



comunicazione

Forbes

FORBES > LIFESTYLE > SPIRITS

Why Grignolino Should Be Your Next Dinner Party Wine

Paul Caputo Contributor ☉

Writing about wine, spirits and related travel and hospitality.



Drone footage of Rosignano Monferrato. Monferrato (AL), Piemonte, Italy. CASTELLO DI UVIGLIE

With drinking trends drifting towards lighter, fresher wines and interest surging in little known grape varieties, the stage may be set for Grignolino to re-appear and have its moment in the spotlight. Traditionally grown in Italy's Northern Piedmont region, but also in the U.S., it gives pale coloured red wines with pronounced notes of wild herb, spice and red berry fruit. High levels of tannin, and a history of uneven ripening, have meant the grape has struggled for popularity over recent decades, but, is it now poised to capture the hearts of wine lovers around the world? With quality improving and consumers on the lookout for something new, can producers spot the opportunity and position Grignolino to the right crowd?



comunicazione

Once fashionable in the royal courts of Savoie, it gradually fell out of favour. Social and economic turbulence in the early 20th century exacerbated the decline, culminating with a real doldrums period in the 1970s and 80s, when riper, sweeter wines became the market's preference. As Nebbiolo prospered in the wake of great wines from Barolo and Barbaresco, Barbera quickly became the secondary red variety of the region, preferred for its body, power and black fruit qualities. Yet with savvy global consumers looking for wines with lower alcohol, and more inclined to appreciate delicate, subtle flavour profiles, Grignolino may well have another chance of making a name for itself.

Grignolino has been cultivated in Piedmont for centuries. It spread throughout the provinces of Asti and Alessandria in the 13th century and was admired for its faint colour, and bright strawberry flavours. Today it is permitted in a number of varietal wines within the Piemonte DOC appellation, but its two key expressions can be found labelled as either Grignolino d'Asti DOC, where the variety is generally planted in sandy soils, or Grignolino del Monferrato Casalese DOC an area of rolling hills that boasts UNESCO protected status. Although there are slight differences in terroir, Grignolino's inherent personality comes through consistently.

In the glass it gives a light, pale colour, not too dissimilar from Nebbiolo or even Pinot Noir, with distinctive floral and herbal aromas. Rose, sage, and mint are common, alongside strawberry, raspberry and cranberry, but the wines can also reveal a range of spices. Generally medium bodied, they have plenty of chewy tannin and prominent acidity. There is a versatility to them also, with many seeing Grignolino as a summer time wine, chilling it, and serving it alongside summer lunches.

Of course, there is a reason why it has faded from the conversation. Often cited as a challenging variety to cultivate, its compact bunches require steeper hillsides with plenty of exposure to sunlight and ventilation. These sites were often dedicated to other, more lucrative grapes. While susceptible to rot, its compact nature accounts for its tendency to ripen unevenly. Mario Ronco, winemaker at Vicara acknowledges "Grignolino is a fairly vigorous plant that requires the best soil and warm exposures. Especially in its youth it has a ripening discrepancy between the bunches of the same vine."

These days though growers are more relaxed on how to extract the best out of it. Giacomo Bologna, of the famed Braida estate, notes "today, mostly thanks to the care of the winemakers, Grignolino no longer has this ripening problem, if the quantities of fruit per plant are correct". Ronco agrees, "a good practice is to regulate production with summer thinning, the management of the foliage must be careful and precise".