

One of the common denominators of the neighborhood I live in is that most of the folks love to travel. Italy is a popular destination . . . Rome, Tuscany, Venice, etc. Lately, however, in talking over travel plans with friends and neighbors, I see that Umbria is included in their itineraries. To me, this makes tremendous sense.

Umbria is a landlocked city located in the center of Italy. From Umbria tourists are able to reach many famous destinations such as Tuscany and the city of Florence, LeMarche, and Lazio. But wait! There is a bonus built in by staying in Umbria. The climate is the same as Tuscany's, with rainy winters and sunny dry summers. Tuscany produces about three times as much wine as Umbria. This is good news. Why? Because while the tourists are wending their way through the urban sprawl of Florence, waiting in lines at packed Tuscan wineries and enjoying bus tours in Rome, you can ramble in peace through Umbria's humble hills and find some very stunning wines. A good tour guide will tell you the right time to visit the neighboring towns when they are not so crowded.

Umbria has around a dozen wine zones (DOC,DOCG, & IGT). While great wine can be found in all of the zones, there are a select few that really make enough to be available on the American Market. Out of these zones, the Orvieto DOC, The Montefalco DOC and the Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG are the most well known. These are the regions that are the most popular to visit and the ones from which you will have the best luck finding wine when you back home.

Looking at The Orvieto DOC we find that the DOC status was awarded in 1972. In the province of Terni lies Umbria's largest production zone. Wines from this area have been celebrated since the Middle Ages. Originally the wines were sweet, but the area is now known for DRY white wine. The wines really shine when paired with food. They go well with a variety of appetizers, salads and first courses, especially if they involve seafood. If you are feeling brave, try An Orvieto with Asian dishes and spicy cold cuts.

Let's take a look at three red wines from Umbria. Considered a rising star among Italy's elite circle of age-worthy red wines, Sagrantino di Montefalco has attracted the eyes of curious wine lovers from all over the world. Sagrantino wine offers a little-known, but outstanding flavor from the Sagrantino grape. It is a grape produced in small quantities from the Umbria region and not really produced anywhere else. It will be difficult, however try to get a bottle of this wine. It should cost around \$45.

Another red is the Rosso di Montefalco. It is less powerful than the Sagrantino di Montefalco; it's a blend of 60-70% Sangiovese, 10-15% Sagrantino, and 15-30% Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine shows bright berry flavors with enough structure to pair with a lasagna, a lamb shank, or a roast pork.

Our third red is from the sleepy town of Torgiano. Here we find that red wines are produced from the Sangiovese grape, the Canaiolo grape (big fruit flavor and soft tannins; a good blending grape) and the not so popular Ciliegiolo grape. Rosso di Torgiano is a blend of up to 50% Sangiovese, 15-30% Canaiolo, and maybe 10% Trebbiano. The wine is freshly acidic with bright berry flavors that would go well with an Italian appetizer or an omelet. The big brother to Rosso di Torgiano is the Torgiano Rosso Riserva DOCG. The first wine to gain DOCG status in Umbria, the wine will age for 10 years or more. It pairs well with game, pork, or sharp cheeses.

Monica Larner of *Wine Enthusiast* Magazine provided me with most of the information on the above wines.

WINESPEAK

The *Wall Street Journal* did us all a favor last Saturday. The book section published a list of suggested wine books to give as gifts for Christmas. Hurray! Let's look at a few of them.

The first, and my very favorite, is Karen MacNeil's book called *The Wine Bible*. This multitalented author delivers to us an updated version of her original publication. Karen combines exhaustive research with a very sharp wit to present her manuscript. The body of the bible is a country-country march through winedom, offering lively regional history, sketches of notable personalities, as well as tips on the best food matches with the best local wines. This book is a "must have" for your home wine library.

Jancis Robinson is the author of *The Oxford Companion to Wine*. Her updated version is ready for Christmas gift giving. Ms. Robinson never strays far from the facts in her heavily researched

volume. She has been on the wine scene ever since I can remember, and is rightly recognized as a worldwide authority on the subject of wine. Spend the \$65. You will not be sorry.

The last book I want to bring to your attention is Matt Kramer's *True Taste*. Matt has long been a writer for the *Wine Spectator*.

His quest is to establish fresh guidelines for assessing the quality and character of individual wine and to toss aside the two most common critical tools: the 100 point rating scale, and the fruit and vegetable wine descriptors. Mr Kramer would like to see an evaluation system based on seven simple words: texture, insight, harmony, finesse, nuance, layers, and surprise. If I say anymore, I will ruin his argument and you will not buy the book. So go ahead and spend the \$18.95.

Are there other books? Yes there are. I recommend going to the nearest book store or shopping on line site and enjoy yourself looking at all there is to offer.