



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

This quarter we have a rare opportunity to examine the concept of *tertiary* flavors in wine, which are the result of time in the bottle. All of our selections are from the 2019 vintage and have evolved past their primary fruit flavors and have begun to develop more complex aromas and flavors thanks to the unique combination of circumstances. Since most of us drink all wines young, let alone whites, this promises to be an exciting collection and unique opportunity for the holidays. It is worth noting that if you typically lay the wines from your club down this is not the quarter to do so. Please make sure you drink these within a year or two.

As an introduction, there are a number of factors that determine if a wine will age and it is important to understand that most do not have them. The wine must come from a place with distinctive terroir that will become more evident as time passes. It must be made from a grape that has the right combination of acidity and fruit to evolve and not fall apart. Finally, it has to be properly stored to allow these factors to play out.

Nikolaihof Riesling Federspiel 2019 | \$65

Nikolaihof is one of the oldest wine estates in the world, with a history that stretches back almost 2000 years. They are located in the Wachau region of Austria, one of my favorite sources for EBR wines. For those who are new to the Wachau wine region or need a refresher, it's approximately an hour's drive west of Vienna. The road follows the Danube River, offering breathtaking views of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. The vineyards cascade down the steep, terraced hillsides, creating a picturesque landscape.

The unique soils in the Wachau region are a blend of slate, granite, schist, and loess. These soils contribute to a wide range of terroir differences among the producers' offerings. The old estates in the region often own vineyards at various levels on the slopes, which results in diverse sunlight exposure, soil types, and water availability for the vines. The main grapes grown in the region are Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, both of which thrive in the specific conditions. It's worth noting that Austrian wines are always dry, despite the producers' use of tall, thin hock bottles.

Returning to our feature estate, the Nikolaihof property was established in 67 AD as part of a Roman fort called *Favianis*. In 470, a group of German monks acquired the property during the fall of Rome. Their leader, Saint Severin, named it "Weingebirge" or 'wine hills.' In 770, it was formally established as the Kremsmünster Abbey and remained a monastic estate under various orders until 1804. During this period, it served as both an abbey and a winery, relying on its wine as its primary revenue source. In 1894, Anton and Anna Saahs purchased the estate, which has been in their ownership ever since. Currently, Nikolaus Saahs Jr. manages the estate. Nikolaus' mother, Christine, introduced biodynamic farming to the estate and Austria in 1971, making them one of the oldest practitioners in the world. Today, the estate is not only a winery but also a fully functioning farm, producing and selling a significant portion of its production, including honey and grape seed oil.

In 2019, the Wachau region experienced an exceptional year, with many comparing the wines to the legendary 1990s. Now, six years after harvest, this wine stands as a remarkable testament to the evolution of Riesling over time. I recommend decanting it for about half an hour before serving, but maintain a relatively cold temperature of 45 degrees. The nose of this wine is a captivating blend of magnolia blossoms, fresh apricots, nectarines, and a hint of old crushed velvet. Initially, the flavor is almost subtle, but as the wine unfolds on the palate, it reveals a deep and intense wave of fruit and minerality. This incredibly versatile wine thrives when it can be the star of the show. It pairs perfectly with sautéed fish with lemon and capers or a simple roast chicken.

Château Le Bruilleau Pessac-Leognan Blanc | \$54

In my opinion the great white wines of the Pessac-Leognan region of Bordeaux are some of the most distinctive, and age worthy in all of France. Sadly, with a few exception the wines are mostly overlooked and I think that is because they can be a little stiff when young. Then, around 5-6 years old they begin to soften and show their stuff, like this one.

For those unfamiliar with this small appellation, it lies south of the city of Bordeaux on the west bank of the Garonne River. The appellation did not gain independent status from the Graves region until 1987, when the dark wine overlords of France finally recognized the difference in soil and elevation for the northern portion of the appellation from the rest. Despite being south of the city there is one First Growth in the appellation, Chateau Haut Brion, as well as many other esteemed estates. Unlike most of the rest of the “Left Bank” of Bordeaux, the producers in this appellation have always been entitled to make white wine, not just red. In fact, it makes up 20% of the total production of the appellation.

Our example comes from a small estate that has been owned and run by the Bédicheau family for four generations. The current generation, Nadine and Serge Bédicheau farm roughly 25 acres, divided 75% to red grapes and 25% to white. Their estate is located in the commune of St-Médard d'Eyrans in the southern portion of the appellation. In this part of Bordeaux the dominant grape variety for white wine is Semillon, which produces powerful wines with great texture. It is augmented almost exclusively with Sauvignon Blanc, which provides acidity and aromatics. This bottling is 70% Semillon and 30% Sauvignon Blanc, from vines that average 40 years old.

In order to make ageworthy and balanced wines it takes some work in the cellar. All of the grapes at Le Bruilleau are hand harvested and destemmed. The Semillon is left on the skins for 10 hours in large oak vats. After it is racked off the skins and fermentation happens in small oak barrels of which 33% are new. The Sauvignon Blanc is immediately pressed off the skins and fermented and aged only in stainless steel tanks. Once both are dry the wine is blended and aged for 10 months in barriques, again, 33% new.

When I visited in Bordeaux in late March 2020 it was to taste the 2019s and I was blown away by the white wines. I have been waiting for all these years to present some of my favorites and this is a wonderful wine from which to start. Decant this wine and let it warm to cellar temperature and the nose offers a brooding combination of fresh green figs, pomelo, bees wax, coriander, vanilla and creme Anglais. The feel on the palate is big, with copious framed by obvious oak notes and a thread of acidity runs throughout. This wine is showing well now and will improve for up to five more years. Drink with a whole roasted fish stuffed with fennel and lemon or ham and cheese tartine.

Domaine des Perdrix Bourgogne Hautes Cotes de Nuits 2019 |\$65

I was hoping to find an older Chenin Blanc for this slot, but when I tasted this wine, I knew it also had to be included. Part of what makes this wine suitable for the feature is that it does not come from one of the heralded appellations of Burgundy but rather the less renowned Hautes Côtes de Nuits. While this would be just a baby if from Meursault or Chassagne-Montrachet, it is approaching middle age since it hails from the high slopes above the Côtes de Nuits. As such, it is showing the perfect tertiary development of a maturing Chardonnay.

The Domaine des Perdrix is owned by the Devillard family, who purchased it in 1996. At the time, this estate needed work, as most in Burgundy did, and they invested heavily in renovating the cellars and replanting the vineyards. Today, it is a large and well-respected estate, farming 320 acres across the Côtes de Nuits with extensive holdings in the Nuits-Saint-Georges and Vosne-Romanée communes. This wine is produced from a tiny parcel, just 1 acre, which grows on the high side of the slope above the village of Premeaux-Prissé.

For almost 1,500 years, the region of Burgundy has been observed by monks, royalty, and vineyard owners, all looking for the subtle changes in slope, elevation, exposition, and soil that create the diversity of the region. Today, there are many official designations to define these characteristics, including the Hautes Côtes de Nuits appellation. This designation defines vineyards that lie between 750 and 1,300 feet above sea level on the limestone escarpment that forms the Burgundy region. These vineyards have been culled from the more expensive village, Premier, and Grand Cru vineyards that lie below them because historically, their elevation was too high for the grapes to achieve complete ripeness. If you are looking for a positive attribute of climate change, that is no longer a problem most years in this region.

When this wine was presented to me in early November, I was concerned it might be over the hill. The 2019 vintage for white Burgundy produced precocious wines, and at that time, I questioned whether they would age. This wine shows they have, as the nose presents a lovely combination of lemon hard candy, Gala apple, candied orange peel, vanilla paste, and caramel. On the palate, it displays gorgeous minerality and plenty of intense fruit that carries nicely into the finish. Drink from 2025 to 2028 with pasta in a cream sauce, crab claws with drawn butter, or grilled prawns.