



Tim's Wine Market

September 2025

By J.P. Donnelly Davis & Tim Varan

When traveling through South Africa the influence of the Dutch is everywhere, particularly in the “Winelands” which lie outside the city of Cape Town. This is not a surprise as the colonization of South Africa started with the Dutch in 1652. However, very early in their rule a group of French Huguenots arrived in the 1680s seeking religious freedom. They brought grape varieties and winemaking techniques from the Rhône and Bordeaux to the Western Cape which greatly helped the infant wine industry. Originally the Dutch sequestered them to an area called Franschoek, which means “French corner” but within a few years their influence began to grow. Thanks to the French several wines from South Africa were well regarded throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. However in the 20th century the global backlash against apartheid nearly destroyed the industry and many wineries folded. With the end of apartheid in the the 1990s came a second wave of producers from France eager to work the Western Cape with its near perfect climate. This month we focus on red blends produced by the new wave of French producers in South Africa.

2019 Terre Brulee “Le Rouge” | \$22

Terre Brulee is a winery created by Vincent Carême in the Swartland region north and west of Cape Town. Driving through the region is reminiscent of western Ohio, with soft rolling hills covered primarily with grain crops. The big difference, aside from the looming Cederberg Mountains in the distance, is that the top of some hills are covered with grape vines. This is because the top soil on the crowns of the hills is too thin to support grain so the farmers planted grape vines which need less nutrients to grow. Wine was never their primary crop so most of the grapes were sold to the growers cooperative of South Africa, the KWV. With the end of apartheid many farmers abandoned their vineyards and focused solely on their grain crops. Starting in the late 1990s a group of young winemakers recognized the value of these old vines and began contracting to farm the vineyards and make wine from the grapes. Their superb efforts caught the attention of other winemakers who swarmed to the region, including Vincent Carême from the Loire Valley of France.

The Swartland, which means “black earth” is so named because of the decomposed granite and shale soils that appear almost black. It is a stunning place to make wine thanks to the warm, dry climate, and moderating influences from the Atlantic and the Cederberg mountain range to the east. This provides a rain shadow that creates dry conditions making organic farming quite easy, especially for Rhône varieties such as Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault. This was quite a change for winemaker Vincent Carême who was born into a winemaking family in Vouvray, one of France’s cool climate growing regions.

Originally Vincent focused on making wine from the old bush vines of Chenin Blanc that dominate the region. It is the same grape used to make Vouvray so he was very comfortable with the process. However, his real interest was red wine and working with the Rhone varieties planted in the Swartland. For this wine he uses a combination of 60% Shiraz and 40% Cinsault, both varieties never found in the Loire Valley of France. Winemaking is relatively straightforward except that Vincent includes 20% whole clusters of Syrah in the fermentation to enhance structure. Both varieties were fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks.

We chose this wine as a feature because it is six years old and showing some gorgeous development. We still encourage you to decant this wine for at least half an hour to allow the bouquet to develop. Once this wine has some time to open up it massively delivers with notes of dried black cherry and red plums, red currant preserves, rooibos tea and black pepper. Surprisingly, this wine is fairly crunchy and bright on the palate despite the age and will work really well with a variety of foods including grilled pork chops, sausage gumbo or baked salmon. Drink 2025-2029.

2020 Le Chant Rouge | \$27

This wine hails from Stellenbosch, South Africa’s best known growing region that is due north of Cape Town. Founded by the Dutch colonial governor, Simon van der Stel, in the early 17th century, the Stellenbosch was an important area for

wine grapes. These grapes were one of the upstart colony's first cash crops. However, most of the early production was distilled into brandy which withstood long sea voyages better than wine. Over time the quality of the wines improved and eventually Stellenbosch became the premier wine region for the Cape. As international experience moved into the region the producers recognized the diverse conditions of Stellenbosch thanks to the topography created by 3 surrounding mountain ranges. Today they are creating several sub-zones, called wards, which offer wines with distinct character. One of the most famous wards is the high altitude Polkadraai Hills from which our first feature hails.

Le Chant is the "second label" of Taaibosch, a store favorite and prior Reserve Club selection. The Taaibosch winery is a boutique estate on the slopes of Helderberg Mountain in Stellenbosch. It is a new winery, built on the remains of the Cordoba winery which last bottled wine with the 2003 vintage. Cordoba, under the guidance of winemaker Chris Keet, was the first South Africa winery to produce a predominantly Cabernet Franc wine in 1995. Although the wines enjoyed a cult status they folded and the property sat on the market for a decade before being purchased by the Oddo family from France. The family has vast resources, owning a financial services company, wineries and vineyards across the globe. According to their general manager, 4th generation Stellenbosch winemaker Schalk-Willem Joubert, this is the crown jewel of their holdings. They have built a new, state-of-the-art winery and are replanting several vineyards that have suffered from a decade of neglect. Le Chant is their second label and is primarily made up of young vines from the property that are not ready for use in Taaibosch.

The name Le Chant pays homage to the French Huguenots who contributed so much to the early wine industry. While working in their vineyards they would sing songs to pass the time, which earned them the nickname "le chant." For this wine they use a blend of 42% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc, 5% Shiraz, 4% Sangiovese, 3% Malbec and 2% Petit Verdot.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. Once this wine has some time to open up it delivers impressive notes of fresh black currants, black pepper, menthol, black olive and dried bay leaf. Despite coming from younger vines this wine has nice richness and intensity, with soft, rounded tannins at the finish. Serve this with grilled skirt steak, pork tenderloin glazed with soy and brown sugar or a mushroom/spinach flat bread.

Chicken, Mushroom and Poblano Quesadillas

Both feature wines this month are medium weight and have soft tannins making them ideal for any cheesy dish. While playing with some ideas this recipe jumped out, as it is both easy and can utilize ingredients you may have on hand.

8 ounces cremini mushrooms , sliced thin
2 poblano chiles , stemmed, seeded, and chopped fine
¼ cup water
½ teaspoon vegetable oil
¾ teaspoon table salt , divided
2¼ cups shredded rotisserie chicken
4 ounces Monterey Jack cheese , shredded
4 ounces sharp cheddar cheese , shredded
1 tablespoon minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce
¾ teaspoon ground cumin
4 (10-inch) flour tortillas
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided

Cook mushrooms, poblanos, and water in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat, stirring occasionally, until skillet is almost dry and mushrooms begin to sizzle, about 3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-high. Add ½ teaspoon oil and ¼ teaspoon salt, and toss until vegetables are evenly coated. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms are well browned, 4 to 6 minutes longer. Transfer vegetables to large bowl. Add chicken, cheeses, chipotle chile, cumin, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt to vegetables and stir to combine. Wipe out skillet.

Spread one-quarter of filling over half of each tortilla, leaving ½-inch border at edge. Fold tortillas over filling and press firmly to seal. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet and line with single layer of paper towels.

Heat ¼ cup oil in now-empty skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Place 2 quesadillas in skillet, pressing into pan with thin spatula, and cook until browned on both sides and cheese has melted, 1½ to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to prepared rack. Repeat with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and remaining 2 quesadillas. Cool for at least 3 minutes. Cut into wedges and serve.