

THE SOMMELIER JOURNAL

# THE SOMM JOURNAL

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## TERROIR *Desires*

**MOLLY HILL'S QUEST  
FOR BALANCE AT  
SEQUOIA GROVE  
WINERY**



At Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa Valley, Winemaker Molly Hill and President and Director of Winemaking Mike Trujillo with Trujillo's dog Samone.



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Alto Adige Wines Ambassador  
May Matta-Allah, DWS, CWE.

# Südtirol *Style*

**ALTO ADIGE  
WINES**  
DELIGHT WITH  
ACIDITY AND  
PERSONALITY

by **Allyson Gorsuch** /  
photos by **Cal Bingham**

**I**taly has a reputation for possessing obscure grape varieties and unusual, unique-to-the-place aspects and soil types; the small region of Alto Adige in northeastern Italy takes that reputation to a grander level. The Alto Adige Wine Consortium and *The Somm Journal* decided to challenge the wines with a lofty menu including several flavor profiles—only to find that most of them went beautifully with everything!

Twenty astute wine buyers convened in the back room of Pizzeria Mozza in Los Angeles to explore the array of dishes prepared by Sous Chef Herbert Yuen in the acclaimed restaurant owned by the famous Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich and Nancy Silverton partnership. Alto Adige Wines Ambassador May Matta-Allah, DWS, CWE, guided us through the eruditely chosen lineup of wines as well as the essential history and intricacies of the region as a whole.

Matta-Allah explained that the region finds itself identifying more as South Tyrolean than innately Italian, as three different languages are spoken and the cuisine has a clear Austrian influence. Moreover, every genuine bottle of Alto Adige wine is branded with the German language “Südtirol” (South Tyrol) logo, creating an identifiable worldwide brand for the Alto Adige DOC.

Winemaking dates back thousands of years in the area, but it was the building of the Via Claudia Augusta by the Romans that established the towns and the region in the wine trade. The route through the mountains exposed the Rhaetian people—essentially several tribes within the Alps—and would eventually contribute significantly to Alto Adige's being so culturally different from even its nearest neighbor to the south, Trentino.

### The Alto Adige DOC

Alto Adige is a broad DOC for an area covering just 13,100 acres, producing only one percent of Italy's wine. Remarkably, though, 98 percent of that wine is produced at the DOC level. The high elevation of the Dolomite Mountains provides long sunshine hours, while the well-drained soils high in limestone content encourage higher acidity levels. With varying elevations, soil types and aspects throughout the region, more than 20 grape varieties are cultivated, including a few native to the area itself.

White grapes lead the overall production in Alto Adige, with Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco, Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Müller-Thurgau, Kerner (a crossing of Schiava x Riesling), Riesling, Sylvaner and Moscato Giallo offering examples. The town of Tramin lies in the area and is thought to be the birthplace of Gewürztraminer. The native Schiava grape (as it's known in Italian, Vernatsch in German) leads the production of red wine in Alto Adige, with Lagrein (another native variety), Pinot Noir and even Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc seeing production.

Alto Adige DOC has a handful of official sub-DOCs including Santa Maddalena, Valle Isarco, Val Venosta, Meranese, Colli di Bolzano and Terlano. Each official sub-DOC focuses either on a specific grape variety or a specific style of wine. The region is unofficially thought of, however, as having seven distinct winegrowing areas within the Alto Adige DOC.

Bolzano and its vicinity lie in the southeast of the Alto Adige region as a whole; a valley basin with alluvial soils and lower elevation, it focuses primarily on reds. Valle Isarco to the



*Sous Chef Herbert Yuen of Pizzeria Mozza, the acclaimed restaurant owned by the famous Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich and Nancy Silverton partnership.*



*The Somm Journal and Alto Adige Wines teamed up for an educational lunch at Pizzeria Mozza in Los Angeles.*

*A rucola and funghi salad finished with Piave, a cheese straight from the Dolomites, paired beautifully with the Manni Nössing 2014 Sass Riais Müller-Thurgau and the Alois Lageder 2015 Porer Pinot Grigio, each wine working in a different way.*



## An Unexpected Range of Styles and Varieties from the Alto Adige DOC

*Tasting notes from Somm Journal  
Publisher and Editorial Director Meridith May and Deputy Editor Allyson Gorsuch.*

northeast, in much higher elevations and in weathered mica schist soils, tends to focus on whites, particularly Müller-Thurgau, Kerner, Riesling and Sylvaner. The poor, infertile soils of Val Venosta, Merano and the Val d'Adige (the area between Bolzano and Merano) demand more careful planning in regard to planting; each region makes both reds and whites. To the west of Bolzano, Oltradige lies near Lake Caldaro (Lake Kaltern in German), and the Schiava wines from these areas may be labeled as Lago di Caldaro DOC or Kalterersee DOC, with other grape varieties utilizing the broader Alto Adige DOC. Bassa Atesina lies to the southwest of Bolzano and is the largest and warmest of the unofficial growing regions.

### Unfamiliar Wines versus a Vast Array of Flavors

At the tasting, the eight bottles selected from Alto Adige Wines thoughtfully presented the wide range available from the region—eight different grape varieties from the various growing areas. We tasted the Cantina Terlano 2015 Pinot Bianco and the Weingut Niklas 2015 Kerner alongside the antipasti of white beans alla Toscana with olive oil and saba on crostini, calamari fritti with spicy mint aioli, and ricotta stuffed squash blossoms. The subtle spice and delicacy of the Cantina Terlano 2015 Pinot Bianco played with richness of the white beans and the slight sweetness of the saba while the bright fruit of the Weingut Niklas 2015 Kerner complemented the spiced calamari and refreshing mint aioli; the vibrant acidity in both wines cleansed the palate beautifully beside the delightful squash blossoms.

Next, we sampled the Manni Nössing 2014 Sass Riais Müller-Thurgau and the Alois Lageder 2015 Porer Pinot Grigio with a rucola and funghi salad finished with Piave, a cheese straight from the Dolomites. The citrus-driven Manni Nössing 2014 Sass Riais Müller-Thurgau brightened the denser flavors of the salad while the Alois Lageder 2015 Porer Pinot Grigio played with it in the exact opposite way, the perfect weight of the wine elevating the richness in the dish.

Castelfeder 2015 Von Lehm Gewürztraminer and Erste + Neue 2015 Leuchtenburg Kalterersee Classico Superiore comprised our pairing for four different pizzas—tomato, Sicilian oregano and olive oil; white anchovy, tomato and Fresno chilies; funghi misti, fontina, Taleggio and thyme; fennel sausage, panna, red onions and scallions—and the vast array of flavors could only have been matched by two such versatile wines. Surprisingly, the Castelfeder 2015 Von Lehm Gewürztraminer maintained enough acidity to cut through the rich flavors, with the characteristic spice and fruit character of the variety really soft-



#### **Cantina Terlano 2015 Pinot Bianco, Alto Adige**

Light, ethereal nose of sweet pear; subtle jasmine and white tea. —*Meridith May*  
BANVILLE & JONES



#### **Weingut Niklas 2015 Kerner, Alto Adige**

Peach is sensational on the nose, but tangerine makes it more sensational on the palate; fruit is fresh and clean with

lime and minerality. —*M. M.*

OLIVER MCCRUM



#### **Manni Nössing 2014 Sass Riais Müller-Thurgau, Alto Adige, Valle Isarco**

Lemon-driven—lemon juice, lemon rind, lemon pith—topped with

crème-fraîche; the high acid offers a simple but refreshing palate. —*Allyson*

GORSUCH  
KERMIT LYNCH



**Alois Lageder 2015 Porer Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige** Onion-skin in color; pear skin and apricot pit, but it's more about the beautiful texture with a phenolic finish. —A. G. DALLA TERRA



**Castelfeder 2015 Von Lehm Gewürztraminer, Alto Adige** Highly aromatic, with lychee and rose petal leading; the acidity here is persistent and impressive for a varietal that can lack a pointed finish. —A. G.

LYRA WINE IMPORTS



**Erste + Neue 2015 Leuchtenburg Kalterersee Classico Superiore, Alto Adige** Super funky and grapey in the best way—a perfect match with the salty mushroom pizza. —A. G.

OLIVER MCCRUM

**Tiefenbrunner 2015 Turmhof Pinot Nero, Alto Adige** Cinnamon, powdered red tea on the nose; tart rhubarbs and raspberries with spiced McIntosh skin, and earthy undertone and powdery tannins. —M. M.

WINEBOW



**Colterenzio 2015 Lagrein, Alto Adige** Juicy, earthy core; red fruits range from fresh cherry to stewed crabapple; fleshy mid-palate and the gritty tannins tangle with the great acidity. —M. M.

GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

ening the richness, especially with the funghi and fontina creation. The naturally high acid in the Erste + Neue 2015 Leuchtenburg Kalterersee Classico Superiore worked fantastically with the sweetness and saltiness of the pizzas, while the fuller-body Schiava created a segue from lighter fare to the more substantial.

After an already amazing amount of food and wine, we enjoyed our main course of rib-eye al forno with aceto balsamico, fried potatoes and roasted yams with butter and parmigiano alongside Tiefenbrunner 2015 Turmhof Pinot Nero and Colterenzio 2015 Lagrein—two very different wines, working with the dish in very different ways. As expected, the Colterenzio 2015 Lagrein met its match in the perfectly seasoned ribeye, and the inherent earthiness in the wine really enhanced the flavor of the meat. The yam may have been the biggest yam ever prepared, and the Tiefenbrunner 2015 Turmhof Pinot Nero was simply stunning with its sweetness and with the salty complement of the Parmigiano.

As our dessert of butterscotch budino with rosemary–pine nut cookies and banana gelato pie with hot fudge and candied hazelnuts arrived, the satiated group began to re-taste some of the wines served earlier, each person seeming to prefer a different one—proof of the wide appeal of the many styles and varieties in Alto Adige. Our discussion moved on to the ability of the wines to pair with flavors we were not necessarily expecting them to be able to highlight. With the persistent acidity, no matter the grape, each wine was able to modulate depending upon the specific dish. For a sommelier, these wines are extremely fun to introduce to guests; few wines are as forthcoming as those from Alto Adige in how they adapt with food, and guests love to experience the obvious transformation.

We finished with a discussion of how the Alto Adige wines would fit into individual beverage programs and wine lists. The consensus was that these wines have two main benefits: The wines offer great value for the quality they deliver and for their uniqueness; and many of the wines would find a place on a restaurant list at a lower price point than any other wine in a similar category, offering something interesting for guests to try at a comfortable cost. **SJ**



*We tasted the Cantina Terlano 2015 Pinot Bianco and the Weingut Niklas 2015 Kerner alongside the antipasti of white beans alla Toscana with olive oil and saba on crostini.*