

Week of 10-09-07

White Bag Clues: White Wine Stem

Grape –

The bunches of grapes on the vine are medium sized although in some regions they may be larger.

The grapes are round; medium sized, usually of a yellowish green color, sometimes more golden.

The leaves of the vine are dark green and pentagon-shaped

Emblematic white wine of its country as it is the only producer of this grape.

This grape is related to the Malvasia group of grapes which originated in the Eastern Mediterranean and found their way to Atlantic islands such as Madeira.

This grape is not a good candidate for aging and should be drunk young.

There are three criolla varieties of this grape; Riojano, which is most common, Sanjuanino and Mendocino. These three varieties may actually be different grapes.

Synonyms: Moscatel de Austria

Region –

The climate of the region is mild though the mountains provide a certain degree of aridity. The temperature in summer ranges from 18° C to 33° C and days are hot and nights are fresh. In winter, the minimum temperature is 3° C and the maximum registered temperature is 16° C.

It is a frequent stopover for climbers heading for mountaineering, hiking, horseback riding, rafting, and outdoor activities. In the winter, skiers come to the city for its easy access to the mountain range.

One of the main industries is wine making. Another large industry is olive oil production.

The capital was founded in 1561 by Pedro del Castillo.

The capital has no cultured grapes.

Producer -

In 1945 this family tradition began. Finding fertile land in the region to sow the families' dreams and harvest the best grapes.

The 3rd generation of the family has now taken the helm.

Your Best Guess???

Profile:

"Enticing aromas that are strikingly similar to Viognier, with hints of peach pit, flowers, and orange citrus fruit. On the palate, it has a beautiful structure and acidity along with enticing fruit flavors that keep you coming back for another sip and plenty of body for a wine that shows such delicate aromas and flavors. Fruity, floral and yet still quite dry, this wine has to be tasted to be believed. Best enjoyed in its youth either by itself, or as a wonderful partner with smoked meats, mild to medium-strong cheeses, and seafood. Great partner for spicy food and Thai as well."

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Drink young, age does not help this wine.

And the wine is.....

Gimenez Riili Torrontes 2006 Perpetuum Argentina





A torrential wine

The *Merriam-Webster™ Dictionary* defines "torrent" as:

a tumultuous outpouring: RUSH.

And we have grape "Torrantes" (tore-ahn-TEZ), which produces a wine whose aroma is a *tumultuous outpouring* of tropical fruit, candied peaches, lychee nut, rose petals and other floral hints. Its flavors *rush* into the mouth, with bright ripe fruits similar to the ones found in the aroma, with an extra zing of spice and acidity for good measure. Needless to say, this is not a wine for the faint of heart.

Torrantes is a grape emanating from the Galician region of northwest Spain. There it is commonly used in wines from the sub-region of Ribeiro (not to be confused with the more popular wines of Ribera del Duero). Though you won't hear much about Spanish Torrantes, the same-named grape flourishes in the dry climate and mountains of Argentina. It is not clear whether the grape is identical in both countries, but who really cares? The main thing to remember is to look for Argentinean Torrantes, which has a strongly perfumed, distinctive character.

If you've ever had a Gewurztraminer (guh-VERTS-trah-mee-ner) wine, then you will have an idea of what I mean by "distinctive": this is a wine of uncommon flavor that some people will flat-out hate, while others will enjoy immensely. The aromas and flavors are decidedly unique -- Torrantes is nearly obnoxious in its expression of character. Bold floral aromas resembling a woman wearing too much rosy perfume will smack you in the face; if you dare taste the wine it will erupt with lychee nut (those little pink, fleshy fruits you get for dessert at Chinese restaurants) and similarly exotic fruit flavors.

Because it's nothing like Chardonnay or other run-of-the-mill white wines, it may take some doing to find a Torrantes wine. However, several excellent examples are finding their way out of Argentina, much to the delight of adventuresome imbibers. The cult-like following of this wine variety should soon swell into a demand that may force Argentina to rethink its export strategy. Though it remains one of the most widely planted grapes in Argentina, much of the attention recently has been paid to growing and developing mainstream varietals such as Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. Maybe it's time to supplant some of those comparatively dull vines and spend some effort toward Torrantes' true potential.

Now for the Torrantes taste-off: one from the Mendoza region of Argentina, another from the Cafayete Valley. First up is Santa Julia Torrantes 2003, which has a fragrant, floral nose with fresh, ripe muscat and Gewurz-like aromas (rose petals, lychee). In the mouth it



has similarly fresh and ripe, grapey fruit flavors -- lime, pomegranate, lychee -- with a hint of mineral and a mild, pleasing acidity. Overall it is a nicely balanced wine with a clean finish. At around seven bucks, this wine is a steal! (Please note there is a Santa Julia Torrantes "Tardio," which is a late-harvest, sweet wine, and has a different taste and price.)

The second is Michel Torino Torrantes "Don David" 2003, which has a very expressive, floral perfume with notes of overripe peaches, candied pears and lychee. A heavy,

almost oily texture covers the palate, giving significant weight and body. Spicy muscat, lychee and overripe pear flavors fill the mouth. On the finish it is a touch hot, but long and tangy -- the acidity is in good balance with the supple fruit and alcohol level. This is as full-bodied a Torrontes as you're going to get. Its contrast to the Santa Julia example can be attributed to its birth in Cafayete vineyards sitting 5600 feet above sea level and soaked with sunshine 340 days per year.

With such distinctive and overpowering flavor, food matching can be a challenge with Torrontes. However, its high acidity can cut through buttery, creamy dishes, and the tropical fruit flavors give it a perception of sweetness than can temper a spicy dish. Therefore, I would suggest similarly exotic and spicy-flavored cuisine, such as Asian, Indian, and the like. Or enjoy it by itself, as a contemplative aperitif -- it will surely initiate torrential conversation.

Send any questions, comments or wine stories to vinojoe@bullz-eye.com.

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