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Archive for July 28th, 2010 [The Best Italian White You've Never Tried](#)



I love the style and scope of Italian white wines, especially the gorgeous aromatics of the best bottlings from Friuli, Alto Adige and Campania. These are the best known whites in the country, but there are some gems I love that are produced in small quantities, so their fame is minimal. I'm thinking here of Pecorino from Marche and Abruzzo as well as Erbaluce from Piemonte or the occasional Fiano from Sicily (Planeta) or Falanghina from Puglia (Alberto Longo).

A few years ago on a visit to Bolgheri, along Tuscany's west coast, I discovered the white wine from **Guado al Melo**, an excellent small estate in this famous red wine district. Like several properties here, the winery grows Vermentino, a white variety that is seen along the coast, both here and on the island of Sardinia. Most examples are made without any oak aging, so as to preserve the pine and pear aromas; the perfumes are a trademark of this wine along with its vibrant acidity. Most are fairly straightforward in their approach, with an appealing freshness along with a bite of saltiness in the finish, no doubt a result of the plantings near the sea.

Of the examples of Vermentino from Bolgheri, the most intriguing for me is the Bianco from Guado al Melo. The trick here is the addition of a variety rarely seen in Italy, Petit Manseng. Grown primarily in southwestern France, Petit Manseng is a white mutation of Manseng Noir; thus it is also known as Manseng Blanc. The aromatics of this variety – quince and apricot – are among the reasons that owner Michele Scienza planted this variety. Son of famed Italian viticultural historian Attilio Scienza, Michele has more than 30 varieties planted at his Guado al Melo estate.



The blend for the Guado al Melo Bianco is usually around 90% Vermentino and 10% Petit Manseng; the latter variety adds complexity and a bit of texture and rounds out the palate. It is very appealing in its youth, but thanks to the excellent acidity of the Vermentino, it ages well. I recently tasted the 2002 vintage (actually a fine vintage in Bolgheri, despite being below average in most of Tuscany) and it displayed lovely freshness and complexity. This may be an exotic white, but there is a nice earthiness in the older bottlings. In its youth, I'd recommend it with Asian cuisine, but as it ages, it becomes a more appropriate partner with veal or lighter game – it's a serious white wine and proof of the ongoing need by the country's finest producers to craft new styles and new wines.