# Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

It is November, and we are on the precipice of the holidays, including my favorite day of the year—Thanksgiving. My love for this holiday is twofold. The first reason is that I am extremely grateful to have been able to make my passion a livelihood for my entire adult life. For this, I have you, our many club members, and customers to thank. You can buy wine anywhere, but supporting us is a choice, and we do not take your dedication lightly.

The second reason goes back to my dad, whom we lost many years ago. When I was 10 or 11, I was helping him prepare Thanksgiving dinner, and I told him how excited I was for Christmas. He said that Thanksgiving is his favorite holiday because he prefers the time with family, unencumbered by the need to buy and exchange gifts. Like his mother, he also showed his love for others by preparing large family meals. He enjoyed experimenting in the kitchen, often adding one new dish to the Thanksgiving repertoire each year. He particularly liked to tweak the dressing, adding things like oysters, bok choy instead of celery, and chestnuts over the years. No surprise, none ever became family classics. Regardless, the food was mostly delicious, and we all appreciated the effort, if not the result.

For this month, both selections were made with the holiday meals that are upon us. Serve them with your favorite people and give thanks for all the blessings we enjoy.

**2023 Halter Ranch Grenache Blanc | $39**

For this feature, we travel to the central California region of Paso Robles, specifically a sub-AVA of the region called the Adelaida District. Not only is this area considered the elite area of Paso Robles, but it is also recognized globally for its unique attributes that are perfect for growing grapes. This recognition began in 1973 when André Tchelistcheff—often considered the father of the modern California wine movement—identified the exceptional potential in the area. He collaborated with Hoffman Mountain Vineyard on their early plantings, taking into account the region's elevation, diurnal temperature changes, rainfall, and high pH soils. The area received a significant boost when the Perrin family, owners of the renowned Château Beaucastel in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, purchased what is now Tablas Creek in 1989. By then, the MacGillivray family, who owned neighboring Halter Ranch, was already growing grapes. In 2000, Halter Ranch winery was purchased by Swiss entrepreneur Hansjörg Wyss, who initiated a massive planting schedule and now cultivates over 200 acres of vines.

The real catalyst for Halter Ranch's growth came when Hansjörg hired winemaker Kevin Sass. For nine years, he was at the helm of Justin Winery, producing its world-renowned Isosceles and Paso Cab. When the Baldwins sold the winery in 2010 to Stewart Resnick and Fiji Water, Hansjörg Wyss invited Kevin to move to Halter Ranch. He was already familiar with the vineyards at Halter Ranch, as they had supplied the grapes for many of Justin's top-end wines.

If you visit Halter Ranch, you'll easily see why the wines are so appealing. The property spans over a thousand acres on Adelaida Road in the west side of the appellation. It features more than 260 acres of vines on rolling hills and steeper slopes, some at elevations exceeding 1,700 feet above sea level. The vineyards are divided into 77 unique blocks, planted with 19 different grape varieties. Most of the estate is dedicated to Bordeaux varieties, but their next-door neighbors at Tablas Creek focus on varieties from the Rhône Valley for obvious reasons, so the balance of the plantings consists of these grapes.

Our feature is produced primarily from Grenache Blanc, which is a favorite for the white wines of the Southern Rhône Valley. Like the more famous red version, Grenache Blanc is perfect for warm, dry climates and does not need a lot of water during the growing cycle. It produces rich, aromatic wines and is often blended with other varieties for added structure. In this case, it is 90% Grenache Blanc, 7% Viognier, and 3% Picpoul Blanc. Picpoul is a personal favorite of Kevin Sass, and he uses it in many wines to naturally add some acidity. The various grapes for this wine were all harvested and fermented separately, with the Grenache Blanc aged in large Hungarian oak casks before blending.

When you are ready to serve, decant this wine for a few minutes to let the bouquet develop. Once you do, it offers an exotic nose of linden flowers, fresh apricots, white peaches, candied ginger, and a wisp of flaky sea salt. On the palate, it is more substantial than the nose hints, with the rich fruit framed by a persistent chalky minerality. This will obviously pair nicely with Thanksgiving dinner, but you could also serve it with crab cakes or grilled swordfish.

**2023 Apaltagua Pinot Noir Reserva | $20**

For wine lovers, Chile is a country that you should spend more time exploring. It produces classic New World-style wines from famous international varieties, as well as some offerings from long-lost grapes carried to South America by the conquistadors more than 500 years ago. For consumers, the wines have the added bonus that while there are tariffs on these imports, the wineries are paid in American dollars. While we all complain about the tariffs, it is actually the plunging American dollar that has contributed significantly to the inflation of European wines this year. There is no such problem for wines from South America.

Our feature wine comes from the Apaltagua winery, which is owned by the Tutunjian family. They established the winery in 1995, and the name is derived from its location in the Apalta region. This Denomination of Origin (DO) is home to some of the most famous wineries in Chile, including Montes and Clos Apalta. In addition to vineyards in Apalta, the family owns sites across Chile where they match the best grape variety to the growing conditions. A great example is this wine, sourced from their estate vineyards in the Casablanca region, which is noted for high-quality Pinot.

The Casablanca wine region is where much of the high-quality Pinot Noir, as well as Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, is produced in Chile. Casablanca lies west of the capital, Santiago, close to the Pacific Ocean. Here, the soils are degraded granite with little water-holding capacity. There is also a constant wind that blows across the region, bringing cold air off the Humboldt current over the vineyards. This helps reduce crop yield but improves the flavor concentration of the grapes. Fans of Oregon and other cool-climate Pinot Noir will find a lot to enjoy in Casablanca Pinot Noir.

Open this wine a half hour before serving and decant it to allow the bouquet to develop. Once you do, this wine reveals a complex combination of fresh black cherries, cooked cranberries, orange marmalade, clove, and allspice. On the palate, it shows a lot of finesse, with the ripe fruit framed by light tannins and moderate acidity. Serve it with your classic Thanksgiving staples, or with salmon and pork.

**Thanksgiving Leftover Bakes**

Unlike most people, I am not the biggest fan of Thanksgiving leftovers. To be fair, I am not a big fan of any leftovers, especially those dishes that seem to linger in the refrigerator for more than two meals. After that, I need to repurpose them, freeze them for later, or pitch them. My meager beginnings dictate that option #3 is too painful, so my normal course is to freeze, forget about them, then pitch them months later as an unidentified, freezer-burned object. Thanksgiving is no exception, as my family demands large portions of their favorite dishes, only to return to their respective homes in other states on Sunday, leaving me with a ridiculous amount of side dishes that are difficult to repurpose. Then, a few years ago, I stumbled upon this idea and gave it a try. It turns out they are great for eating while watching the Florida-Florida State game and refereeing the arguments between my two Gators and one Seminole.

For this recipe, you will need Thanksgiving leftovers and a 1-pound ball of uncooked pizza dough, or if you are feeling ambitious, you can make your own. Cut the dough into 4 parts and roll it out into a 4 x 8 inch rectangles. Then smear the middle of each with either mashed potatoes or sweet potatoes—both work surprisingly well—leaving 1 inch of space on both sides of the rectangle. Then add a 1/2 cup of chopped turkey meat to each stripe of potatoes, along with a couple of tablespoons of chopped veggies or green bean casserole. Sprinkle everything with grated cheddar cheese or remnants of a pre-dinner cheese board. Fold and seal the sides, but do not worry about the ends. Place them on a parchment-lined baking sheet fold side down and let them rest for 30 minutes. Brush with an egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds or everything-bagel topping. Bake at 350°F for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown. Serve with a side of ranch dressing or warmed gravy and a glass of either feature wine.

To my other point, these also freeze well. I prefer to freeze them unbaked. After construction but before the egg wash, freeze them on a parchment-lined cookie sheet overnight. Then place them in a freezer bag and store for later. Thaw completely in the refrigerator before baking and add egg wash and topping if desired.