

Today is going to be a good day and tonight even better. Franco and I are leaving Friuli and driving to Verona. The drive will be leisurely, thru beautiful Italian countryside. Tonight Franco is cooking for friends and I am invited because I was told that I am choosing, and also paying for, the wine. He is preparing a white fish course and lasagna with spicy meat sauce. Bardolino will go well with the fish, and Valpolicella will match well with the pasta. I chose these two wines for various reasons. They are light in body and alcohol, and we are going to be switching off between a white and a red wine. Secondly, I chose two well-known styles of wine that are popular in both Italy and the United States. It is accurate to say that most US retailers carry Bardolino and Valpolicella. Each wine enjoys the DOC status.

Some details on the wines: Bardolino and Valpolicella are produced from the same grapes but in different proportions. The three main grape varieties in Bardolino are Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara. An additional 15% of other grape varieties are allowed in Bardolino under DOC regulations. Corvina, the main variety, provides color and body to the wine, making up about 65-70%. Rondinella, a lighter variety, makes up about 10-20%, and adds flavor and complexity. Molinara and other varieties take up the remainder of the wine and add fragrance.

Valpolicella typically uses more Corvina grapes and less of the other varieties. Valpolicella is oak aged while Bardolino is aged in stainless steel. Both wines could be served chilled.

There is a unique feature about both of these wines that relates to the future. While both will remain available in their present form, a large portion of the grapes used to produce Bardolino is going to go into the production of a sparkling wine called Chiaretto. Chiaretto Sparkling Wine is a huge marketing success. It is sold domestically and is exported to many countries, including the US. If one were to locate a bottle of Chiaretto, it should retail for about \$20.

The same scenario exists for Valpolicella. Amarone is a successful wine product in its own arena. It has been around for years, however it too has soared in popularity, thus placing greater demand on the Corvina grapes. It has also done a number on retail pricing. Vintages from 2000 thru 2008 can run anywhere from \$100 down to \$29 per bottle, respectively. Clearly, Amarone requires some shopping for the best price.

If I find myself dwelling on these two situations, I come to the conclusion that it's not a bad problem to have. It can only lead to more jobs, more acreage planted, and more products

produced and sold.

While I am in Verona, allow me to mention Soave. I bring it up because Soave is Italy's best-known exported white wine, and a name familiar to most of us. Soave is made from garganega and trebbiano grapes. Soave ranges in quality from "jug wine" to Soave Classico to Soave Classico Superiore. The "Classico Superiore" Soave is required to be aged for at least eight months before release. The Jug Wine status comes from wine that was produced from flavorless Tuscan Trebbiano grapes, grown in fields that have enormous yields. The Classico Soave DOC is produced from grapes grown in a smaller Soave zone on the steep hills above the towns of Soave and Monteforte d'Alpone.

Winespeak:

What is Recioto? Recioto, as in "Recioto Della Vapolicella," is a desert wine made from grapes that were dried on straw mats until they were raisin-like. This process concentrates the flavors of the grape juice, and makes the wine taste very sweet. This technique dates back to pre-Roman times and is still thriving today. Most of the process took place in Northern Italy and in the French Alps, however producers in other areas are experimenting.

Next stop: Somewhere in Piedmont.

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