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Italian
Winery of the Month



Vignalta & Other Adventures of Lucio Gomiero



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Vignalta

Lucio Gomiero's narrative is different from those that normally unfold in these pages, no family castles, no countless generations of wine makers or grape growers, not even the rich man's story about an entrepreneur who decides to explore a romantic version of agriculture and a different type of capital investment. Instead, Lucio Gomiero's foray into winemaking sounds more American than Italian. He pursued opportunity, almost whimsically, wherever it took him, and it took him to two totally different places. He successfully planted grape vines in the Colli Euganei where few had done so before and cultivated radicchio in California where no one had succeeded before.

In his early 50s, Lucio is soft spoken and seemingly relaxed. An architect by education, he planted a few hobby vines around his family's country house in the Colli Euganei, a hilly area beyond Venice that was created by volcanic eruptions

30 million years ago. Around the same time, his father who owned an import-export company, was receiving daily requests from the U.S. for radicchio, the wine-red lettuce that adds color to salad mixes and is extensively farmed in the Veneto. If there was a growing radicchio market here, they reasoned that it made more sense to grow it in the U.S. rather than to ship it from Italy. Lucio and friend Carlo Boscolo, whose family grew radicchio in the Veneto, came here to explore the idea.

In 1987, they planted their first radicchio field. Today, Lucio Gomiero is known in the United States as the "King of Radicchio," the largest grower of the crop in the world with 7,200 acres in production in the Salinas Valley and Oxnard in California and more recently in Florida.

At home in the Colli Euganei, Lucio founded Vignalta together with partner Graziano Cardin in 1980 after harvest

See **WINERIES** inside

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WINES OF THE MONTH



ARTISAN SERIES

Vignalta

2007 Venda

Named for Mount Venda, the wine was made from grapes that grow at a 2,000 foot elevation, the highest vineyard in the Colli Euganei. The wine is mostly Merlot but with a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon to give it more body. Elegant and fruity, the Venda has fine mineral notes and bright color and will pair gracefully with both grilled white and red meats, a delicious warm-weather red.

Secco Bianco

The Secco Bianco is not part of the Vignalta portfolio but instead is owned by Sorelle Casa, a company founded by two sisters Ginevra and Olivia Casa, who make just two sparkling wines, the Bianco and Rosa. The Bianco is a blend of 40% Pinot Bianco and 60% Glara, the grape variety used for wines made in the Prosecco appellations in the Veneto region. This sparkling Bianco is entirely dry with crisp notes of flowers, apples, and peaches. Serve chilled with appetizers such as olives, nuts, soft cheeses, and smoked salmon but also with Asian and Indian dishes.

WINEMAKER SERIES

Vignalta

2006 Rosso Riserva

The Rosso Riserva is a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. These bordeaux varietals were introduced in the Colli Euganei and other parts of Italy at the end of the 19th Century after the phylloxera epidemic wiped out vineyards throughout Europe. A catastrophe of that magnitude often opens the doors to new ideas as it did in California in the late 1980s when phylloxera struck there. The 2006 Rosso Riserva is a true expression of the Colli Euganei terroir, a balance between rich fruit flavors and tannins that have softened in the bottle over a five year period. Serve at cool room temperature

Vignalta

2007 Agno Tinto

The Agno Tinto is made primarily from Petite Sirah with a small percentage of local Italian varieties, Marzemino among them. Vignalta owner Lucio Gomiero brought Petite Sirah cuttings from Ridge Geyserville to his Colli Euganei vineyard where they are currently the only Petite Sirah vines in Italy. He named the wine Agno Tinto after a 500 year-old plant, Agnus Castus that finally died in the Orto Botanico in Padova, the oldest botanical garden in the world in its original location, covering 22,000 square meters and founded by the Senate of the Venetian Republic

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ing more grapes and making more wine than he could consume or give to friends. Over time, he continued to plant vines, among them Petite Sirah, for which Lucio developed an enthusiasm here in California. The grape varietal came originally from the Rhone Region of France but did poorly there while it flourished here. Today, Petite Sirah is a uniquely Californian wine, at least until Lucio Gomiero began to successfully plant the grape varietal on the Colli Euganei hills.

Today, Lucio has 55 hectares (123 acres) of vineyards planted on most of the south facing slopes of the Colli Euganei and has the largest production winery there since grape growing, other than for personal consumption, is relatively

new to the area. The Veneto has always been dominated by the Valpolicella, Amarone, Soave, and more recently the Prosecco zones. Lucio produces a modest 20,000 cases a year and since 1998 has won Gambero Rosso's highest *Tre Bicchieri* award six times for his Gemola, a Merlot-Cabernet Franc blend, the Rosso Arqua` Merlot, and the Cabernet Riserva, which he releases every ten years. Italy's foremost wine-rating journal Gambero Rosso writes, "The winery style is a delicate compromise of the rich features offered by the volcanic hill terrain and the elegance typical of great wines." The winemaker is Michele Montecchio, assisted by consulting winemaker Francesco Polastri.

WINES OF THE MONTH

COLLECTOR SERIES

Vignalta 2006 Gemola

The Gemola or “little gem among other hills” describes the Gemola Vineyard where the grapes were harvested, surrounded by olive groves and meadows below, with rich volcanic soils that produce exceptional grapes. Mostly Merlot, Vignalta’s flagship wine has a small percentage of Cabernet Franc. The wine has won multiple *Tre Bicchieri* awards from wine rating board Gambero Rosso. With rich Bordeaux fruit flavor and fine structure, the wine is best paired with game and roasted or grilled red meat.

lic in 1545. In other words, Lucio has brought back to life the Petite Sirah that had died in Europe. He changed his original name for the wine from Agno Casto to Agno Tinto because *Casto* means chaste, pure, or white and suggests a white wine whereas *Tinto* means “colored.” Lucio subsequently made an Agno Casto from white Pinot Bianco grapes. Lucio describes the Agno Tinto as “an iron hand in a velvet glove” because the wine has warm notes of raspberry, blackberry, and spice but also solid tannins. Serve with grilled red meats.

Vignalta 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon Riserva

Vignalta focuses on Merlot but releases this Cabernet Riserva only during the best vintages and usually after a ten-year period of aging time in barrel and bottle. Thomas Keller from the famed French Laundry in Napa, usually named as one of the 50 best restaurants in the world, chose the Vignalta Cabernet Sauvignon Riserva for his wine list. The Cabernet Riserva displays dark color and an austere nose with mineral scents, cocoa, and tobacco. The spicy palate displays an impressive concentration of dark berry flavor, and the tannin texture is tight but smooth. Lucio Gomiero describes the wine as the “younger brother” of the 1990 Cabernet Riserva, the last release, and promises that both wines will benefit from prolonged aging and will surprise the drinker for years to come.



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REGION OF THE MONTH



V E N E T O

Venezia, a city built into the sea, is like no other, haunted by the princes and poets of its noble past and by centuries of tourists. The cities of Padova, Vicenza, and Verona, originally frontier posts on the Roman trade route between Venezia and Genova, grew into Renaissance splendor and are marvels in their own right. In the 16th Century, the region's great architect Andrea Palladio worked throughout the area and his buildings are everywhere, in the cities and in the countryside. Nature exhibits its own marvels in the region, the spectacular Dolomite Mountains in the north, the rolling

Euganean hills in the south, vast Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake, on the eastern border, and to the west, the Adriatic with its beaches and ports.

Today, Veneto is a thriving agricultural center, a lush land of vines, ranking third after Apulia and Sicily in wine volume but the first with classified DOC wines. There are three general areas of premium production: the western province of Verona in the hills between Lake Garda and the town of Soave, the central hills in the prov-

inces of Vicenza, Padova, and Treviso, and the eastern plains of the Piave and Tagliamento river basins along the Adriatic coast northeast of Venezia.

Verona is the leader in classified DOC wines and the site of Vinitaly, the largest wine trade fair in the world. A major part of the DOC wines in the region are Soave, Bardolino, and Valpolicella, a blend of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. When young, Valpolicella is a full, fruity red, but when the grapes are partly dried, they are made into Amarone, one of Italy's most noble wines. Bardolino is made from the same grapes as Valpolicella but is a lighter version. Similar to Soave, Bianco di Custoza is another DOC white as is Lessini Durello, a steely dry wine, usually sparkling.

The central hills produce whites similar to Soave as well as Tocai, the Pinots, Merlot, and Cabernet. Prosecco, a dry to lightly sweet white, is produced in the area as is the renowned Venegazzu, both usually sparkling.

The eastern plains have been dominated by Merlot and Cabernet Franc for decades, but the local red Raboso and white Verduzzo still have admirers. Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon, and Chardonnay are also gaining ground.



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