

There Are No Sick Bees Here



I have been back in Texas less than a week. During the first half of November, I visited six regions in Northern Italy. These were wine producing areas that were mountainous. There was usually a temperate valley included, for the grapes. We visited wine producing areas such as the Valle d'Aosta, Valle de la Roya, Valtellina, Valpolicella and the Valle Isarco.

Today I worked in my garden. It is past mid November and the figs on the trees are ripe, the basil is still growing and I harvested a 5 pound cucuzza squash. There are dozens of baby cucuzzas that probably won't survive the coming cold spell later this week. The oregano and the rosemary will, though.

I don't know how to go about telling stories about the wine valleys we visited. They were intense visits, lots of climbing and probably too many appointments. But what diversity there is between the regions. Is this Italy? Happy to report, it is, although it will be difficult to find many of the wines, and the food to go with it, in Italian restaurants here in the US.



One place that captured my heart was Airole in Liguria. Positioned in the Italian Riviera, this is a little known area, but what a treasure. Stark landscapes, dramatic inclines, awesome vistas, heroic spirit of place. On the trip into Liguria, and specifically to Airole, we had an appointment with Dino Masala, whose [A Trincea](#) property makes a wonderful olive oil from the Taggiasca olive. The oil is a dense, prehistoric kind of primordial slime that is worth fighting over. Brilliant yellow, cloudy, dense and desirable. If an olive oil can be sexual, the oil from Liguria is a symbol of that kind of sensual quality one normally associates with a person. It is an elixir, a medicine, an antidote, a vitamin, mineral and vegetable, a full meal and an anointing potion.



Dino Masala charges €18 Euro for a 1 Liter bottle of his oil. That's precious enough. He also makes a variety of white and red wines, but it is his signature wine called Roccese that was one of the most interesting finds of the trip. Made mostly with the famous Rossese of Dolceacqua and blended with other indigenous grapes of the area. That could mean Italian or French varieties, as we straddled the two worlds on these mountaintops, shared between vines and olives, thyme and ruta. The wine is this rich, fleshy, ride in the back seat of a '55 Chevy - smooth, comfy and pleasurable.



Dino Masala is a man with a tan from working on his land, not from a

tanning machine or a bottle. He is less about the wine and more about the land. Here is a man who, when he puts his head on a pillow, sleeps so soundly, so deep, that when he awakes, resurrects himself everyday as a new man. An entrepreneur who has made several fortunes, but who sees his bees and his vines and his mules as his real wealth. As we were walking though his property, which looks and feels like something out of Cervantes and the [Douro](#), the bees were buzzing so loudly as to be the dominant hum of the world around us. "There are no sick bees here," Dino remarked as we walked through a wall of the busy little creatures, intent upon gathering as much of the precious nectar that they could find, or steal. Yes, the air was filled with the sound of bees with the music of Leonard Cohen playing in the valley below.



Maybe it is just that I haven't been here that much. For me Liguria is a wonderful find. It is rustic and wild, far from cities and frescoes. It is a wild side of Italy. At the end of the day I smelled like a bouquet of herbs - ruta, thyme and rosemary. From the top of A Trincea I remarked to Dino that his place is the Macchu Picchu of Italy. He nodded, as if that hadn't been the first time someone had said that to him. To the old Roman bones inside this soldier of the vines, it was like coming home.



The Macchu Picchu of Italy

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