

Reflections on Wine

Views on wines from Italy, California, Chile, Argentina and other great regions of the world from a freelance writer and photographer

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2011

Alto Adige Treasures



Vineyards at Cortaccia (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

When people ask me to name my favorite regions in Italy, Alto Adige is always in my top three. I would give that answer my no matter whether people were referring to the beauty of the region, the friendliness of the people or the quality of the wines. To me, Alto Adige truly is a magical territory on many levels.

So I was excited about attending a special Alto Adige tasting in Chicago a few weeks ago; this despite the fact that I was leaving for Italy the next day. I don't normally do much the day before I fly, but I rarely pass up an opportunity to taste wines from this splendid region in northern Italy.

Several dozen producers came to Chicago as part of a three city tour in the US (Boston and New York City followed) and what was evident after sampling only a few bottlings was the collective quality of these wines (certainly no surprise to me, given my previous experiences, but always nice to see consistent excellence on display). Alto Adige is best known for its deeply fruity whites, generally aged only in steel tanks, so as to preserve the lovely aromatics. The most famous white is Gewuztraminer - known sometimes simply as Traminer - with its remarkable perfumes of lychee and rose petals. These are rich, dry offerings with distinct spice that are ideal when paired with Oriental cuisine. There were bottlings that ranged from \$15 to \$40 a bottle; the two most impressive were the 2009 **Cantina Tramin "Nussbaumer"** and the 2009 **Elena Walch "Kastelaz"**, both of which are among the finest examples of this variety, not only in Italy, but in the world.

Another variety that is quite successful in the region is Sauvignon Blanc, which is labeled here (as in much of Italy) as Sauvignon. As Alto Adige is a cool region, the variety truly shines here, as the long growing season preserves acidity as well as the grape's textbook aromas of spearmint, pear and freshly cut grass. There were two favorites for me on this day; the beautifully textured and structured 2009 **Nils Magreid "Mantele"**, a single vineyard offering with excellent persistence and the 2008 **Cantina Terlano "Quartz"**, a massively concentrated bottling that should drink well for 5-7 years. (A special shoutout to this producer, who is one of the region's very best and in my opinion, one of the finest producers of white wine anywhere in Europe. Their 2007 **Nova Domus Terlaner Riserva** is truly a stunning wine and one that is quite unique- I expect this wine to drink well for another 7-10 years.)

ABOUT ME



tom hyland

[View my complete profile](#)

BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2011 (11)
 - ▼ March (3)
 - [Alto Adige Treasures](#)
 - [Italy at 150 Years - A Labor of Love](#)
 - [A Discovery from Piemonte](#)
 - ▶ February (5)
 - ▶ January (3)
- ▶ 2010 (54)
- ▶ 2009 (45)
- ▶ 2008 (10)

MY BLOG LIST

-  [On the Wine Trail in Italy](#)
Pour Decisions
9 hours ago
-  [CAMPANIA CHE VAI](#)
marzo - aprile 2011 Percorsi a Taurasi e dintorni per piccoli gruppi
10 hours ago
-  [Montalcino Report](#)
Hilltop towns of the Val d'Orcia VI Sant'Angelo in Colle
12 hours ago
- [Do Bianchi](#)
Want your wine to last? Drink good wine (Gianni Brunelli Brunello di Montalcino)
14 hours ago
-  [Vino al vino](#)
Succede anche questo oggi a Montalcino ...
23 hours ago
- [The Blend](#)
Hanging 10 with Bridlewood's Maverick Winemaker
1 day ago
-  [Eat Wine](#)
Dejunk Your Kitchen—and Life—of HFCS
1 day ago
- [learnitalianwines](#)
Etna – Singular Red Wines
1 day ago
-  [Vino Wire](#)



Vineyards at Cantina Terlano (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

Pinot Bianco is the most widely planted white variety in Alto Adige and it truly represents the heart and soul of the area's vintners. There were several excellent examples on display at this event. My favorites included the 2007 **Cantina Terlano Vorberg Riserva**, the 2009 **Castel Sallegg** and most notably, the 2009 **Elena Walch "Kastelaz"** and the 2009 **Alois Lageder "Haberle"**. This last bottling in particular has been a favorite of mine for several years; it shows the potential of this variety in terms of texture and complexity. This would be a marvelous match with any number of foods from vegetable risotto to poached trout.

No, I haven't forgotten Pinot Grigio, the grape that everybody seems to pick on, yet one that is enjoyed by millions. What makes the versions from Alto Adige so special is a combination of the proper growing conditions (cool climate along with hillside plantings that naturally limit the yield) as well as the tender love and care given to the wines by the vintners. That was evident in the 2009 **Nils Magreid "Punggi"** and the 2009 **Lageder "Porer"**. The former is from vineyards that are 80-100 years old; needless to say, the wine has intensity as well as beautiful texture and the exotic tropical fruit notes as quite distinct (the wine is a steal at \$20). The latter is a Pinot Grigio that ages and offers excellent complexity; this is one of the wines made by Lageder using the strict Demeter biodynamic practices. How nice to see Lageder put this much effort into this variety; this too is wonderfully priced at \$23.

While the white wines are the most famous in the region, there are some very impressive Alto Adige reds as well. The first I'll mention was a wonderful surprise, the 2009 **Elena Walch Schiava**. I've tasted many versions of this variety in the past; it's a very light red with extremely delicate tannins; while pleasant, too many examples are often a bit green and have a strong herbaceous streak that takes away from the simple charms of the wine. But not this one; this was pure, fresh, tantalizing strawberry fruit and a refreshing finish with tart acidity. This is a variety few people outside the region are familiar with, but when consumers take the time to stop and smell the roses (or strawberries in this instance) and enjoy the simple pleasures of a red wine meant for immediate consumption, they will be delighted in a well made and pleasing bottling such as this.



Werner and Elena Walch (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

A few words here about Elena Walch and her husband Werner. They own some beautifully situated vineyards just outside the town of Tramin and produce a wide range of stellar wines. They are extremely personable and gracious people and it's truly nice to see such wonderful people who work hard and do things the right way in their quest to become one of the Alto Adige's leading wine estates. I'd recommend just about anything from this label, from the basic Pinot Grigio to the *riserva* bottlings of Lagrein and Merlot.

Two featured red varieties at this tasting were Pinot Nero and Lagrein. A few words on the former; the top examples from Alto Adige are medium-full with round tannins, tart acidity, pleasant herbal notes and attractive cherry fruit. They resemble lighter Burgundies, with most bottlings styled for optimal consumption within the first 3-5 years, though a few of the best can age for a decade. The

Agriculture minister appointment blocked by President Napolitano
1 day ago

VINTROSPECTIVE -> [An Italian Wine Blog](#) -
Vintrospective -> [An Italian Wine Blog](#)

Two wines from Ananna Occhipinti: Sicilia Bianco 2009, Nero d'Avola e Frappato 2009
5 days ago

[Charles Scicolone on Wine Neapolitan Pizza and BYOB](#)
1 week ago

[The "Iron Chevsky" Wine Blog](#)
A date with Rhys
1 week ago

[sotto la pergola](#)
Italian in 'the Jura' - Part II
2 weeks ago

[McDuff's Food & Wine Trail](#)
Notes from a Sunday
3 weeks ago

[In the glass](#)
Old Vintages of Barolo or Pour It and They Will Come
2 months ago

[Vinostrum](#)
Visiting passionate winemakers in Friuli and Tuscany
1 year ago

[The Wine Camp Blog](#) -

most successful versions I sampled at this tasting were the lightly spicy 2009 **Nils Magreid** and the slightly richer and more fragrant 2008 **Franz Haas**, which offered beautiful cherry fruit and a sublime note of cardamom.

As I mentioned earlier, I had to fly to Italy the following day, so I missed a number of top wines at this event. But I made sure to sample at least a few bottlings of Lagrein, a beautiful indigenous red from the region. This varies quite a bit from Pinot Nero, in that Lagrein is much deeper in color with a bright purple robe (as compared to the garnet appearance of Pinot Nero) and has more distinct tannins. Lagrein is generally a forward red and while it can be quite big, the tannins are not like Cabernet Sauvignon or Nebbiolo, so the wine can be enjoyed much sooner upon release. Most have the stuffing and proper structure to drink well for 5-7 years, though some drink well for a decade or longer. Two wines that impressed me this day were the 2007 **Castel Sallegg Riserva** and the 2004 **Lageder "Lindenburg"**; both offered notable richness and excellent complexity. I'd pair these wines with a red meat such as a New York strip steak, though I think they would be even better with duck breast, pheasant or venison.

A taste of the tantalizingly delicious 2009 **Franz Haas Moscato Rosa**, a gorgeous red dessert wine, and my tasting was complete. A lovely day to be sure and one that started me thinking about my next trip to Alto Adige to enjoy the company of some lovely people and their marvelous wines!

Posted by tom hyland at 10:44 AM

Labels: alois lageder, alto adige, elena walch, gewurztraminer, lagrein, nils magreid, pinot bianco, pinot grigio, pinot nero

0 comments:

Post a Comment

Comment as: [Select profile...](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

Simple template. Powered by Blogger.