



PLUMPJACK
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

January 2008

Happy New Year! I was recently asked what my New Year's resolution was, and I came to realize that when it comes to wine, my resolution is really just a continuation of a lifelong process. I don't mean to sound like a recording on a repeat loop, but I am constantly awed and humbled by the diversity the world of wine offers. What better way to start a new year than by discovering new wines, producers, varietals and appellations? Our two wines this month cover all those bases. If you are like me, (be kind...), grape varietals like Grillo, Insolio, and Tannat are, up until now, unfamiliar. The IGT's of Sicily and the Béarn Appellation Controlée might also be new to

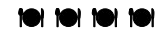
you. Both producers this month reside in areas where the cooperative has always been the mainstay of wine production. As independent wineries, Valle dell'Acate and Domaine Lapeyre have elevated the quality of their regional wines to new levels and have caught the attention of the international market. Both producers, especially Valle dell'Acate, are leaders in showcasing local varietals. When it comes to value, take a moment to research the incoming 2005 Bordeaux prices, and after you have picked yourself up off the floor, open the Domaine Lapeyre, have a glass, look at the price, and stock your cellar!

2006 Valle dell'Acate

"Zagra"

Bianco di Sicilia, IGT

Acate, Italy



2003 Domaine Lapeyre

Béarn, AC

Salies-de-Béarn, France



Sicily, the largest Mediterranean island, is Italy's largest region (10,000 square miles) and ranks fourth in population (5,084,000). Sicilians have been producing great wines for about three thousand years - that's almost a thousand years before the Romans introduced wine to their northern dominions (France, Germany, Britain and Romania). Sicily has more vineyards than any other Italian wine region (over 406,500 acres), competing with Apulia for first place as the largest wine producer. The westernmost province of Trapani alone turns out more wine than the entire regions of Tuscany or Piedmont, or wine nations such as Hungary, Austria or Chile. The proportion of D.O.C. wine in Sicily's total is a mere 2.5%, and a major share of that is Marsala, which ranks among Italy's top ten D.O.C.s in volume and accounts for about 90% of the total Sicilian D.O.C. production. Except for traditional fortified wines like Marsala, Malvasia, Moscato and Passito, each traditionally associated with particular parts of Sicily, the individual varietals, wineries and vintages are the most important factors in a Sicilian wine's quality. Wines from several admired producers have not been qualified as D.O.C., though most are now classified by the I.G.T. of Sicilia. I.G.T., or *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* is the new wine classification introduced in 1992 as part of a general reorganization of the D.O.C. (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata*) Italian wine law. I.G.T. was to be a new controlled quality level just below the D.O.C. to create a home for wines that, for many reasons, did not meet the D.O.C. requirements but had regional character. Valle dell'Acate is located in the province of Ragusa in the southeast corner of Sicily. The winery sits in the triangle of three cities, Acate, Comiso and Vittoria, and was created when the heads

of two ancient families from Ragusa, Jacono Ricca and Ferreri dell'Anguilla, joined forces in 1981. The winery is located at Jacono Ricca's old Bidini estate, an area that dates back to the ancient Bidis of the VI century, on a road that linked northeast and northwest Sicily. Aware of the historical value of their land and the indigenous grape varieties of the area, the estate has grown to 247 acres of vines that stretch along the steep slopes of the river that runs through the Dirillo Valley. Here, the soil, locally known as "Milaro," is characterized by a particular substrate of calcareous sandstone, interleaved with packets of clay that allow the vines to produce high quality grapes. Today, the winery is run by Gaetana Jacono, representing the sixth generation. With the same love that tied her ancestors to the vines, along with marked entrepreneurial insight, Gaetana has devoted herself to the production of Sicilian D.O.C.G., D.O.C. and I.G.T. wines. Zagra is a new wine for Valle dell'Acate. Zagra in Sicilian dialect is "La "Zagarai," the white blossom of citrus plants found throughout Sicily and traditionally used for bridal bouquets. The wine is a blend of two local varietals, 70% Grillo (the grape that makes Marsala) and 30% Insolia. The wine goes through fermentation in stainless-steel tanks at cold temperatures, is aged for 4 months in stainless-steel, and then rests for an additional 2 months in the bottle before being released. In the glass, Zagra offers intense, clean and pleasing aromas that start with hints of apple and almond, followed by aromas of pear, citrus fruits and plum. The aromas follow through in the mouth, with a crisp attack balanced by good body and intense flavors. The finish lingers with flavors of apple and almond. This is a wonderful wine to have with antipasti, salads, and fish. It pairs beautifully with traditional Sicilian dishes such as *pasta con le sarde* (pasta with sardines and wild fennel), or tuna lightly grilled, served on a bed of tender white beans seasoned with tomatoes, arugula, pancetta and onions.

The 2006 Valle dell'Acate "Zagra" is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



Béarn's claim to fame is being the home to the creation of Béarnaise sauce. While many know the sauce, Béarn is a relatively unknown wine appellation spread over three *départements* in the southwest region of France: the Haute-Pyrénées, Pyrénées Atlantique, and the Gers. At the end of 1951, Béarn was granted VDQS status, with its borders stretching to just beyond the towns of Bellocq, Salies-de-Béarn and Orthez. In 1958, the zone was expanded to include the appellations of Madiran and Jurançon. This enlarged territory was classified AOC in 1975. Consequently, some producers in Madiran release a Béarn rosé (as rosé is not permitted in Madiran) and some producers in Jurançon release a Béarn red (as red is not permitted in Jurançon). Production within the region is dominated by the cooperative. One independent producer exists in Béarn, however--Pascal Lapeyre. The Lapeyre family has been making wine here since 1909. Later in the century they were the first domaine to market Béarn in a fluted bottle, leading to a court case brought on by the Alsations to protect their identity. The Lapeyre family was victorious, which is why the traditional bottle for Béarn rosé and Jurançon sec has remained fluted. Pascal Lapeyre, the fourth generation, is now in charge of winemaking. He, like so many other young winemakers in France, is the first generation to have actually studied enology, doing an internship at Château Cheval Blanc in St. Emilion. He is also the first generation to use small oak barrels to age his wine. The Domaine Lapeyre red is made with 60% Tannat, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Cabernet Franc. The grapes come from a 32-acre parcel, planted on a 20-degree slope, where the soils are composed of clay and limestone, and the average age of the vines is 40 years old. The grapes are hand-harvested, destemmed and fermented separately with indigenous yeasts. The macération period lasts between 15 and 21 days, during which time the cap is punched down frequently. Each varietal is aged separately in oak, about 33% new, for 12 months. The wine is blended and bottled with light fining and no filtration. Production in 2003 was about 3,000 cases. Charles Neal, the importer, says "the wine is, simply put, a milestone for the Béarn appellation." Ripe, dark fruit soars from the glass, while in the mouth, supple vanilla-scented cassis, blackberry, raspberry, and almond notes coat the palate. The tannins are round and well-integrated, giving the wine structure. This is a big wine that will continue to age for many years. Have it with full-flavored meat dishes or strong cheeses. Or as Charles suggests, "It's a nice accompaniment to steak-frites with a sauce Béarnaise!"

The 2003 Domaine Lapeyre is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.