

Notes From The Cellar (NFTC); Winepairings e-letter Jan 02, 2008

Today: Recioto Deal !

From the wine region of Valpolicella, north of Verona in North East Italy comes this, my favorite style of Italian dessert wine: **Recioto della Valpolicella**. Up to the 1980's most wine imported from Valpolicella was insipid low grade grade stuff (a similar situation to the more famous region of Chianti) unfortunately, even today there is plenty of this junk around. On the other hand, not all wine from this region fits the "under achiever" category. At the top of the heap, there are the wines made in the traditional technique of Appasimento, (sometimes also called Passito). In order to concentrate the juice, the grapes are partially dried on straw mats- a tradition which originated during Roman times. Now days straw is still used, though it is often replaced by specially designed bins -which result in much improved hygienic conditions. After the grapes dry out they are pressed and fermented.

If fermentation is complete, the result is the famous Amarone della Valpolicella (Amaro -Italian for bitter is used in the context of opposed to sweet). Due to the concentration, Amarone is a very ripe, raisiny, powerful yet velvety lush red wine with very little acid, often exceeding 15% in alcohol. When done right it is one of the world's greatest forms of red wine.

The other wine made in the Appasimento style is Amarone's little sweet brother: Recioto. The sweetness is archived -as the fermentation process is interrupted before all the grape sugar can change into alcohol. The result, when done right is a wine deep ruby red in color, which has a spicy bouquet with hints of dried fruit and is full and velvety on the palate. What has always intrigued me about good Recioto is that while the attack, or front flavors of the wine are sweet, the finish can be dry and refreshing similar to a good vintage port (but since it is not fortified like a port, it is lower in alcohol level).

Traditionally this wine is enjoyed with dry desserts, such as shortbread, Cantucci (dry almond biscuits), and Sbrisolona (local crumb cake). Thanks to its outstanding roundness, it makes a perfect partner for some cheeses, especially a mild Gorgonzola. As well as Chocolate. (if you think that a big ripe red Zinfandel is good with chocolate and haven't tried a Recioto -you are in for a treat!). It is also ideal with strawberries and tropical fruits. My absolute favorite pairing is with Blueberry cheesecake as the bouquet of Blueberry is often found in this wine....Ideally it should be served slightly cool (57 F) and you may want to open the bottle several hours before drinking. Once opened it can last for several days in your fridge, though leftovers are seldom encountered once a bottle is served.

As you can imagine, all this special handling of Appasimento wines is quite intensive, and the resulting wines rather expensive. Furthermore there are only a handful of producers who can actually produce a good Amarone and even less so, a good Recioto.

\$\$\$ Special wine deals \$\$\$

Giuseppe Lonardi Recitot della Valpolicella 2003 le Arele

\$25 (reg 45) or 6 for \$135

Recioto is traditionally sold in 500ml bottles and top examples from producers such as Allegrini and Bussola sell from \$75-80 and up to \$300-\$400 for the very best from producers

such as Dal Forno and Quintarelli.! There are a few products in the market sold in the \$40-50 range, most fall short and are simply not worth it. About 5 years ago The wines of Giuseppe Lonardi, a small but high quality oriented producer, began being imported into the US. To date only 3 vintages of his Recioto have been available here: the 1997, 2000 and 2003. I remember having the 1997 and searching in vain for more of this wonderful wine. At the current suggested retail price of low to mid \$40's (and these are last year's prices based on the stronger dollar) this wine has been an excellent choice worth seeking out. It remains a bit of an insider's wine, without major press in the main -stream wine journals. It is an under the radar sort of wine sometimes found on wine lists of upper restaurants & steakhouses. Much to my surprise the latest vintage 2003 was offered to me at an incredible close out price.(more on this in a second) -While I was familiar with the previous 2 vintages I ordered a sample of the 2003 which was much enjoyed at my house over the holidays with you guessed it: Blueberry Cheesecake. Somehow a mistake was made along the supply chain, too much wine was delivered locally and orders were given to slash prices & rid the excess inventory. So while this is a unique opportunity I do not expect this scenario to repeat, so I would urge you to take full advantage of this while you can. I am thrilled to start off the new year with a terrific blow out for our clients. We are offering this wine today at the unheard of price of: **\$25- /500ml bottle.!** (regular \$45+) Buy a 6 pack and take off another 10% (at only **\$135- or 22.50 a bottle**) Yes baby! I am getting a case for myself! -drink now and over the next 5-7 years. Happy New Year.

Events:

Jan 14th Bordeaux Dinner featuring wines from the 2005 vintage at the Westin Tabor Center hosted by Applejack cost \$245 details : http://www.applejack.com/bordeaux_invitation.pdf

Tues Jan 22nd Aix Restaurant & Paul Dolan from Parducci Vineyards host an evening of organic food and wine.Parducci Winery, the oldest family-owned winery in Mendocino County, is the first in the United States to achieve carbon neutrality \$65 details :<http://www.restaurantaix.com/>

Thanks again for all your support and referrals, tell your friends, Cheers ! Paul David, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

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