

Alto Adige: Why Is It Also Called the Suditrol?

Charles Scicolone (March 04, 2008)



Alto Adige -- Where La Dolce Vita Meets Sudtiroil Efficiency

As we drove north past the city of Bolzano, the countryside began to look more like Germany than Italy. Road signs were in both German and Italian and most names seemed German or Austrian. At the Alois Lageder winery we were greeted by Urs Vetter, the export manager, who gave us a tour of the winery and a wine tasting. At lunch time, Urs invited us to join him at an excellent restaurant not far away. When we agreed, he called the restaurant and spoke in German. Seeing our surprised look, he simply said that in the Alto Adige region, German is the first language.



The Alto Adige borders on Austria and Switzerland. The Alps protect it from harsh weather from the north and the mitigating effects of the Mediterranean Sea and Lake Garda make this an excellent region to grow wine grapes. In the summer, the temperature of Bolzano is higher than in Palermo in Sicily. The people that live in Alto Adige call it Sud Tirol and themselves Tyroleans.

At the restaurant, we ate Speck, a smoked dried ham, and Weinkase Lagrein cheese. With them, we ate a variety of dark, whole grain breads including one called Schuttelbrot. Instead of pasta we ate canederli, big dumplings made of bread and bits of speck that were floating in a flavorful broth. This was followed by a hearty game stew and finally strudel, a regional specialty. The food is decidedly Austrian with only a hint of Italy. Both the Lagrein rosato and Schiava wines went very well with the food.

Recently, Mary Ewing Mulligan, MW (the first American woman Master of Wine) moderated a seminar on the wines of the Alto Adige. The first speaker was Wolfgang Klotz from the Tramin winery and he spoke about Gewurztraminer (Gewurz meaning spice in German and Tramin being a village in the South of Alto Adige. Some believe the variety originated there while others say that it is Germanic in origin). Wolfgang led us through a tasting of three wines.

2006 Aristos Valle Isarco Gewurztraminer, DOC \$32 -- Aromatic with hints of spice and a pineapple flavor, but not too sweet. The acidity was good and it had the least residual sugar of the three wines we tasted. It would go very well with food.

2006 Gewurztraminer DOC Nussabaumer \$35 – A little sweeter with hints of spice, dried fruit and pineapple but also a mineral quality. The finish was long and it had a good aftertaste. It would seem to work well with pates and foie gras.



2005 Baron di Paul Exilissi Gewurztraminer DOC \$60 -- Very aromatic, very full on the palate with high sugar and fruit flavors, this is a very rich wine. However, I found the finish and aftertaste to be less sweet than the aroma. The wine maker recommends decanting the wine and he likes to serve it with creamy ripe cheese. This would make a good desert wine.

In the Alto Adige, a sweet late harvest wine is also produced. Some wine writers suggest Gewurztraminer with Chinese food. My suggestion with Chinese food is tea!

The next speaker was Christof Tiefenbrunner from the Tiefenbrunner Castel Turmhof Winery who spoke about Lagrein. This grape variety is native to the Alto Adige and is the oldest cultivated grape in the area going back over six hundred years. It is the second most planted variety.

2007 Lagrein Rosato DOC Muri-Gries \$18 -- very nice red fruit aromas and a raspberry taste. The wine had a lot of fruit but was not sweet. It should be drunk young and served chilled. It would be good with white meats and speck.

2006 Tiefenbrunner Castel Turmhof Lagrein, DOC \$20 -- was a very well made wine but I felt that it was aged in barriques too long. It did have hints of cherry and a long finish but the varietal character was masked by the oak. It might work with lamb, game, and strong cheeses.



2006 Cantina Bolzano Prestige Line Riserva DOC \$34 -- The oak seemed to overwhelm all the other aromas. However, when I tasted the wine the flavor of the grape came through and it did not seem as oaky. This is a wine for game, meats and rich stews.

The last speaker was Dr. Heike Platter from the Laimburg Province Winery. Heike took us through a tasting of Schiava (also known as Vernatsch), the most planted grape in the region. Schiava means female slave in Italian. It is native to the Alto Adige and as one of the most consumed varieties, it is looked upon as their own home grown grape. There are two different styles, the lighter of which can be chilled and is a great summer wine.

2006 Nals Margreid Galea Schiava, DOC \$14 - fresh and very fruity with good acidity and a slightly bitter finish. In the summer, it would be very good slightly chilled.

2006 Laimburg Province Winery Olleiten, Largo di Caldaro DOC \$20 -- very soft, easy drinking wine, fruity with hints of bitter cherry. Served chilled, it would go well with speck and light dishes.

2006 Franz Gojer Glogglhof Rondell St. Magdalerner, DOC \$32. A full bodied wine, with soft red fruit and very aromatic. It had a great fruity finish and aftertaste. Serve it with game, red meat, and strong cheeses. The producer recommends it with "marende" (local snacks).

Following the seminar there was a tasting of the wines from more than 26 wineries. There were many great wines but a few stand out in my mind. Abbazia di Novacella is not only a winery but also a monastery run by Augustinian monks since 1142! It is Italy's northern most winery. Their 2006 Kerner (white grape) was wonderful at \$23, as was their 2006 Sylvaner (white grape) at \$21. The desert wine Praepositus Moscato \$53 would be a great way to end a meal.



The 2007 Pinot Bianco from Alois Lageder is a bargain at \$15. I always liked the Sanct Valentin Sauvignon Blanc from Cantina Produttori San Michele Appiano. The 2007 at \$40 a bottle is well worth the money. Their 2006 Lagrein is a good buy at \$16.

Pinot Grigio is grown in many places but one of the best is the Castel Ringberg Pinot Grigio 2006 from Elena Walch. I had visited this winery a number of years ago and still have a fondness for her wines \$28.

The 2006 Moscato Giallo \$23 from Castel Sallegg is all moscato fruit on the palate but finishes dry, a very unusual wine. I also liked the 2007 Muller Thurgar \$15 from Cantina Bolzano as well as the Valle Isarco Veltliner 2006 \$19 from Cantina Valle Isarco. This white grape variety is also grown in Austria and Alsace.

For more information on the wines www.altoadigewines.com [2].

Information on visiting the area and skiing in the Dolomites www.sudtirool.info [3].



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