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Treasured ICONS

Keeping the Classics
FRESH

FROM TREASURY WINE ESTATES: From left to right, Christophe Paubert, Winemaker/General Manager, Stags' Leap Winery; Margo Van Staaveren, Winemaker/General Manager, Chateau St. Jean; Mark Beringer, Chief Winemaker, Beringer Vineyards; DLYnn Proctor, Winemaking Ambassador, Penfolds; Harry Hansen, Senior Winemaker, Sterling Vineyards; Trevor Durling, General Manager/Chief Winemaker, Beaulieu Vineyard; Gillian Ballance, Trade Education Manager, Treasury Wine Estates; and Jon Priest, Senior Winemaker/General Manager, Etude, gather at Stags' Leap Winery.

P-2 P102
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A Trio of Pure *Pinot Perfection*

by Allyson Gorsuch

ALTO ADIGE WINES
SHOWCASE THE
PINOT FAMILY AT THE
SOCIETY OF WINE
EDUCATORS ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

ITALY'S ALTO ADIGE REGION, with its varying elevations and soil types, produces more than 20 different grape varieties. *The SOMM Journal* attended an exploration of Alto Adige Wines at the Society of Wine Educators Annual Conference, with a focus on the Pinot family—specifically Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio and Pinot Nero.

Alto Adige Wines Ambassador May Matta-Aliah, DWS, CWE, introduced the region as a whole, explaining that it lies at the confluence of two extreme climates: Alpine in the mountainous terrain and Mediterranean in the basin. With seven general growing regions—Val Venosta, Merano, Valle Isarco, Val d'Adige, Bolzano, Oltradige and Bassa Atesina—the best expressions of the Pinot grapes tend to come from cooler sites within the warmer areas to the south like Val d'Adige and Oltradige.

The Alto Adige region of Italy lies in the Dolomite Mountains on the Austrian border, and it enjoys a mix of Italian and Germanic cultures.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALTO ADIGE

While Alto Adige produces just 1 percent of Italy's wine, 98 percent of the wine produced there is of DOC quality. The area includes 13,100 vineyard acres, with more than 5,000 winegrowers. The average vineyard size is smaller than two and a half acres, so many growers sell to cooperatives rather than producing wine of their own. In fact, 70 percent of the wine produced in Alto Adige are produced in co-ops. The growers are generally shareholders, and as such are highly motivated to produce top-quality grapes.

Matta-Aliah also gave us background on the grapes we are tasting. "Pinot Nero is over 2,000 years old, and there have been many natural mutations of the grape over that time, including Pinot Bianco and Pinot Grigio," she explained as we started to taste the first flight of wines. Each flight was structured the same way with three wines of one variety, the third with a few years of age.

First, we tasted Pinot Bianco, the grape variety accounting for 10 percent of Alto Adige's vineyard acreage. "I don't find anyone who doesn't enjoy Pinot Blanc; there's really nothing not to like, and that's not to say that it doesn't have character," stated Matta-Aliah. The Pinot Bianco wines showed varying ripeness of fruit, but each one displayed a characteristic textural richness while maintaining fresh acidity.

The most planted white grape in Alto Adige is Pinot Grigio, with approximately 12 percent of the region's vineyards. "It is capable of making great wine," declared Matta-Aliah. "Treat the grape like it's high-end, and you'll get a quality wine." Exhibiting riper fruit than is common of Pinot Grigio in many locales, the wines were expressive and charming.

Moving on to Pinot Nero, the wines clearly presented cooler-climate traits. Matta-Aliah assured us, though, "They're not trying to make Burgundy; they're trying to make Pinot Nero." While maintaining red fruits and high acidity, the wines offered distinct herbal notes and savory undertones—food-friendly wines immediately inspiring thoughts of culinary creations to match with them.

"Alto Adige wines typically display three attributes: precision, purity and acidity," informed May. These wines certainly offered all three in spades. The region lies in the Dolomite Mountains on the Austrian border and enjoys a mix of Italian and Germanic cultures; hence the capsule always includes the German language "Südtirol" (South Tyrol) as well. **SJ**

Alto Adige Wines:

PINOT BIANCO, PINOT GRIGIO AND PINOT NERO

Tasting notes by Meridith May, Publisher/Editorial Director of The SOMM Journal

Cantina Kaltern 2015 Vial Pinot Bianco, Alto Adige

An earthy, slightly reductive nose with ripe pear and oatmeal; creamy on the palate with tart lemon, a salinity, pear, toffee and an oily mouthfeel.

St. Michael-Eppan 2015 Schulthausen Pinot Bianco, Alto Adige

(hillside fruit at elevation of 1,700–2,000 feet) Mineral-laden nose with butter and lanolin; lean and palate-cleansing with fresh lemon and hay; a lovely, clean finish.



Terlan 2010 Vorberg Pinot Bianco, Alto Adige Terlano Expressively sweet nose with tropical fruits, white flowers and green leaves; creamy with pineapple and mango, chamomile tea; age has influence with richer texture and body.



Peter Zemmer 2016 Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige Gorgeous peach and apricot with shale and slate; broad strokes of tropical fruit with focused acidity and minerality.

Elena Walch 2015 Vigna Castel Ringberg Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige White plum, tangerine, honeysuckle, mineral core leaning to pear and brine on the palate; texturally expressive—it's not about the fruit.

Tramin 2015 Unterebner Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige (single vineyard) Chalk, stone fruit and chamomile; peach pit bitterness with an herbal undertone of lemon verbena and grass; stony yet creamy mouthfeel.

Abbazia do Novacella 2015 Pinot Nero, Alto Adige A bright nose of cherry blossoms, earth and tomato leaf gives way to a dry, earthy, modest wine with prevalent acidity.

Colterenzio 2014 St. Daniel Riserva Pinot Nero, Alto Adige Cherry wood and cinnamon lead on the nose with white pepper, beets, cherries, rhubarb liqueur and mountain brush herbs.

Castelfeder 2008 Burgum Novum Pinot Nero, Alto Adige

Age showing with a brown tinge; oak notes surface on the nose and secondary notes of tobacco, nutmeg and espresso; red fruit thread with plums and a mid-palate juiciness.

