

I Love Italian Wine and Food - Vino Novello (New Wine)

Contributed by Levi Reiss
Wednesday, 29 November 2006

I love Italian wine and food so much that I am doing a series on the typical and special wines and foods of Italy's twenty regions. This article explores the Italian new wines of the 2006 harvest. I'll make specific recommendations, and won't be silent if I'm unhappy with a wine.

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We interrupt our series on the wines of Italy's twenty regions to present a very timely subject, Vino Novello, Italy's version of New Wine. Once a year, starting in early November, Italy releases Vino Novello, to the delight of many, and to the eternal disappointment of many others. We describe New Wine, in particular the Italian version, and then taste locally available samples. Will you be delighted or disappointed with the 2006 offering? After reading this article, rush to your favorite wine store and sample the wines. Whether you are delighted or not, you probably will have fun.

{bot_wrgoogle}What is exactly is new wine (vino novello in Italy; vin nouveau, often Beaujolais nouveau in France)? New wine is the first of the crop, released in early November. The exact date depends on the country. In 2006, Italy permitted the sale of Vino Novello on November 6th, beating France, the major player in the new wine market, by a full 10 days.

New wines are produced by a special method, carbonic maceration, in which whole grapes ferment in stainless steel tanks, often reaching a temperature of 25 to 30 degrees Centigrade (77 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit). This process lasts for about 5 to 20 days, and may be followed by crushing the grapes, which then undergo traditional fermentation for a few days. The exact procedure varies from one winemaker to another, but the ensuing wine is virtually tannin free. The lack of tannins implies a short shelf life. While you don't have to drink the wine immediately, most people finish the season by Easter.

New wines are usually colored bright red or violet. They tend to be fruity, tasting of cherry, strawberry, raspberry, banana, and freshly squeezed grapes, depending on the grape variety used, the production method, and the area in which the grapes are grown. Detractors talk about bubble gum, lollipops, nail polish, and jello. Many feel that new wine tastes of grape juice with alcohol. One thing is certain, if you don't like a given new wine, don't store it away to try it again in two years. It won't improve with time.

Italy is a major producer of new wine, bringing to market about 18 million bottles a year. About one third of its output is exported to Germany. The most important Italian new wine regions are Veneto and Tuscany, followed by Piedmont and Trentino-Alto Adige. Let's take a closer look at two new wines.

Wines Reviewed Nosio Spa Novio Mezzacorona 2006 Vigneti Delle Dolomiti IGT 12% about \$8.50 and

Cantina di Negrar Novello del Veneto IGT 12% about \$8

I went to a small wine store and bought these two bottles on the day that the 2006 Beaujolais Nouveau was released (November 16, 2006). The following day I

went to a major wine store, expecting additional offerings from Italy, but there were none. I did buy one bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau, which I will review in another article.

The Novio Mezzacorona is produced from Teroldego and Lagrein grapes native to the Trentino-Alto Adige region in northeastern Italy. Interestingly enough, the Teroldego grape is quite tannic. Furthermore, the Lagrein grape is known for meaty wines. Neither of these characteristics showed up in the final products.

The Novello del Veneto wine, with a designer label, is made from Corvina and Rondinella grapes native to the Veneto region in northeastern Italy. Interestingly enough, the Corvina grape is quite tannic, but you would never guess from tasting the final product. You may be familiar with these two grape varieties; they are the major components of Valpolicella and other well-known Veneto wines. I'll spare you the gushing marketing materials that purported to describe these two wines.

I first tasted these wines with braised, slow-cooked beef ribs and potatoes. The Novio Mezzacorona was fruity, a nice complement to the food's grease. It lingered in my mouth. In contrast, the Veneto tasted of bubble gum, both with the meal and on its own.

The next tasting involved bagels and smoked salmon, accompanied by a dainty grilled artichoke dip and caponata, a savory Italian-style salad composed of eggplants (including their skin), tomatoes, and onions. The Novio Mezzacorona was weak when paired with the smoked salmon but handled itself better with the caponata. The wine showed its strength with the artichoke dip, without overpowering it. The Veneto was a bit fruitier with the smoked salmon, the bubble gum flavor no longer dominated.

Then I moved on to the cheeses. Asiago is a semi-sharp cheese produced in both the Trentino Alto-Adige and Veneto regions. The Novio Mezzacorona was almost pleasant with this cheese. The Veneto did better, it came close to being a winner. Montasio Veneto is a sharper cheese, produced in the Veneto region. This cheese overpowered the Novio Mezzacorona and rendered the Veneto wine flat.

The final tasting involved an omelette containing non-imported Provolone cheese, and once again a side of caponata. The Novio Mezzacorona was round and tasted of dark fruits but was quite short. It was more complex when imbibed with the caponata. The Veneto wine still tasted of bubble gum. It also tasted of dark fruits and was short.

Final verdict. For many years I have not been a fan of new wines. I taste them every year, and am always willing to change my mind. These two bottles gave me no reason to budge an inch. Having said this, there still is the Beaujolais Nouveau to taste and review. I cheated a bit; I bought the most expensive bottle available. Let's hope that it works out better than these two wines.

Levi Reiss has authored or co-authored ten books on computers and the Internet, but to be honest, he would rather just drink fine Italian or other wine, accompanied by the right foods. He teaches classes in computers at an Ontario French-language community college. His wine website is www.theworldwidewine.com .