



PLUMPJACK
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

December 2008

Happy holidays! Every December, as the year comes to a close, I like to reflect on the enological trek we have experienced in our wine club over the last twelve months. And what a journey it has been! We have covered a lot of ground, tasting wines from Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Austria, California, and Australia. Other than getting on an airplane, I can't think of a better way to experience the diversity the world of wine offers. By opening and sampling wines we can learn about different regions, producers, and cultures. Our organoleptic senses can be our camera, focusing on a landscape of flavors.

This month, as a grand finale to 2008, we have two exceptional wines from very small producers in Italy and Austria. The holidays are a wonderful time to open special bottles and share them with friends and family. These two wines will enhance any holiday meal, and will also make any occasion a special occasion when you pull the cork (or twist the screwcap). We at PlumpJack, wish you all the best for the holidays and a very healthy and happy New Year.



The major wine regions of Austria, all in the eastern half of the country, and are divided into 4 areas: Lower Austria (Niederösterreich), Styria, Burgenland, and Vienna (Wien). Each of these regions is then further divided, for a total of 19 designated winegrowing areas. Niederösterreich (Lower Austria) is the northernmost, and is divided into 8 sub-regions: Wachau, Kremstal, Kamptal, Danubelands, Traisental, Carnuntum, Weinvertel, and Thermenregion. One generally equates "north" with "upper", but not here. The explanation given is that it has to do with altitude and not latitude. The Wachau, while not the largest region, is perhaps the best known of the 8 sub-regions. There are 3500 acres of vines, mostly Grüner Veltliner and Riesling, planted in a soil of weathered primary rock, granite and slate on the steeply-terraced vineyards above, and sand and loess on the slope of the hills below. The regional association "Vinea Wachau Nobilis Districtus" acts as a kind of DOC police for this area, labeling the wines under three classifications: Steinfeder (light, young and racy), Federspiel (elegant and with body), and Smaragd (very ripe and powerful). The Wachau's proximity to the Danube River, which winds lazily past like some great fat serpent, adds to the amazing beauty of the region. In the spring the steep rising hills are a lush bright green and the apricot trees blossom beautifully. In the fall these hills seem almost ablaze with the turning leaves of the vineyards. Weingut Johann Donabaum is located in Spitz, in the Wachau. At 26 years old, Johann Donabaum has taken over the reins as the cellar master of the relatively small 9-acre family winery. His total production each year is 2,100 cases, of which 85% is white, 10% red, and 5% sweet. He might seem terribly young to us here in America, but Johann has been in training for this his entire life, including a stint working and learning from F X Pichler, perhaps the most famous vintner from the Wachau region. Johann's white wines, primarily Grüner Veltliner but also Riesling and Neuburger, are terroir-driven. Johann strives to produce wines that demonstrate the true and full potential of his vineyards. He says, "A wine should be like a mirror that clearly reflects its origins, the soil, the care and the signature

*2007 Weingut Johann Donabaum
Grüner Veltliner
Spitzer Point Federspiel
Spitz/Wachau, Austria*



*2004 Azienda Agricola Vigliano
"L'Ertà"
Vigliano, Italy*

of the winemaker. Our goal is to find that perfect balance between the old and the new by, for example, combining traditional knowledge with modern thinking to significantly improve the quality of our wines.” His vines are from the steeply-terraced vineyards on hills above the Danube in an area called the “Spitzer Graben,” a narrow valley at the western end of the Wachau. The potential of the terroir in the Spitzer Graben long remained unrecognized, and it was not until the advent of drip irrigation that winemakers were able to fully realize the quality of vineyards in this area. Our featured 2007 Grüner Veltliner Federspiel comes from a vineyard named Spitzer Point in the Spitzer Graben. When the word "point" is in the name of a wine from the Wachau region, it signifies that the vineyard lies at the bottom where two other vineyards meet. Spitzer Point lies at the foot of the Setzberg vineyard and faces southwest. Sandy residual soil dominates in this vineyard, with the mineral content of the soil coming from layers of washed up sedimentary rock from the Setzberg and Offenberg vineyard. The vines are all between 25 and 45 years old, with the older vines in particular providing the basis for intense wines suitable for cellaring. The 2007 Spitzer Point Grüner Veltliner Federspiel is a classic Grüner Veltliner, along the lines of the '04 and '05 vintage, yet is being touted as even better than those. It showcases the typical notes of stone fruits, minerality, white pepper, and lively acidity. Grüner Veltliner is a very versatile wine to pair with food, and pork, chicken and veal dishes are great options. It also compliments spicy Thai or Vietnamese seafood dishes as well.

The 2007 Weingut Johann Donabaum Spitzer Point Grüner Veltliner Federspiel is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



Vigliano is a small town on the hills around Florence, on the border between the cities of Scandicci and Lastra a Signa, in the region known as Chianti Colli Fiorentini. In 1978, Mauro Marchionni, a medical doctor and university professor decided to move his family from the city to the countryside in order to grow grapes, olive trees, and the family's vegetable garden. Today Azienda Agricola Vigliano is run by Mauro's two sons, Lorenzo and Paolo Marchionni. While they both share a great passion for the vines, their diverse skills compliment one another. Lorenzo, the elder, is rational, constant, and determined. He is a lawyer and a professor of wine legislation and agrarian law at Florence University. He manages the vineyards and the cellar with painstaking care and attention. Paolo, the younger, is creative, lively, and innovative. He studied philosophy, as well as marketing and management, and became a partner to a number of consulting organizations in the wine sector. He is in charge of sales management, and customer relations. The estate is situated on land that is ideal for growing grapes and olives. The vineyards are stony and well exposed to the west/southwest. They have an alkaline nature and a varying composition, with a significant amount of limestone mixed with marl, sand, and loose clay. The average slope is considerable, almost 15%, with much higher peaks. Temperatures vary significantly from day to night in the summer and autumn. The Marchionnis cultivate 17 acres of vineyards and expect to increase that to 30 acres over the next few years. Sangiovese accounts for about 60% of the vineyards, but Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot are also grown. In 1981, upon the suggestion of oenologist Giacomo Tachis, they dedicated about 4 acres to Chardonnay. Andrea Paoletti has been the consulting agronomist at Vigliano since 1996. He graduated in agricultural science at Florence University and then joined Antinori and became the agronomic manager of all their estates. L'Erta is Vigliano's top wine. The first vintage was released in 1997. It is a blend of 60% Sangiovese Grosso (the Brunello clone) and 40% Cabernet Sauvignon from a steep hillside vineyard. The wine goes through a two-week maceration and fermentation in stainless steel. The Sangiovese is then aged for 12 months in large oak casks, and the Cabernet ages 11 months in small one and two year old French oak barrels. After the wine is blended it spends 11 to 12 months in bottle before being released. The wine is dark and extracted with aromatic elegance. Concentrated and balanced flavors of tar and chocolate linger on the lengthy finish. L'Erta is delightful now and I suspect this will actually cellar handsomely for a number of years, maybe 3 to 5. If you're grilling a steak and want something to pair with your rendition of *bistecca Fiorentina*, or braising lamb shanks, or making a risotto with wild mushrooms, this would be the perfect accompaniment. L'Erta usually sells for close to \$40 a bottle but we have obtained a limited amount for a great price. Our supply will disappear quickly.

The 2004 Azienda Agricola Vigliano L'Erta is \$23.99/bottle, \$259.10/case.