



Tim's Wine Market

September 2024

By Tim Varan

In theory the last day of summer is September 22nd but for us Floridians we still have at least another six weeks of hot weather. So while all of my favorite clothing purveyors have already transitioned to heavier shirts, long pants and jackets, I find myself still grabbing shorts and breezy shirts when not in the TWM uniform. This is the inspiration for our selections this month, which continue the “celebration” of hot sticky weather with a couple of delicious but not heavy wines.

2021 Domaine de la Font des Pères Bandol Rosé - \$25

Starting in the early 2000s I would select a Rosé as an Explorer Club selection every summer in order to give legitimacy to the category. Then in the late aughts, Martha Stewart wrote that her drink of the summer would be Provence Rosé, and suddenly what was a little spark we carefully guarded became an out-of-control brush fire. The good news is that customers finally accepted Rosé as 1) dry not sweet, and 2) serious wine. The bad news is that it also gave rise to a lot of mediocre examples that flooded the market and made it hard to find the best wines. As markets are efficient, eventually a lot of the junk has faded away and now we have a pretty homogenous collection of Provence Rosés so finding a good one is not hard. So to my delight one of my strategic partners brought me this wine early this summer, along with their 2022 and 2023 for us to taste. All three were delicious but the 2021 stood out because it is at the apex of drinkability and being two vintages old they were looking to move some quantity. Normally this wine sells for \$32 so you can see why it is now a club selection.

While Provence Rosé is considered the epitome of the Rosé category, it is actually those from Bandol that set the ultimate standard. The village of Bandol is a small fishing village south of Marseilles, in the heart of Provence, that is also one of the greatest places for this style of wine. This is because the laws regarding the production Bandol are far more stringent than those for other Provence Rosés.

The first thing that sets Bandol apart is that producers must use at least 40% Mourvèdre in their Rosé blend. Mourvèdre is a grape, most likely of Spanish origin, that grows around the western Mediterranean rim but typically within 50 miles of the coast. This is because the variety buds and ripens late, meaning it must have a warm climate to thrive. It also produces a smaller crop than Grenache, the favorite in Provence, and the individual berries are more intensely flavored which creates a more substantial Rosé. The other major quality factor for Bandol is growers are required to hand harvest, with most Provence Rosé being harvested with machines. While machines can do a good job with harvest they cannot replace the work done by experienced pickers. As a result of these factors Bandol Rosé is a more serious example that you can drink young or with a few years in the bottle.

Our feature comes from a historic estate in the heart of the Bandol appellation that was initially established by Cistercian monks in the 13th century because of a natural spring, or Font. Most of the early history focused on farming but five hundred years ago they began to plant vines on the steeply terraced hillsides. After Napoleon nationalized the abbey lands the property exchanged hands several times before being purchased by Caroline and Philippe Chauvin in 2010. They have invested heavily in the property, expanding from 22 to almost 40 acres, adding a restaurant and small hotel as well. Of course the emphasis is on wine, producing red, white and of course Rosé.

The grapes for this wine are farmed on 220 individual terraces that rise from 750 to over 1000 feet above sea level. The blend is 43% Mourvèdre, 37% Grenache, and 20% Cinsault with all the grapes picked by hand then pressed to tank. They let the juice settle naturally for five days at low temperature, then transfer the majority of the juice to clean tanks, and 25% to used oak barrels. After the wine is fermented it ages an additional 5 months before blending and bottling. This wine explodes out of the glass with notes of fresh strawberries, rhubarb, pink sea salt, fennel pollen and pink peppercorns. On the palate it is light but with great flavor intensity, with the restrained fruit framed by minerality and acidity into the finish. Drink 2024-2025 with grilled calamari with lemon and olive oil or a tomato gratin.

2023 Reigning Sun “Liquid Sun” Red Wine - \$22

I have been searching for a red wine that would best be served slightly chilled to use as a summer EXP feature for some time and had just about given up for this year. Then during a virtual tasting with one of my favorite importers of South African wines this one jumped out, and it has a great story too. We had to move quick as this wine was still sitting in New Jersey on September 3rd, but we made it work and you will be so glad we did.

Reigning Sun is a brand created by importer Pascal Schildt and one of his closest partners in South Africa, Tremayne Smith. Tremayne studied to be a chef and right before finishing culinary school he pivoted, returned to university and picked up a winemaking degree too. It turns out his love for food and wine steered him toward the wine making side so all of his bottlings, and he has a bunch, are great for pairing.

It has been over a year since our last feature of a South African wine and that is something I am hoping to correct in 2025. The country is producing incredible wines that straddle the fence between new world fruit qualities and old world structure. While many of the modern wines are produced from single varieties, or blends made in the cellar, Tremayne makes this using an old world method of field blending all the varieties by picking them at the same time. He produces this wine from a few old vineyards where the majority of the grapes are Carignan, Grenache and Cinsault, but there is a small amount of Pinotage as well. The interesting thing is that the Pinotage vines are trellised using a lyre technique similar to Côte-Rôtie in France. This grape is notoriously fickle to grow and this gives the leaves maximum sun exposure so it achieves full ripeness. While Pinotage can easily dominate a wine it makes up a tiny portion of this bottling and adds a wonderful depth of color and slightly earthy quality.

Chill this wine down to slightly above refrigerator temperature, say 45 degrees. I used to have a customer who called this “water glass” wine because it is too lip smacking and juicy for a stemmed glass, but serve it anyway you like. The nose is a summer berry basket mix of fresh raspberries, blackberries and Bing cherries, rooibos tea, dried thyme and lavender. On the palate this wine is not very heavy but has a lip smacking quality that almost demands to be gulped, not sipped. There is some tannin but most of the structure is acidity, which is light but holds everything in balance. Drink 2024 to 2025 with flank steak tacos, birria ramen or poke bowls.

Grilled Calamari

I fell in love with grilled calamari at a local Italian restaurant that was our neighbor for a decade called Gargi's. Their version would make you forget fried, although they would do it if you asked, and you would see this dish on almost every one of their 8 tables every night. It works really well with both wines and this is great cookout food too, eating beach or poolside. Two quick notes... If you can find squid that are not already cleaned they typically have more flavor. There are a lot of videos online for cleaning directions and it is not hard. You also get the ink sack to make pasta! Second, make sure to follow the directions and score the tubes in a crosshatch pattern and it will yield a more tender final product. Finally, yes, you can just use shrimp if you want.

2 lbs fresh squid cleaned

1 tsp sea salt

½ tsp black pepper

1 tsp paprika

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

Lemon wedges for serving

Lay the tubes out on a flat cutting board and using a sharp knife make a cross hatch pattern on both sides. Be careful not to cut through the tubes.

Place your squid in a mixing bowl. Whisk the salt, pepper, paprika and olive oil together in a small bowl and pour over the squid, turning the squid over so it is completely coated. Cover the bowl and allow the squid to marinate for 30 minutes.

Make the Ladolemono Sauce and set aside.

Ladolemono Sauce

¾ cup olive oil

¼ cup lemon juice

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 tablespoon dried oregano

Bring a charcoal grill or gas grill to high heat. Use tongs to place the calamari on the grill and cook about 4-6 minutes per side, until completely cooked through. Remove the calamari to a cutting board. If serving family style then cut the calamari into rings about ½-inch wide to place on a serving platter.

Serve with the Ladolemono sauce, a sprinkle of parsley and lemon wedges.