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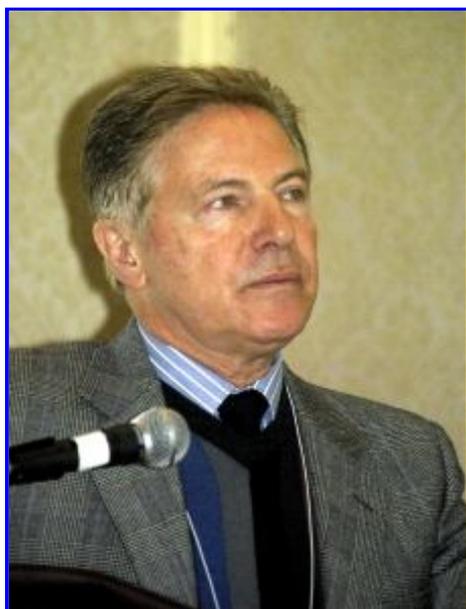
  

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### Tuscany's Viticultural Coast

*February 9, 2010*

Last week at VINO 2010 in New York City, I attended several seminars, ranging from the wines of Calabria to one featuring wines from Sardegna made from the Cannonau grape. For this post, I'd like to focus on the seminar about the wines of Tuscany's western coast.



**Piero Selvaggio of Valentino Restaurant moderated the seminar on the wines of Morellino di Scansano and Bolgheri (Photo ©Tom Hyland)**

Led by Piero Selvaggio, the gracious owner of Valentino Restaurant in Santa Monica, CA (as well as Las Vegas), this tasting and seminar dealt with the wines of two separate zones in western Tuscany; Morellino di Scansano to the south and further north, the famous territory of Bolgheri.

The wines from these areas are quite different in nature. Morellino di Scansano is made primarily from Sangiovese, while Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc are the main types used in Bolgheri. Professor Attilio Scienza, arguably Italy's most knowledgeable authority on indigenous Italian varieties (his last name in Italian fittingly translates as "science") spoke about the soils of these lands and why particular varieties were well suited to specific zones. He also asked all of us to note the youth of the producers who were present to speak about their wines. These young vintners, armed with the knowledge of their parents and grandparents, are forging new paths in Tuscan viticulture.

The wines of Morellino di Scansano (Morellino, or “little cherry” is the synonym for Sangiovese here) can be quite traditional, made with 100% Sangiovese and aged in large oak casks or they can be quite modern in their approach, often blended with small percentages of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot or Alicante, a variety that adds very deep purple, almost black color to the wine. The wines selected for this seminar were primarily traditional in style; my favorites were the 2005 Villa Patrizia “Le Valentane” and the 2008 Celestina Fé. The former offers black cherry and tar notes with a lightly spicy finish and should drink well for another 3-5 years. The latter is a wine meant for earlier consumption (2-3 years), but one that shows remarkable subtlety, finesse and elegance. There are lovely strawberry and red currant flavors with silky tannins, subtle wood notes and lively acidity. I love wines like this, which display not only beautiful varietal character, but also a gentle hand of the winemaker.

I've written [previously](#) about Bolgheri; this seminar showcased some of the area's lesser-known producers. These estates, such as Guado al Melo, Batzella and Poggio alle Querce may never be as famous as Ornellaia or Tenuta San Guido (Sassicaia), but they are first-rate and display the excellent to outstanding quality of this zone. My favorite wine of this seminar was the 2006 Guado al Melo Bolgheri Superiore, which is produced from 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc and 10% Merlot. Medium-full with flavors of marascino cherry and black currant, this is impeccably balanced and has the structure to age for 10-12 years and perhaps even longer. It is an excellent, almost textbook example of what a top notch Bolgheri red is all about. This estate, incidentally, is run by Michele Scienza, the son of Attilio.



**Michele Scienza, Guado al Melo** (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

Selvaggio made an important point; that despite the use of Bordeaux varieties, these wines had a Tuscan character. I agree and I believe a major reason for this is the fact that the vineyards are so close to the sea – usually 3-7 miles – which moderates temperatures and preserves acidity.

This was an excellent look at one of Tuscany's newest viticultural chapters and I want to thank the Italian Trade Commission, BuonItalia and the producers for making this event so memorable!

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