

Italian red wine tour

It could just be me, but I have a difficult time keeping Italian wine regions and their varietals straight. I often need a map of Italy in front of me to figure out what I am drinking and where it comes from. Part of the reason for my confusion is the labyrinth of vineyard designations and the complex regulatory governance that defines and enforces the various levels of quality from each region.

Italian vineyards and wines are regulated by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies, which is responsible for enforcing the Denominazione di Origine Controllata laws that were established in 1963. The Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita was created in 1980, adopting more restrictive regulations for 30-some-odd appellations.

The Indicazione Geografica Tipica was founded in 1992 and consists of roughly 200 appellations. Even though their restrictions are more relaxed than those of the aforementioned designations, these wine regions must also meet specific rules for production standard and varietal purity.

So what about all of the other wines that do not conform to a specific governing body? They are considered vini da tavola, or table wine. These include wines that can be produced from a prestigious DOCG region but may use a grape varietal or technique that is not approved for that area, so it is considered a vini da tavola no matter how critically acclaimed it may become.

I recently had the pleasure of sampling a variety of wines from across Italy and I finally started to get a grasp on what goes where. So let's take a tour, north to south, of Italy by red wine. Retail prices are approximate.

In the northern edge of Italy is an area carved out by the Adige

River where the estate of Tenuta San Leonardo has been under the ownership of the Guerrieri Gonzaga family since the mid-18th century. Today, the estate is planted to international varietals that thrive in the various microclimates on the nearly 50 acres. The **2008 Terre di Tenuta San Leonardo Vigneti Delle Dolomiti IGT (\$15)** is an outstanding value. **QPR 9.5**

A quarter of the way down the coast is where you'll find Fattoria del Cerro, the largest private estate producing Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. The star of the show in this region is the prugnolo gentile, a clone of the sangiovese grape. The **2008 Fattoria del Cerro Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (\$16)** spends a good bit of time in Slovenian oak, which gives the nose a distinctive toasty oak accent. **QPR 8**

In the dead center of the country is the region of Abruzzo, where the vineyards of Cataldi Madonna sit in a valley blessed by exceptional exposure to the sun. The **2010 Cataldi Madonna Montepulciano D'Abruzzo DOC (\$17)** is made from 100 percent montepulciano and exudes richness and depth with every sip. **QPR 7.5**

Founded in 1979 by Gianni Cantele and sons Augusto and Domenico, the vineyard, located in the southern tip of Puglia — in the "heel of the boot" — is home to varietals that include primitivo and negroamaro. Today, Augusto's son, Gianni Cantele, is the winemaker and is responsible for the wonderfully balanced **2009 Cantele Primitivo Salento IGT (\$11)**. Made exclusively from primitivo, considered by many to be the precursor of zinfandel, it features a toasty oak nose and flavors of succulent red and black fruit on an extremely well-balanced, fat frame. **QPR 9**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



COURTESY PHOTO

Noah Dan licks the heat

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Some people have all the luck — they either work for a bakery, for a candy store, or in the case of Noah Dan, for an ice cream business.

Founder of Pitango Gelato, Dan freely chats about his teenage summers in Trieste, Italy, with his Italian grandparents. "It was obligatory to eat gelato one or two times a day," he explained. "There were many stores, but only one was the real place. In the old days, it was all from scratch, with a secret recipe and hard work."

Recalling those delicious summer days, Dan says the owner of this particular gelato shop used the milk from his own cows, the eggs from his own hens and the fruits from his own garden. "Other places would buy ready-made [mixes]," he said.

Understanding that creating real, from-scratch gelato was really not so difficult, Dan set about making an authentic product in the United States, as delicious as those gelati from Italy. His determination was inspired, in part, by his great-aunt, who always insisted on having gelato for dinner.

To celebrate her 85th birthday, Dan asked a friend with a laboratorio to make the basic gelato, known as crema, from scratch. "I picked up the eggs and the milk," he said, "and when I tasted it, I knew she was right. You can't replace the basic ingredients with powders."

However, when the former technology entrepreneur set out to launch Pitango Gelato in 2006, he encountered more than a few hurdles. Rather than sourcing milk that was already pasteurized — which is the norm in the ice cream business — Dan wanted to use raw milk in his recipes to recreate the authentic taste. "Most dairy farmers," he said, "don't think about the taste of milk. I tried to make the gelato here with regular milk, but that didn't work. So I thought of raw milk, but I couldn't get it."

Determined to have the best product money could buy, Dan connected with a Pennsylvania farm that produces organic milk from a single, grass-fed herd and built his own dairy on the premises. He also went to extremes sourcing other ingredients — including imported nuts and



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Noah Dan, founder of Pitango Gelato, crafts his gelato from scratch.

What is your comfort food?
Chicken soup, and it is so simple.

What's in your fridge?
Parmigiano, the real McCoy. Lemons and milk.

Which is your favorite restaurant?
Tosca; it's service is like a well-oiled machine. But the truth is we eat at home. The kids love to cook, and it is a lot of fun.

Which is your favorite ingredient?
Depends on the season. It's lot of fun to grow your own tomatoes, rhubarb and apricots.

What is your luckiest moment?
I guess when I met my wife. I was working in an office in Curacao. She walked in to interview my partner, and for a long time, it was a long-distance relationship.

chocolates and fresh-picked local fruit — to create a product that is honest, pure, and free of processed foods, colorings or flavorings of any kind. As it turns out, the mixes are made at the farm, flash-frozen and then shipped to the retail outlets. "I send the frozen mix to each store," he says, "and each store makes its own gelato

to avoid ice crystals. It's then frozen at 10 degrees."

Pitango produces more than 40 flavors of gelato and sorbet — 20 of which are served at each shop. Flavors include Italian classics such as hazelnut, caffè espresso and pistachio as well as a host of fat-free, vegan sorbets.

EMBRACE YOUR TRUE IDENTITY.

New Pastry Informational Class starts June 8th

New Daytime Classes start July 1st

New Evening Classes start August 7th



L'Academie de Cuisine
THE ACADEMY OF CULINARY AND PASTRY ARTS SINCE 1976

Where good cooks become great.

16006 Industrial Drive, Gaithersburg, MD 20877
301-670-8670 x201 · www.lacademie.com

