



PLUMPJACK

WINES

WINE CLUB

April 2006

Oh Italy, how do I love thee? Let me drink- I mean count-the ways! Is it the over 1,584 million gallons of wine produced each year? Is it the over 3.4 million acres of vines planted? Is it the over 2000 indigenous grape varieties that make your wines so unique? Is it the 20 regions, 94 provinces, 8,090 communes that are all different from one another? Is it the 232 wine-producing zones that qualify for DOC or DOCG status? I think by now you get my drift! One could spend a lifetime tasting and researching only Italian wines and still just scratch the surface. Our two selections this

month are fantastic wines from well-established and historical producers. They both exemplify why their regions are famous for their wines. The Montecucco Sangiovese demonstrates the potential of an area that has only recently been awarded the prestige of DOC (*denominazione di origine controllata*) status, and the Pinot Bianco from the Alto Adige showcases the elegance and freshness of a white wine from the Northeast. What makes my love for Italian wine grow stronger is the wonderful value these wines offer. Once again fasten your organoleptic seatbelt because these two wines are going to take you on an unforgettable sensory journey.

The Alto Adige is officially Italy's most northerly wine growing region. Unofficially, and patriotically in the hearts of its inhabitants, it is an extension of Austria. Though the region falls within Italian borders, many factors set it apart from the rest of *La Bella Italia*. First is language and culture. All may speak Italian, but German is the dialect of choice, as the region was part of Austria for 600 years, until annexed by Italy in 1919. To this day, most family names end in m, n and er not o or i. Of the 17 grape varieties that make up the DOC, all being used to make single-varietal wines, some have their origins in Germany, some in France, and a few in Italy. The Adige River (Etsch in German) and its tributary the Isarco (Eisacktal) flow through the province, meeting just south of the city of Bolzano, its capital. The vineyard area forms a Y-shape around the confluence of these rivers. Their valleys are narrow and the hills rise steeply on either side. Maureen Ashley, a contributor for Oz Clarke's *Regional Wine Guides* writes, "The view of the rushing river at the bottom of the valley, then the deep green of the vines covering the hills like a velvet cloth, followed higher by the wooded slopes which are topped by the bare crags of the mountains, often snow-capped and pink-tinged by evening, is a magnificent sight." Despite its septentrional position, (septentrional is a rarely used word that means "of the north" and could easily replace organoleptic as my new favorite word,) the Alto Adige enjoys warm summer climate in the valleys and in the hills just off the valley floors, and the towns of Bolzano and Merano are frequently among Italy's hottest in July and August. This warmth provides the stimulus for the grapes to ripen fully, while the cold nights ensure slow ripening. Kellerei Giran/ Cantina Sociale di Cornaiano, hereafter referred to as Giran, is a cooperative founded in 1923, with 240 member/vintners. Their vineyards, approximately 525 acres, are located in the Überetsch, the rolling hills across the Adige from Bolzano. Giran has a history of innovation and a pioneering spirit and was one of the first wineries to pay growers not just for the quantity of

**2004 Kellerei Giran/ Cantina Sociale
di Cornaiano
Pinot Bianco "San Martino"
Alto Adige, Italia
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**2003 Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona
Montecucco Sangiovese
Montenero, Italia**



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grapes delivered, but also for the quality of the grapes. Giralan was also one of the first wineries in the region to subdivide its assortment of wines into three quality ranges (Select Art, Premium, and Vinum). The 2004 Pinot Bianco "San Martino" falls into the Premium category. The grapes for the Premium range come from 40-80 year-old vines. Only fully ripe grapes, that have enjoyed a long growing season, are selected. The vineyards for the Pinot Bianco are situated in cool, north-east facing slopes at an altitude of 1500 feet. The grapes were hand-harvested at the end of September, and fermentation took place in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks. Once fermentation was complete, the wine was aged in stainless steel for 5 months before being bottled, and 800 cases were produced. Giralan's 2004 Pinot Bianco's bouquet of apples and pears leaps out of the bottle when you pull the cork. In the mouth the wine is clean and fresh, with minerals, intense fruit flavors and bright acidity. It is a delicious wine to have as an aperitif, while enjoying cheeses such as Gruyere or Provolone, or with Balboa Café's calamari fritti or Dungeness crab cakes.

The 2004 Giralan Pinot Bianco "San Martino" is \$16.99/bottle, \$183.50/case.



The very recent (1998) Montecucco DOC wine region is situated along the axis Cinigiano-Montenero, and most of its area faces and, in fact, borders the Montalcino DOC area, where the highly respected Brunello di Montalcino is produced. In this vast area, wine production has been traditionally neglected. Although the region has been producing excellent wine since the 8th century, it has been mainly at the domestic level. No one ever entertained the thought of considering wine production on a grander scale until a few years ago. Montecucco vineyards, on the south-west hillsides of the Amiata mountain, are directly opposite the Brunello di Montalcino production area. Both sides of this large valley share the same climate, cultivate the same vines and have traditionally worked according to the same agricultural practices. Yet, while on one side the Brunello acquired international recognition, Montecucco farmers continued to produce olive oil, honey, and chestnuts. This area now produces its own DOC red of Montecucco, and its producers are confident they can develop a wine with an equally great potential. Ciacci Piccolomini d' Aragona is one of the most sought-after producers in all of Italy. This ancient estate in the Montalcino DOC has 86 acres of superior holdings in the prized Castelnuovo dell' Abate zone, including the "Pianrosso" vineyard (from which the best grapes are selected for their Brunello di Montalcino) and the "Fonte" vineyard, which produces grapes for their Rosso di Montalcino. Recognizing the potential of the Montecucco area, Ciacci recently purchased 30 acres of vineyards at an altitude of 1700-2500 feet above sea level, and built a new winery across the Orcia River from Montalcino, near the town of Montenero. The 2003 Montecucco Sangiovese is the first release from their new estate. The wine was previously known as "Istriciaia" but is now definitively classified under the Montecucco DOC. Its composition is 85% Sangiovese blended with Syrah and Merlot. After fermentation the wine is aged four months, half in new French barriques, half in large 60hl Slavonian oak casks. What could be better than finding a wine that has all the wonderful qualities of Brunello, but at a fraction of the price? Ciacci's tasting notes on the wine are as follows, "Caratteristiche organolettiche: profumi ampi, fruttati e vinosi molto eleganti; Sapore pieno, caldo e abbastanza morbido con sentori di spezie e fiori, tannini morbidi e ben equilibrati, lunga persistenza finale." I couldn't have said it better! (Call me for a translation.) Try this wine with *tagliata di manzo*, grilled steak that is sliced, surrounded by arugula, drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil, and garnished with Parmigiano-Reggiano.

The 2003 Ciacci Montecucco Sangiovese is \$21.99/bottle net, \$263.90/case