromatics. During the winemaking they also stir the lees to build additional texture and body in the wine.

Decant this wine before serving and let it warm to cellar temperature. The nose is then a heady mix of white nectarine, white pepper, graphite, dried basil and fennel seed. On the palate it displays great intensity, with vivid acidity and minerality that stretch the fruit into a moderate finish. Drink 2024-2026 with a whole grilled snapper stuffed with fennel and lemons, or linguine with white clam sauce.

2022 Domaine Laureau Savennières “l’Alliance” - \$49

Most customers I speak with who are heading to France tend to focus on Paris, the Riviera and Burgundy. While all are very special places I enthusiastically encourage everyone to spend time in the central Loire Valley, which is where you will find this selection, from the tiny appellation of Savennières. The Savennières AOP lies between the towns of Sully-sur-

Loire and Chalonnes, with the whole area designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. The designation was given for the striking architecture of the towns and castles, as well as the wines which have been famous for over a thousand years.

The appellation of Savennières is tiny with less than 400 acres total and roughly 30 producers. All of the vineyards lie across three hills composed of schist soils. The appellation only produces white wine, exclusively from the Chenin Blanc grape. Historically the producers of this region work reductively, meaning they minimize oxygen in the winemaking and aging, so the wines can be very austere in their youth. Traditionally I suggest to most consumers to cellar them for a few years or open them hours before they plan to drink. As I was going over my tasting notes deciding on the features for this release, I kept going back to this wine, which is very different from the other producers.

There are many reasons to love the wines from Damien Laureau, who of course focuses all his attention on his vineyards. Savennières is the epicenter of the biodynamic movement, famously launched by Damien's neighbor Nicolas Joly. Laureau also works using biodynamic principals and even plows his vineyard with a horse to minimize modern inputs. This bottling is his entry level, which used to be called La Petite Roche, one of the many climates of the area. A couple of years ago Damien decided to create a young vine bottling using his youngest vines in each vineyard site which he now calls l'Alliance. On average the wines are 10 years old and grow on a mix of schist and sandstone soils.

When you open this wine I still strongly recommend letting it breathe for at least half an hour and drinking at cellar temperature is best. This is far more savory than you may expect for a white wine, with exotic notes of butterscotch, saffron lobster broth, cooked down red apples and pomelo. On the palate it is firm to start, then the fruit plumps out in the middle before the minerality again takes over into the finish. I suggest serving this wine with richer dishes, like lobster poached in butter, Coquille St. Jacques or a pork roast stuffed with apples and raisins.

2022 Gai'a Santorini "Thalassitis" - \$55

The island of Santorini was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000 but the current formation of this unique island traces to the largest volcanic eruption of the past 10,000 years. For millions of years three active volcanos submerged below the Mediterranean slowly built up shields forming a small group of islands including what is today Santorini. Then in 1620 BC a fourth volcano erupted with such force that most what was then the island of Thera was destroyed or submerged under the water. This event is thought to be the origin of the legend of the lost city of Atlantis, and is also attributed to hasten the fall of the Minoan civilization on the nearby island of Crete. Thankfully, today the volcanos are dormant and what is left is a tourist paradise and one of the most interesting wine growing regions in the world.

Next to tourism, wine is one of the most important products from the island. There are several Greek grape varieties grown but the king, and the only one allowed for Santorini wines, is Assyrtiko. The variety is fascinating, retaining very high levels of acidity even if harvested very late. For this reason most Santorini, like our feature, are dry table wines, but there is also a significant amount of sweet vin santo produced as well. What makes the wines even more interesting is the way the vines are tended on the island. Due to extreme wind and sun, the growers curl the canes around in a circle, positioning the grape clusters in the center. This protects them from the intense winds of the Mediterranean along with sun burn and dehydration as they ripen. It is an interesting technique and worth doing a Google search for pictures.

Our feature comes from one of the elite producers of Greece, Gai'a, which is pronounced *Yay-ya*. One of the pioneers of the modern Greek wine revolution, Gai'a Estate was established in 1994 by Leon Karatsalos and winemaker Yiannis Paraskevopoulos. The estate is named after "Mother Earth," in honor of the unique terroir that gives birth to these world-class wines. They produce many great wines across Greece but this bottling consistently pops up in my notes as an outstanding example of Assyrtiko from Santorini.

The grapes for the Thalassitis, which in Greek means "originating from the sea," come from 70-80 year old vineyards located on the Southeastern slopes in Episkopi on the island of Santorini. The site is uniquely challenging as strong winds are omnipresent and soils largely pumice, a nutrient poor medium that further stunts yields. Assyrtiko is one of the few varietals that can thrive in these conditions. Decant this wine for a few minutes before serving and bring to cellar temperature. The nose is a gripping blend of sea spray, lemon zest, grapefruit peel, grains of paradise, green apple, with a hint of smoke from the volcanic soils. On the palate this wine is almost searing, with acidity that encapsulates the rich fruit and a lightning bolt of minerality that is almost a shock. Good now, this wine will age up to 10 years. Drink with the classic Santorini fava bean puree with capers, red onion, dill and olive oil, or grilled swordfish or octopus.