



Tim's Wine Market

November 2024

By Tim Varan

Most years, the selections made for the Explorer's Club in November focus on Thanksgiving pairings to work with the usual fare. This year I decided to focus on the other often over-looked days around Thanksgiving, when family and friends assemble in more casual settings. Sure, leftovers from the big meal are still appearing from Tupperware containers and foil-wrapped plates, but by Sunday after Thanksgiving I am ready to move on. In our house, this usually means something Italian and an older wine from my cellar. For this month I thought it would be interesting to give you two wines that work with Thanksgiving, but also a wide variety of meals to combat turkey fatigue.

2022 Marchetti Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi "Tenuta del Cavaliere" - \$25

This is the fifth wine selected from the Marchetti winery for the Explorers Club dating way back to 2009. Until now all of our selections from Maurizio Marchetti have come from the red wine side of his estate. This is the first time we are featuring his flagship wine which happens to be white. While he produces some of our most popular red wines, it is actually this bottling, an authoritative example of Verdicchio, for which he is most proud. Although most examples of this grape are made into lovely, lighter whites perfect for the cuisine of Italy's most beautiful coastline, this example is far richer and more intense, the perfect wine for many other dishes you may serve during the holidays.

Looking back through my digital tasting notes of this wine it is not surprising that my impressions are very consistent. Since the release of the 2013 vintage I have really loved each year this wine was produced but have only purchased it for the Orlando store shelves, never a feature. The other thing that surprised me is that is the cost of this wine has actually gone down in price 34 cents over that time. Imagine if groceries had the same deflation!

For those who are new enough to the club that this is your first Marchetti experience, the story of the winery is a great one. Maurizio Marchetti's great-great-great grandfather was a spice trader and, 250 years ago, amassed a fortune. Like all great spice merchants of the time, he assembled a large estate on the Adriatic coastline in the region of the Marche (pronounced *mar-kay*.) Today, his heir Maurizio Marchetti lives there and grows his grapes while also pursuing his two passions, wine and painting. Although this is a large estate that includes a small castle and amphitheater, it is far from covered with vines, so his annual production is only 4000 cases, of which this wine accounts for roughly 800.

The classic white wine variety of this part of Italy is the Verdicchio grape, which has been grown in the region for centuries. Recent DNA evidence has concluded that it is the same as Trebbiano di Soave, which is used in the north of Italy as a blending grape for the wines around Lake Garda. Thanks to its naturally high acidity, it is a versatile variety that can be used to produce sparkling wines and crisp, dry whites. If left to hang on the vines to achieve optimal ripeness, it can be used to produce richer, full bodied whites that retain great freshness, such as this bottling, and even dessert wines. While I always enjoy the lighter styles with seafood, this bottling is well suited for richer dishes and serious meals.

While it is easy to consider Maurizio a bon vivant, he also has a doctorate in oenology (winemaking science), so his skills in the cellar are without question. For this wine he allows the grapes to ripen three weeks longer than his regular Verdicchio and then they are hand picked. Only perfect clusters are used in this wine and the grapes are pressed using an extremely sensitive pneumatic press. The machine is so sensitive that he jokes that "butterflies crush my grapes with their wings as they fly by." The juice is allowed to settle in a stainless steel tank and then fermentation occurs very slowly, over six weeks, at extremely cold temperatures. He blocks the malolactic conversion to preserve freshness and then bottles the wine in March following the harvest.

When you are ready to serve this wine I strongly recommend decanting it for a half hour before serving. This wine has such a dramatic bouquet that evolves slowly and extra air really wakens it up. After a little time the nose is a glorious combination of gala apple, fresh yellow peach, honeydew melon, coriander seed, fennel pollen, and graphite. Where this wine really shines is when you take a sip and experience the superb richness that is kept in check by a frame of beautifully integrated acidity. Take note of how long the finish persists, a rarity for any wine made with Verdicchio. Serve this wine with any seafood dish that involves heavy cream, or an herb-stuffed porchetta.

2019 Tacchino Buongiorno - \$23

Is there a better name for a wine to have waiting for your guests than one called “Buongiorno?” Technically this means “good morning” in Italian, but greet your guests with a big hug and kiss and they probably won’t notice while thinking you have been spending time in Italy. You will appear so continental!

The story of this wine is the classic tale of the wine business, a great idea undone by reality and economics. Buongiorno is produced by winemaker Romina Tacchino, who together with her brother Alessio, are an up-and-coming star of the Monferrato region in Piemonte, Italy. While wines made using Nebbiolo are common in the Langhe Valley to the west, in Monferrato the producers focus more on the Barbera grape. The results are so impressive that the Italian government recently awarded Monferrato a new DOCG called Nizza. Since the Tacchino family have been racking up awards and big critical ratings for years, they were approached by a national coffee house chain in Italy to produce a private label red wine for them called Buongiorno. However, in the months it took to create the wine the chain folded and left the Tacchino family with hundreds of cases of wine. Their American importer tasted it during their annual visit and offered to buy it for the US market, which is how we discovered it.

As you would expect, the Tacchino family practice organic viticulture and harvest all their grapes by hand. This wine is fermented and aged only in stainless steel to preserve varietal clarity and freshness. The blend is 40% Barbera, 40% Dolcetto, and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Produced from the 2019 harvest, this wine has now been in bottle for almost five years so it is really hitting stride and showing beautifully.

When you open this wine, I strongly recommend decanting for 15-30 minutes. In addition, I would recommend serving this wine slightly chilled, around cellar temperature or 55 degrees. Once this wine has some time to open up, it delivers notes of ripe black cherry, fresh blackcurrant, dried fig, and black licorice. Drink now through 2026 with gnocchi with brown butter and sage, pappardelle with mushrooms, or porchetta.

Easy Porchetta

Growing up in an Italian family in Pennsylvania I am no stranger to porchetta, although I find the current social media fad surrounding this dish funny. Everyone Italian has their own “authentic” recipe for this dish although none remind me of what I grew up with in PA. Regardless, this version is really good and much easier than many examples. The results are great with my only recommendation being to not skip the overnight marinade for best results. If you do not want to purchase a fennel bulb just for this recipe then add two extra teaspoons of fennel seeds in the marinade. The color won’t be as pretty to start but the results are very similar in taste.

1 6- to 7-pound boneless roast, fat trimmed to ¼-inch thickness
¼ cup chopped fennel fronds
¼ cup chopped fresh rosemary
2 teaspoons chopped fresh sage leaves
5 garlic cloves mashed to a paste
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
1½ tablespoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon fennel seed
¾ teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon black pepper
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Score skin and fat all over pork, taking care not to cut down to the meat.

In a food processor or mortar and pestle, combine fennel fronds, rosemary, sage, garlic, lemon zest, salt, fennel seed, red pepper flakes and black pepper. Pour in oil. Pulse or mash until it forms a paste. Rub all over pork. Tie with kitchen string at 2-inch intervals. Transfer to a large bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate at least 6 hours and preferably overnight.

Remove pork from refrigerator 1 to 2 hours before you want to cook it. Heat oven to 450 degrees. Transfer pork to a rimmed baking sheet and roast 35 minutes. Reduce temperature to 325 degrees and cook an additional 2 hours 45 minutes to 4 hours, until a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat reads 180 degrees, which will give you sliceable, tender meat.

Transfer pork to a cutting board and let rest 15 to 30 minutes before serving. Make sure everyone gets some of the cracklings.