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For My Italian Grandparents

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A blog exploring Italian food and wine from a tiny American kitchen





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This post was posted in Liguria (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/category/liguria/>)

Not your average red sauce (or red wine, for that matter) (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/2018/03/07/not-your-average-red-sauce-or-red-wine-for-that-matter/>)

March 7, 2018 by admin (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/author/admin/>)

Our third meal took an entirely different direction from the first two—red wine and beef. Specifically, the Rossese di Dolceacqua Terre Bianche 2016 from Moore Brothers, paired with Lidia’s Meat Sauce Genova-Style (*Sugo alla Genovese*), which is roast beef braised in tomato sauce—an auspicious choice. The tasting notes for this wine included some quick pairing suggestions: “grilled rib eye, pork shoulder roasts, and grilled veal chops are all delicious with this wine. For the adventurous cook, try a rabbit ragu. Sage and Provençal herbs are recommended.” I think we’re more in the ball park with this pairing.



In the glass, this wine is drop-dead gorgeous—imagine the color of a blown-glass Bing cherry (these photos simply do not do it justice). Initially the nose smells very faintly of plum. As the wine opened up, its aroma became more peppery and earthy, but earthy like a wet tree rather than like a barnyard, with notes of ash and slate. Initially the flavor was definitely juicy, perhaps sour cherry, although hard to pin down until it was aerated (which we did in the simplest possible way, by using one of those bottle-top numbers). Aeration really intensified the flavor, even more so than usual—the wine is now fruitier, smokier and spicier with a very long finish. The fruit now is more of a raspberry or candied cherry flavor (remember Jolly Ranchers?) with some violet and a bit more ash and slate.

This was our first encounter with Rossese and we knew little about it other than what we found on the tasting sheet. Of the grape it says: “Also known as Tibouren in Provence, many ampelographers believe the vine to be an ancient variety from the Middle East that found its way to France through the Phocaen Greek traders when they settled in what is now Marseilles over two thousand years ago. In Dolceacqua on the Ligurian coast near Nice, the grape produces a rare, local specialty called Rossese di Dolceacqua—an aromatic wine with earthy, herbal overtones.” So in drinking this wine we are experiencing something special, and it shows. *Molto elegante.*



And the meat sauce? It did not disappoint. Rich and hearty, it reminds me a bit of the Sunday dinners we used to have at my grandparents' house when I was a kid, but it's a bit more elaborate. Lidia explains that what makes this dish “distinctively *alla Genovese*” is the base of the sauce, which is a purée of sautéed onions, garlic, reconstituted porcini mushrooms, sage and rosemary; reduced red wine and toasted pine nuts. And, of course, that base along with beef stock and plum tomatoes became a decadent sauce after simmering for about three hours. Once again, this Lidia recipe made so much food! We're going to be able to eat it a few times this week and freeze a few portions for a future treat. And with the wine? Heavenly.



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Pleased to meet you, Pigato (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/2018/03/07/pleased-to-meet-you-pigatto/>)

March 7, 2018 by admin (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/author/admin/>)



Having started with the Terre Bianche Vermentino, the Riviera Ligure di Ponente Pigato Terre Bianche 2016, also from Moore Brothers, seemed like a natural choice for the second wine in our first Ligurian round. On the nose it was flinty, with a bright palate tasting of broiled grapefruit and tart white peach. Our closest reference point to the flavor of this wine was an old world (probably French? Maybe Loire Valley?) Sauvignon Blanc. Overall this wine was bigger and more approachable than the Vermentino, which, while unquestionably *bella*, was a little austere. These differences may be explained more clearly by the tasting notes: “Pigato is a local clonal variant of Vermentino, producing a richly flavored, exotically scented (peach and acacia flowers) white wine.” Also of note, “the grape is generally lower in acidity than typical Vermentino.”

The suggested food pairing from Moore Brothers was the same on the tasting notes for the Pigato as for the Vermentino: “grilled, olive oil-laced seafood, whole-roasted fish, as well as pastas with diced tomato and herbs work very well with this wine. A simply roasted chicken is also delicious with this wine, as are cow and sheep-milk cheeses.” Again, though, we interpreted these suggestions rather liberally and decided to pair this lovely libation with an array of (practically) vegetarian Lidia dishes—Green Beans Genova-Style (*Fagiolini alla Genovese*) a Rice and Zucchini Crostata (*Torta di Riso e Zucchine*) and Stuffed Vegetables (*Ripieni all’Antica*).

And as we are wont to do (as a result of necessity, caution, fear or funding) we made a minor change to the green bean recipe, which called for six anchovy fillets. We currently eat anchovies on only the rarest of occasions and were hesitant to add that many, so we used only 2 or 3. The flavor was subtle but certainly still present and enjoyable. For the stuffed vegetables, Lidia suggests zucchini, colorful bell peppers, mushrooms, tomatoes and onions as viable contenders, but we used only red bell peppers, mushrooms and zucchini, opting to save the tomatoes and onions for next time. The crostata recipe we followed exactly.



These dishes were all delightful and made enough food to feed us both for most of the week. They also paired quite nicely with the Pigato. The green beans brought out some citrus flavors in the wine, while the stuffed veggies made the wine taste earthier and creamier. We can't wait for our next taste of Liguria!



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In the beginning, there was soup. (<https://formyitaliangrandparents.com/2018/03/05/in-the-beginning-there-was-soup/>)

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Finally, our Italian adventure officially began with our inaugural Ligurian meal. Our first bottle was the Riviera Ligure di Ponente Vermentino Terre Bianche 2016 from Moore Brothers. This wine had a very subtle nose—orange peel and thyme were the only real aromas we could pull out. On the palate, we thought it had a citrus or orange flavor that was not tart or sour. We tasted something herbal and maybe slightly bitter. Perhaps like peppery greens? The wine was very well-balanced and I thought it might be a good choice for someone who is primarily a red wine drinker (some folks in our wine club drink exclusively white or red so this is a possibility that's frequently on my radar, especially when thinking about what we might present to the group). This wine, too, had a salinity that reminded me a bit of a Retsina we'd tried at a Greek wine class at Collier's this summer. In fact, I think I have a habit of comparing any wine with a saline quality to Retsina as that's the first wine in which I can really remember encountering that flavor. This Vermentino is one of those wines that really opens up if you can give it a little time. Once it got to room temperature, it was much livelier than it was right out of the fridge. Somehow it seemed both softer and more vibrant at once. And bright! That exclamation point is not frivolous. The quality of brightness in this wine, which I'd be hard-pressed to cogently define, requires it. The flavors of the wine are now more distinct, with a more subdued citrus flavor, more grapefruit than orange.

As mentioned before, Moore Brothers does provide tasting notes upon checkout if you're interested. Although, truth be told, more often than not we open a bottle of wine and forget all about the tasting notes. That's okay by me, though, since I'd rather look at them afterwards than beforehand. Although this was not our first experience with Vermentino (we'd just recently enjoyed one from Sardinia, Villa Solais, that we discovered at Collier's) it

was our first encounter with Vermentino from Liguria. Of Vermentino the tasting sheet reveals: it is “A late ripening white grape with many local clonal variations that appears to be indigenous to Italy. It can produce richly textured wines when well farmed, with floral/citrus aromatics. Various ‘local’ clones include Nascetta in Piemonte, Pigato in Liguria, Rolle in France.” Out of curiosity we consulted the “Quick food pairing suggestions” section of the tasting sheet: “grilled, olive oil-laced seafood, whole-roasted fish, as well as pastas with diced tomato and herbs work very well with this wine. A simply roasted chicken is also delicious with this wine, as are cow and sheep-milk cheeses.” All of these options sounded enticing, but our meal nevertheless went a different direction—Lidia’s Ligurian Vegetable Soup recipe (*Zuppa di Verdure all’Agliata*), finished with a swirl of Ligurian olive oil and a generous sprinkling of parmesan cheese and served alongside Italian wheat bread, which was treated to a light spray of olive oil from the Misto and then grilled on both sides.



I think for many people soup may not seem like a very exciting meal. It’s so humble, really, but it’s a significant part of our regular diet. Less so in the summer, but we both think of soup as a meal in and of itself, rather than as a prelude to some bigger culinary event. I think soup may be categorized as peasant’s food, but we often eat like peasants, sometimes out of necessity but more often out of desire. The truth is that we don’t find that we need to eat extravagantly to feel we’re eating well (although I am not remotely averse to lavish and indulgent meals when I can make them happen). Even if we’re buying simple ingredients, we always try to get the best quality we can afford.

But back to this particular soup—it's amazing! Although it takes quite a long time to cook it's well worth the effort. It calls for a multitude of vegetables (onion, tomatoes, potatoes, chicory, spinach, porcini mushrooms, generous amounts of basil and parsley, garlic, peas, carrots and celery) but we found it to be easily adaptable. I don't know if chicory is more widely available in the tri-state area at other times of the year, but after visiting three stores and coming up empty-handed (rest assured, we didn't visit these stores just for the chicory—this is the adventurous path our food shopping takes us on many weekends) we decided to substitute kale. The recipe also called for six cups of water, but past experience has made me wary of relying on water to become more flavorful when added to soup so we went with half water, half chicken stock.

I would say I eat soup at least once a week, and this is honestly one of the best soups I have ever tasted. Hands down, it's definitely the best vegetable soup I've ever had. I cannot wait to make it again! The pairing with the wine is excellent, in no small part due to the pesto-like base that gives this soup such great flavor. Like the wine, the soup is bright and lively. I can't recommend this combination highly enough!

PS-Eric had not yet taken on the role of official blog photographer at the time that these pictures were taken. Should you, dear reader, notice a significant increase in picture quality as we continue our trek through Liguria it is entirely thanks to his skill in this arena.



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