

Week of 05-01-07

White Bag Clues:

Serve in a Cab/Merlot Stem

Clues:

Grape -

- Produces very good wines with perfumy characteristics of apples, pears and hints of licorice.
- Difficult to grow.
- Nearly extinct once.
- Recently saved from extinction by a few notable Barolo producers.
- Sometimes referred to as Barolo Bianco although never labeled as such.
- Blended into red wines to soften tannins.
- In the regional dialect means “little rascal”.

Where is it from?

- Originally from the Roero hills and still primarily grown there.
- From the newly formed very unrestrictive Langhe DOC.

Answer – Ugo Lequio Arneis 2004 Langhe
[ahr-NAYZ]

04 Ugo Lequio, Langhe Arneis

It's wine like this that means Italy to me. Despite all the great Baroli and Barbaresci--perhaps the most noble of all wines--made just beside these Roero hills in Piedmont, despite the barberas made just south in Alba, it's the unadulterated presence of Italy's table whites that make them, to me, amongst the country's most enjoyable everyday wines. And, tasting the Lequio arneis, it's no surprise that such wines have occasionally been blended with nebbiolo to make Langhe's reds, the way roussane, marsanne, and viognier are often blended into the reds of Rhone. The perfume is like that of pear tarts keeping warm in the oven, with more pastry and dry salted pears on the palate and a strong surge of lemony acidity to finish. A waxy body infused with citrus, fuller than you might expect, calls on Oregon pinot gris or the cortese-based wines of neighboring Gavi. It ends tart and chalky, begging for shrimp, crawdads, trout, or a foggy, crisp country morning.

Snippets from the Italian Scene

The Langhe DOC: A Good Idea?

According to an article in a recent issue of *Civiltà del Bere*, Italy's major wine trade magazine (lots of news & statistics, no reviews) Piemonte has established a new Langhe DOC zone to cover the wines made around Alba that do not fit into the existing DOCs, which include Barolo, Barbaresco, Dolcetto d'Alba, Barbera d'Alba, Roero Arneis and many more.

The rationale behind the new DOC, the authors say, is to provide vintners with a designation other than the lowly *Vino da Tavola* (see <http://italianfood.about.com/library/weekly/aa031497.htm> for an overview of Italian wine designations) for their non-traditional wines -- wines made from grapes that are new to the region, e.g. Chardonnay, and wines made from blends of grapes, e.g. Nebbiolo and Barbera. The establishment of this new outlet should, they continue, reduce pressure to tinker with the regulations governing the existing DOC wines (especially Barolo and Barbaresco) that are all made from single grapes. Thus tradition is saved, and innovation recognized. It's all quite glowing, and the vintners interviewed are extremely positive.

I'm not quite so sure. Foremost, for a philosophical reason. DOCs should in theory be used to denote specific wines made in specific areas well suited to the production of wine, following specific methods.

For example, Barolo is a wine made from specific varietals of the Nebbiolo grape grown in non-north-facing vineyards in the 5 townships around Barolo; it must mature for 3 years, 2 of which in wood (4 years for the Riserva) prior to its release. Even though there is considerable variation in fermentation technique and wood use from producer to producer, you have a fairly good idea of what you're getting when you buy a bottle -- a full bodied, elegant, powerful wine.

The new Langhe DOC sets no restrictions on grapes used -- they can be red (Nebbiolo, Syrah, etc) or white (Chardonnay, Viognier, Arneis), or any blend the vintner chooses to try. While I have nothing against the use of non-traditional grapes or blends (the labels pictured in the article stated what went into the wines), it is stretching the concept of DOC to say that anything and everything qualifies.

The Langhe's traditional DOCs are for the most part quite restricted: Barolo to all or parts of five townships around Barolo, Dolcetto di Dogliani to Dogliani and parts of 10 other surrounding townships, and Roero Arneis to a few towns on the left bank of the Tanaro down river from Alba, and so on. The Langhe DOC covers the entire area. Were it monotonous this would be fine, but the Langhe are topographically and geologically varied; some parts of the region are perfectly suited for the production of wine and others less so. The new DOC includes them all; it thus becomes a catchall for grapes grown in the region but outside the areas that have been traditionally recognized as excellent. This again goes counter to the philosophy behind the concept of DOC.

My final reservation is one regarding what's known as "trasparenza" in Italian -- clarity for want of a better term in English. Many of the vintners who are making the new Langhe wines have their vineyards within the areas of the more traditional, prestigious denominations. Therefore, for example, they could make both Langhe Nebbiolo and either Barolo or Barbaresco, using the better grapes for the latter and the rest for the former. In a good vintage this could work very well. However, in an off year, or one in which part of the vineyard suffered hail damage, what's to prevent a producer from diverting most of the grapes into the more prestigious wine that sells at a much higher price? The temptation will be great, and I expect the output of some producers' prestigious wines will be strangely constant, while that of their Langhe wines will fluctuate considerably.

A DOC should denote a specific wine with well defined characteristics. The new Langhe DOC, as far as I can tell, does the opposite -- Since Langhe DOC wine can contain any grape or blend of grapes, be

fermented and aged as the vintner pleases, and come from any part of a very diverse region, consumers will have no way of knowing what's really in a bottle short of buying and tasting. In final analysis, the Langhe DOC strikes me primarily as a marketing ploy that will give vintners the opportunity to classify wines that break with local tradition as something other than a plain table wine (VdT). Considering that the Super Tuscans gained worldwide renown while classified VdT, I'm not sure this new DOC is necessary.

A presto,
Kyle Phillips
Webweaver, About Italian Cuisine

Wines & Vines ARNEIS

Point the cursor over the variety name to see the pronunciation.

Type of wine: Light-to-medium-bodied white.

Origin: An ancient variety grown near Alba in Piemonte (northwest Italy). Recently saved from extinction by a few notable Barolo (Nebbiolo) producers. Arneis is sometimes referred to as Barolo Bianco although never labeled as such.

Difficult to grow, "Arneis" in the regional dialect means "little rascal." It is often used as a blender to soften tannins in the red wines of the area, much as the French use Viognier in the Northern Rhone.

Description: Delicate aromas and flavors of pears, with a hint of almonds. The grape seems to possess more acidity in California than in Italy, yielding a crisper wine with a more lingering finish.

Aging: Arneis is best consumed within a year or two of the vintage.

Best location: Warm-to-hot days with cool, fog-influenced nights help this variety retain acidity and delicate, sometimes fleeting, fruit aromas and flavors.

[Cal-Italia producers](#)



FastFoodFacts: A charming aperitivo and sipping wine with ripe Bartlett pears, and a good companion for shellfish and lightly breaded, sauteed sole. Avoid cheeses and strongly herb-influenced dishes.