

# WINE News

*We are proud to introduce two new Direct Imports from Italy this issue, plus some fabulous sparklers and wines from the Italy's Alpine edge. Learn more inside...*



## SEPTEMBER 1, 2014 FEATURES

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## A New DI: La Monacesca

By Greg St. Clair

**Matelica.** I struggled for days trying to find the words to introduce you to the newest producer in our portfolio, La Monacesca. I finally settled on the one: Matelica. The commune of Matelica is one of the most unique growing zones for white wines in Central Italy. It is a town and eponymous valley in the middle of the Apennine Mountains in the westernmost portion of the Marche. (The Marche region is just east of Umbria and Tuscany on the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula.) The Verdicchio grape grown in this valley is fairly well known in the U.S., but the wines you find are almost always from the “other” D.O.C. where it is grown, Verdicchio di Castelli di Jesi. Castelli di Jesi has mostly sandy soils and warmer, more constant temperatures are the norm, producing wines that tend to be fruitier and less complex (albeit with certain exceptions). Matelica’s soils are heavier, with more clay and more marine influence—fossils, limestone, etc. And Verdicchio di Matelica is harvested in October—yes October. This long hang time allows the grapes to achieve complete physiological ripeness, and the resulting wines have amazing richness that belie their relatively low alcohol levels—13.5% on average.

The acidic structure, salinity, richness and depth of flavor found in the wines of this region is fabulous. There aren’t many producers in Matelica, so I consider us very fortunate to have signed La Monacesca. I know you’re going to love their wines as much as I do. They have all of the minerality, acidity and freshness I love in white wines, but with an added textural richness and weight that is utterly beguiling on the palate. In an appellation that makes the richest expressions of Verdicchio I’ve tasted, Monacesca’s are the richest of all.

The **2012 La Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica\*** (750ml \$17.99; 1.5L \$34.99) is harvested the first 10 days of October, fermented and aged in stainless and released after a year. The wine is so powerful and intense that bottle aging, or decanting, is needed to get to this powerful wine’s mineral core. The nose is full of pear-like fruit spiced with anise, citrus and a bit of brioche-like toastiness, although the wine sees no wood.

**2011 La Monacesca “Mirum” Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva\*** (750ml \$26.99; 1.5L \$49.99) The Mirum is a big league wine. The level of flavor saturation, power, density and age-ability is remarkable. Mirum is harvested the third or fourth week in October, assuring the maximum amount of flavor, focus and richness on the palate, all coming together in a textured, seamless experience. The wine is fermented in stainless steel for 20 days and then remains there for 18 months *sur lie*.

**2010 La Monacesca “Mirum” Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva\*** (\$34.99) A minute after I ordered this wine, I knew I’d screwed up. I should have taken all they had, so I wrote back and ordered the rest. The wine is incredible and so worth the price jump from the 2011.

**MV La Monacesca “Mirum-20th Anniversary” Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva\*** (\$39.99) This is a multi-vintage blend of Verdicchio, 85% from the 2008 vintage and 15% 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2004. (To be fair, the “MV” designation is my creation.) I’ve never had a blend like this before, other than Champagne. The concept is the same, however, to use reserve wines to add depth of flavor. It is an experience to behold.

You owe it to yourself to try these; they are among Italy’s best whites.



Left: Three generations of the Ciacci family. Right: Sunset at Il Valentiano.

## A New Di: Il Valentiano

By Greg St. Clair

I received an email from Valentina and Fabiano Ciacci back in March of this year. It was an email like many I get from wineries on a regular basis. It said, we're looking for an importer and would K&L be interested? Well, we already have lots of producers from Montalcino and another one didn't seem to be in the cards. However, I checked out their location and realized that their region, over the hill from the town of Montalcino and just above the village of Tavernelle, at about 1,300 feet and on a gentle slope to the southwest, was one not represented in our portfolio. I've been passionately interested in Montalcino for several decades, so the opportunity to meet a producer I was unfamiliar with seemed like a good idea. We scheduled an appointment for the following month at Vinitaly in Verona; I was already going so it didn't seem like a stretch.

I have to admit, they were a little circumspect when I arrived. They didn't think I'd be speaking Italian, and I asked just a few questions. (I really try to have a poker face on while I'm tasting so as to not get anyone's hopes up if I'm not interested.) Well, the wines were impressive! The Rosso di Montalcino (to be released later this year) was rich, complex and balanced; it seemed distinctive, not just another simple Tuscan Sangiovese. But it wasn't until I tasted the **2009 Il Valentiano "Campo di Marzo" Brunello di Montalcino**\* (\$29.99) that I really began to get interested. This was a wine that had character and an immediate palate presence. There is a certain weight and density that signals "serious" to me, and this wine had it. The 2009 vintage was a four-star year in Montalcino, but the wines have been pooh-poohed by the critics looking for more blockbuster wines that can age for two decades or more. Well, I don't think all wines need to age that long; I'm more of a realist. Hell, I'd like to drink some before I turn 80! So knowing I was tasting a 2009, I was still impressed by the serious nature of the wine. Its flavors were real, multi-faceted and intense. Unlike a wine that is like a pearl, smooth and lustrous, multi-faceted wines remind me of why I love cut stones—diamonds, emeralds—because to me those wines have so many more expressions to show.

The Brunello had that verve I look for; it also had a classic Sangiovese earth, spice and just a bit of cocoa powder.

Of course, I don't decide to sign a producer based on one wine alone. Then I tasted their 2008 Riserva. The 2008 vintage was another four-star vintage in Montalcino, but with the complete opposite character of 2009. The 2008s, in general, are much higher in acid and tighter, with more evident tannins. The **2008 Il Valentiano Brunello di Montalcino Riserva**\* (\$44.99) was a revelation. It was a decidedly more linear wine, but so supple, texturally important and layered with vibrant, fresh Sangiovese fruit. The Riserva has more structure, too, but that wasn't what jumped out at me. Again it was the flavor profile, a real, pure expression of the soil with a bit of chocolaty ripeness, and it was really drinkable! 90 points RP.

After tasting the 2009 Brunello and the 2008 Riserva, I said I liked the wines, but that I wanted to visit the winery and taste some upcoming vintages, particularly the 2010 Brunello, to get a better feel. So we made an appointment to meet the following week, exchanged phone numbers, and I was on my way. Though the winery was a bit remote and not easy to find, I made it on time, but there was obviously no one there. So I called Fabiano, who told me he couldn't believe that I'd actually found the winery. He had driven out to meet me in town assuming I wouldn't. So we toured, tasted, looked at the vineyards, and then he invited me to lunch. He pointed to a selection of bottles and said to pick something for us to drink. I chose the **2006 Il Valentiano "Campo di Marzo" Brunello di Montalcino**\* (\$39.99) to get a better feeling for vintage variations from the estate. It was a delicious and incredible representation of this classic vintage, with definition, balance, length and wonderful palate richness, all at a stunningly good price!

Of course, we agreed to do business, and I think you'll love the wines. They are sensational. Then, when all the negotiations were done, Fabiano said, "Okay, no more wine talk. Do you watch the NBA?"

# Always Sparkling: Follador Prosecco

By Mike "Guido" Parres



*Follow the signs to Follador.*

In 2005, one of K&L's favorite Prosecco producers, Silvano Follador, began using biodynamic methods. The winery no longer uses insecticides in the vineyards, and they limit the use of mined sulfur and copper salts to control mildew. With the 2010 harvest they stopped using enzymes to clarify musts, as well as selected and activator yeasts for primary fermentation, which now occurs naturally. They have also drastically reduced rackings to just one, at the end of fermentation, leaving the wine to age on the lees in tank for six months. The results are some truly stunning wines.



*Silvano Follador in the vineyard.*

**Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore is a mouthful, and a little intimidating to try and say, so around here we just call it Prosecco from the Valdobbiadene.** This little hamlet is just about 31 miles from Venice (where, unsurprisingly, the famous Bellini was invented by Giuseppe Cipriani, founder of Harry's Bar). The Valdobbiadene is one of the coolest wine regions I have been to. The hillsides are steep, the mountains are craggy, and the vineyards look like they might be stalked by Ichabod Crane. Young vines grow right next to a 20- and 30-year old vines. All in all, it's a pretty special place.

The Valdobbiadene earned the premium designation of D.O.C.G. in 2010. It's well-deserved and adds a level of seriousness to Prosecco, which evokes an image of Italy's good life, its food and wine culture that celebrates the bounty of the countryside and the expertise of the winemakers and chefs. These are amazing wines that have come a long way from the inexpensive sweeter bubbles of yesteryear.

I love my Proseccis, and with the lull in expensive holidays right now, it's a great time to stock up on your favorite bottles.

**San Venanzio Prosecco Valdobbiadene Brut\* (750ml \$12.99; 1.5L \$26.99)** San Venanzio has won many awards over the years. At K&L they get the coveted "Guido" award—two thumbs up and three stars for value. On the nose, there are generous notes of apples, peaches, tropical fruits and pear blossoms. It's wonderfully balanced and elegant, with a pleasurable spiciness. The palate is rich and creamy, with pretty fruit closely mirroring the nose and admirable fullness and length. This is balanced and elegant, an excellent apéritif.

**2013 Silvano Follador Prosecco Valdobbiadene Brut\* (\$18.99)** This is a perfect wine year-round, and it has been one of K&L's best sellers since we started bringing it in about eight or nine years ago. There are melon, green apple and citrus notes, and it is crisp and floral on the palate, with a long finish and a subtle mousse that makes this delicious wine a sure bet for the dinner table. This Prosecco works well as a Champagne alternative, as well as for sitting and sipping on the porch watching the last days of summer roll by. Buy a few extra bottles to have around to impress unexpected guests.

**2013 Silvano Follador "Cartizze" Prosecco Valdobbiadene Brut\* (\$24.99)** The Cartizze comes from the most famous vineyard in the region, a 266-acre slope framed by the villages of San Pietro Barbozza, Saccol and Santo Stefano (from where the Folladors hail), and it is among the most expensive vineyard land in all of Italy. This 2013 Cartizze is dry; I swear smoke left my mouth after my first taste. It has Granny Smith apple upfront, with a hint of red apple and white flower aromas and a touch of nectarine on the aftertaste. Silvano's wines should be drunk young, generally within a year or two of bottling. This is not a wine to be cellared. Its youth is its charm.



**Affordable Bordeaux?** Yes, it does exist! Join us Saturday, September 20th for our annual **Bordeaux Value tasting at Alexander's Steakhouse in San Francisco from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.** This trade-style tasting will feature our 15 best Bordeaux buys. Your \$40 ticket price includes appetizers from the delicious Alexander's Steakhouse. This great value tasting will sell out quickly, so purchase tickets now.

# On the Alpine Edge

By Greg St. Clair

**The first time I drove into the Alto Adige I was hooked, just on the scenery alone.** It looks like a combination of Yosemite, a Swiss postcard and a bunch of vineyards. It is the location of the only year-round, north-south passage through the Alps for the last 5,000 years, and hence it has seen more history pass down its verdant corridor than almost any other place in Europe. The steep vertical walls provide dramatic vistas at every turn, the chiseled Dolomites with their spire-like peaks on the east side, and the omnipresent power of the Alps to the west. Besides the physical beauty it is a spectacular growing area for apples and grapes. This region, originally Südtirol, only became part of Italy after World War I, and it has resisted becoming “Italian” ever since. It’s semi-autonomous, and their German speaking heritage and Austrian culture still dominate. Traditionally the wines were exported to Austria, Germany and Switzerland and had no market in the rest of Italy. But today’s Italian wine drinkers travel more and are more open to trying wines from previously “unexplored” regions, so wines from the Alto



*The Terlan Vineyard in Alto Adige.*

Adige can now be found all over Italy. The area is also chock full of spa hotels and restaurants. The cuisine is superb, with its Germanic attention to detail, spectacular produce (including the aforementioned apples), and regional specialties like speck. The region has produced some simply scintillating restaurants and multiple Michelin stars.

One might think that there would be few places to grow grapes in this Alpine zone, but it is an extraordinarily productive area for both reds and whites. The white wines are mineral-driven versions of Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio, Kerner, Gewürztraminer (native to the town of Tramin) and Sauvignon Blanc, and the red wines are smoky, earthy versions of Lagrein, Schiava and Pinot Noir.

I can’t think of a better introduction to the region than the **2013 Cantina Terlan “Terlaner Classico” Terlano (\$21.99)**, a blend of 60% Pinot Bianco, 30% Chardonnay and 10% Sauvignon from an amazing 100-plus-year-old co-op. This isn’t just some trendy blend, they’ve been making this wine in this region for more than 100 years, and it is superb. The Pinot Blanc gives the wine its backbone, energy and mineral core, the Chardonnay a bit of richness and the Sauvignon a dose of personality. Combined they make a delicious drinking wine that can do double duty as a cocktail and at the table. 93 points JS.

The **2011 Cantina Terlan “Vorberg” Pinot Bianco Riserva (\$26.99)** comes from a series of vineyards that are basically perched on the side of a cliff. The wine has an incredible salty character to go along with its focused acidity. Its remarkable richness, coupled with its minerality and acidity, make this wine exceptionally well balanced and age-worthy, with a supple and luscious feeling on the palate. 91 points WS.

Okay, switching over to reds: I love the **2012 Erste e Neue “Gröbnerhof” Santa Magdalener Alto Adige (\$15.99)** made with the Schiava grape. This light-bodied red is perfect for so much of modern cuisine, which begs for lower alcohol wines that don’t sacrifice flavor. The fresh-ground black pepper and supple body are outstanding; it sort of looks like a dark rosé. Serve it about 55 degrees.

The **2010 Cantina Terlan “Gries” Lagrein (\$26.99)** is a bold red. Lagrein is the varietal, and to me it most resembles a smoky Syrah, full-bodied with a firmer tannic structure. The 2010 is gorgeous to drink right now. I had this wine with some wild boar ravioli, and the gamey flavors went perfectly with the Lagrein. I’m sure you’ll love it too!

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