



Tim's Wine Market

February 2026

By Tim Varan

Every time I serve wine, I make two recommendations. The first is to decant the wine for a period of time, and the second is to aim for a specific serving temperature. For the next couple of months, I will briefly explain why you should follow these guidelines to enhance your wine-drinking experience. After that, we will dedicate the rest of the year to discussing other details often found in the write-up, such as farming practices, winemaking, and aging. Stay tuned; this is going to be an educational year!

Why Decanting Is Important

I may sound like a broken record, but in all my tasting notes for club selections and weekly features, I recommend decanting the wine. Yes, it's an extra step and means one more thing to clean, but the results are worth it! Space does not allow for a full explanation here, but I covered the subject in my blog post, "The Argument For Decanting," which you can find on our website under Tim's Blog.

The most basic reason for decanting is to allow the bouquet of the wine to blossom. This happens due to a chemical process between the wine and oxygen that facilitates the release of aromatic compounds called esters. All the fruit and floral components described in the write-up are produced during this process. This is why I suggest decanting white wines, too.

For red wines, there is the added benefit of the color compounds, known as anthocyanins, binding with tannic acid in the presence of oxygen to form microscopic chains. These chains grow longer as the wine opens, becoming too long to be perceived by your taste receptors, which gives the impression of a softer texture. (If you read my blog, you'll find a lengthy and somewhat convoluted metaphor about an all-girls school dance to illustrate this point.)

Finally, for wines bottled under screw caps, which are far superior to cork closures, it's common for these wines to smell "reductive" when first opened. This occurs because sulfur compounds, both naturally occurring during fermentation and possibly added at bottling, can bind to the wine over time. The smell of matchsticks indicates that this has happened in both red and white wines. Oxygen from decanting breaks these bonds and allows the wine to develop more quickly, enhancing your enjoyment.

Cabernet Franc - Worth Getting to Know

This month, we will examine two examples of Cabernet Franc, a variety that is gaining popularity around the world. Cabernet Franc is an ancient variety most famously used as a blending grape in Bordeaux. It is known that Cabernet Franc is one of the parents of Cabernet Sauvignon, which was created when it was crossed with Sauvignon Blanc, most likely in the 18th century. The most common belief is that the variety originated in Bordeaux, where it was called Breton for many years. Now, DNA evidence suggests that it may actually have come from the monastic wineries of Spain and was carried over the Pyrenees Mountains into Bordeaux as early as the 12th century. It is also believed that at least one of the parent grapes of Cabernet Franc is either extinct or has yet to be identified.

For most of the past century, Cabernet Franc, as a standalone variety, has been more commonly used in the cool Loire Valley of France, where it buds and ripens early enough for their short growing season. Until the past decade, it was rarely planted outside of France for anything other than blending, but climate change is shining new light on this variety across the globe.

While it is true that Cabernet Franc ripens earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon, it also does so at lower alcohol levels and with higher natural acidity. As tastes change and consumers steer toward wines with lower alcohol content, Cabernet Franc is well situated to become more significant. This month, we have two excellent examples from Argentina and South Africa to demonstrate the range of this wonderful grape.

Sur de Los Andes Cabernet Franc Reserva 2021 | \$20

Argentina may seem like a strange place to begin our study of Cabernet Franc, but during my trip there in 2013, it was the variety that struck me as the most interesting. Of course, the reason for my journey was to develop a greater understanding of Malbec and the differences among the various appellations of Mendoza. In the process, I tasted several Cabernet Franc wines and found compelling examples that were vastly different from those commonly tasted in the Loire Valley of France or California.

At that time, Cabernet Franc was still rare in Mendoza, with only around 1,200 acres planted, mostly for blending. That number has grown significantly since then, reaching 3,700 acres as of 2022. Today, most wineries that grow the variety also bottle a singular example, as many are searching for a second variety to promote. Cabernet Franc is well suited to the cooler regions of Mendoza due to the high elevation of most of the vineyards. Its habit of early budding and early harvest also means it produces a reliable crop.

A good example is our feature winery, Sur de Los Andes, which is owned by Guillermo Banfi. Guillermo, who is not related to the Italian brand (which is owned by the Mariani family), started Sur de Los Andes in 2005 after a successful career in banking. He established a 60-acre vineyard in the Luján de Cuyo region of Mendoza, where the vines are planted at 3,500 feet above sea level. Guillermo also had the foresight to hire Pablo Durigutti as winemaker, who was one of the bright young stars of Argentina at that time. Together, they have forged Sur de Los Andes into one of the top addresses in the region.

Decant this wine for half an hour (see above) and try to serve it at 55 degrees, or cellar temperature. Once you do this, the nose rewards you with a rich combination of fresh blueberry, black currant, toasted bread, milk chocolate, and menthol. The palate is dry with good concentration, featuring deep fruit framed by very polished tannins and modest acidity. This is a great wine to serve anywhere you think Cabernet Sauvignon works, but it plays beautifully into the faintly herbal quality with a finish of parsley or mint. I particularly enjoy this wine with a pork tenderloin that has been butterflied and stuffed with a mushroom duxelles, heavy with parsley and lemon peel.

Big Flower Cabernet Franc 2023 | \$35

I have a funny story about how I discovered this wine way back in 2016. When I visited South Africa in January 2016, it was a whirlwind five-day trip during which I tasted well in excess of 600 wines—so many that taking detailed tasting notes was impossible. As a guest of the Wines of South Africa trade organization, my contact information was given to anyone who imports wines I tasted while there. Upon returning, my inbox was flooded with suppliers and importers wanting to know about my interest in their products. One of those importers was Pascal Schildt, who specializes in boutique South African wineries.

When Pascal Schildt reached out to see if I was interested in any of his wines, I confessed my inability to document all of the 600 wines I tasted over five days. He laughed and then sent me two cases of samples so I could digest them at my own pace. Wanting to get back to him as quickly as possible, my nephew Lee and I took all the samples and headed to a newly opened pizza joint near his house, Pizza Bruno. With their permission, we carried in two coolers and proceeded to open all 24 bottles while consuming several of their early experiments. At that point, they did not have much of a wine program, so we also shared a glass with any other patrons who were interested. It was quite a night!

One of the early standouts was this stunning example from Ginny Povall. Ginny's family owns Protea Heights in the Devon Valley, a short drive from the town of Stellenbosch. Since the 1940s, her family has grown Protea flowers, the national bloom of South Africa. In 2009, Ginny decided to plant a few acres of vines as well because of her love for wine. Today, vines consume more than half of the property, and in 2014, she received her organic certification. Our featured wine is produced from those early cuttings, which grow at roughly 600 feet above sea level on a mix of decomposed granite, shale, and sandstone.

Once you decant this wine for half an hour and chill it to cellar temperature, it shows a greater sense of restraint, with subtle notes of dried rose petals, blood orange, dried cranberry, cedar, and pipe tobacco. It is also less bombastic on the palate than the Sur de Los Andes, displaying more elegance, with long, sinewy tannins that wrap around the fruit more obviously. This savory example is well suited to rich meats like duck and lamb, where the higher acidity and prominent tannins help cut through the fat.

Stuffed Pork Tenderloin

This easy and elegant dinner from All Recipes that is perfect for enjoying with either of the New World Red Club selections this month. There are not a lot of tricks to this except make sure you pound out the pork tenderloin to an even thickness. I typically trim the thinnest part of the tail off and cook while browning the complete dish. It makes a great snack while this roasts in the oven. Also, I feel like they missed an opportunity for a killer pan sauce to accompany this so I added my version at the bottom.

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided, or as needed
10 white mushrooms, minced
1 shallot, minced
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon dried sage
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
2 cups fresh spinach, lightly chopped
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 (2 pound) pork tenderloin, butterflied and pounded flat
4 slices prosciutto

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a skillet over medium heat; cook and stir mushrooms, shallot, thyme, garlic, sage, black pepper, and salt in the hot oil until liquid has evaporated and mushrooms and shallots are softened, 5 to 10 minutes.

Add parsley; cook and stir for 1 minute. Mix in spinach; cook and stir until spinach is wilted, about 5 minutes. Stir in mustard. Remove from heat.

Place pork tenderloin on a work surface; lay prosciutto atop tenderloin. Spread mushroom-spinach mixture over prosciutto, leaving a 1/2-inch border on all sides. Tightly roll tenderloin around filling and tie together with kitchen string to keep closed.

Heat remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat; place rolled tenderloin in the hot oil. Sear until all sides are golden brown, about 10 minutes.* Transfer seared tenderloin to a 9x13-inch casserole dish.

Bake in the preheated oven until pork is slightly pink in the center, 25 to 30 minutes. An instant-read thermometer inserted into the center should read at least 145 degrees. Remove from the oven, remove from the casserole and allow to rest for 15 minutes under a foil tent. Slice into 1-1/2 inch slices and serve.

* When I made this dish I did not use a non-stick pan to brown the tenderloin, and after browning placed the whole pan in the oven rather than dirty a casserole dish. When I removed the pan from the oven and placed the tenderloin on a cutting board to rest, I then built a pan sauce in the skillet. Be careful, the handle is hot! I browned one minced shallot in the remaining fat, then deglazed with a splash of Cabernet Franc and a 1/2 cup of chicken stock. Scrape the pan to remove all the brown bits and reduce for five minutes until the liquid begins to thicken. Then off the heat whisk in 3 tablespoons of frozen butter you cut into cubes. Whisk until emulsified, taste for seasoning and spoon over the slices of tenderloin.