

DiWINEtaste

Wine Culture and Information

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Talks About Wine: Lots of Words and Little Wine

Talking about wine has now become an important custom of our society, even the simple showing off of a minimal knowledge of such label or something represents a sign of distinction, or better to say, seems to be a sign of distinction, in any group of individuals. Giving the impression of being great experts about something, to appear superior to others, even with the simple, however deprecable, purpose of humiliating one's interlocutors, seems to be one of the main characteristics of people's behaviors. Wine, unfortunately, being a trendy and common subject, is no exception to that.

In the past few years we also had the invasion of wine "super-experts" in every channel's TV shows, as well as in magazines and newspapers, that in a sense they could also positively contribute to the spreading of wine culture, and sometimes, maybe, they also contribute in a determinant way to the increasing of confusion about this subject and to have people getting uninterested, giving the impression that wine is a beverage reserved to a group of haughty and elected individuals having their mouths always full of words which say nothing and with little wine in their glasses. It is probably natural to ask oneself whether to be a wine expert is just enough to make an abundant use of words having an "effect", a very common custom, such as the abused term "fruity", as well as other absolutely generic and obvious terms, which say absolutely nothing about any wine and they certainly do not describe it saved when it is supported by other specific and qualified words. We truly wish a wine is "fruity", indeed, it is a beverage produced by the fermentation of a fruit juice, grape, and therefore it would be preoccupying, very preoccupying, in case a wine would not have any aroma resembling the ones of fruits.

Moreover, what can be said about those comments full of pompous and sumptuous words, full of rhetorical terms, that soon after having read or heard them, one inevitably ends up

asking himself or herself whether they were talking about wine or who knows about what. Sometimes they are intentionally full of terms, even inappropriate ones, which say nothing, which are sometimes ridiculous, and even beyond that, and smiling is really the least thing everyone can do. Reading or listening to those descriptions about wine, one can also end up thinking or believing wines are all the same because of the high frequency of certain terms or expressions. Nevertheless, it is not like that. Everyone having a sufficient culture about wine and tasted, while paying attention, what he or she had in the glass, knows it is not like that. There are differences from wine to wine that make each one of them unique, such as the area of origin, or *cru*, wines produced with the very same grapes but in different areas, even distant few kilometers one from each other, give different wines, differences which are unfortunately ignored by some summary descriptions and definitions having the sole purpose of confusing and homologating a whole category of products.

This trend is also found, unfortunately, among consumers which try to emulate the "super-expert", in the hope to appear like that, by repeating and filling their mouths with the very same words. This can be seen in any restaurant paying enough attention to wine, and watching what happens when a client orders his or her wine. In the beginning, mainly when he or she is in company, tries to make the choice by using "expert" terms and, sometimes, with arrogance as well, even trying to humiliate the person who is in charge of serving wine. Then, when he or she realizes that person is sufficiently competent about wine and probably has a better knowledge than his or her, there is a change in behavior and gets lost while ending up

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to ask advices and help to the person in charge of serving wine.

The same is also true for the majority of things about the world of wine, in particular, the habit and the insistence of having any wine decanted, both young and aged, according to a supposed "rule" distinguishing real connoisseurs. It seems that the more a wine is important, and for important everyone may think of what he or she wants, from the preferred wine to a very expensive one, and the more it needs to be decanted. Maybe it is the decanting "ceremony" to enchant people, unfortunately most of the times it is done in a wrong way, however it should be remembered the procedure of decanting, the term itself suggests its purpose, is used to separate wine from its sediments in order to have a limpid and drinkable liquid. Many support the idea, and they certainly are not wrong, that decanting is very useful for oxygenating a wine which has spent a very long time in a bottle and this operation would be capable of "awakening" it from its torpor. It should be considered that for some wines, in particular the ones aged for a very long time, any sudden oxygenation, such as the one provoked by decanting, can irreparably damage them and, however, it dissolves in few moments the long and patient work of time. In case it is really needed to oxygenate a wine, one should consider the many types of glasses available from any producer and, thanks to their shapes and volumes, they allow a perfect oxygenation of any wine.

The same also happens with wines produced with the "famous" grapes, the ones everyone talks about, the only ones, it seems, capable of making good wine, as well as the supposed miracles that only the fermentation and aging in cask could make on wine. There is still a strong and common belief that the quality of wine should inevitably pass for a *barrique* and that should be made with certain grapes. In case a wine has pronounced wood aromas therefore it certainly has quality. In case a wine is aged in a cask therefore it is important, in case it was made with certain grapes therefore it must be a great wine. These prejudices, common beliefs, seem to be very hard to change and it is sad to see that only few people, when they are about to taste a wine, pay attention to the place of origin and to the specific area where the wine was produced, once again, it should be considered as one of the real and proper factors of quality. The only positive thing is that someone is trying to ask himself or herself about those wines and look beyond that while discovering, or better to say, rediscovering, those wines produced with local grapes from certain places and that only in those places are capable of giving the very best of them.

Of course there cannot be any dispute about personal taste and preference, indeed, it is not good what it is said to be good,

but first of all, it is good what it is liked. The concept of goodness, as well as of beauty, is so abstract and undefinable that everyone has proper ways and definitions not always agreeable by others. Anyway it should be good that everyone would have his or her concept of "good" and, in particular, it should be the result of personal tastes and preferences and not other's. The next time you hear someone saying a wine is "fruity", without giving any other specification about its quality, besides resenting of the fact it is a term which does not help at all and does not say anything, take your glass and try yourself to taste that wine, always with moderation, and let your senses to tell you about it. After all wine is a beverage which needs senses in order to be understood; words, no matter how beautiful they are, will never be right, they can only give a vague idea.

MailBox

In this column are published our reader's mail. If you have any comment or any question or just want to express your opinion about wine, send your letters to our editorial at Mail@DiWineTaste.com or fill in the form available at our site.

In your magazine's pages I often read about your opinion in favor of local grapes as opposed to the international ones. What's wrong in preferring wines produced with international grapes and why should the ones produced with local grapes be better?

Christofer Leighton – Berkshire (England)

Dear reader, we do not think wines produced with local or autochthonous grapes are better than the ones produced with international grapes and we do not think we supported this hypothesis. The so called international grapes are capable of producing great wines and this is certainly indisputable. What we think is that it is often believed any wine in order to be good must be produced with these grapes without even considering that quality and goodness of wine is also the result of many factors, of which grape, in particular its quality, is certainly one of the most important ones, while it is often forgotten the fundamental role played by the area of origin where the grapes were cultivated. There is nothing wrong in preferring wines produced with international grapes (it is enough to take a look at our Wines Guide and see many wines which scored five diamonds are made with international grapes, therefore we too like them), however we think it is good, in the sake of a cultural richness, to know, and to recognize, also the vast heritage of autochthonous grapes that every part of the world can offer and that only in those places are capable of giving the best of them. This is true, of course, provided there are other indispensable conditions for making good wine as well. In case we consider Cabernet Sauvignon grape, and the very same considerations are valid for any other grape, either international or not, alone it is not a guarantee of quality. In case this grape it is being cultivated in a very speculative way, therefore with high yields, in an area not very suitable for viticulture and with unfavorable microclimatic conditions, the result will be a mediocre wine. Indeed the same grape, properly cultivated, will be ca-

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pable of giving wines having a very different quality and the area of origin will make a unique and fundamental factor, not reproducible elsewhere.



As autumn is about to come there is also the return of nouveau wines which are usually available after some weeks from harvesting. How are nouveau wines produced?

Luca Cappelli – Ascoli Piceno (Italy)

Nouveau wines, of which *Beaujolais Nouveau*, or *Beaujolais Primeur*, is the most famous example, are produced with a specific technique called *carbonic maceration*. This process, based on the researches and experiments French Michel Flanzy made in 1936, consists on intracellular fermentation of grapes in tanks filled of carbon dioxide. Grapes are put in these tanks, while paying scrupulous attention of not breaking berries and to leave them intact. Tanks are then sealed and filled with carbon dioxide which starts the fermentation of sugar inside of berries and therefore a little quantity of ethyl alcohol is produced. Moreover, this fermentation allows the extraction of aromatic substances from the skin as well as a very little quantity of tannins. The duration of the process depends by temperature and can be from one to three weeks and at the end of this period grapes are being removed from tanks and vinified. Wines produced in this way are usually very aromatic, with very deep colors and little quantities of tannins, therefore not astringent; characteristics which allow a service at low temperatures, just like white wines. Grapes typically used for the production of wines with carbonic maceration are red, whereas white berried grapes are not usually processed with this method because they produce some unpleasing aromas. In France, by law, *nouveaux* wines are commercialized from the third Thursday of November, whereas in Italy the commercialization is allowed from the 6th of November.



ABC WINE

Hungary

Centuries of history based on an extraordinary wine, Tokaji Aszú, have made this country one of the best producers of sweet wines of the world

Whenever there is a talk about the countries which made the history of wine in the world, in particular those wines which were preferred by noblemen of the many European countries and kept their fame and glory unchanged up to nowadays, Hungary certainly is one of them. The charm and elegance of one of its most renowned wines, Tokaji Aszú, known everywhere in the world written as *Tokay Aszu*, has been, and still is, an example of absolute greatness to which few persons are indifferent to. No matter it was Tokaji Aszú the wine to make Hungary famous in the world, its production is now just 4% of total, in

the country are also produced dry wines, mainly whites, both with local grapes and international ones.

The first historical witnesses about the cultivation of grape and the production of wine in Hungary are dated back to Roman times, when the territory where it is today located this country, was part of the Roman province of Pannonia which also included part of today's Austria. When Magyar tribes, the people which Hungarians descend from, arrived in these lands at the end of the ninth century, they found many vineyards and local people had a good knowledge about vinification techniques and therefore wine and culture of vine continued to develop. Later, during the kingdom of Bela IV, around the half of 1200's, the production of wine was considered very important. After the invasions of Mongols in 1241, king Bela IV started to rebuild Hungary and he payed particular attention on vineyards and to the production of wine. In order to succeed in that, he particularly favored everyone who had a good knowledge about wine making and that wanted to help in restoring vineyards in every devastated area. Results were very positive and at the end of his kingdom there were huge quantities of wine exported from the cities of Eger and Sopron.

Nevertheless it will be Tokaj's wine (Tokay) to make Hungary famous in Europe. The first evidence about this wine is dated back to the end of fifteenth century, and it is likely at those times it was produced as dry. It was only in the seventeenth century Tokaji Aszú acquired the fame and prestige it certainly deserved. In 1641 was emanated the first law regulating the production of this wine in the region of Tokaj-Hegyalja and it set norms about the selection of places where vineyards could be planted, norms on how to build terraces, irrigation systems, manuring and cultivation as well as periods in which this practices should be done. Works in the vineyards were to be completed within the 20th of August, whereas the official harvesting date was on the 28th of October. Moreover in 1660 was discovered the so called *noble rot* (*Botrytis Cinerea*) and its effects on wine production and therefore special laws were set for the production of Tokaji Aszú.

The fame and notoriety of Tokaji Aszú began to spread when in France arrived at the court of king Louis XIV, some bottles of this wine presented as a gift by Ferenc Rákóczi, in the hope of obtaining support and help for the independence of Hungary. The wine was so appreciated that soon became famous everywhere in Europe and considered as the best sweet wine. The production of this wine was suddenly interrupted in 1870 because of phylloxera that here, as well as everywhere

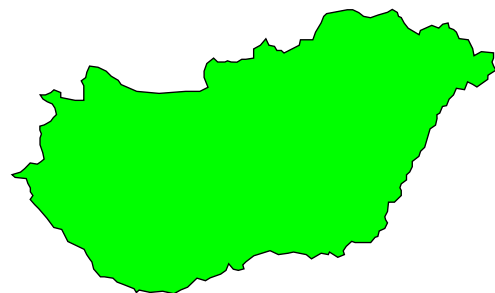


Fig. 1: Hungary

else, devastated vineyards. It was only in 1881 they started to plant new vines resistant to phylloxera and the production of wine resumed its development.

In 1947, with the advent of the communist monopoly system, the historical National Association of Hungarian Viticulturists and of Wine Communities, established in 1830 with the goal of experimenting and researching in order to improve the wine industry and to promote its development, was forced to suspend its activity and the production of wine passed under the control of the State. The production and trading of wine, produced in huge quantities and very low quality, was mainly controlled by the monopoly system and most of the wine was generally exported in the former Soviet Union. Hungarian enology experienced a long recession period characterized by scarce technology and low quality, the fame and prestige of its renowned Tokaji Aszú was vanished in a very short time.

At the end of the communist era and the subsequent establishment of democracy, Hungarian enology resumed its development also thanks to the arrive of foreign investors who bought wineries and resumed wine production while introducing new and modern wine technologies, aware of the huge possibilities the country could offer in the wine production. The interest of new investors was particularly focused on the production of Tokaji Aszú and today, despite the fact production techniques has been slightly changed, this wine is rightly acquiring again that fame and prestige it had in the past centuries.

Hungarian Quality System

The current Hungarian quality system is regulated by laws emanated in 1990 which replaced the ones set in 1970. Current laws are mainly based on directives emanated by the European Union. The last revision of wine laws in the country was in 1997 and, in certain aspects, the system is similar to French's *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*. Hungarian laws define wine regions and their boundaries, allowed grape species, cultivation and vinification techniques and procedures, as well as mandatory information to be written on labels.

Production Areas

Wine production in Hungary is mainly about white wine and, despite the fact most of the wine is produced in regions located in the southern part of the country, the most important productions are from regions located to the north. The wine regions of the country are currently 22 and only eight of them are considered as important, both for historical reasons and for quality. Undoubtedly the most prestigious and famous one of them all is Tokaj-Hegyalja region, where the renowned Tokaji Aszú is produced, located to the north-eastern part of the country, bordering Slovakia. In this region, besides the famous sweet wine, is also produced white dry wine mainly with Furmint, Hárslevelű and Muscat Lunel grapes, the same used for Aszú. Among the most interesting wines produced in this region are to be mentioned late harvests wines and *Szamorodni*, literally meaning "as it comes", produced with grapes not sufficiently affected by noble rot and therefore not suited for the production of Aszú. Szamorodni is produced as dry (száraz) or sweet (édes). The other seven wine regions include, to the north of the country, Eger and

Mátra Foothills, to the west, near Balaton Lake, Somló and Badacsony, and to the south, Alföld (great plains), Szekszárd and Villány-Siklós. In Hungary are cultivated autochthonous grapes as well as "international" grapes. Among international white berried grapes, the most common ones are Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, whereas for red berried grapes are Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Pinot Noir. In the country are also present many species considered autochthonous as well as other grapes common in many countries of Central Europe. Among white berried grapes are cultivated Furmint, Hárslevelű, Kéknyelű, Muscat Lunel (the name used here to refer to *muscat blanc à petit grains*), Olaszrizling (Welschriesling), Orémus, Szürkebarát (Pinot Gris) and Tramini (Gewürztraminer). Red berried grapes include Kadarka, Kékfrankos (name used here to refer to Blaufränkisch), Kékoporto and Zweigelt.

The region of Eger is pretty famous thanks to the production of a red dry wine, Egri Bikavér (literally "bull's blood of Eger") mainly produced with Kékfrankos grape and sometimes Kadarka as well. The name of this wine originates from a legend of the half of 1500's. It seems that during Turk's siege to the fortress of Eger, Magyars, while they were trying to repel the enemy's attack and fighting with particular fierce, they drunk huge quantities of red wine in order to withstand to battle's efforts. The legend goes that when Turks faced Magyar warriors having their beards stained of red, they thought their fierce and skill in the battle was because they drunk bull's blood and, scared by that, they retreated. The region of Eger also produces light red wines, although it is Egri Bikavér the most famous one, not only in this region, but also in all Hungary. In the region of Mátra Foothills, as opposed to Eger, is mainly produced white wine, sometimes of good quality, with Olaszrizling, Muscat Lunel, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon grapes.

In the region of Somló, among the tiniest wine areas of the country, are being produced white wines according to Hungarian traditional techniques, with long aging times in cask and sometimes also oxidized. No matter these wines are pretty "unusual" and certainly different from what modern taste would expect from a modern white wine, in Hungary they are considered as very typical products to be perfectly matched to local foods. In the Badacsony region, in the northern part of the Balaton Lake, are mainly produced white wines with Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Szürkebarát and Olaszrizling grapes. The region of Alföld, the largest wine area of the country, are found more than the half of Hungarian vineyards and production is mainly about huge quantities of coarse wines mainly produced with Chardonnay and Merlot grape. The region of Szekszárd, considered as one of the most important of the country, mainly produces red wines, certainly to be considered among the best ones of the country. The main grape of the region is Kadarka, however there also are international grapes. Even the region of Villány-Siklós, the most southern of them all, is an excellent red wine producer, to be considered among the best ones of the country. The production makes use of local grapes, such as Kékfrankos, Kékoporto and Zweigelt, as well as international grapes, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Among the regions producing dry wine, Szekszárd and Villány-Siklós are to be considered as the most advanced ones according to a technological point of view; in these two regions producers of-

ten make use of barriques and modern equipments, producing wines that meet the modern taste the most.

Tokaji Aszú (Tokay Aszu)

The wine which best represents Hungary and of which Hungarians, rightly, are proud of, is certainly Tokaji Aszú, or Tokay Aszu, as it is often written outside Hungary. For many centuries this wine has been considered among the best wines of the world, preferred by the majority of noble courts of Europe. The zar of Russia Peter the Great even had an army detached in the region of Tokay which was in charge to get and escort to the court sufficient quantities of Tokaji Aszú. King of France Louis XIV defined this wine as “*vinum regum, rex vinorum*”, that is “wine of the kings, king of wines”. For many centuries Tokaji Aszú worthily rivaled with the famed French’s Sauternes, the renowned Constantia from South Africa and sweet wines from Germany and Austria, and what it is absolutely certain is that Tokaji Aszú is the best and most extraordinary wine produced in Eastern Europe.

After the inevitable decline, just like other European countries, because of the fearful phylloxera which destroyed vineyards, as well as devastations caused by the two world wars and, lastly, the era of the communist regime which monopolized the production of wine, it is from about ten years this extraordinary wine is reviving the great glory of the past. Thanks to the investments of foreign companies and to the advent of democracy in the country, viticulture was reorganized and its development is so rapid and convincing that in the forthcoming years it is easy to think about a high quality production of Hungarian wine, as a matter of fact, the Tokaji Aszú currently produced is to be considered as a wine of extraordinary quality.

The wine is produced in the Tokaj-Hegyalja region and “Aszú” is the term used in Hungary to refer to “dried grapes affected by noble rot”, whereas “Tokaji” simply means something, in this case wines, from Tokaj. Tokaji Aszú has been defined in the course of centuries as the “Sauternes of Eastern Europe”, however this definition is certainly inadequate, because it was in this very region where a wine produced with grapes affected by noble rot was produced for the first time in the history of enology. As it frequently happens, the most sensational discoveries of humans are the result of lucky conditions or mistakes and Tokaji Aszú was no exception to this rule. The tradition of sweet wine production is widely documented by witnesses which are dated back to the middle age. Around the half of the seventeenth century a priest, Máté Szepesi Laczkó, began experimenting with Furmint grape, an autochthonous Hungarian grape. At one point the priest decided to experiment the drying of grapes on the vine and, unfortunately, or luckily, at the moment of harvesting, one of the many incursions of Turks in the territory took place. Hungarians were forced to take arms and to forget about their daily activities, including harvesting. When they returned back, at the end of autumn, the grapes were dried and mouldy. Szepesi Laczkó did not lose confidence and decided to harvest those mouldy grapes anyway and with the little must he could make from them produced some wine, soon after he was surprised by the extraordinary taste and the rich aromas of that wine. The priest then decided to add this nectar to a regular dry wine he produced the year before and therefore he gave origin to a myth still alive nowadays. Tokaji

Aszú was born.

The main grape used for the production of this wine is Furmint to which is usually added Hárslevelű and Muscat Lunel, and since about ten years, the Orémus grape is added as well, a crossing between Furmint and Bouvier. The essential condition for the production of Tokaji Aszú is the presence of noble rot (*Botrytis Cinerea*) in the grapes, and the development is ensured by the favorable climatic and environmental conditions of the Tokaj-Hegyalja region, in particular near the city of Tokaj.

The production of the wine is amazing and laborious at the same time. The process begins with harvesting, berry by berry, the grapes affected by noble rot and they are promptly sent to the winery in order to be pressed and reduced in a paste. The rest of the grapes not affected by noble rot are harvested and used to make a dry wine that will be used as a base wine. At this point begins the creation of the real and proper Tokaji Aszú and the final product is determined by the quantity of “Aszú paste” added to the base wine which is measured in *puttonyos*. The *puttony* is the traditional basket used for harvesting Aszú grapes and contains about 25 kilograms of grapes (about 55 lbs.), equivalent to about 20 liters of Aszú paste (5.2 gallons). The number of *puttonyos* added to the base wine determines the sweetness of the final wine. The preparation is usually made in *gönci*, traditional casks having a capacity of 136 liters (about 35.9 gallons), where base wine and Aszú paste are blended together. The number written in Tokaji Aszú’s label indicates the number of *puttonyos* added to the *gönci*. A Tokaji Aszú 4 *puttonyos* is therefore produced with about 100 liters of Aszú paste (26.4 gallons) and about 36 liters of base wine (9.5 gallons). The highest number of *puttonyos* for the production of this wine is 6 which is capable of producing an extremely sweet wine, however, thanks to the natural acidity of Furmint and Hárslevelű grapes, the balance is always excellent and not sickly at all.

Currently Tokaji Aszú is produced in steel tanks instead of wood casks and the number of *puttonyos* is determined according to the quantity of residual sugar, as shown in table 1. The period of time in which Aszú paste remains in contact with wine depends by the quantity added and its concentration: usually this time goes from eight hours to three days. At the end of this process the wine is separated from Aszú paste and fermentation begins in historical caves dug underground, very moist, cold and with sides perennially covered by mould. In these conditions fermentation can last months and even years thanks to the low temperature and to the high quantities of sugar present in the wine. Tokaji Aszú must age, according to law, for at least two years in oak casks and for at least one year in bottle before being commercialized. Tokaji

Type	Residual Sugar
3 puttonyos	6 - 9%
4 puttonyos	9 - 12%
5 puttonyos	12 - 15%
6 puttonyos	15 - 18%
Tokaji Aszú Eszencia	More than 18%
Tokaji Eszencia	40 - 70%

Table 1: Sweetness levels of Tokaji wines

Aszú is traditionally sold in typical Hungarian bottles made of transparent glass and with a capacity of 500 ml (16.9 fl.oz.). According to the choices made by producers, during the aging in casks, the ullage can be high and therefore leaving the cask level low while favoring the formation of a bacterial and yeast layer which develops on the wine's surface. This layer, comparable to the so called "flor" essential in Spanish Jerez, contribute to the preservation of wine while giving it an evident complex character.

Tokaji wines are magnificently completed by two other types, considered as real rarities, great sensorial experiences: *Tokaji Eszencia* and *Tokaji Aszú Eszencia*, often written as *Essencia* or *Essence*. Between the two, Tokaji Eszencia is the most looked for and complex one, as well as the most expensive of them all. In particularly favorable years, Aszú grapes are left in tanks and the must is uniquely the result of the weight of the grapes themselves and having an incredible quantity of sugar of more than 45%. This pure essence of grapes is so rich in sugar that even yeasts have some difficulties during fermentation; the process is extremely slow and sometimes the wine does not ferment at all. The fermentation is so slow that these wines usually have alcohol by volume from 2 to 5%. Tokaji Eszencia is an explosion of aromas and flavors, with persistences reaching incredible levels. Tokaji Aszú Eszencia is produced by adding a Tokaji Aszú 6 puttonyos to Tokaji Eszencia. The result is an extraordinary wine, rare and produced only in the best years. According to law Tokaji Aszú Eszencia must be aged for at least five years of which at least three in cask.

WINE TASTING

Tasting Sweet and Botrytised Wines

Rich and enchanting aromas, intense and charming flavors: the magic of sweet and botrytised wines is a combination of art and mystery, a pleasure which surprises every wine lover's senses

Among the many types of wines, the ones which are capable more than any other else to evoke rich emotions and to excite senses the most are probably sweet and botrytised wines. In the course of centuries these wines have always been appreciated and looked for in every place, considered real and proper nectars for their aromatic qualities and for their enchanting and intense flavors. They were also considered as medicines and reconstituents; it is often cited in ancient documents that doctors prescribed these wines as a cure. The charm of these wines could also be because of the fact they are usually produced in limited quantities and in tiny areas, two factors which certainly contribute to make rare, and therefore precious and valuable, these genuine nectars of grape.

Dried Grapes and Noble Rot

The production of sweet wines, with the exception of sweet sparkling wines, are always based on the usage of grapes which

lost part of their water while obtaining a concentration of juice and a higher quantity of sugar. The reduction of water in grape's berries is a natural process which takes place in two different ways: by leaving bunches on the vine and waiting for berries to get dried, or to harvest grape when it reached full maturation and to let it dry in protected and well aerated rooms, placed in mats or hanged. The most common method is the one of allowing bunches to get dried on the vine, mainly in those places where particular climatic conditions promote the development of a mould, apparently a negative factor, which in reality adds unique and extraordinary characteristics to the wine. This particular mould, to be considered as a real and proper blessing, whose scientific name is *Botrytis Cinerea*, is capable of giving grapes where it gets developed, truly unique aromas and flavors and, because of its effects, it greatly contributes to water reduction in grape's berries.

The development of this mould, usually called *noble rot*, exclusively takes place in areas where particular environmental and climatic conditions allow its formation on the skin of grape's berries. The effect of noble rot in sweet wines, for this reason they are also called *botrytised wines*, is always a positive factor because it is capable of giving wine unique and extraordinary aromas and flavors, very difficult to explain with words or with the help of analogy, and they become absolutely unmistakable after having perceived them for the first time. The most common and frequent definitions used to describe the aromas added by noble rot to wine include honey, spices, apricot, hazelnut, toffee and caramel; honestly no one of them can describe it fully, maybe they can just give a vague idea, what it is certain is that aroma of *Botrytis Cinerea* is unique, pleasing, elegant and very appreciated. This precious mould is called *muffa nobile* in Italian, *pourriture noble* in French, *edelfäule* in German and *Aszú* in Hungarian; in every country is always and however welcome in vineyards and allows the production of great, magnificent wines.

The first witness about the discovery of noble rot's effects on wine is dated back to the half of seventeenth century by a Hungarian priest, but it seems it was already known to Greeks more than 2000 years ago. The development of noble rot, which needs particular environmental and climatic conditions, in particular favorable conditions of humidity, is frequent in certain areas of Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Australia and North America. The development of noble rot is pretty unpredictable, it requires good humidity for its formation and a dry climate in order to survive. The repetition of



Sweet wines: sweet moments of life

these climatic conditions and in subsequent days, in particular cool and moist nights followed by warm and dry days, ensure the development of noble rot which usually appears on grapes after two or three days. Noble rot usually prefers white berried grapes having a pretty thick skin and with compact bunches, and in case climatic conditions are not favorable, in particular when humidity is excessive and prolonged, it could easily degenerate into another type of mould having opposite effects: *grey rot*, a factor which irremediably ruins grapes and therefore cannot be used for producing wine. The development of noble rot in vineyards truly is a preoccupying event for every viticulturist because in case conditions are not favorable, precious and valuable grapes can turn into unusable and rotten grapes, a preoccupation that ends only after harvesting.

When the spores of *Botrytis Cinerea* get in contact with the moist skin of grape, usually transported by wind, they start consuming the water on skin's surface and therefore they increase in dimension. At this point begins the development of a germinal tube which holes the skin in the aim of searching nourishment. As the mould gets into the berry, and also thanks to the huge quantity of nutrients, the development is pretty rapid and the surface of the skin gets literally covered by noble rot. Holes made by spores in the skin promote the reduction of water, therefore concentrating sugar and aromatic substances. The effect of noble rot continues by transforming some substances present in grapes and get mixed to them therefore adding its aroma and its flavor. At the end of the process grape's berries have a look which is not certainly inviting, apparently rotten, but on the inside took place unique magic that will give origin to a divine nectar.

Color

Typical colors of sweet and botrytised wines depend, first of all, by the species of grapes used for their production. In sweet red wines, such as Recioto della Valpolicella or Sagrantino di Montefalco Passito, the range of colors is pretty common, usually ruby and garnet red, very deep and most of the times impenetrable by light, with nuances of garnet red. In sweet white wines the range is wider and colors can go from golden yellow to amber yellow, sometimes very dark. The color of sweet white wines mainly depends by the way grapes were dried as well as the type of grape. Generally speaking sweet wines produced with grapes dried after harvesting usually have deeper and darker colors and tend to amber yellow, such as Vin Santo produced in Umbria and Tuscany or Moscato di Pantelleria Passito. It should be however remembered that amber color could also be the sign of oxidation, sometimes wanted by the producer in order to give wine particular organoleptic qualities.

Sweet white wines produced with grapes dried on the vine and, in particular, grapes affected by noble rot, such as *Sauternes*, German and Austrian sweet wines, as well as botrytised wines produced in Orvieto (Umbria), are characterized by splendid golden yellow colors, brilliant and intense, however amber yellow is frequent as well, such as the one of *Tokaji Aszú*. The color of sweet white wines tends to get darker with the aging in bottle, changing from golden yellow to dark golden yellow and then to amber yellow.

Aromas

Aromatic characteristics of sweet wines produced with dried grapes are pretty complex and change according to the type. A characteristic which is usually common to every sweet wine produced with dried grapes is the richness and intensity of aromas, sometimes seems that every time the glass is being smelt a new aroma is coming out from it and the list seems to be endless. In sweet wines produced with red berried grapes will be frequent aromas of red and black skinned fruit, such as plum, strawberry, blackberry, black cherry, cherry, blueberry, raspberry and black currant, sometimes also perceived as jams made with those fruits. Dried flowers can be found as well, such as violet and rose, as well as particular aromas, such as chocolate and cocoa, and spices, such as cardamom, cinnamon and vanilla, in case the wine was aged in cask.

In sweet white wines the aromatic range is certainly more variegated and complex. In sweet wines produced with aromatic grapes, such as Moscato di Pantelleria, Malvasia delle Lipari and Moscato Passito di Chambave, the aroma of grape will be very pronounced, often resembling raisin. In wines produced with grapes affected by noble rot, such as *Sauternes*, *Tokaji Aszú* and *Muffato di Orvieto* as well as German and Austrian sweet wines, the aromatic effect of *Botrytis Cinerea* will be evident and often very pronounced. The pleasing and elegant aroma of noble rot is, like we already said, pretty hard to define with words or with the help of analogy, many have compared it to the one of honey, spices, apricot, hazelnut, toffee and caramel, no one of them really resemble to it, maybe, it could be defined as a combination of them all in different proportions.

In these wines is the aromatic range of fruit to dominate, most of the time it is dried fruit and jams, such as apricot, peach, quince, pear, apple and fig, as well as tropical fruit, such as banana, litchi, mango and pineapple. Common are also aromas of flowers, often dried, such as acacia, orange blossom and broom. The aromatic series in sweet white wines continues with aromas of candied fruit, in particular orange peel and other citrus fruits, honey of many types of flowers, caramel, chocolate, croissant, almond and hazelnut. Sometimes can also be found aromas of spices, such as cinnamon, anise and vanilla, in particular when the wine was aged in wood containers. Typical aromas in sweet white wines are countless and, in general terms, very complex, in wines aged in bottle for many years the aromatic range gets richer, often so surprising that one would not even expect to find them in a wine.

Taste and Balance

As a sweet wine enters the mouth, it is more likely the impact is pretty surprising. Its flavors are usually intense, having a good correspondence to the aromas perceived by the nose, sweetness is clearly perceivable from the very beginning and a pleasing sensation of velvety roundness pervade the mouth. A pleasing characteristic of these wines is their very long taste olfactory persistence, like no other wine. It is not rare to find a sweet wine with a taste olfactory persistence longer than 15 seconds and sometimes they can even be measured in minutes instead of seconds.

Despite the fact this premise could make sweet wines appear like a heavenly nectars, and they certainly can be like that, what makes these wines pleasing and extraordinary to the taste is their balance. Because of the presence of sugar, these wines could taste sickly and syrupy in case they are not properly balanced by other components. Because of the different quantities of substances present in white and red sweet wines, it is necessary to distinguish balance of the two types. The characteristic common to both is certainly alcohol and sugar, whereas in sweet red wines it is common the presence of tannins, and therefore of the tactile sensation of astringency; in white sweet wines the quantity of acid is higher, usually can be appreciated to the taste as well.

The critical factor in sweet wines is represented by the quantity of residual sugar and from this factor also depends the whole balance. Alcohol, which basically has a sweet taste, partially has a role in the balance of sugar as its pseudo caloric action lowers the *relative perception* of sugar. In sweet red wines, where tannins can be found, sugar has a balancing function for astringency as it basically tends to attenuate it, the same function is also done by alcohol. Moreover it should be remembered sugar tends to slow down the perception of astringency. In sweet white wines it will be acidity to play an important role for balance. Sweetness and acidity tend to balance one each other, sugar will therefore balance a very acid wine, whereas acid will avoid a wine to taste sickly or syrupy. This is the specific case of German sweet wines, despite the fact they have a high acidity, they are very balanced thanks to the mutual tendency of these two components to balance each other: the wine will never be sickly nor acid, but perfectly and pleasingly balanced.

Practical Application

In this practical application on sweet and botrytised wines we will use three wines having particular characteristics: an aromatic sweet wines, a sweet wine and a botrytised wine. We will examine a Moscato di Pantelleria Passito, a Vin Santo from Umbria or Tuscany, and a Muffato di Orvieto. Despite there is a very personal preference about serving temperatures for sweet wines, in our case we will taste the wines at a temperature of 14° C (57° F) in order not to penalize the development of aromas and without excessively enhancing sweetness. In the evaluation of appearance the three wines will have very different colors whereas “consistency” and viscosity will seem to be the same: by rotating the glass it will be noted a higher density of the liquid if compared to any other wine. Moscato di Pantelleria Passito will show an amber yellow color tending to a pale tint; Vin Santo will be the one having a deeper and more intense color compared to the others, in this wine the amber yellow color will be darker and deeper. The Muffato wine will show a brilliant and intense golden yellow color.

To the nose the three wines will offer very different olfactory perceptions, however they will all be characterized by a strong intensity of aromas. In the Moscato di Pantelleria Passito it will be perceived, in the beginning, a pronounced and pleasing aroma of grape, a primary characteristic of the wine, followed by aromas of dried fruit and jam, such as dried apricot, candied fruit, peach jam, almond, dried fig, citrus fruit peel and orange marmalade. Moreover will be perceived aromas of

tropical fruit such as litchi. The aromas of Vin Santo will seem to be more complex and in particular it will be perceived a clear aroma of fig jam and caramel, as well as aromas of jams, such as apricot and peach, and dried fruit, such as dried fig, almond, dried apricot and raisin. Other aromas that can be found in Vin Santo include honey and vanilla, in case the wine was aged in casks, according to the traditional process for the production of this wine. In the Muffato di Orvieto the aroma of noble rot will clearly be perceivable from the very beginning. This aroma, truly particular, is pretty hard to describe by means of words, however it is easily recognizable after having perceived it for the first time. The aromatic series of botrytised wine continues with intense aromas of dried apricot, honey, apricot and peach jam, candied fruit, orange peel, as well as orange blossom and broom. Aromas of tropical fruit can be perceived as well, such as banana, pineapple and litchi.

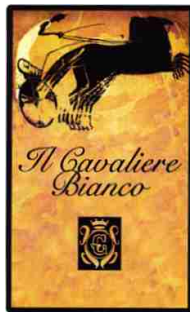
During the gustatory analysis, the three wines will be noticed for their common characteristic: sweetness. This taste will be the first one to be perceived and there will be a clear and strong sensation of roundness in the oral cavity, a sensation almost syrupy without being sickly. In all three wines the correspondence to the nose will be truly convincing: the pleasing aromas perceived to the nose have now become flavors. Then it will be evaluated the balance and the relations among alcohol, sugar and acidity: despite the fact sweetness will be the main gustatory characteristic of the three wines, particular attention will be paid to the role played by the pseudo caloric sensation of alcohol that will tend to diminish its perception, as well as acidity, and each one of these wines has a different quantity of acid, that will have the function of balancing sweetness. The most surprising characteristic of the three wine will probably be their taste olfactory persistence, also known as *PAI* (Intense Aromatic Persistence). Flavors and tastes will be clearly perceivable even after having swallowed the wine and they will even continue to be perceivable after a truly unusual length of time, not common for other wines, often measurable in minutes instead of seconds.

Wines of the Month

Score legend

- ◇ Fair – ◇◇ Pretty Good – ◇◇◇ Good
- ◇◇◇◇ Very Good – ◇◇◇◇◇ Excellent
- ★ Wine that excels in its category

Prices are to be considered as indicative. Prices may vary according to the country or the shop where they are bought



Il Cavaliere Bianco 2001
Fratelli Casali (Italy)

Grapes: Trebbiano Romagnolo

Price: € 3,20

Score: ◇◇◇

This wine shows an intense greenish yellow color and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals clean and pleasing aromas of chamomile, almond, pear, apple, hawthorn, grapefruit and hints of elder. In mouth has good correspondence to the nose, in particular the aroma of chamomile, good balance and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with flavors of chamomile and apple.

Food match: Appetizers, Dairy products, Soft cheese, Pasta and risotto with vegetables



Sangiovese di Romagna Superiore Riserva 2000
Fratelli Casali (Italy)

Grapes: Sangiovese

Price: € 10,00

Score: ◇◇◇★

The wine shows a brilliant ruby red color and nuances of rube res, moderate transparency. The nose reveals intense, clean, pleasing and elegant aromas of black cherry jam, plum jam, blueberry, licorice and violet followed by pleasing hints of

camphor and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however well balanced, intense flavors and full body. The finish is persistent with flavors of black cherry, plum and blueberry. This wine ages in barrique for about 13 months.

Food match: Braised and stewed meat, Game, Roasted meat, Hard cheese



Ecarté Re di Fiori 2002
Baravalle (Italy)

Grapes: Muscat Blanc

Price: € 7,00

Score: ◇◇◇★

The wine shows a light straw yellow and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, elegant and refined aromas where the good aromaticity of the grape is clearly evident. There can be perceived aromas of peach, apricot, litchi, apple, melon, pear, broom and hawthorn followed by pleasing aromas of sage and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, intense flavors and good balance, agreeable crispness. The finish is persistent with flavors of peach, pear and melon. This wine is fermented in barrique.

Food match: Appetizers, Crustaceans, Pasta and risotto with fish



Barbera d'Asti Superiore 1998
Baravalle (Italy)

Grapes: Barbera

Price: € 7,20

Score: ◇◇◇★

This wine has an intense ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, moderate transparency. The nose denotes intense, clean and pleasing aromas of black cherry, blueberry, plum and violet followed by pleasing hints of vanilla and carob. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, good balance and pleasing to drink, good tannins, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with flavors of plum, black cherry and blueberry. This Barbera is aged for at least 12 months in barrique.

Food match: Roasted meat, Braised meat, Hard cheese



Terre di Franciacorta Rosso 2001
Conti Terzi (Italy)

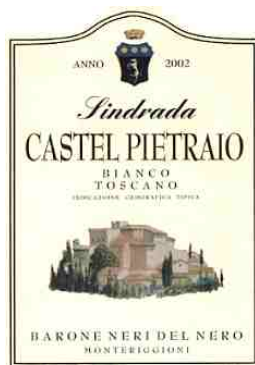
Grapes: Barbera, Cabernet, Nebbiolo, Merlot

Price: € 4,80

Score: ◇◇◇◇

The wine shows an intense ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, moderate transparency. The nose has intense, clean and pleasing aromas of black cherry, raspberry, blueberry, plum and violet. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly and pleasing crisp attack however balanced by alcohol, good tannins, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with flavors of plum, black cherry and blueberry.

Food match: Roasted meat, Sauteed meat, Hard cheese



Sindrada 2002
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio (Italy)

Grapes: Chardonnay (90%), Malvasia Bianca (10%)

Price: € 6,00

Score: ◇◇◇◇

The wine shows a brilliant straw yellow color and nuances of straw yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals intense, clean and pleasing aromas of citrus fruits, pineapple, hawthorn, almond, apple, pear, peach and plum. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly sweet attack which does not disturb and however well balanced by crispness, good body and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with flavors of peach, pear and plum.

Food match: Pasta and risotto with vegetables, Sauteed fish, Sauteed white meat



Ghinibaldo 2000
Fattoria di Castel Pietraio (Italy)

Grapes: Sangiovese (80%), Merlot (20%)

Price: € 18,50

Score: ◇◇◇◇◇

This wine shows a deep ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, little transparency. The nose reveals good personality and intense, pleasing, clean and elegant aromas which open up with black cherry jam, plum jam and a hint of vanilla followed by pleasing and good aromas of violet, blueberry, carob as well as hints of cocoa, licorice and eucalyptus. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with good and intense flavors of plum, black cherry and blueberry. A well made wine. Ghinibaldo is aged for 12 months in barrique.

Food match: Braised and stewed meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat, Game, Hard cheese



Chianti Classico Riserva 1999
Castello d'Albola (Italy)

Grapes: Sangiovese, Canaiolo Nero

Price: € 14,60

Score: ◇◇◇◇★

The wine shows a brilliant ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, moderate transparency. The nose has clean, pleasing and elegant aromas of black cherry, blueberry, plum and violet followed by good hints of carob, licorice and vanilla. In mouth reveals good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with flavors of plum, black cherry and blueberry. This Chianti Classico ages for 15 months in barrique followed by 12 months in steel tanks and 4 months in bottle.

Food match: Braised meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat, Broiled meat and barbecue, Hard cheese



**Insolia 2002
Feudo Principi di Butera (Italy)**

Grapes: Inzolia

Price: € 8,30

Score: ◇◇◇★

This wine shows a light straw yellow color and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose denotes intense, pleasing and clean aromas of pineapple, almond, apple, hawthorn, broom, pear and peach. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, good balance, good body, intense flavors and agreeable crispness. The finish is persistent with clean flavors of peach, pear and apple. Insolia is aged for some months in bottle.

Food match: Fish appetizers, Pasta and risotto with vegetables and fish, Fish soups



**Nero d'Avola 2001
Feudo Principi di Butera (Italy)**

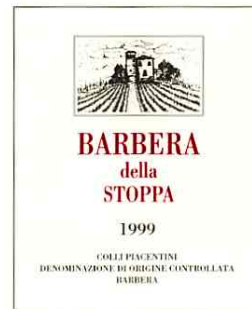
Grapes: Nero d'Avola

Price: € 11,00

Score: ◇◇◇★

This wine shows an intense ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, little transparency. The nose reveals good personality with clean and pleasing aromas of plum jam, raspberry, blueberry and cyclamen followed by good hints of white pepper and vanilla. In mouth denotes good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, good body and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with flavors of plum jam, raspberry and blueberry. This wine ages for 12 months in cask.

Food match: Braised meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat, Hard cheese



**Colli Piacentini Barbera della Stoppa 1999
La Stoppa (Italy)**

Grapes: Barbera

Price: € 9,50

Score: ◇◇◇◇

This wine shows a deep ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, little transparency. The nose reveals good personality with intense, clean, elegant and pleasing aromas which open up with violet, black cherry and blackberry followed by pleasing and intense aromas of blueberry, plum, licorice and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly and pleasing crisp attack however well balanced, good tannins, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with good flavors of plum, blueberry and black cherry. A well made wine. This Barbera is aged for 12 months in barrique.

Food match: Braised and stewed meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat, Game, Hard cheese



**Colli Piacentini Malvasia Passito Vigna del Volta
2001
La Stoppa (Italy)**

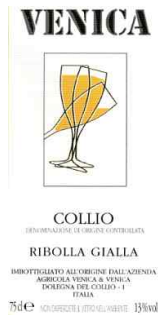
Grapes: Malvasia Bianca (80%), Muscat Blanc (20%)

Price: € 16,00 - 500 ml (16.9 fl.oz.)

Score: ◇◇◇◇

This sweet wine shows a light amber yellow color and nuances of golden yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals clean, pleasing, refined and elegant aromas of dried apricot, candied fruit, caramel, peach jam, dried fig, almond, honey and citrus fruit peel followed by a pleasing hint of vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a round and sweet attack which is continuously perceivable, intense flavors. The finish is persistent with flavors of caramel, apricot and peach jam. Vigna del Volta is produced with grapes allowed to dry for two weeks and ages for 10 months in barrique.

Food match: Piquant and hard cheese, Confectionery, Fruit tarts



**Collio Ribolla Gialla 2002
Venica (Italy)**

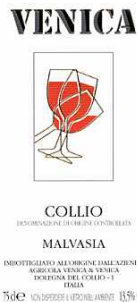
Grapes: Ribolla Gialla

Price: € 12,60

Score: ◇◇◇◇

This wine shows a light straw yellow color and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose denotes intense, clean, pleasing and elegant aromas of apple, orange, almond, hawthorn, pear and grapefruit followed by pleasing hints of lavender. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a pleasing crisp attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with clean and pleasing flavors of grapefruit, pear and apple. A well made wine.

Food match: Fish appetizers, Pasta and risotto with fish and vegetables, Sauteed fish



**Collio Malvasia 2002
Venica (Italy)**

Grapes: Malvasia Istriana

Price: € 12,60

Score: ◇◇◇◇

This wine shows a brilliant straw yellow color and nuances of straw yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, elegant and refined aromas of banana, hawthorn, apple, hazelnut, pear and peach followed by pleasing hints of avocado and rosemary. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly crisp attack however well balanced, intense flavors, good body. The finish is persistent with pleasing flavors of peach, pear and banana.

Food match: Fish appetizers, Crustaceans, Pasta and risotto with fish, Sauteed fish, Sauteed white meat



**Brunello di Montalcino Progetto Prime Donne 1998
Donatella Cinelli Colombini (Italy)**

Grapes: Sangiovese

Price: € 27,50

Score: ◇◇◇◇★

The wine shows an intense ruby red color and nuances of garnet red, moderate transparency. The nose reveals good personality with elegant, refined, clean and very pleasing aromas of black cherry, strawberry jam, raspberry jam, plum jam and violet followed by good aromas of cinnamon, chocolate, licorice, thyme and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however well balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and full body. The finish is persistent with pleasing and clean flavors of plum, raspberry and strawberry. A very well made wine. Progetto Prime Donne ages for two years in cask.

Food match: Game, Roasted meat, Braised and stewed meat, Hard cheese



**Chianti Superiore 2002
Donatella Cinelli Colombini (Italy)**

Grapes: Sangiovese (90%), Canaiolo Nero (10%)

Price: € 8,50

Score: ◇◇◇◇★

The wine shows a brilliant ruby red color and nuances of purplish red, moderate transparency. The nose has very pleasing aromas of fruit, as well as intense and elegant aromas of black cherry, cherry, strawberry, raspberry and plum followed by pleasing aromas of anise, cyclamen and violet. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however well balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with pleasing flavors of strawberry, raspberry and plum.

Food match: Broiled meat and barbecue, Stuffed pasta, Sauteed meat, Hard cheese



Rosso Piceno Superiore Roggio del Filare 2000
Ercole Velenosi (Italy)

Grapes: Montepulciano (80%), Sangiovese (20%)

Price: € 18,00

Score: ♦♦♦♦★

This wine shows a beautiful and deep ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, little transparency. The nose has personality with intense, clean, refined, elegant and pleasing aromas of black cherry, carob, blueberry, blackberry, black currant, plum and violet followed by intense and good aromas of caper, ink, licorice, leather, black pepper and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and full body. The finish is persistent with good and intense flavors of black cherry, blueberry and plum. A very well made wine. Roggio del Filare ages in barrique.

Food match: Braised and stewed meat, Roasted meat, Game, Hard cheese



Rêve 2001
Ercole Velenosi (Italy)

Grapes: Chardonnay

Price: € 15,00

Score: ♦♦♦♦♦

The wine shows a beautiful and intense straw yellow color and nuances of straw yellow, very transparent. The nose opens up with an intense hint of toasted wood followed by elegant, intense, clean and pleasing aromas of banana, coffee, pineapple, acacia, grapefruit, peach, vanilla, apple, litchi and pear as well as hints of toasted bread. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly alcoholic attack however balanced, good body and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with good flavors of pear, vanilla, banana and pineapple. A well made wine. Rêve is produced with late harvested grapes and ferments in barrique.

Food match: Stuffed pasta, Fried vegetables, Roasted fish, Sauteed meat, Soft cheese



Linagre 2002
Ercole Velenosi (Italy)

Grapes: Sauvignon Blanc, Pecorino

Price: € 7,90

Score: ♦♦♦♦♦

The wine shows a beautiful and soft straw yellow color and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, clean, refined and elegant aromas where the Sauvignon Blanc grape is clearly perceivable from the beginning. The wine opens up with fresh and good aromas of elder flower, broom, peach, pear and pineapple followed by intense and good aromas of banana, litchi, melon, grapefruit as well as hints of bell pepper. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a pleasing crisp attack however well balanced, good body and very agreeable. The finish is persistent with pleasing and good flavors of peach, pineapple and melon. A well made wine.

Food match: Sauteed white meat, Pasta and risotto with fish, Sauteed fish, Soft cheese

WINE PRODUCERS

Cataldi Madonna

In Abruzzo, region of ancient and renowned enological traditions, Luigi Cataldi Madonna winery produces excellent wines with typical grapes, between tradition and innovation

Cultivation of vine and production of wine have very ancient origins in Abruzzo and it is likely that were Etruscans to introduce vine in the lands of this region. The wine produced in Abruzzo has always been praised in the course of history, Greeks were probably the first ones to praise its qualities and soon after they were followed by Romans. Abruzzo is a region whose territory is mainly composed by mountains, to the west there are Apennines, of which Gran Sasso and Maiella are the most important mountain systems, and from which take origin a vast highland that spreads for most of the region's territory, whereas to the east the region meets the Adriatic sea. It is just in the inner part of Abruzzo, in the province of L'Aquila, to the feet of the southern side of Gran Sasso, there is Ofena where Luigi Cataldi Madonna winery is located.

The winery was established in 1920 and in 1968 began an important renewal process started by Antonio Cataldi Madonna, who worked in order to plant new vineyards and to

renew winery's structures and resources. Currently the winery is run by his son, Luigi Cataldi Madonna, who continues the important process of qualifying winery's products by means of a working philosophy whose goal is to safeguarding and enhancing the specific characteristics of the territory. Ofena, the city where the winery is located, is in a mountain's valley at 380 meters of altitude (1246 feet), to the feet of Gran Sasso, and which is traditionally called "oven of Abruzzo". Thanks to the exceptional exposition to sun rays and to the sensible thermal variations, this area has remarkable possibilities in wine making, also thanks to the composition of the soil.

It is more likely this territory represents one of the most ancient sites of Montepulciano, the renowned grape used for the production of the generous red wines of Abruzzo as well as the interesting Cerasuolo, whose fame seems to be emerged at the end of the sixteenth century thanks to the enhancement of its culture done by the Grand Duke of Tuscany Francesco de' Medici. However it must be remembered Montepulciano is an autochthonous grape of this region, as well as being the most common grape in Abruzzo, and researches about vine's DNA have proved there is no connection with Sangiovese grape, as opposed to a hypothesis supporting the idea of it being introduced from Tuscany, in particular from the city of Montepulciano. It seems that the grape was named like that because some wine merchants confused the wine produced with this grape with the *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*.

According to some historical documents dated back to the half of 1900's about the agricultural activity of the region, it is clear the importance of the viticulture done in the province of L'Aquila in regard to quality, and in particular in the area of Ofena, not much productive in terms of quantities, but interesting for its possibilities in wine production. Winery's philosophy is oriented towards the full emphasizing of the viticultural possibilities of the territory as well as the optimal agricultural management and the work done in vineyards. Luigi Cataldi Madonna's vineyards have a surface of 24 hectares (59 acres), 7 of which were planted in 1968, whereas the rest is characterized by recent plantings. Winery's vineyards are all planted in the highland to the feet of Gran Sasso, at an altitude of 380 meters (1246 feet). Macerone, Cona, Pie' delle Vigne are the names of the places where the vineyards are located and, sometimes, as in the specific case of Pie' delle Vigne, they are specific crus that also name the wine. The microclimate of the highland is characterized by sensible thermal variations.



A view from Luigi Cataldi Madonna winery



Cataldi Madonna winery produces three different styles of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

The soil is calcareous-clayey, with slightly differences between the many locations and that also affect the productive strategies of the winery as well as the wines produced. For example, the soil of Pie' delle Vigne, has the same physical-chemical constitution, and it is less fertile, therefore vines have less vigor and a higher fruit concentration. The density of plantings ranges from 2000 and 5000 vines per hectare, yields are generally low and limited, in particular 30-34 quintals/hectare for Pecorino grape, 50-60 quintals/hectare for Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Tonì, 60-70 quintals/hectare for Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo Pie' delle Vigne. The grapes varieties cultivated by the winery are Montepulciano, whose proportion is planned to increase according to winery's plans, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, the autochthonous Pecorino and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wines produced by Cataldi Madonna include many types, according to a productive differentiation of modern conception in respect of tradition while meeting the choices and tastes of consumers. Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Tonì, white Pecorino IGT Alto Tirino and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo Pie' delle Vigne are the main crus which fully represent the winery's philosophy. The first wine is the result of an accurate selection of grapes and a proper aging, obtaining a Montepulciano having full body and elegance. Pecorino, name of the homonymous and ancient grape, is particularly resistant in the mountain areas of central Apennines, is a sort of challenge, the one of keeping tradition alive while giving the wine a modern interpretation. The same conception, and certainly proud of the winery, is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo Pie' delle Vigne, an ancient and truly typical wine of the mountain areas of the region. Cataldi Madonna's production is completed by base products such as Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo DOC and Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC. Moreover the winery also produces two interesting and particular red wines, Occhiorosso, an Alto Tirino IGT mainly produced with Cabernet Sauvignon and a small quantity of Montepulciano, and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Malandrino, produced, according to the DOC disciplinary, with Montepulciano grape as well as a small quantity of other grapes, in this specific case, Cabernet Sauvignon. Luigi Cataldi Madonna's wines are commercialized in every region of Italy, whereas the commercialization in foreign countries include United States of America, England, Ireland, Ger-

many, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Netherlands.



Wines are rated according to DiWineTaste's evaluation method. Please see score legend in the "Wines of the Month" section.



Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2002
Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Trebbiano d'Abruzzo

Price: € 4,00

Score: ❖❖❖★

The wine shows a brilliant greenish yellow color and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, clean and elegant aromas of acacia, hawthorn, kiwi, lemon, almond, apple, coconut and pear. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, an agreeable crisp attack however well balanced, intense flavors, very agreeable. The finish is persistent with good flavors of lemon, pear and apple.

Food match: Dairy products, Soft cheese, Pasta and risotto with vegetables, Sauteed white meat



Pecorino 2001
Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Pecorino

Price: € 12,00

Score: ❖❖❖❖

This wine shows an intense gold yellow color and nuances of gold yellow, very transparent. The nose reveals an evident hint of wood as well as intense, clean, pleasing and refined aromas of peach jam, banana, broom, apple, hazelnut and plum followed by a pleasing hint of vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly round attack however balanced, agreeable crispness, good body and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with good flavors of apple, banana and plum. This wine is produced with late harvested grapes and ages in barrique.

Food match: Crustaceans, Pasta and risotto with fish, Soft cheese, Roasted cheese



Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo
Pie' delle Vigne 2002
Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Montepulciano

Price: € 7,00

Score: ❖❖❖★

This wine shows a light ruby red color and nuances of deep pink, moderate transparency. The nose reveals intense, clean and pleasing aromas of cherry, strawberry, raspberry, almond, blackberry, peach, plum and rose. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a pleasing crisp attack however well balanced by alcohol, intense flavors, agreeable. The finish is persistent with flavors of raspberry, strawberry and peach.

Food match: Mushroom soups, Sauteed white meat with mushrooms, Cold cuts, Fish soups, Pasta



Occhiorosso 2000
Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon (90%), Montepulciano (10%)

Price: € 10,20

Score: ❖❖❖❖

The wine shows a beautiful and intense ruby red color and nuances of ruby red, little transparency. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, clean and elegant aromas of black cherry, blueberry, plum, black currant, violet and carob followed by pleasing and good aromas of licorice, bell pepper and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a slightly tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and good body. The finish is persistent with good flavors of plum, black cherry and blueberry. A well made wine. Occhiorosso ages in cask.

Food match: Braised and stewed meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat, Hard cheese



Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Malandrino 2001 Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Montepulciano (88%), Cabernet Sauvignon (12%)

Price: € 10,50

Score: ◆◆◆◆

The wine shows a deep ruby red color and nuances of purplish red, little transparency. The nose reveals intense, pleasing, clean and elegant aromas of black cherry, carob, blueberry, blackberry, plum and black currant as well as pleasing and good aromas of ink, menthol, nutmeg and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, very balanced, with agreeable tannins, intense flavors and full body. The finish is persistent with good flavors of plum, black cherry and black currant. A well made wine. Malandrino is produced with grapes from the Cona vineyard and ages in cask.

Food match: Game, Braised and stewed meat, Roasted meat, Hard cheese



Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Toni 2000 Cataldi Madonna (Italy)

Grapes: Montepulciano

Price: € 16,20

Score: ◆◆◆◆

The wine shows a deep ruby red color and nuances of purplish red, little transparency. The nose has good personality and intense, clean, pleasing and elegant aromas of black cherry, raspberry, blueberry, blackberry, carob, plum, violet and vanilla. In the mouth has good correspondence to the nose, a tannic attack however balanced by alcohol, intense flavors and full body. The finish is persistent with clean and good flavors of blueberry, plum and black cherry. A well made wine. Toni is produced with grapes from Cona vineyard and ages in cask.

Food match: Game, Braised and stewed meat, Roasted meat, Hard cheese

Azienda Agraria Luigi Cataldi Madonna - Loc. Piano - 67025 Ofena, L'Aquila (Italy) Tel. ++39 0862 954252 Fax ++39 0862 816166 - **Winemaker:** Lorenzo Landi - **Established:** 1920 - **Production:** 230.000 bottles - **E-Mail:** cataldimadonna@virgilio.it



DiWINEtaste's Wines Guide WEB page

Cellar Journal

This section is reserved to wine producers who want to publish news and information about their business, to announce new products or just for communicating to its customers informations and promotions about their products and activity. Send news to be published at the e-mail address CellarJournal@DiWineTaste.com.

EVENTS

Success for DiWINEtaste's Wines Guide

The publication of our new WEB site has confirmed DiWINEtaste's success among wine lovers. High appreciation for the new wines guide and for new services

The publication of DiWINEtaste's new WEB site released on last September has represented for our editorial activity a new success of which, of course, we must thank our readers and all the Internet users who visited our pages. The confirmation of this result has also been the many e-mails from our readers and visitors who wanted to send us their comments of appreciation for the job we have done. In particular we had an increasing interest and appreciation for DiWINEtaste's Wines Guide. The new information we added to wine forms, such as the map of origin of wine, glasses and serving temperature, have enriched this tool, which already had a good appreciation by our readers, with new resources and useful information for the spreading of wine culture.

DiWINEtaste's Wines Guide was not the only enhancement which caught the interest and the appreciation of our readers and visitors. The new pages dedicated to wine service, in particular wine glasses, serving temperature and accessories, information having an immediate and direct purpose in Wines Guide's forms, have been defined as "very useful" by the majority of readers who sent their opinion and their precious suggestions to our mailbox. Even the amusing aspect of the site has been very appreciated. EnoQuiz, our quiz about wine cul-

ture, has been used by the majority of visitors who used it to test their level of knowledge about the beverage of Bacchus. Enquiz provide a quiz of ten questions, different at every usage and, despite the number of questions currently used for quizzes is enough to ensure a good rotation, we are planning to add new questions every month in order to allow visitors who already used this service to test their knowledge with new quizzes.

The main news concerning the publication, that is the possibility of reading DiWineTaste online by using a WEB browser, has been very appreciated as well, the majority of visitors read both the September issue online as well as the back issues. However this did not change the preference towards the Adobe Acrobat® PDF edition that has been continuously downloaded by readers every day of September, therefore confirming the importance and the preference of printing and reading DiWineTaste without being connected to the Internet. The availability of back issues for online reading has been very appreciated as well, in particular the site's search function which allowed visitors to search our site about specific subjects about wine in a practical and quick way.

DiWineTaste's Wines Guide, in particular the renewed wine food matching function, has registered a very high level of appreciation, and it has been the wine food matching function, widely used in the past already, to register the highest number of users for the Wines Guide. The renewed interface, capable of a better interaction during the process of data entry, made the Wines Guide a more efficient and versatile tool in order to know the wines evaluated by DiWineTaste's tasting committee. Even wine forms, renewed in their graphical aspect and enriched with new information, have contributed, according to our readers' comments, to make DiWineTaste's Wines Guide a more rapid and efficient tool to be used for getting information about wines. The success of DiWineTaste's Wines Guide must be shared with all wine producers who honored us with their trust and allowed us to evaluate their products and to publish the results, in the hope they will continue doing so and that new producers will be added to the guide as well.

News

In this section will be published news and informations about events concerning the world of wine and food. Whoever is interested in publishing this kind of information can send us a mail at the address Events@DiWineTaste.com.

CORKSCREW

Matching Food with Rose Wines

Rose wines, sometimes forgotten and scarcely considered, are very pleasing, aromatic and crisp, last but not the least, very suited and versatile in the matching with food

In case there is a style of wine which is scarcely considered and sometimes forgotten by consumers, this certainly is the category of rose wines. These wines, which are very pleasing, fresh and aromatic, are often victims of absurd prejudices, also supported by a scarce knowledge, and unfortunately considered as lesser wines. Perhaps the fact they are placed in a position between white wines and reds, makes these wines appear like something which is neither the one nor the other, worse, a wine produced in a arguable way having low quality and therefore considered as a lesser wine. The only thing which is not arguable is that rose wines are neither white wines nor reds, moreover they are not an in between choice, they are wines belonging to a specific type and, above all, are real and proper wines.

However it should be remembered the discredit for rose wines was also the result of a bad information, culture and, first of all, the dishonesty of some subjects, such as in certain restaurants, who in past times, when controls were probably more permissive, used to serve to their clients a "rose wine" which they prepared by blending white and red wines of bad quality, obtaining a product having very bad organoleptic qualities. The practice of blending white wines and red wines with the purpose of producing a rose wine is a method which is explicitly forbidden by the law of many wine producing countries. The only rose wine that can be prepared this way is the base wine used for the production of classic method rose sparkling wines, such as Champagne or Franciacorta.

Production of Rose Wines

Rose wines are produced with the specific purpose of obtaining this style of wine with specific techniques and their production is not to be considered of lesser quality. True rose wines, that is the ones produced with this specific purpose, are to be considered real wines with proper dignity. Methodologies used for the production of rose wines are mainly three and all of them begin, of course, with harvesting red berried grapes which are subsequently pressed in order to obtain must.

A technique used for the production of rose wines having pale colors consists in pressing red berried grapes and to separate must from skins soon after this process. These kind of wines are called grey wines in France (*vins gris*). However the most common technique requires a short period of maceration of skins in the must in order to obtain wines having different rose tints, a factor which also depends on the quantity of pigments contained in grape's skins and therefore on its coloring capacity. The duration of the maceration on skins is usually short, it scarcely goes beyond 24 hours, and "wines of one night" will be produced in case the maceration time is from

6 to 12 hours, “wines of one day” when the maceration lasts for 24 hours. At the end of this short period, the must, which will acquire a more or less intense rose color, is separated from skins and the vinification process continues by using the typical procedures for white wines.

Another technique used for the production of these style of wines is the so called “bleeding”, called in French “*saignée*”. The technique consists in drawing a certain quantity of must produced with red berried grapes after a short period of maceration on skins, usually within 24 hours, and after the fermentation process has begun. The part of must drawn, which will have a rose color as a consequence of the short maceration, will be vinified by using the same methodologies for white wines, whereas the remaining part, that will continue to macerate and ferment on skins, will be used for the production of red wine. The technique of bleeding increases the quantity of polyphenols and aromatic compounds in the must therefore obtaining a more concentrated red wine with a greater structure and body. Many producers of quality red wines use the technique of bleeding for their best wines and this technique allow them the production of excellent red wines as well as excellent rose wines.

Many Rose Wines to be Discovered

Despite the fact rose wines are not particularly common and are not particularly appreciated by consumers, there is a good availability and offer from producers even though, it should be admitted, the produced quantity is very low when compared to white wines or red wines. However there are wine areas where rose wines represent the majority of total production, such as for certain areas in southern France. Grapes used for the production of rose wines are the same used for red wines, therefore it is pretty common to have wines in this category produced with grapes usually believed to make great red wines. In general terms, rose wines are produced in warm and sunny areas where white wines are not characterized by the same crispness and aromaticity of the ones produced in cool areas.

Among wine producing countries, the one having the longest and most important tradition in the production of rose wines certainly is France, in particular the southern part, where



Rose wines are a good match for cereal soups

this style of wine is produced in great quantities and very appreciated, however there also are good examples of rose wines in the northern areas as well. In Champagne, a region renowned for its excellent sparkling wines, in the area near Aube, it is produced the rare *Rosé des Riceys* with Pinot Noir grape which in this area, thanks to a warmer climate as opposed to the northern part of Champagne, grapes reach full maturation therefore allowing the production of a wine having strong flavors. In the northern part of France, in Loire Valley there is a good production of rose wines, such as the renowned *Rosé d'Anjou*, a demi-sec wine mainly produced with Grolleau grape, as well as *Rosé de Loire*, and *Cabernet d'Anjou*, a demi-sec wine produced with Cabernet Franc grape and *Cabernet de Saumur*. In the same area are also produced the renowned rose wines of *Touraine*, produced with Pineau d'Aunis and Grolleau grapes.

The production of French rose wines is particularly common in the southern area. In Rhône Valley there is a modest production of rose wines, mainly produced with Grenache Noir and Cinsaut, as well as Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan, in particular *Tavel*, *Lirac*, *Vacqueyras*, *Gigondas*, *Côteaux du Tricastin*, *Côtes du Vivarais* and *Côtes du Lubéron*. Even in Languedoc-Roussillon, known for the production of *vins doux naturels*, there is a good production of rose wines, mainly with Carignan, Grenache Noir, Cinsaut, Mourvèdre and Syrah grapes, in particular wines from *Collioure*, *Minervois*, *Saint-Chinian*, *Côtes du Roussillon*, *Faugères* and *Coteaux du Languedoc*.

The most renowned area of France concerning rose wines is certainly Provence where this style of wine represents the most important proportion in the total production. Grapes used in this region for the production of rose wines are Grenache Noir, Syrah, Cinsaut, Carignan, Mourvèdre and Tibouren. Among the areas of Provence which produce rose wines are to be mentioned *Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence et Les Baux-de-Provence*, *Côtes de Provence*, *Palette*, *Cassis*, *Coteaux Varois*, *Bellet* and *Bandol*, the latter wines are usually aged in casks. Even the evocative Corsica produces interesting rose wines, mainly with Nielluccio, Sciacarello, Grenache Noir and Cinsaut grapes, in particular *Ajaccio*, *Porto Vecchio* and *Sartène*. In the southern part of France, precisely in the South-West area, there are interesting areas for the production of rose wines, such as *Tursan*, *Béarn-Belloq*, *Iroléguy*, *Côtes du Brulhois*, *Côtes du Frontonnais*, *Côtes de Millau*, *Entraygues et du Fel* and *Estaing*. In the region of Bergerac, west from Bordeaux, are produced interesting rose wines, although in modest quantities, such as *Côtes de Duras*, *Buzet*, *Bergerac* and *Côtes de Bergerac*.

In Italy the production of rose wine is not very high, however it should be noticed that a good number of disciplinary for the production of DOC wines include this style. Probably the region having a stronger tradition in the production of rose wines is Apulia, which produces excellent rose wines with Negroamaro and Malvasia Nera grapes. Among the many areas must be mentioned rose wines from Salento, Salice Salentino Rosato, Alezio Rosato and Castel del Monte Rosato. In the southern part of Italy, also Calabria has an interesting production of rose wines, in particular Cirò Rosato produced with Gaglioppo grape. Among Italian rose wines should be mentioned the renowned and ancient Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Cerasuolo, produced with Montepulciano grape. In Campa-

nia there is a production of rose wines, usually produced with Aglianico grape, in particular Aglianico del Taburno Rosato and Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio Rosato, the latter produced with the adding of Piediroso grape. In the northern part of Italy the production of rose wines is mainly found in the eastern part, in particular in the lake of Garda, renowned is the Garda Chiaretto, mainly produced with Gropello grape, whereas in Veneto there is Bardolino Chiaretto, mainly produced with Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes. Another excellent rose wine produced in the northern part of Italy is Lagrein Kretzer, from Alto Adige, an interesting crisp and aromatic wine.

Other interesting production of rose wines are found in Spain, in particular in the regions of *Rioja*, *Ribera del Duero* and *Navarra*, usually produced with Tempranillo and Garnacha grapes. Another area famous for its rose wines is Styria, in Austria, in particular for its *Schilcher*, produced with Blauer Wildbacher grape, a pretty acid wine as opposed to what one may usually expect from a rose wine.

Matching Rose Wine

Rose wines offer interesting opportunities in matching with food, they offer an incredible versatility, are usually suited in all those cases when a white wine is not enough and a red wine is simply too much, thanks to the low content in tannins and to their appreciable crispness, they can be served to the same temperatures for white wines. It is often said rose wines have the same aromas of red wines and the advantage of being served like a white wine, therefore they are characterized by an excellent agreeability and pleasing aromas. The versatility of rose wine in the matching with food is very wide, they are perfectly matchable with appetizers, pasta, rice, fish, meat as well as cheese.

One of the main characteristics of rose wine is their freshness in aromas, usually the same which are typically found in young red wines, however, just like any other type of wine, before proceeding with matching, it is best to know the specific characteristics of every wine. We already mentioned that, according to the matching food/wine point of view, rose wines are to be considered as an in between possibility for white and red wines, and thanks to this characteristic they offer a wide versatility. Compared to white wines, rose wines are usually less acid and have a higher roundness, factors which also depend by the technique used for their production, whereas when compared to red wines, they have a lesser structure and a lower astringency. In general terms, rose wines do not have a high alcohol by volume percentage, a factor that, of course, also depends by the specific conditions of the wine and of its balance.

Thanks to the smoothness of rose wines and to their appreciable crispness, certainly not excessive as in white wines, these wines can make excellent matchings with every dish of pasta where tomato sauce is used, as well as in stuffed pasta and pasta cooked in the oven, moreover, also with pizza and its many versions. The higher structure of rose wines compared to whites and their low quantity of tannins, therefore a lower astringency, is useful for recipes based on fish, in particular fish soups and roasted fish especially when it is richly seasoned and spiced. Rose wines are also suited for the matching with mushrooms and with dairy products, as well as with

soft cheese.

Rose wines, thanks to their characteristics, are well matchable with meat dishes as well, in particular white meat, from sauteed meat to roasted meat, even prepared with mushrooms or truffles. Moreover, these wines are also good as aperitifs, thanks to the possibility of being served at low temperatures, and they are very pleasing with appetizers as well, even the ones made of fish. Thanks to their low, however appreciable acidity, to their roundness and moderate alcohol quantity, rose wines are usually matchable with cold cuts, from lean ones to fatty ones, as well as with preparations based on vegetables, in particular vegetable puddings and the rich "parmigiana", lastly, they are very good with cereals and legumes.

NOT JUST WINE

Chocolate

The food of gods, a beverage having its origin in the most ancient times, has become a tasty food having a countless number of lovers everywhere in the world

Cocoa

The cocoa plant, whose scientific name is "*Theobroma cacao*" (Theobroma = food of gods), attributed by the naturalist Linnaeus, is a perennial plant growing in the tropical area at a latitude 20-30 degrees north and south, has its ideal habitat around 400 meters of altitude (1312 feet), in soils rich of azote and potassium, in a moist climate at a temperature from 20 and 30° C (68-86° F). The trunk is thin and in plantings can reach 6-7 meters in length (19-23 feet) whereas can reach 10 meters in wild conditions (33 feet). The fruit is called caryopsis and is egg shaped of 20-25 centimeters in length (7-10 inches) and 10-12 centimeters wide (4-5 inches) and its weight ranges from 200 grams to one kilogram (0.44-2.2 lbs.). The color ranges according to the variety, from yellow to ochre and to red. Cocoa is cultivated on the shadow of other plants having an abundant foliage which shelter it from wind, rains and from direct sunlight. The flowers, truly abundant, directly grow on trunk and on main branches, and only few of them, pollinated by gnats, will succeed in transforming themselves into fruits. On the inside of the fruit there are about 30-40 egg shaped seeds, 2-3 centimeters long (about 1 inch), covered by a whitish mucilaginous gelatin very rich in sugar.

There are three varieties of cocoa: *Criollo cocoa* (creole), from Mexico (according to others, from the Amazon), having whitish seeds, considered of very high quality because it is very aromatic and not much bitter, delicate and unfortunately rare and also scarcely productive in terms of quantity. The second variety is *Forastero Cocoa* (foreign), from high Amazon, from which are derived African trees, characterized by violet seeds, considered of lower quality than Criollo, because very acid and with a bitter taste because of the higher contents in tannins. Despite this characteristic, and also because it is more resistant and productive, has a more rapid growth and covers 80% of worldwide production. The third variety is *Trinitario*

Cocoa, which is an hybrid obtained by the other two species and has the characteristics of both. There are many hybrids, different for their characteristics, taste, aroma and color, and just like coffee, only one quality of cocoa does not give an excellent product, but only a proper blending of different qualities that every producer secretly keeps.

History

The history of chocolate begins with the history of cocoa. Back in the time of legends, it seems that the first cultivators of the plant of cocoa were Mayans, around 1000 BC, and then were Toltecs and Aztecs. Legend goes that Aztec god Quetzalcoatl gave the world the seed of cocoa in order to be used for making a bitter and spicy beverage very energetic. In honor of this god the seed was called "*cacahuatl*" which subsequently changed into "*chocolatl*". Around 600 AD, in central America, Mayans used cocoa seeds as money, as a computation unit as well as for making a beverage called "*xocoatl*". This beverage, obtained by toasting and grinding seeds, then blended with a liquid and whipped until obtaining a foaming beverage, is something which had nothing in common with the chocolate beverage we are used to consume today. This beverage, scarcely inviting, at least according to the modern taste, was appreciated because it could relief fatigue as well as stimulating physical and mental strength.

In 1200 Aztecs imposed to the conquered people of Maya tributes to be paid in cocoa seeds. The cocoa beverage enriched with vanilla was the preferred drink of emperor Montezuma. At this point legend is substituted by history. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in Honduras, brought back cocoa seeds from America to Spanish court, however they will be ignored. Herman Cortes, in the first half of 1500's, understood the importance of the beverage obtained by cocoa seeds and brings to Spain the Aztec recipe of chocolate but the taste is still too bitter for the taste of the old world. Experts do not agree on the date, however we know for sure that at one point chocolate was consumed sweetened with sugar.



The cocoa plant

In the beginning of the 1600's chocolate arrives in France added to sugar, cinnamon and vanilla, therefore meeting the taste of French and becoming a very common beverage. Its advent was because of the marriage between Spanish princess Anna, daughter of king Felipe III, and the king of France Louis XIII. As ordered by princess Anna, chocolate started to be served to the court of France. At the end of 1600's the beverage was common in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. In 1720 father Labat, while writing its memories about a mission in the Antilles, told Creoles from Martinica used the expression "at the chocolate" to say "at eight o'clock in the morning", therefore revealing a very common habit.

At the end of 1700's and at the beginning of 1800's in England are used steam machines to grind cocoa seeds: that was the beginning of the production of chocolate in huge quantities. In Netherlands, Van Houten invented a machine to extract cocoa butter, the beverage gets more fluid and therefore more pleasing. At the end of 1800's Swiss Daniel Peter adds condensed milk to chocolate therefore obtaining milk chocolate of solid consistence. Moreover, at the end of 1800's, another Swiss, Rudolph Lindt, develops a new and original method to refine chocolate, the result is an extremely fine final product: fondant chocolate was just born, a product having nothing in common with its ancient Mayan progenitor, "*xocoatl*".

From Cocoa to Chocolate: the Production

Transforming cocoa seeds into chocolate takes a lot of work. After the harvesting, fruits are broken and the seeds and the whitish pulp covering them are extracted, then they are put in recipients in order to ferment the pulp and to soften seeds: this process reduces the bitter and astringent taste of seeds while enhancing essential oils, an extremely important factor because it promotes the development of aroma that will determine the quality of the final product. At end of this process seeds are being dried under the sun or in artificial heat, then they are stored before being toasted. Subsequently the seeds are brushed by cleaning machines, in order to eliminate impurities and extraneous bodies, and at the end begins the process of "calibration" that allows the selection of seeds according their size, ready to be toasted.

Toasting is a process during the which all the substances formed with the fermentation are now enhanced while giving seeds the characteristic aroma of cocoa. A fundamental process for the quality of the final product, because this process eliminates moist and acidity while promoting the development of aromatic components. In large rotating spheres the beans, this is the name of cocoa seeds, are being toasted for a period of 15-20 minutes, at a temperature ranging from 110 to 120° C (230-250° F). This process must be controlled by experts who decide the moment in which stopping the procedure, before cocoa beans get carbonized.

The next phase consists in grinding and melting at a temperature of 50-60° C (122-140° F) cocoa seeds therefore obtaining cocoa paste, a part of it is used for the production of cocoa butter and soluble cocoa. The other part is processed and other components are added, such as sugar, and then it is refined. This process is not a simple operation of blending because friction, heat, air and time allow sugar to change some of its characteristics (inversion of sugar). The result of this



An opened cocoa's fruit

process is a fluid, plastic and velvety product: fondant chocolate. At this point the compound is ready to be processed, to be pressed in tablets or in any other procedure. This process may vary according to the nutritional customs of the many countries, for American chocolate, pretty rough, this process lasts 18 hours, whereas for Swiss chocolate, extremely velvety, the process lasts 72 hours.

The next phase of the process is called "*tempering*" and consists in lowering chocolate's temperature from 40° C (104° F) to 28° C (82° F) and subsequently to raise it to 31° C (87° F). This sudden change of temperature is useful in obtaining a solid and shiny final product while modifying cocoa butter crystals. The final phase is modeling where chocolate is poured in metallic or wooden molds which are subsequently vibrated in order to take air out from the paste and to obtain a homogeneous product. As soon as chocolate is cooled down is removed from the mold and then packed.

Types of Chocolate

With the term chocolate it is intended a product containing a percentage of cocoa butter not lower than 35%. Among the many types of chocolate there are:

- **Base chocolate** - it must contain at least 35% of cocoa of which at least 18% must be cocoa butter and the quantity of sugar must not be greater than 65%
- **White chocolate** - contains at least 20% of cocoa butter, milk powder and sugar. It is not chocolate in the strict sense on the term because it does not contain cocoa but only cocoa butter
- **Milk chocolate** - it is a blend of cocoa paste, cocoa butter, sugar and milk. The percentage of cocoa must not be lesser than 25%
- **Milk chocolate with hazelnuts** - it is a blend of cocoa paste, cocoa butter, sugar, milk and whole hazelnuts. The percentage of cocoa must not be lesser than 25%
- **Fondant chocolate** - must contain cocoa butter, cocoa paste and sugar. It contains a high percentage of cocoa, 35-45%, and it is slightly sweetened
- **Extra-fondant chocolate** - contains a high percentage of cocoa up to 70%
- **Bitter chocolate** - must be produced with partially skimmed milk for not more than 10% and must not contain colorants

- **Gianduia chocolate** - contains about 25% of cocoa, cocoa butter, sugar and finely ground hazelnuts

Nutritional Qualities

Chocolate is made of 64% of sugar, 22% of lipids (cocoa butter), 5% of proteins, 4% of mineral salts, 1.7% of alkaloid theobromine. Chocolate, because of its high contents in lipids, is undoubtedly a very caloric food: 100 grams of fondant chocolate has 515 Kcal, whereas the same quantity of milk chocolate has 545 Kcal. The permanence of cocoa in the stomach is one of the lowest, from one to two hours, just like wine, beer or coffee.

Among the 850 chemical components of chocolate some requires a short mention. Theobromine seems to be a stimulant for the central nervous system, it also contains some anti depressive substances as well as aphrodisiac substances. The lipid component of chocolate is represented by 32% of monounsaturated fats and 58% of saturated fats, of which 33% is represented by stearic acid. Stearic acid is rapidly unsaturated into oleic acid which helps the prevention of the formation of blood coagula. Most of fatty acids in chocolate have a positive metabolic effect. As for cholesterol it should be noticed its low content: 1 mg every 100 grams.

Chocolate, rich in polyphenols contained in cocoa seeds and that remain unaltered during the process of transformation, are the same found in red wine and tea. These substances have a strong antioxidant capacity and help the prevention or atherosclerosis. 40 grams of fondant chocolate contain 950 grams of antioxidants, the same as a glass of red wine, this is true for fondant chocolate only because milk chocolate contains just the half of that. The low content of sodium and the presence of iron, higher than red meat, magnesium, the mineral present in the highest quantity in chocolate, indispensable for the correct functioning of cellular activities, phosphor, slightly higher than in cod, potassium and calcium, make chocolate a food particularly suited for the ones who are involved in sports and physical activities. Chocolate has a low content in sodium, therefore is a food to be considered by those individuals that, because of hypertensive pathologies, should control the daily intake of sodium.

It is frequently said that chocolate has anti depressive effects, a capacity which certainly has. Chocolate works as a catalyst and promotes the production of endorphins. Endorphins are peptides substances produces by hypophysis having a function of neurotransmitter: thanks to the narcotic action similar to the one of morphine, they lower the sensibility to the pain and stimulate euphoric sensations. 100 grams of chocolate contain about 1 mg of a substance having similar effects of LSD, which is naturally produced by the brain in circumstances of desire and also probably during sexual excitement. In chocolate it is also present a certain quantity of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), one of the active principles of marijuana. The brain produces a similar substance, connected to sensation of wellness, and the consumption of chocolate tends to keep this substance longer before being dissolved, prolonging the pleasing sensations. In case this premise could be cause of fear, it should be remembered these substances are present in quantities so low that cannot be cause of any negative effect, they are natural substances and are present in the right quan-

tity in order to have positive effects. In order to have negative effects to human health it requires a quantity 100,000 times higher of that contained in chocolate.

Tasting

Just like wine, even for chocolate there are rules to be followed in order to do a correct tasting, these rules, or better, these advices, created and used by experts, are useful to the evaluation of every aspect of this extraordinary food. Before proceeding with tasting it should be considered that in case fondant chocolate is going to be tasted, the first one will be that having the lowest content of cocoa up to the highest. In case the tasting includes more types of chocolate, white chocolate will go first, then milk chocolate and finally fondant chocolate, always paying attention to the quantity of cocoa, always in ascending order. These rules are very important in order to correctly perceive chocolate's aromas.

The ideal color should be mahogany-cinnamon red and it is not true a chocolate in order to be good must always have a dark color (brown-black), sometimes this color is used to hide certain defects. The color must be brilliant, not dull, without any white coating (it is a cropping up of cocoa butter) or grey coatings (cropping up of sugar) caused by a bad keeping.

Snap the tablet of chocolate: the sound must be clean and sharp, according to the environmental conditions; this will be useful for the evaluation of the quality of cocoa butter crystallization. Smell the chocolate while trying to individuate primary aromas (the ones typical of cocoa) and the secondary ones (these may vary from cocoa to cocoa) and any possible bad aroma. A good fondant must have a clean aroma of cocoa and a vague hint of vanilla. A milk chocolate must smell of vanilla followed by the aroma of milk and then the one of cocoa. A white chocolate must have a delicate and sweet aroma of vanilla and milk.

Take the chocolate to the mouth and chew it slowly. A quality chocolate must rapidly melt, it should not be neither too sweet nor too bitter as well as not acid, in the mouth must give a velvety sensation. The sequence of sensations go from sweet to rapidly change into slight acid and then to bitter (bitter taste is a positive sign of a low content in sugars). Then the persistence will be evaluated, that is the time passed after having swallowed the chocolate up to the end of the aromatic sensations: the higher the persistence, the higher the quality. In case of milk chocolate, it must rapidly melt in the mouth, it must be less crunchy of fondant chocolate and slightly softer, and it must develop this way: sweet, acid, bitter with an intense flavor of milk followed by an aroma of vanilla.

In case white chocolate is being tasted, it should be remembered it must be as crunchy as milk chocolate, it must rapidly melt in the mouth and must develop this sequence of flavors: cocoa butter, a vaguely acid sensation, sweet of sugar and an intense flavor of milk, followed by an aroma of vanilla and a vague flavor of lecithin. The right temperature for keeping chocolate is from 16 to 18° C (60-64° F). It should not be kept in refrigerator because other extraneous smells could contaminate the aromatic characteristics of chocolate. In case chocolate is going to be kept in the refrigerator, it will be good to put it in an airtight container.

Wine Parade

The best 15 wines according to DiWineTaste's readers. To express your best three wines send us an E-mail at WineParade@DiWineTaste.com or fill in the form available at our WEB site.

Rank		Wine, Producer
1	➤	Colli Bolognesi Pignoletto Superiore "Prova d'Autore" 2001, Bonfiglio (Italy)
2	▲	Masseto 1998, Tenuta dell'Ornellaia (Italy)
3	▲	Capo di Stato 1998, Conte Loredan Gasparin (Italy)
4	➤	Franciacorta Cuvée Annamaria Clementi 1996, Ca' del Bosco (Italy)
5	▲	Teroldego Rotaliano Granato 1998, Foradori (Italy)
6	➤	Château Laroque Saint-Émilion Grand Cru Classé 1998 (France)
7	▲	Sauvignon Blanc 2000, Cakebread (USA)
8	➤	Fumé Blanc Napa Valley 2001, Grgich Hills (USA)
9	▲	Shiraz 2000, Plantaganet (Australia)
10	☆	Alto Adige Gewürztraminer Kolbenhof 2002, Hofstätter (Italy)
11	➤	Margaux 2000, Ségla (France)
12	➤	Riesling Adelaide Hills 2001, Nephente (Australia)
13	☆	Barolo Brunate 1999, Enzo Boglietti (Italy)
14	↔	Pinot Noir 1998, Mountadam (Australia)
15	☆	Carignano del Sulcis Superiore Terre Brune 1999, Santadi (Italy)

Legend: ➤ up ▲ down ↔ stable ☆ new entry