

Verdicchio: A Great Italian White Wine Needs Some Love



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Jul 25, 2018, 09:00am • 1,367 views • #Food&Drink



Estate of Tenuta di Tavignano in the Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi zone PHOTO COURTESY OF TENUTA DI TAVIGNANO

Verdicchio, a dry white wine from the central Italian region of Marche, is one of the country's longest lived whites. It has been called Italy's best white wine by numerous writers, and it is also one of the finest values of any white anywhere in the world. Yet, you truly don't see many offerings of Verdicchio on retail shelves or wine lists in America or many countries.

I'll look at the reasons why this is so later, but first, let's examine the particulars of this truly original wine. Produced from the eponymous variety, Verdicchio is made in two zones in Marche. The best known of the two is Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, about 25 miles from the Adriatic Sea, on Italy's east coast, while the other territory is Verdicchio di Matelica, located much farther inland, south and east of Jesi.

Leopardo Felici of the Andrea Felici winery in the Jesi zone, notes the fresh winds from the east and the temperature shift from day to night as two principal factors as to why Verdicchio from Jesi offers such impressive overall harmony. At Tenuta di Tavignano, another Jesi producer, proprietor Ondine de la Feld also notes the climate as well as soil balance (a mixture of limestone and clay) for the structure of the wine; cool temperatures maintain lively acidity, resulting in excellent aging potential. “Verdicchio shows its best after aging, but never immediately. It is a lazy wine, which is an homage to slowness, because the wine can be better appreciated after a number of years.”



Vineyard at the Andrea Felici estate in the Castello di Jesi zone PHOTO © JEROME BANSELAER

If you visit Marche, be prepared for unspoiled beauty; this is the type of landscape that most tourists hope to see in many places in Italy, but seldom do. This is a green region in the truest sense of the word, and producers here are careful to maintain this natural approach to production of Verdicchio. Most examples are vinified without wood, with numerous examples being fermented and matured in cement tanks to highlight the varietal purity of Verdicchio. Perfumes of pear, melon and jasmine are common, as are floral notes of lilacs and magnolia; certainly the finest examples of Verdicchio are among the prettiest white wines from anywhere in the world.

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Examples of Verdicchio di Matelica are in this fragrant style, with perhaps a bit more of a subtle herbal character as compared to the Jesi wines. You just don't see many Matelica wines however, as the area is about one-tenth the size of Jesi, as Fabio Marchionni of Collestefano notes; the local farms are also quite small. Vineyards in Matelica are

generally situated at higher elevations than in Jesi (1300 to 1600 feet as opposed to 800 to 1000 feet on average), giving Matelica wines a bit more intensity. Marchionni states that his examples of Verdicchio di Matelica “have a positive evolution in the bottle for one or two years,” which seems a bit of a low estimate, but he does comment that in cooler vintages, such as 2014-2016, “the evolution is more significant,” thanks to higher acidity. Along with Collestefano, top examples of Verdicchio di Matelica include those from La Monacesca and Bisci, especially this latter producer’s superb Vigneto Fogliano offering from a single vineyard.

Generally the most complex versions – and often the ones with the greatest staying power – are the *riserva* examples of Verdicchio. From Jesi, look for the Villa Bucci (whose 2009 is drinking beautifully now), the Montecappone “Utopia” (the 2010 is exceptional now) as well as the “Misco” from Tavignano and the “Il Cantico della Figura” from Andrea Felici. The 2013 version from Felici is extremely rich with superb varietal character; it should be near its peak in another 10-12 years.

Yet, not every Verdicchio that ages well is a *riserva*, as exemplified by the “Cuprese” bottling from Colonnara, one of Jesi’s largest producers. Sourced from some of the highest vineyards in the Jesi zone, this wine in the best vintages can age for up to 20 years. Also consider the entry level bottlings from Tavignano, Andrea Felici, Villa Bucci and the Santa Barbara “Le Vaglie,” a wonderful value from this esteemed producer.

One other wine to consider is the “Plenio” Riserva from Umani Ronchi, a wine that unlike most Verdicchio, is partially fermented in oak barrels. Proprietor Michele Bernetti explains that “we wanted to bring some complexity to the wine ... wood allows a different evolution, keeping the nose fresh, and adding a more open, penetrating aroma.” Past vintages such as 2008 and 2010 are first-rate wines and are currently in excellent shape.

So with the aging potential, why doesn’t Verdicchio have a more visible profile? Perhaps more importantly, why doesn’t it sell better, given the reasonable pricing? Ondine de la Feld of Tavignano believes the pricing is too low. “It’s difficult to understand the value of a product if it is identified with a low cost. Low price often means low quality.” For Leopardo Felici, “until a few years ago, the main production of Verdicchio was in the hands of the cooperatives, who did not pay attention to quality, but only quantity. For Bernetti, “Verdicchio knowledge and the awareness of the great potential of this variety doesn’t depend only on producers. I think the whole territory needs to be better promoted.”

Yet there is some good news as far as Verdicchio sales from the top producers. De la Feld reports a 20% increase in sales of her Verdicchio since 2014, and she also notes that recent critical praise has brought more attention to the wines. For Felici, there has been “a new rediscovery in indigenous varieties, and sales have increased. Verdicchio is well received in restaurants all over the world.”

Highly recommended current releases of Verdicchio:

Andrea Felici Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Riserva “Il Cantico della Figura” 2013 - Outstanding

Beautiful aromas of lemongrass, melon and almond. Excellent complexity and outstanding varietal purity. Seamless and delicious, with brilliant harmony and a distinct note of minerality. One of the area's greatest producers. Enjoy over the next 10-12 years.

Bisci Verdicchio di Matelica “Vigneto Fogliano” 2015 - Outstanding

Expressive aromas of lemon oil, jasmine and orange blossom. Excellent complexity, beautiful texture and a long finish with excellent persistence. Structured for 7-10 years of enjoyment.

Tenuta di Tavignano Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi “Misco” 2016 - Excellent

Aromas of golden apple, orange zest and a touch of honey. Medium-bodied, very good persistence and acidity. Beautiful harmony – seamless finish. A super consistent Verdicchio producer. 5-7 years.

Garofoli Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Superiore “Podium” 2015 - Excellent

Aromas of hibiscus, pear, thyme and tarragon. Medium-full with beautiful texture, impressive persistence, very good acidity and complexity. Lovely harmony. Enjoy over the next 5-7 years.

Umani Ronchi Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Riserva “Plenio” 2013 - Excellent

Intense aromas of Anjou pear, lilacs and lemon oil. Ripe and lush with excellent depth of fruit and persistence. Very good acidity and persistence, this is a rich Verdicchio that will drink well for 5-7 years, perhaps longer.

Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica 2016 - Excellent

Bosc pear, dried yellow flower and delicate grassy aromas. Good acidity, impressive persistence and notable harmony. Elegant, well-structured finish. 3-5 years.

Text © Tom Hyland

I am a Chicago-based wine writer, educator and photographer, with 37 years of experience in the wine industry. For the past 20 years, I have been a freelancer, writing professionally about wines from around the world, based on visits to wine regions from Napa Valley to Champ... MORE