



PLUMPJACK
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

June 2007

My quest as a wine-drinking pilgrim trekking the enological path toward organoleptic bliss has led me once again to Italy. Grapes are cultivated virtually everywhere on the Italian peninsula. Italian viticulture as a whole remains firmly bound to traditional, indigenous varieties, whose number has been estimated at over 2,000. As a result, there is an infinite number of flavors to be discovered, and many of these local grapes produce wines of magnificent character. Viticulture impinges on the Italian consciousness, on the Italian imagination, and on the Italian way of life in a manner that is hardly conceivable to those not accustomed to the Mediterranean lifestyle and its dietary trinity of bread, olive oil and wine. This lifestyle, however, has crept into the American consciousness, and Italian food, culture and wines are more popular today than they have ever been. Our two wines this month demonstrate that Italian wine has never been better, and when it comes to seeking out quality wines for a great price, Italy is always a good place to start.



While it is true that Piedmont is noted primarily for its great red wines, there is also a handful of whites produced. Two white grapes in particular are indigenous to the region and produce unique wines: Arneis and Cortese. The history of the white wine of the Cortese vine is as old as that of the town of Gavi where it was first produced over one thousand years ago. Gavi lies in the southern extremes of Piedmont. It is virtually in Liguria, and used to be part of the Republic of Genoa, so it's arguable that it has closer ties with Liguria than with the region within which it now resides. It is believed that Cortese was planted in the area to satisfy the demand for white wine from Genoa and the Ligurian coast, less than 40 miles away to the south. Cortese is best known for its DOC wine, Gavi or Cortese di Gavi. Cortese is also grown in Cortese dei Colli Tortonesi DOC and Cortese dell'Alto Monferrato DOC. Gavi (the wine) is produced in the Alto Monferrato, a vitivincultural zone situated in the southern part of the province of Alessandria. The tiny zone surrounding the town of Gavi and a few neighboring villages is the most ideally suited microclimate for the Cortese vine. Its steeply inclined upper slopes, that are extremely difficult to cultivate, are composed of argilo-calcerous and volcanic soils with noticeable iron content, shot with veins of chalky limestone similar to that found in Champagne and Chablis. Located 30 miles inland from the sea, the zone is warmed by Mediterranean breezes, which temper cool mountain air, creating a perfect variation in temperature for the maturation of the fruit. Gavi is typically pale green to straw yellow, occasionally with golden highlights. The 2005 Figini Gavi is 100% Cortese harvested exclusively from the family-owned vineyards, which are located within the township of Gavi. Only Gavi produced within this township can be called Gavi del Comune di Gavi. Silvia Figini is the wife of the noted winemaker Robert Bergaglio. For many years, Robert and his father worked for the renowned winery La Scolca. La Scolca led the movement to establish an exciting, new quality level for dry Italian

*2005 Figini
Gavi del Comune di Gavi
La Chiara, Italy*



*2005 Casanova della Spinetta
Il Nero di Casanova
Toscana Sangiovese, I.G.T.
Terricciola, Italy*

white wines when the Soldati family launched their trademarked 'Gavi dei Gavi' in 1966. They pioneered modern, controlled vinification in stainless-steel to preserve the subtle fruit of the Cortese grape. In 1975, Robert and his father left to start their own winery in Gavi, beginning with only 5 acres of vineyards. Today, Robert and his family own 96 acres of which 52 are cultivated vineyards. Their vineyards are situated at 2800 feet above sea level with south/southwest exposure. The harvest is done by hand and the grapes are pressed gently with modern pneumatic presses. The must is fermented in temperature-controlled stainless-steel and aged for 6 months before bottling. The 2005 Figini Gavi has rich aromas of ripe apple, honeydew melon, and pear fruit. On the palate the wine is elegant but has wonderful concentration. The finish is long with nice lingering minerals. While enjoyable now, the wine will improve with one to three years of bottle age. The wine pairs beautifully with shellfish, grilled vegetables, and poultry. I saw a menu where the wine was matched with Crespelle Stuffed with Parmigiano Cream and I was immediately famished!

The 2005 Figini Gavi is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



A glance at the line-up of two-and three-glass scores in any recent Gambero Rosso guide, not to mention annual 92+ point ratings from Parker and Tanzer, clearly shows that Giorgio Rivetti of La Spinetta is a Piedmont superstar. Giorgio Rivetti is affable and gregarious, and if passionate seems more and more a cliché, used to describe the modern winemaker, it certainly does fit him well. Less than 15 years ago La Spinetta didn't even make red wine, but was known only for Moscato d'Asti. Serious and rigorous vineyard and winemaking strategy has resulted in some of the most incredibly textural, jammy and explosive wines in Italy, whether it's the silky and complex barrique Barbera, Super-Piedmont "Pin" (a blend of Nebbiolo and Barbera), or a stunning Barbaresco. Enologist Stephane Mazzetta, who settled in at La Spinetta several years ago after working at other top Langhe wineries, implements and oversees the work in La Spinetta's stunning, first-class cellars in Castagnole delle Lanze. In 1977, Giorgio's father, Giuseppe Rivetti (nicknamed Pin) and his family bought the La Spinetta (top of the hill) Estate in Castagnole Lanze. They then began to purchase choice parcels of vineyard property, making their first red, the Barbera Cà di Pian in 1985. 1989 brought about the first Pin, followed by their first Barbaresco Gallina in 1995 and their first Barolo Campè in 2000. In 2001, La Spinetta acquired 160 acres of vineyards in Tuscany to make three different Sangiovese wines, and so the Rivetti horizon continues to expand. Casanova is La Spinetta's Tuscan venture, located in the village of Terricciola, between Pisa and Volterra. Using the region's Sangiovese grape, Casanova produces "Sezzana," a 95% Sangiovese from Casciana Terme, as well as "Sassontino," another 95% Sangiovese single-vineyard wine. In 2004, for the first time, they also harvested a third Sangiovese, made from young vines (4-5 years), called "Il Nero di Casanova." The 2005 Il Nero di Casanova is a blend of 95% Sangiovese and 5% Colorino (a Tuscan indigenous grape that gives color). The name Il Nero means "the black one" and refers not only to the deep, dark color of the wine, but also to how old-timers in Tuscany call their red wine. The grapes come from the estate vineyards at Terricciola. The soil is calcareous and the vineyards sit at an average altitude of 2700 feet above sea level, with southern exposure. Fermentation takes place for 7-8 days at controlled temperature, followed by malolactic fermentation in oak. The wine is then aged in medium-toasted French oak for 9 months and bottled without filtration or clarification. Leading the way with new approaches to Piemontese winemaking, La Spinetta crafts its wines using state-of-the art equipment – starting with the most sophisticated grape presses on the market. After vinification, wines are aged in 100% new barriques for 6 to 18 months. Though clearly crafted with an "international" leaning, these wines are not overly modern. The barrique effect doesn't mask the fruit and allows the underlying pedigree to shine through. The 2005 Il Nero is brooding in color, with Bing cherry that comes through on the nose and palate. Chewy, ripe, rich and beautifully balanced, it has tremendous texture and a very long finish. 2005 is a superb vintage for Casanova offering a wine with tons of fruit and the perfect balance of tannic structure and acidity. It is the perfect wine with meat ravioli or grilled salmon topped with a little pesto.

The 2005 Casanova della Spinetta Il Nero is \$23.99/bottle, \$259.10/case.