



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

This month we turn the spotlight onto a variety that is gaining a lot of support among winemakers looking to combat the challenges of climate change, Cabernet Franc. The producers of these selections take a decidedly New World approach picking at a higher ripeness level which creates a wine with smooth, polished tannins. The selections also show how this variety can shine by itself or as part of a blend.

2022 Garzon Cabernet Franc Reserva - \$22

When I start my research for each club writeup I always begin with the excellent resource book, **Wine Grapes** by Jancis Robinson, Julia Harding, and José Vouillamoz. For wine geeks it is an invaluable resource that goes into great detail about 1368 different wine grapes. Although published in 2012 it remains the standard by which all other books on this topic are judged. The reason is that they rely on DNA evidence as well as in-depth research into each variety to determine the origin, as well as contemporary details about where it is grown and handled. When you get to the listing for Cabernet Franc it is quite long because this is one of the most important varieties with regard to progeny.

What makes this wine so interesting is that it is from the country of Uruguay. Although this country does not have a long history of exporting wine, they have been producing it on a commercial scale since the 1870's, and are the fourth largest producer in South America. Their industry was started, much like Argentine winemaking, by Italian and Basque immigrants who flocked to South America around that time. They found that the cuttings they brought from their native land did well in the dry, temperate climates of the country, and the industry took off. As was the case in Argentina, the wines were rarely exported because their domestic population drank most of it. It was not until just a couple of decades ago that the number of wineries, and acres planted, grew enough to provide excess for export.

If you think this may be a primitive affair, I urge you to visit the Bodega Garzon website and see the winery built by owner Alejandro Bulgheroni. It is the first LEED certified winery outside of North America and their consulting winemaker is Alberto Antonini, who came to fame as the head winemaker for Antinori in the 1990s. The winery also sports a 120-seat restaurant directed by none other than Francis Mallman. Fermentation is done in large concrete tanks, like those found at Cheval Blanc, and aging is done in a combination of French oak tanks and barrels, as well as concrete. For this Cabernet Franc, the wine is fermented in the large 150HL concrete tanks, then aged on the lees in barrique for 6-12 months.

Decant this wine for a half hour and chill to cellar temperature. This wine immediately delivers the fantastic complexity of Cabernet Franc with notes of fresh dark cherries, black raspberries, oolong tea, tangerine peel and bay leaf. It also shows the gorgeous texture of the grape with medium weight, a nice punchy mid-palate of fruit then long, sinewy tannins. Drink with dishes with richness such as pasta Bolognese, skirt steak with chimichurri or tea smoked salmon.

2021 Sleight of Hand "The Spellbinder" - \$35

For this incredible blend Cabernet Franc plays the lead role in a diverse ensemble. The wine is made by Trey Busch, who is a Washington State winemaker who has been featured in this and the Reserve Club before. We first introduced him with a selection from Dunham Cellars in the mid-aughts, then in this and the Reserve Club with selections during his five year tenure at Basel Cellars. After Basel he launched Sleight of Hand and this is our second feature from his winery. During an early summer tasting of his new releases I noticed that the wines are slightly less powerful and oaky compared previous bottlings, which allowed for the finesse of the Cabernet Franc in this wine to have more impact. Despite only producing a little less than 1000 cases I was able to secure enough for this feature.

This wine is produced from grapes grown primarily in their estate vineyards on Blue Mountain, in Walla Walla, and Red Mountain west of Yakima. The Walla Walla AVA offers a unique look at the soil types of eastern Washington and Oregon. Most of the lower elevations in the area are composed of gravel and sand soils, remnants of the Missoula floods of 15,000 years ago, and the shifting riverbed of the Columbia River. Grapes from Red Mountain, which is roughly two hours northwest of Walla Walla, grow in very different soil conditions. On the western side of Red Mountain, where the vineyards are located, this area was less impacted by the Missoula floods. Here, the soil is more the result of weathered basalt, which is the remnant of the ancient lava beds from the volcanoes that covered the northwest US in the earliest days of the North American continent. For hundreds of millions of years, this deep crust of volcanic material has been weathered and broken, creating a mineral-rich but nutrient-poor soil. The combination of grapes from these conditions produces a wine that has great richness along with great balance.

To make this wine, Trey uses a combination of 42% Cabernet Franc, 38% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Merlot, and 10% Syrah grown in several sites. To reduce the impact of the oak the Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon were aged in a combination of large, upright French oak tanks and older, neutral barriques. The Merlot and Syrah were aged in more new oak as they were added for texture and structure. You will want to decant this wine for at least an hour before serving, as it is young and quite powerful. As soon as you pour the first glass, this wine explodes with notes of Bing cherries, tangerine peel, cocoa powder, roasted coffee beans, clove and cardamom pods. On the palate it shows a deep core of fruit framed by polished tannins and relatively low acidity. Drink this wine between 2024 and 2030. As this wine shows a lot of baby fat, try with leaner cuts of meat such as filet mignon, smoked pork loin or a New York strip.

Steak au Poivre

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 medium shallot, minced

1 cup low-sodium beef broth

¾ cup low-sodium chicken broth

¼ cup heavy cream

¼ cup brandy

1 tablespoon brandy

1 teaspoon lemon juice or 1 teaspoon champagne vinegar

Table salt

4 strip steaks - 8 to 10 ounces each

Table salt

1 tablespoon black peppercorns, crushed

There is something about how this bistro classic works with Cabernet Franc based wines that makes it one of the greatest great food & wine pairings. Put the peppercorns in a zip-lock bag and gently crack but not pulverize with a rolling pin for the best coverage. I also mix in pink and white peppercorns for a colorful take on this classic.

Heat 1 tablespoon butter in 12-inch heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat; when foaming subsides, add shallot and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 2 minutes. Add beef and chicken broths, increase heat to high, and boil until reduced to about 1/2 cup, about 8 minutes. Set reduced broth mixture aside. Rinse and wipe out skillet.

Meanwhile, sprinkle both sides of steaks with salt; rub one side of each steak with 1 teaspoon crushed peppercorns, and, using fingers, press peppercorns into steaks to make them adhere.

Place now-empty skillet over medium heat until hot, about 4 minutes. Lay steaks unpeppered side down in hot skillet, increase heat to medium-high, firmly press down on steaks with bottom of cake pan, and cook steaks without moving them until well-browned, about 6 minutes. Using tongs, flip steaks, firmly press down on steaks with bottom of cake pan, and cook on peppered side, about 3 minutes longer for rare, about 4 minutes longer for medium-rare, or about 5 minutes longer for medium. Transfer steaks to large plate and tent loosely with foil to keep warm.

Pour reduced broth, cream, and 1/4 cup brandy into now-empty skillet; increase heat to high and bring to boil, scraping pan bottom with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Simmer until deep golden brown and thick enough to heavily coat back of metal tablespoon or soup spoon, about 5 minutes. Off heat, whisk in remaining 3 tablespoons butter, remaining 1 tablespoon brandy, lemon juice or vinegar, and any accumulated meat juices. Adjust seasonings with salt. Set steaks on individual dinner plates, spoon portion of sauce over steaks, and serve immediately.