



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

On March 20, 2026, the famed oenologist Michel Rolland passed away from a heart attack at the age of 78. His impact across the entire wine industry is immense, not only for his gifted palate but also for modernizing the winemaking process. He counted hundreds of wineries as clients, including most of the top names on three continents: Europe, North America, and South America.

At the same time, he also faced criticism from some corners due to those who saw his guidance as homogenous. The complaint was that it was often hard to tell the wines produced by his elite Bordeaux clients from those of the top Napa addresses that employed his services. There is even a movie, *Mondovino*, which was released at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004, detailing his “recipe” for winemaking, regardless of location. Winery owners loved Rolland because he could deliver high ratings, even if the sense of terroir was secondary.

This quarter, we will look at three wines from the Southern Hemisphere that are often perceived as homogenous by the trade and customers. However, these wines are made by three very independent winemakers who see uniformity as a curse as they strive to let the vines tell the story. A couple of these have been featured before, but in my tastings, they still stand as some of the best in their category.

David Finlayson Cabernet Sauvignon “GS” | \$59

David Finlayson is a South African winemaker who works exclusively with older, high-elevation vineyards. The Finlayson family immigrated to the Western Cape from Scotland, where David’s grandfather, Dr. Maurice Finlayson, was a well-respected microbiologist. After turning his talents to winemaking and vineyard management in the Stellenbosch region, Maurice was joined by his sons, their wives, and eventually a slew of grandchildren by the early 1990s. Feeling a little cramped on the family estate, Walter Finlayson left the farm and worked for several other producers before purchasing the Glen Carlou winery in Paarl, known for its old ungrafted vines. His son, David, joined him in the vineyard shortly after.

After a brief yet prestigious post-graduate stint working for Château Margaux, David returned to Glen Carlou to accept a position as head winemaker. Together, he and his father, Walter, revitalized the farm’s older vineyards, specializing in French varieties such as Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and, of course, Cabernet Sauvignon. Then, in 2004, they sold Glen Carlou to Donald Hess of the Hess Collection and purchased a new farm on the Simonsberg Mountain. He named the estate Edgebaston, after the town in England where David’s mother grew up. This area is one of the warmer parts of the region, perfect for ripening varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

The GS designation for this wine honors George Spies, who ran the Stellenbosch Farmers Winery in the 1960s. At that time, most of the grapes grown in the region went into fortified wines, like port, but Spies experimented with table wine production as well. From 1965 to 1967, he produced and bottled a pure Cabernet Sauvignon, which was very uncommon at the time, as the grape was typically blended with Syrah or Cinsault to soften it. The wines were brutally tannic, and when the cooperative came under new management in 1968, the project was abandoned. However, bottles of those wines continue to pop up at auction in South Africa and are now reported to be remarkable. In fact, they are so highly regarded that they command astronomical prices.

For his GS Cabernet Sauvignon, David farms a small 4-acre parcel of clone 46A vines planted in 2000. This clone is from Bordeaux and does well in the clay and gravel soils of the region. Finlayson only uses the free run juice for this wine, which is barreled down in 100% new, 300-liter French oak barrels for 24 months. After an hour of decanting, you will see the wine reveal a complex combination of cooked blackberries and blueberries, milk chocolate, grains of paradise, dried sage, and a hint of menthol. On the palate, it shows vivid acidity, obvious tannins, and a lot of oak, but there is more than enough fruit to compensate. Drink 2026-2040.

2021 Teusner Shiraz “Albert” | \$59

Teusner Winery started almost by accident in 2001 when Kym Teusner and his brother-in-law Mike Page overheard a conversation in a Barossa bar room. They learned that the Riebke brothers were considering ripping out their 85-year-old Grenache vineyard due to low demand. Kym was then working for Veritas, a venerable Barossa winery, so he and Mike offered to buy the grapes to save the vineyard. After convincing Veritas owner Rolf Binder to allow them to process the three tons of Grenache, they launched their brand, Teusner. Since then, they have expanded significantly but have always focused on old vineyards, preferably dry-farmed and self-rooted vines. This bottling is from their elite level, an example of Barossa Shiraz that you can use as a benchmark moving forward.

What makes Shiraz a challenging variety is not the farming. The variety buds a little later than most red varieties, making it ideal for cooler climates where frost is a possibility. It has a vigorous growing habit, meaning it can produce a big crop, and it ripens quickly after veraison, so there is little threat of fall rains. Like Cabernet Sauvignon, it also produces good quality at relatively high yields, making it popular with growers and winemakers alike. However, once ripe, the grapes can shrivel quickly and become overripe. Growers must pick quickly to ensure the wines will not be overly alcoholic.

For this wine, Kym uses grapes from two vineyards. The first is an 80+-year-old block in the Ebenezer sub-zone of Barossa, and the second is an equally old block in the Koonunga area. Ebenezer is well known as one of the grand cru areas, sitting almost 1,500 feet above sea level, where the nights are cool and there is more clay in the soil. Koonunga sits west of Ebenezer at equally high elevations but with a different black clay soil. The old vines in both areas yield very small crops of intensely flavored grapes that also retain good acidity. As a result, Kym is able to craft a beautiful example of Shiraz that avoids the overripe notes so common in this variety.

The Teusner “Albert” Shiraz is named for Kym’s grandfather, Albert Alfred Teusner, “a man of strong will but quiet leadership, standing firm where others may have faltered, a fitting paragon of this Barossa Valley Shiraz.” 2021 was a superb growing season—warm but never too hot—with just enough rain to keep the vines invigorated. For winemaking, this wine was aged for 22 months in 50% new French oak barrels with the balance in second and third pass wood. When you open this wine, make sure to decant it for half an hour and serve at cellar temperature. As you pour the first glass, the notes of boysenberry and blueberry fruits jump forward, with dried red plums, clove, cinnamon, cedar, and menthol all peeking out. On the palate, this wine has superb richness and texture with obvious but polished tannins. Drink 2026-2036.

La Cayetana El Corazon 2023 | \$55

I met Eduardo Soler in New York city in the fall of 2024 at a tasting put on by Brazos Imports, his American importer. There was a lot of buzz at the event about his wines, particularly his Ver Sacrum project, which are natural wines but not funky. What caught my eye, or palate, was his reserve level wines, La Cayetana, of which there is a Cabernet Franc, Criolla Blanca and this stunning Malbec. If you are like me and have a ho-hum attitude about Malbec then prepare yourself, this is a game changer.

At the heart of this project is the vineyard site, which is located in El Cepillo, the coldest and wettest section of the Uco Valley. Located more than three hours from the city of Mendoza, the elevation is over 3800 FAS and the soils are a mix of alluvial sands and calcarious rocks from the nearby Andes Mountains. It is an inhospitable place so the vines only produce a few clusters per vine, but their flavor is very intense. The combination of elevation and calcarious soils also gives the wines incredible tension, which is not common in Malbec.

For all of Eduardo and his wife Emilia’s wines they farm using only organic practices. For this project the grapes are harvested and fermented using native yeast, and 20% whole clusters, in a large, upright, conical concrete fermentor. After 14 days on the skins the wine is racked to another concrete tank where it is aged on the lees for a year before bottling.

Decant this wine for a half hour before serving and chill to cellar temperature. The nose is what you expect of Malbec, a mix of cooked blueberries and blackberries and dried figs before you pick up a subtle note of wet clay. Then you see it on the palate, as the fruit is framed by a sense of polish and texture that provides perfect balance the way limestone frames Burgundy. There is also a refreshing level of acidity that is rarely found in Malbec. Only 3250 bottles of this wine were made and you can drink it between 2026 and 2033.