



# Tim's Wine Market

April 2025

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For our tour around Europe this month we turn our attention to Spain, an ancient wine growing region that has exploded into the modern world in the past three decades. While we often focus on the modern side of Spain, this month we bring you two very cool examples of how the old categories still offer a lot too. - **Tim**

## **2023 Botani Moscatel de Malaga | \$25 per bottle**

The Phoenicians' role in the history of winemaking is often overshadowed by their other contributions to history, including manufactured goods, improved navigation techniques, and the alphabet. Most of the time it is the Romans who dominate the discussion when it comes to the introduction of wine in western Europe. However, when the Romans arrived in what they called Hispania, they were shocked to find a centuries-old wine industry, stretching from Cadiz all the way to the Balearic Islands. Almost as remarkable is the fact that this wine is made from the same exact grape variety, which has grown in southern Spain for nearly 3,000 years!

Moscatel is the local name for Muscat of Alexandria, one of the world's oldest grape varieties and the backbone of the early Mediterranean wine trade. This variety thrives in warm, dry climates, including its native Egypt and the islands of Sicily and Crete. All of these were part of an extensive trade network that linked Egypt to modern-day Spain, where the sunny, mountainous Sierra de Malaga creates a natural growing environment for this variety.

Like most wines of the ancient world, the Muscat-based wines of Malaga were dessert wines, whose residual sugar acted as a natural preservative in the era before refrigeration. When the Malaga denomination of origin was created in 1932, it exclusively applied to sweet wines. However, pressure from local winemakers and a decreased global demand for dessert wines prompted the creation of the Sierras de Malaga category, which covers the same geographic area but produces dry table wines instead.

This particular project is a collaboration between Spanish importer Jorge Ordóñez and Austrian winemaker Alois Kracher. Both partners have a history with dry Muscat-based wines and wanted to showcase the fresher, more mineral-driven side of this variety. Cultivated by many of the same growers who produce the Ordóñez dessert wines, the vineyards used in production of this wine are over 60 years old and completely dry-farmed. Some of the vineyard sites are so steep that specialized climbing gear is required at harvest. Needless to say, in such a dramatic setting, there is no room for artificial chemicals or any sort of machinery!

After the challenges of harvest, all fruit used in this wine is brought to the winery in Velez-Malaga, chilled, and hand-sorted. The wine ferments at cooler than usual temperatures and spends 6 months on the fine lees before bottling. When you open this wine, you will want to serve it chilled but not ice-cold, around 45-50 degrees Fahrenheit, which allows the intense aromatics of Moscatel to develop in the glass. Once this wine has a little time to open up, it delivers notes of fresh nectarine, peach pit, golden delicious apple, magnolia blossom, and wet stones. Drink 2025-2027 with prosciutto-wrapped melon, cod fritters, Indian dishes and sushi!

## **Lopez de Heredia Rioja "Viña Cubillo" 2016 | \$35**

Despite its long-standing reputation for quality, Rioja is one of the hardest regions in Spain to define concisely. For starters, the autonomous community of "La Rioja" and the wine region of "Rioja" cover different geographic territories, with the Rioja appellation stretching into the neighboring Basque Country and Navarra. Even more confusing is the adjective "traditional," which many wineries in the region use to describe themselves, no two of which produce a unified style of wine. It follows, then, that many Spanish wine enthusiasts in the United States associate the wines of Rioja with full-bodied Tempranillo that sees plenty of oak barrel maturation, a category that many wineries of the region have embraced.

However, one truth universally agreed on is that it is hard to get more “old-school” than the wines of Lopez de Heredia. Understand that, as a mountainous, land-locked region, La Rioja produced very little wine during the Spanish Golden Age compared to the agrarian powerhouses of Castile and Andalusia. Though wines from Rioja enjoyed popularity in France and Spain, it was not until the 19th century that the region would find a much larger audience. Winemakers from Bordeaux, fleeing the outbreak of phylloxera which devastated much of the French wine industry, relocated to Spain, where the epidemic was less severe. Due to its accessibility by rail, Rioja became the first stop for many French producers, who settled in the region and began to blend French winemaking technique with native Iberian varieties.

Don Rafael Lopez de Heredia y Landeta, who was studying winemaking at the time, wanted to take this fusion of French and Spanish techniques even further. In 1877, he began construction on the Lopez de Heredia winery, founded with an emphasis on single-vineyard bottlings and extended cellar maturation. These wines represent a side of Spanish wine rarely seen today, complex and fully mature, released only when the family deem them ready.

This wine is sourced from the family’s old clay-limestone vineyard, called “Cubillo,” which sits roughly 1300 feet above sea level on the right bank of the Ebro River. Though composed predominantly of Tempranillo, the site is also planted to Garnacha, Mazuelo, and the rare Graciano, all of which factor heavily into the final blend. All fruit is harvested by hand and matures in a selection of large oak barrels produced at the winery’s on-site cooperage, another Rioja tradition that has all but disappeared. After nearly 6 years in barrel the wine is bottled unfiltered, where it ages for an additional 2 years, far longer than the traditional crianza designation requires, before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. Once this wine has some time to open up, it displays incredible complexity with notes of cooked red plum, blackcurrant, cherry pit, earth, tanned leather, and pipe tobacco. Drink 2025-2028 with baked potatoes, cured ham, sheep’s milk cheeses such as Manchego, or bean soup.

## **Butter Chicken**

I specifically chose this recipe because it works great with both wines for different reasons, and it is not a Spanish dish. While I am a strong believer that wines pair best with their native cuisine, I also feel that many wines like these can also accompany other dishes with great success.

When looking for a recipe for this month I wanted a dish that could work with the aromatic qualities of the white wine, but also the tannin structure of the red. The spice palate of Indian cuisine is perfect for the Moscatel, as are the Asian spices and fish sauce. Where Butter Chicken leaps to the front of the options is due to the high fat content from cream, which really buffers the tannins of the Graciano. There are infinite recipes for this dish but this one stands out because the results are delicious, and it comes together quickly with mostly pantry staples. - **Tim**

**1 cup butter, divided**  
**1 onion, minced**  
**1 tablespoon minced garlic**  
**1 (15 ounce) can tomato sauce**  
**3 cups heavy cream**  
**2 teaspoons salt**  
**1 teaspoon cayenne pepper**  
**1 teaspoon garam masala**  
**1 ½ pounds skinless, boneless chicken breast,**  
**cut into bite-sized chunks**  
**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**  
**2 tablespoons tandoori masala**  
**2 tablespoons cilantro**

Gather all ingredients. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a skillet over medium heat. Stir in onion and garlic, and cook slowly until the onion caramelizes to a dark brown, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine cream, tomato sauce, remaining butter, salt, cayenne pepper, and garam masala in a saucepan over medium-high heat; bring to a simmer.

Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes. Stir in caramelized onions.

While the sauce is simmering, toss chicken with vegetable oil until coated. Season with tandoori masala and spread out onto a baking sheet.

Bake chicken in the preheated oven until no longer pink in the center, about 12 minutes.

Add cooked chicken to the sauce and simmer for 5 minutes before serving. Serve over basmati rice with a sprinkle of chopped cilantro.