



# PLUMPJACK

WINES

WINE CLUB

May 2006

I have always been somewhat of a purist when it comes to wine. In the past, I held steadfast to the opinion that if you wanted to drink an Italian wine, why waste your time drinking an Italian varietal from anywhere but Italy? That same closed-mindedness also applied to Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. Outside of California or France, why bother? But in the pursuit of organoleptic gratification, I have come to realize that one must have an open mind (and palate).

Granted, some Cal-Ital wines fall somewhat short of what their Italian versions can offer,

both in flavor and price, but I have discovered there are exceptions. Likewise, I have always felt that Italian winemakers should only focus on the indigenous varietals of their region. Both wines this month present a strong argument to this type of thinking. Our white wine combines the native Tocai Friulano and Pinot Grigio of Collio with international varietals, and the result is an outstanding wine that captures the fabulous aromas and structure of the grapes in the blend, while remaining genuinely typical of the region. Our red wine from California displays the same bright fruit and flavor characteristics, along with great food compatibility, that an Italian Barbera offers. As usual, both wines are extremely limited in supply so don't wait to order some extra bottles. With the summer barbeque season upon us, these will be great wines to have on hand.

Friuli-Venezia Giulia is one of the twenty Regions of Italy. Located in northeastern Italy, it borders the region of the Veneto to the west, the republics of Austria and Slovenia to the north and east, and the Adriatic Sea to the south. The region covers an area of over 3,000 miles and has 1.2 million inhabitants. There are 3 DOC (*Denominazione d'Origine Controllata*) zones of major importance in the region: Collio, Colli Orientali and Grave del Friuli. Collio is an arc of land situated at the extreme eastern edge of the region in the province of Gorizia on the border with Slovenia. Collio was one of the first in Italy to be recognized as a DOC zone in 1968. The zone runs almost without a break from east to west, with its gentle slopes presenting extensive south-facing areas that are ideal for premium-quality winemaking. Its succession of rolling hills, dotted with small villages and vineyards, covers a total of almost 4,000 acres. It extends from the hills of San Floriano and Oslavia above Gorizia to those of Ruttars, Lonzano and Vencò on the banks of the Judrio River, once the border between Italy and Austria. The white wines of Collio account for 85% of total production. Azienda Agricola Zuani is the grand design of Patrizia Felluga. Patrizia is the daughter of one of the most famous winemakers in Friuli, Livio Felluga. A few years ago she left the frenetic world of the family winemaking business to create her own wine. She bought a property in the heart of the Collio and decided to do something completely different. In a region where a typical winery might make up to a dozen different wines from one varietal, Patrizia is the first, and to date the only, producer to put everything she grows into a single white wine. Everything hinges on one exceptionally well-positioned "cru," or vineyard, on a gentle hillside where about 12 acres of vines and gardens surround the Zuani cellar. The varieties, Tocai Friulano, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon, are planted in soils composed of marl and sandstone and the vines are between 15- and 30-years old. The Collio Bianco is a

*2004 Zuani Vigne  
Collio Bianco DOC  
Azienda Agricola Zuani  
San Floriano del Collio, Italy*  
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*2004 Barbera  
VJB Cellars  
Mendocino County, California*

blend of the aforementioned varietals. Each varietal was vinified separately using modern techniques of cold maceration and temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel tanks. The resulting wines were then blended before bottling, and no oak was used. The 2004 Zuani Vigne Bianco has a fruit salad nose, highlighted by a hint of citrus. Tocai Friulano and Sauvignon provide the aromatic profile while Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay contribute structure. Oz Clarke (my favorite wine writer) says, "If you want to understand Italian white wines give yourself a week or more drinking nothing but whites from Collio. At first you may well find them all rather similar and uninspiring. Then you get accustomed to their deliberate understatement, begin to understand their subtlety and start enjoying them as excellent food partners. If, after your indoctrination period, you delve into a good rich Chardonnay from some other county, I guarantee you will find it outrageously big and brash and wonder how on earth you could ever have admired such a crude monster." Try the 2004 Zuani Vigne with *torta tricolore di polenta*, alternating layers of polenta, goat cheese and leeks. Some of the polenta is mixed with tomato sauce, and some with chopped spinach. The result is a striped dish that resembles the Italian tri-colored flag.

The 2004 Zuani Vigne Collio Bianco is \$20.99/bottle, \$226.70/case.



VJB Cellars is located in Sonoma County. It was created out of a partnership of two brothers, Victor and Henry Belmonte, and their parents Vittorio and Maria. Vittorio and his wife came to the United States in 1963. After spending 12 years in Boston, in hopes of settling in an environment that mirrored his homeland, Vittorio and Maria decided to move west with their two small sons. The rolling hills of Sonoma Valley, covered with vineyards, reminded Vittorio of his hometown Bonito, in southern Italy. Maria and Vittorio had the common vision of sharing the flavors and tastes of their backgrounds with others and they opened their popular family-owned restaurant in Santa Rosa. After years in which their restaurant patrons enjoyed many distinctive local wines, Henry and Victor decided to produce and bottle premium wines under their own name. They hired winemaker Chris Wills, who had worked for St. Francis Winery, Arrowood, Korbel and Lake Sonoma Winery before joining VJB. The fruit for 2004 Barbera comes from vineyards in Redwood Valley, Mendocino County, that are vertically trellised on a steep southwesterly exposed block with shallow and well drained soils. As a wine region, California's Redwood Valley may not have the same name recognition as Napa or Sonoma. Vineyards in the Redwood Valley AVA sit about 200 feet higher in elevation than those along the Russian River, further downstream in Ukiah and Hopland. The climate of this upland valley is slightly cooler, furthered by a gap in the coastal ridge that allows cool Pacific air currents to penetrate. These conditions lead to a gradual ripening of fruit that makes Redwood Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Barbera and Petite Sirah refined and complex. The notable red soil of the area also provides depth of color and flavor to the wines. Once picked, the fruit for the 2004 Barbera was brought to the crush pad in 1/2-ton bins. After a cold soak of 10 days, the must was allowed to ferment naturally with indigenous yeast and was pumped over hourly for two weeks resulting in optimum extraction of flavors and color. The wine was fermented in stainless steel tanks and then aged in American oak for 18 months. The 2004 VJB Barbera is loaded with strawberry, blackberry, and cherry flavors. The wine has subtle tannins and ample acidity that give it structure and balance. PlumpJack Café Squaw Valley's Niman Ranch pork tenderloin with prosciutto and cranberries, fava bean puree and pearl onions would be excellent with this wine.

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