

Savoring Soave

Charles Scicolone (May 30, 2010)



Soave: One of Italy's Great Terroir Based Wines

Recently I was invited to a PR event that included an invitation to a NY Knicks game at Madison Square Garden. After the event I was told that they had run out of tickets but to make up for it they would send me on a press trip to Soave!

I have been drinking Soave for over 30 years and it is a lovely area and town. I always wanted to spend more time there, so I said yes. Before leaving, I was told that a surprise would await me in Soave, but no one would tell me what it was.

I was picked up at the airport in Venice by Giovanni Ponchia who was to be our guide through the



vineyards and wineries of Soave. Giovanni is an enologist who works for the [Consorzio Tutela Soave](#) [2], who hosted this trip. The Consorzio was established in 1970 to protect and promote Soave. Giovanni is interesting, knowledgeable and passionate when he speaks about Soave and our group of journalists agreed that having him with us was a great help. He took us to his favorite restaurant Riondo in Monteforte d'Alpone. We had culatello topped with radicchio, parmigiano reggiano and olive oil and perfectly cooked risotto with white asparagus. The wine was Soave and it was the perfect combination to these dishes.

Giovanni by use of slides and maps gave us an excellent introduction to the Soave area and its wines.

The Soave production zone lies in the eastern part of the Province of Verona in the region of the Veneto. The production zone is of volcanic origin and the hills where the vineyards are planted have rocky strata that are a result of lava flows that turned into sediment over time. The soil is dark, stony and rich in minerals. There is a difference between the soil of the hills and the soil of the flat lands. Soave is one of Italy's great terroir-based wines.

Soave is a relatively small concentrated area and it has a history of selling grapes outside of the region. There are some 3,000 growers and the DOC is the largest in the province of Verona accounting for 40% of the production. There are 52 crus in the zone and like Barolo one cru can be worked by different producers. The vineyards are so close together that they all "spray" at the same time.

The grapes are the same for Soave DOC, Soave Classico DOC, and Soave Superiore DOCG., Soave DOC, Colli Scaliger, and Reciotto di Soave.

Garganega is the primary grape and Soave must contain at least 70% of it. The other 30% is made up of Trebbiano di Soave, Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco (Trebbiano Toscano has been excluded). The better producers use 100% Garganega, or very close to it. There does not seem to be much Chardonnay or Pinot Bianco used. Trebbiano di Soave seems to be the new favorite, but this is a matter of controversy. One producer, Ca' Rugate, next year will add Trebbiano di Soave because they felt it would make one of their wines a little different.

Garganega is the fifth most planted white grape in Italy and may be related to the Grecanico grape of Sicily. Many of the wine makers said it is not markedly aromatic in nature, but displays a range of perfumes of which almonds and white flowers are the most clearly identifiable. It does not actually complete its ripening until October. Its skin is very tough and is a particularly deep yellow (verging on red) when ripe. It does not display especially high acidity but rather a balance of extract and fruit sugars.

Trebbiano di Soave has traditionally always been present in the vineyards. It has a tangy liveliness that some wine makers feel blends well with the typical structure and density of the Garganega grape.

We spent a lot of time in the vineyards looking at the vines and the way in which they are trained. The training system for the vines is very interesting. It can be single or double Espalier Guyot and Cordon Spur or a Pergola (known as Tendonne in the South). The vines grow on trellises and the leaves cover and protect the grapes from the sun. It can be a unilateral Pergola, or uni- or bi-lateral pergoledda Veronese- Veronese Pergola. This Pergola does not close all the way in the middle allowing some sun light to come through. This is the method used on flat land even at high elevation. The Veronese Pergola is again becoming popular among the producers. Many were very proud of this system and talked about it everywhere we went. No matter what the training system, there can be no less than 3,300 vines per hectare.

The agronomist of [Cantina di Soave](#) [3] said that in very hot years they would use the grapes grown under the Pergola for their best wines. In cool years, lacking sun they would use the grapes from the Espalier vineyards.

Soave wine is split up according to the production regulations between Soave DOC, grapes grown outside the Classical zone, Soave Classico DOC, Soave Superiore DOCG, Recioto di Soave DOCG and Soave Colli Scaligeri DOC, grapes grown in the hills outside the Classical zone.

Soave DOC grapes grown outside the Classical zone make a very refreshing wine that should be drunk within a year or two. It is usually vinified in stainless steel which gives it the floral and fruity notes.

Soave Classico DOC is a wine that comes from restricted zone between the hills of the communes of Soave and Monteforte d'Alpone. This is the oldest original classical zone and the wines must be harvested and vinified there. It is a complex wine with mineral notes and floral and fruity character depending upon the soil in which the grapes are grown. When it is aged in barrels (Barriques or Botti) it can last for a number of years. This was demonstrated by the number of older vintages that we tasted and how well they have stood the test of time. There were two that were particularly impressive. The Soave Superiore Classico "Foscarin Slavinis 2004 from Monte Tondo and the incredible 1990 Soave Classico "La Frosca" from Gini

Soave Spumante DOC. This is a very interesting sparkling wine but we did not taste any examples of it. The few that we did try were very good. Vinification can be by Method Classico or the Charmat method.

Soave DOC Colli Scaligeri derived from grapes grown in the hilly area outside the Classical Zone.

Soave Superiore DOCG The production zone is limited to the hillsides in the Classical zone and in the Colli Scaligeri. New vines must be trained using the Espallier system (Guyot and Cordon Spur) with at least 4,000 vines per hectare. For those vines planted before 2002 the Espallier, Pergola Incline and Pergoletta Veronese (mono or bilateral) are allowed. It must have an alcohol level of 12% and 12.5 % for the riserva. Soave DOCG may be released on to the market only after 1st September of the year following the harvest and after bottle ageing of at least three months so as to emphasize characteristics of maturity and complexity. Wines aged a minimum of two years may be labelled as "Riserva".

Lucia Sabatini from Cantina di Soave explained the quality difference by use of a pyramid.

There is a natural and logical pyramid of quality that the rules for Soave are very much intended to reiterate. So at the top of the pyramid, we have Soave Superiore D.O.C.G., a true synthesis of selection and strict production methods, designed to be the upmost expression of quality. Then just below, there is Soave from the hillside sites, both in the Classico version (if obtained from grapes grown in the historic production area) and that from the Colli Scaligeri. At the base of the pyramid we have Soave D.O.C., which stands for its excellent price-quality ratio.

Recioto di Soave DOCG In 1998 this was the first Veneto wine to receive the DOCG.

In the Veronese, dialect the word Recioto derives from "recia", the upper part of the bunch of Garganega grapes which is exposed to the most sunlight and therefore richest in sugar. Just before the harvest, a selection is made of the best bunches which are laid out on racks to dry. They are dried indoors in open plastic containers for from four to six months and lose over 50% of their moisture. In the past straw mats were used. A long, slow fermentation often takes place in small barrels in which the opening on top is closed with cement. At the Ca'Rugate winery the year the wine is put in the barrel is written in the cement.

Arturo Stocchetti, a Recioto specialist of Cantina di Soave, makes three different Reciotos. One of them I have waited many years to taste and when I did I was not disappointed. More on this wine in



Part II and my adventures in Soave, visits to the vinyards, the crus, wineries, tastings and how I became "CAPITANO SPADARINO" delle terre di Suavia(my surprise).

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