



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

When I was in high school I was a member of DeMolay, a young men's youth organization created by the modern Knights Templar. While I never really embraced the "secret society" aspect of the organization I did enjoy going to the meetings which were held in a turn-of-the-19th century building on Main Street of my home town. The lodge was above a grand old furniture store, with access through a small, unmarked door on the side of the building. After climbing two flights of old wooden steps we would enter the meeting chambers, which was a massive facility with many small rooms, all finished with dark wood paneling, thick drapes and tapestries. While I never pursued this into my adulthood it ignited an interest in secret societies that I still have today.

A few years later I started working in the wine business for a store that sold primarily Bordeaux. Immediately I learned about the Bordeaux Classification of 1855 and how two of the famous chateaus bore the name of the Rothschild family. There is a lot of speculation and conspiracy theory about the family, who in that time were some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the world. This month our two selections are made by current day members of the family from projects they have in South America. During my tastings with their representatives in late 2024 the wines were so good that this theme developed and is a great combination of wine and history.

The story of the Rothschild family begins in 1760 when Mayer Amschel Rothschild established himself as a banker to the court of Frankfurt, which at the time was a city/state within what is today Germany. Unique for the period Mayer was able to grow his business through his five sons, establishing branches in the financial capitals of Europe of the time; Paris, Frankfurt, London, Vienna, and Naples. They focused their attention on the royal courts of the time, underwriting the bonds used for war, which was so prevalent from the 1700s and through the early 1900s. It was due to this back channel power that so much of the mystery and intrigue surrounding the family developed. They also maintained a strong family bond, permitting no outsiders into positions of leadership, further building the illusion of conspiracy. Over time the family power declined, in part due to regime change as royal courts gave way to elected governments, and because of inheritance laws divided the fortune across copious family members. Today two prominent branches of the family continue, specifically the heirs to the London and Paris divisions, who share a name but are only distantly related. Our features are each from one of the branches and show how the families have evolved since their most prosperous period.

2022 Flechas de los Andes Malbec Aguaribay - \$19

In 1868, Baron James de Rothschild of the Paris branch of the family, bought Château Lafite in the commune of Pauillac. It was already classified as a First Growth in 1855 and some speculate his purchase was competition with his cousins who already owned Château Mouton-Rothschild, which at the time was a Second Growth. James was the grandson of Mayer Amschel and his family remains today what is believed to be the wealthiest of the Rothschild branches. Over the years his heirs have collected many famous Bordeaux chateaus including Château Duhart-Milon (also in Pauillac), Château Rieussec (Sauternes), Château L'Evangile (Pomerol), and Château Clark (Fronsac).

In 1998 James' great-grandson, Benjamin de Rothschild, inherited Château Clark from his father and hired the world renowned oenologist Michel Rolland to guide the winemaking. Looking to diversify their wine investments, Benjamin already had formed a partnership in South Africa, called Rupert and Rothschild, and was convinced by Rolland to consider Argentina. Initially he committed to being a part of Rolland's Clos de los Siete project. At the same time Benjamin's friend, Laurent Dassault of the Saint-Émilion Grand Cru Château Dassault, had expressed interest in a potential non-French joint venture. Together they visited Argentina and decided to purchase vineyards in the Vista Flores sub-region of the Valle de Uco, creating the Flechas de los Andes winery without Rolland's help.

The vineyards for Flechas de los Andes lie at the western edge of the Vista Flores area at nearly 3300 feet above sea level. At this elevation the land is semi-arid and windswept, a combination that amplifies the intensity of the grapes. The pair immediately began planting in 1999 and today the winery has more than 250 acres, broken into 48 individual parcels.

Each parcel is farmed specifically to the unique conditions of the site using only natural and organic treatments. It is from these 48 different blocks that they produce a series of wines, with the Aguaribay being their base line Malbec.

Decant this wine for a half hour and it provides a powerful bouquet of fresh blueberry, black raspberry, black peppercorn, and dried rosemary. There is very nice clarity of fruit with obvious but polished tannins that prove this is no entry level Malbec. Drink this from 2025 to 2027 with the steak bites below or grilled picanha with chimichurri.

2021 Escudo Rojo Gran Reserva - \$25

During their most prosperous period the family members began to invest in wineries in Bordeaux beginning with Nathaniel de Rothschild's purchase of Bran-Mouton in 1853. He changed the name of the chateau to Mouton-Rothschild and his family still operates it to this day. Coincidentally, the only change to the Classification of 1855, establishing the hierarchy of Bordeaux châteaux, occurred in 1973 when Château Mouton-Rothschild was elevated from a Second to First Growth, after decades of lobbying by then-owner Baron Philippe de Rothschild. California fans may also recognize it was Philippe who also formed a partnership with Robert Mondavi to create Opus One in 1978.

After Philippe's death his daughter, Philippine, embarked on another famous partnership with Concha y Toro in Chile, creating Almaviva in 1997. That remains the most collectible wine produced in South America. They also have other investments in South America including Los Vascos in Chile and Bodegas Caro in Argentina. In 1999 Baron Philippe de Rothschild, Philippine's son, embarked on another project in Chile, Escudo Rojo, in the Maipo Valley.

The Maipo Valley is famous around the world as an ideal place to grow Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties. Lying at the base of the Andes and as far east as possible, the soils are similar to Bordeaux, a mix of gravel and rock over sand and clay. With a perfect western exposure the vines always receive a full day's worth of sunlight which allows for optimal ripening. The family produces several tiers of wine from this vineyard but Gran Reserva is the wine they craft to show the entire vineyard, so it is a blend of 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 39% Carmenere 9% Syrah, 7% Petit Verdot and 6% Cabernet Franc. After blending the wine was aged for 12 months in 25% new French oak with the balance divided between second to fourth pass barrels.

Decant this wine for up to an hour before serving. Unlike the dramatic Flechas above, this wine is more refined with complex notes of claro cigar wrapper, Luxardo cherry, dried black figs, milk chocolate and dried rose petals. It has plenty of power on the palate but with some restraint and a savory finish. Drink 2025-2029 with the recipe of the month, braised meats or a mushroom studded meatloaf.

Garlic Steak Bites

My personal goal for this year is to make less time intensive meals on weekday nights and save the big meals for the weekend. This recipe is a perfect start because these amazing little bites can be served as an appetizer or with your favorite salad or starch. Of course they also work as an amazing complement to both wines.

1/4 cup olive oil

3 tablespoons soy sauce

1 1/2 pounds sirloin or flank steak, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

2 large garlic cloves, minced or grated

Chopped fresh parsley leaves and tender stems

Flaky salt and freshly cracked black pepper

In a large bowl, mix together the olive oil and soy sauce. Add the meat, tossing to coat. Let sit on the counter for 30 minutes or in the refrigerator for 1 hour or overnight, stirring occasionally.

Heat a large (12-inch) cast-iron or heavyweight skillet over medium-high heat for 2 minutes, until very hot. Using a slotted spoon, add the steak bites in a single layer, shaking off any excess marinade. Work in batches, if needed, to avoid crowding the pan. Cook until browned, 5 to 6 minutes, using tongs to turn over the pieces when they easily release from the pan.

If you've cooked in batches, return all the meat and juices to the pan. Remove from the heat and add the butter and garlic, pushing the steak around to coat and mix everything together, about 1 minute. Transfer to a serving plate. Drizzle the meat with any remaining sauce lingering in the pan. Top with parsley, a sprinkle of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Skewer bites with toothpicks, if desired.