



Tim's Wine Market

October 2023

By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

Before the pandemic I was privileged to be an attendee at a trade luncheon at Osprey Tavern, in Baldwin Park, during a take-over by Master Sommelier Bobby Stuckey. For this lunch he and chef Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson created a menu of dishes from Friuli, Italy, to sell a line of wines they import from the area. It is worth noting that they also own several restaurants in the Boulder, Colorado area including Frasca, which is based on the cuisine of Friuli. During the luncheon Bobby and Lachlan consistently impressed the attendees with how different the cuisine and wines of Friuli are compared with the rest of Italy. To this day I often find my cooking at home inspired by a couple of techniques I learned that day, along with how beautiful these wines can be with food. - **Tim**

Once the main seagoing hub of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Friuli region borders Slovenia to the East, the Adriatic Sea to the South, and Austria to the North, boasting several unique micro-climates and soil types. It is a rare winemaking region with mountains in the foreground and the Mediterranean nearby, so the climate is warm during the day and cool at night. As a result, this is something of a winemaker's paradise, often making use of native grape varieties and winemaking styles not common in the rest of Italy. This month, we will examine two varieties that are well known, though the flavors and aromatics of these examples are uniquely Friulian.

2022 Tunella Pinot Grigio (\$23)

Often associated with light-bodied, large production wines, Pinot Grigio drinks very differently in Friuli. Many local white varieties see extended time on the lees and barrel maturation, traditions dating back to the early days of winemaking in the region. In addition, the region's chalk and limestone soils increase the concentration and minerality of this variety, producing a Pinot Grigio that is ripe, aromatically intense, and even capable of aging, certainly a far cry from the grocery store stuff.

All of these principles are combined at Tunella, a property located on the border of Slovenia. This growing region is called the Colli Orientali and is dominated by limestone soils and a moderate climate. Gabriella Zorzettig and her two sons, Marco and Massimo, take care of their family's property under the philosophy of "doing less to do better." This phrase may seem confusing at first, but "doing less" in this case means sticking to environmentally conscious practices in the vineyard. Pesticides and mechanization are kept to a minimum, native biodiversity and cover crops are encouraged, and the wines are made with minimal intervention. Though it can be tempting for many wine writers to lump this in as "natural" viticulture, these methods were the norm for most of winemaking history, and remain in use throughout the Colli Orientali.

To make this wine, all fruit is harvested and destemmed by hand. A long, slow fermentation takes place in stainless steel, over the course of 30-40 days. Once dry, the resulting wine spends 5 months on the lees, which contributes additional body and aromatics. After maturation is complete the finished wine is bottled unfiltered.

When you open this wine, you will want to serve it chilled, but not ice cold. About 45-50 degrees Fahrenheit should suffice. In addition, the wine will benefit from a brief splash in the decanter, about 10-15 minutes. Once this wine has some time to open up, it over-delivers on the aromatics, including fresh Fuji apple, kumquat preserves, white nectarine, orange blossom, and dried straw. Drink now through 2026 with grilled shrimp skewers, pasta carbonara, or Thai green curry with chicken.

2019 Ronchi di Manzano Cabernet Franc (\$25)

Our second selection for October comes from a hillside winery situated just outside the municipality of Manzano, about 10 miles from the Slovenian border. Since the earliest days of unified Italy, wines grown on this property were famous among the Italian and French upper classes, particularly dessert wines done in the passito method. However, since the Borghese

family took over management of the estate in 1969, production has shifted to predominantly dry wines, made from both native and French grape varieties. Roberta Borghese, together with her daughters Lisa and Nicole, craft a wide variety of red, white, and rosé wines, all created to express the traditional characteristics of Friuli.

This is very easy to achieve, due in part to the unique soils of the region, which are made up of limestone, fossils, and chalk. Known locally as ponca, this soil layer extends over the border into Slovenia and facilitates ripeness in both red and white wines. In addition, these nutrient-rich soils encourage resource competition, forcing the vines to dig further into the earth. Combined with severe hand pruning in the vineyard, the resulting wines are full-bodied but never lacking in acidity, a hallmark of Ronchi di Manzano and of Friulian wine in general.

To make this wine, fruit is sourced from the family's original 40-hectare vineyard site in Manzano. Planted in 1975, these are among the oldest remaining vines on the Borghese estate. After pruning and green harvest in the vineyard, the resulting crop is low in yield but high in concentration and quality, and is harvested by hand. In the winery, fermentation takes place at controlled temperature in order to block malolactic conversion. Once dry, the wine sees 2 weeks of post-fermentation maceration on the skins before racking to used oak barrels of varying sizes. After 12 months of barrel maturation, the wine is filtered and bottled.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. In addition, this wine benefits from a slight chill, so make sure to serve it around 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit or cellar temperature. Once this wine has some time to open up it delivers notes of dried blueberries, black currants, red cherry pit and dried ivy. Drink now through 2025 with grilled pork chops and polenta, white bean and sausage soup, or chill it down a bit more and try it with grilled salmon!

Venison Pasta Sauce (Ragù di Cervo)

This is a classic dish of Friuli, a rich meat sauce with a unique palate of spices. The unusual combination is due to the region's point of origin on the Spice Route, where Marco Polo even began his adventure. The recipe is easy but there are a couple of changes I made to simplify preparation. First, you can easily substitute 93% lean ground beef for venison, which I was able to find at Wild Fork, or even ground bison. Second, the recipe is specific about the number of spices because they are added whole then fished out after cooking. I found the thought of a Where's Waldo search for 20 juniper berries ridiculous, and put them and the cinnamon stick in a spice infuser. (This is a stainless steel hollow thing that looks like a giant tea infuser. They are cheap and I use mine all the time for making stocks.) Last, traditionally this recipe would be served with really wide noodles, called *blecs*, which are closer to narrow lasagna noodles. I used gnocchi, because that is what I had on hand, and the result was amazing. Serve this dish with either wine selection this month. - **Tim**

2 lbs ground venison
3/4 cup diced onion
3/3 cup diced carrot,
3/4 cup diced celery
28 oz of canned tomatoes, pureed
1 cup of red wine
2 bay leaves
2 cloves
20 juniper berries
1 stick cinnamon
4 Tbsp olive oil
salt and freshly ground black pepper
250 ml (1 cup) cream, optional
1 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Heat 4 tablespoons of olive oil in a casserole (Dutch oven) and add the onions, carrot and celery. Season with salt and stir over medium heat until the vegetables are golden, about 10 minutes.

Add the ground venison, or whatever meat you use and stir over high heat until the meat has lost its raw pink color. Add the wine and continue stirring until almost evaporated, also scraping any brown bits off the bottom of the pan. Add the tomatoes and stir to combine. Increase the heat to high then reduce back down to a very low simmer, and add the bay leaves, cloves, juniper berries and cinnamon stick (*see head note*), stir to combine and add a half teaspoon of salt.

Cook for 4 hours, stirring every half hour, until the sauce looks extremely thick. Taste for seasoning and adjust with salt and pepper. Remove the spices (did you count them?) and stir in cream and cheese. Serve with prepared noodles or gnocchi. This recipe freezes really well (before adding pasta) and makes two really nice dinner portions for 4 people.