



Tim's Wine Market

March 2026

By Tim Varan

The inspiration for this quarter came to me while reading about the Winter Olympics last month and how they were held across several areas of Northern Italy. This got me thinking about how mountainous the majority of Italy is and the complexity of terroirs that creates. For many, we overlook the great white wines of Italy because the reds are so famous, but there is a rich tapestry of grapes and terroirs that you should explore, and hopefully, this will motivate you. After a couple of focused tastings, this collection came together with one unique, very special wine at the end.

2023 Murva Sauvignon Blanc “Teolis” | \$59

If you are surprised to see Sauvignon Blanc as the starting point for a study of Italian wines, then you are probably not alone. Globally, this grape is red hot, but producers in Italy are not “Johnny-come-lately” to the variety, thanks to the complex history of the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, where this wine originates.

Friuli Venezia Giulia is located in the far north-eastern corner of Italy, geographically tucked between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea. Due to this location, it has been the crossing point for many different tribes and conquerors throughout history, eager to access the sea for commerce. This has given the region influences from Italian, Slavic, and Germanic leaders and added to the reason why there are so many different grapes grown here, both unique and well-known. It was Rome that first conquered the region in the second century BCE, and evidence of their occupation still exists today. After the fall of Rome in the 6th century, the power vacuum was filled by the nearby Lombards, who divided the region between Friuli and Venezia Giulia. A lot happened over the next 13 centuries, but it is too much to include here, with the salient point being that the region was ultimately ceded to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. From that time, the wine producers evolved a winemaking style that was different from their Italian neighbors, as their domestic market preferred white wines similar to those of Austria, which are richer and more concentrated. By the time the region was given to a then-unified Italy after WWI, the style was well established and remains prominent today.

Our featured selection comes from one of the bona fide superstars of this region, Murva, which was established in 2009 by husband and wife Alberto Pelos and Renata Pizzulin. Both come from families with a background in viticulture in the region, but Alberto spent 15 years as the winemaker for Vie di Romans. This is one of the legendary estates in Friuli that helped establish the international reputation for the wines, particularly for well-known varieties. The couple farms roughly 12 acres divided into six parcels, each carrying the historic name of the area. Teolis is one of their most famous wines, an expression of Sauvignon Blanc that is both specific to the variety and singular in the way the site is expressed through the wine.

What makes this area unique is the way that rivers have carved up the land over time and created a complex tapestry of soils. The Teolis site lies near the Isonzo, which has cut a path through the topsoil of limestone to reveal the Dolomitic granite bedrock. This gives the wines a very distinctive character as both soils contribute to the complexity of this expression of Sauvignon Blanc. The couple also farms using sustainable practices to enhance the unique attributes of the site.

To make this wine, the grapes are hand-harvested, destemmed, and then allowed to sit overnight at low temperatures before pressing. Fermentation and aging are done entirely in stainless steel to preserve the aromatic complexity of the wine and retain freshness.

I strongly recommend decanting this wine for half an hour before serving and shooting for cellar temperature, 55 degrees, not refrigerator temperature. The nose has laser focus with intense notes of gooseberry, Kaffir lime leaf, tangerine peel, elderflower, and sea salt. On the palate, this wine has incredible intensity, with the salinity from the limestone and the pepperiness of the granite both shining through. Serve with linguine with white clam sauce or sautéed chicken breasts wrapped in prosciutto and sage.

2023 Chateau Feuillet Petit Arvine | \$55

This is our second selection in 12 months featuring the Petit Arvine grape variety, which is surprising as there are only about 600 acres of this grape planted in the world. The majority is grown in Switzerland, the home of our selection last year, but roughly 70 acres are planted in the nearby Italian region of Valle d'Aosta.

Our featured selection comes from Maurizio Fiorano, who came to the wine world basically by default. He was born in Turin and studied surveying in Milan, where he met his wife. After they married, she longed to return to her hometown of Saint Pierre in the Valle d'Aosta, where her family runs an inn and restaurant. When their kids came along, Maurizio grew tired of the commute to work in Milan and decided to work the vines that his wife inherited instead. His plan was to make wine for their restaurant, but farming roughly 9 acres proved to be more wine than they could consume. A chance meeting with Kermit Lynch at Vin Italy led to a contract, and today the wines are available in the US, albeit in very tiny quantities. As mentioned before, our selection is produced from the Petit Arvine variety, which is known to growers as the Diva of the Alps. This challenging grape variety requires a lot of sun exposure and ripens very late. In cool years, it produces very little crop, if any at all. To make it more challenging, the grape also has very thick skins and a fair amount of tannin, so winemakers must be careful not to over-press in the cellar, which can lead to bitterness.

At Chateau Feuillet, they farm roughly 4 acres of this variety on a site that has thin, sandy topsoil over granite bedrock. They do not pick this variety until mid-October, and it is fermented exclusively in stainless steel tanks very slowly over 25-30 days. The result is a very different expression than our feature last year, which was a richer, more evolved example. Maurizio's bottling is almost the exact opposite, displaying sharp notes of lime zest, green apple, underripe pineapple, and magnolia blossom on the nose. Then on the palate, the granite bedrock shows itself, with a very chiseled and mineral focus that wraps around the fruit and carries this wine into a long finish. Being a relatively austere wine, you will want to serve this with richer dishes, such as fondue, pasta Alfredo, or slow-braised pork shoulder with apples and honey.

2022 Vigneti Vecchio Sciare Vive | \$55

Brace yourself because you are entering the world of skin contact wine, aka "orange wine," for the first time in this club. Honestly, I am not really a fan of this style, but occasionally I find an example like this that gives me pause. Perhaps it is the volcanic soils of Mt. Etna, which are so expressive in this wine?

This tiny estate was established in 2016 by Carmelo Vecchio and his wife, Rosa La Guzza. They are both locals, living their entire lives in the shadow of Mount Etna, most of it spent tending vines. Carmelo worked for Passopisciaro, one of the region's superstars, for fifteen years while they tended a single hectare of vines inherited by his wife. When they decided to strike out on their own, they had assembled almost 20 acres of vines scattered across six different holdings. Like most of the vineyards on Mount Etna, there is a mix of newer plantings scattered among ancient vines, many well over 100 years old. This wine does not carry the Mount Etna designation because it is assembled from several parcels, one of which lies just outside the zone.

As with most white wines from Mount Etna, this one is based on 70% Carricante, a variety that is gaining increasing popularity in the region. Over the past decade, white wine production on the volcano has risen from 30% to 45% of the total production, with Carricante leading the way. For this bottling, Carmelo includes 30% grapes from very old vines, including Minnella, Inzolia, Grecanico, and Catarratto. The soil for these vineyards is limestone-rich clay over volcanic bedrock.

Winemaking is classic for this region, with the grapes macerated for 3 days with the skins before pressing. This imbues the wine with an amber color and emphasizes the smoky nature of the terroir. After fermentation, this wine is aged in a large concrete tank for a few months, then bottled without fining or filtration.

For this wine, I also recommend decanting, but only for a few minutes, and serving it colder than the other selections. Leave the decanter on the counter for 10 minutes and aim for 40 degrees. The color is almost amber, and the nose is a restrained combination of dried apricots, dried pineapple, orange blossoms, and wet granite. On the palate, this wine is powerful and intense, with a surprising amount of texture for only 11% ABV. Not at all mature despite the color, it shows impressive stoniness and deep structure that carries into the finish. Serve this with grilled swordfish or spaghetti with sardines and breadcrumbs.