



Tim's Wine Market

May 2025

By Tim Varan

The theme for this quarter is an advanced concept for many casual wine drinkers but one that is important, the way tannins present on the palate. While tannins are an integral part of most red wines they are often misunderstood by many consumers. Tannins, or specifically tannic acid, is one of the structural elements of red wine that allow it to age. By contrast most white wines do not have tannic acid unless it is added in the fermentation and/or aging process. The presence of tannic acid in a wine is perceivable by a drying sensation on the sides of your gums and inner cheeks. The way the tannins are managed in the wine is a complex topic, with different grape varieties and cellar practices designed to minimize or accentuate tannins depending on the goal for the wine. Professionals will describe them as “wood tannins” or “fruit tannins” so our features were selected to demonstrate these two different styles.

2020 Argiolas “Korem” | \$55 per bottle

The Argiolas winery would be a great American rags-to-riches story if they were not located on the island of Sardinia, an independent state of Italy. In 1938 Antonio Argiolas inherited a small, 7 acre farm near the capital of Cagliari at the southern end of the island. At the bequest of his father Antonio planted the first vineyard and shortly after began making wine. His project grew in size and in the late 1970's he began visiting other wine regions, particularly California and Bordeaux, and recognized how technology could improve his quality. While this seems like an obvious statement today, at the time the wines sold for pennies and investing any money to improve them was seen as a waste. Antonio also recognized that the winery's future would be anchored in the past, utilizing traditional indigenous varieties instead of the international varieties like Syrah and Merlot that were gaining popularity on the island. Antonio guided the winery until 2009, when even at 102 years old he worked every day. Today the winery is guided by his two sons and their children, who hold Antonio's belief as their guiding light for the future.

The name of this wine is taken from an ancient Greek coin found in the vineyard that depicts the head of Korem, goddess of the vineyards. If you read the back label of this wine you will see it is 85% Bovale, which is an “indigenous” variety to the island. Genetic testing shows the grape is actually Graciano, one of the high quality blending varieties for Tempranillo that is common in northern Spain. The reason it grows on Sardinia is that between the 13th and 17th centuries the island was under the rule of the Crown of Aragon, a piece of present day Spain. The balance of the wine is 10% Carignano, or Carignan, and 5% Cannonau, the local clone of Grenache. Both of these varieties were likely imported from Spain at the same time as Bovale, and over time have adapted to the harsh growing conditions of the island. To build some tannin into the wine the blend is aged in a mix of new and one year old French oak barrels for a year before bottling.

Of the three wines in this offering this is the “biggest” in terms of texture and power and shows a significant presence of “wood tannins.” These are tannins that are put into the wine during the winemaking and aging process through the use of new and mostly new oak barrels. You will want to decant it for a half hour or so and make sure to serve with some form of protein. The nose is a mix of fresh black raspberries, black olives, dark chocolate, toasted walnut shells and dried oregano. Initially the tannins jump in front of the fruit, but after a sip or two the richness becomes apparent and carries into the finish. The wood is pretty obvious at first but fades as the bottle opens. Drink 2025-2030.

2020 Cordero Di Montezemolo Barolo “Monfalletto” | \$65 per bottle

There is no question that Barolo is a category that has been considered elite for many years. Even in the 19th century Carlo Alberto of the House of Savoy called it the “king of wines and the wine of kings.” However, times were not always easy for the Piedmont, particularly in the decades following WWII. The Germans ravaged the region, which was a hotbed for resistance, leaving the vineyards in ruins and very few males to even work the land. That is why I find this selection so significant as the Cordero Di Montezemolo family have owned and farmed this land for 19 generations, and began bottling wine to export in the 1830's. Today this historic producer is not content to rest on their laurels but rather pushes the

boundary for what great Barolo should be in the future. This bottling, from the excellent 2020 vintage, is a wonderful introduction to this historic estate.

At the core of this estate are vineyards acquired by the Falletti family in 1800, when they traded land in the lower elevations of the valley for holdings higher in the hills around Alba. While many farmers of the time wanted land in the fertile valley where farming was easy, the Falletti family was well aware that the best quality wines come from the hills. By the early 1830's they were one of the few properties bottling wine to export, at a time when most of the production was sold to locals and restaurants. In 1941 Countess Luigia Falletti di Rodello passed away with no heirs, so her nephew Paolo Cordero Di Montezemolo inherited this large estate. He immediately began making improvements on the estate and vineyards, setting the stage for innovation that has become the hallmark of this property.

Throughout the economic ups and downs of the region the family has always guarded their holdings around the town of La Morra, in the heart of the Barolo district. They own two cru sites, Gattera and Gorette, and other parcels scattered around the village, totalling nearly 70 acres. Collectively they farm and vinify these parcels and bottle the wine as Monfalletto. In this part of the Barolo region the soils are primarily a mix of clay and limestone, which give the wines elegance and good structure. Classically Barolo is a wine that shows a lot of "fruit tannins" which are naturally occurring in the skins and seeds of some red grape varieties. Nebbiolo, the grape of Barolo, is known for high tannins and through the years winemakers have tried different techniques in the cellar to lessen their impact. The Cordero family utilize shorter maceration times for their Barolo, this one only 10 days, to lessen what can be relatively austere tannins derived from the skins and seeds of the Nebbiolo grapes. They then age the wine in a mix of older oak from small 225 liter French barrels to 250 hectoliter Slavonian casks. These older casks have been leaching off their tannins over time. Their goal is to let the sense of terroir push through without any imprint of oak on the wine.

One of the alluring attributes of the 2020 vintage in Barolo is how drinkable the wines are young. After a half hour in the decanter you will notice the exotic bouquet of fresh red cherry, tangerine peels, dried red plum, violet liqueur, star anise seed and pipe tobacco. On the palate this wine is almost the reverse of the Korem, as you will initially be greeted by a nice pop of fruit followed by rising tannins that carry into the finish. Good now but this wine will age nicely until 2035.

2021 Donne Fittipaldi Bolgheri Rosso | \$49 per bottle

This was the last piece of the puzzle to pull the theme together, demonstrating both fruit and wood tannins. The Donne Fittipaldi winery is the dream of a mother and her four daughters, who in 2004 purchased vineyard land in the Tuscan region of Bolgheri. For them the combination of coastal influence, well drained soils and sunny climate are the perfect place to grow grapes to make elegant and aromatically complex wines. Typical of this part of Tuscany the preferred grapes are actual Bordeaux varieties, which thrive in the gravelly soils.

For this project each of the four daughters brings her professional experience to the company, handling all of the aspects except the actual grape growing and winemaking. For these tasks they hired esteemed viticulturist Stefano Bartolomei and the oenologist Emiliano Falsini. The final component is their striking label designs by Giorgio Restelli, who perfectly captures the essence of this woman owned and managed winery.

The Bolgheri region has a very interesting history as prior to WWII it was considered too swampy for grape production. As a build up to the war Benito Mussolini brought in Dutch engineers to help drain the region so it could be used for grain production. Unfortunately much of the soils in the area are gravel, which while poor for grain production is fantastic for grape vines. After the war Mario Incisa della Rocchetta noticed how similar the soils are to Bordeaux and took vine cuttings from an old vineyard near Pisa. Instead of the more traditional Sangiovese he focused on the classic grapes of Bordeaux; Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Today most of the producers in the Bolgheri region use the same mix with this example being 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc and 10% Petit Verdot.

The reason this wine was selected is because it shows both fruit and wood tannins. Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot provide a lot of fruit tannins. Each variety was fermented separately then the blend was made and the wine aged in a mix of 2nd and 3rd pass French barriques for 12 months, which contributed some wood tannins. The result is a wine that shows warm notes of cooked cherry, blackcurrant preserves, cola syrup and tamari on the nose. The palate is pretty dense with forward tannins that put a frame around the ample fruit into the finish. Drink 2025-2030.