

Alto Adige: Bites of Stories and the Flavor of the Dolomites

Benedetta Grasso (June 30, 2010)



At Clo's Wine Bar on June 23rd 2010 the border Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige was celebrated through a tasting of regional products that can also be bought in New York, at Di Palo Fine Foods. Event sponsored by the Italian Trade Commission, EOS (Export Organization Südtirol) and the Italian Ministry of Economic Development

A sleek glass table, long and surrounded by elegant and classy stools. A dashing and yet cozy wine bar ([Clo's Wine Bar](#) [2]) on the 4th floor of the famous Time Warner building at the center of Columbus Circle in New York. On the table a few simple items, placed in front of every seat: five glasses of wine with their names and origin aptly written on the table mat; a small white plate with samplings of different cheeses alternated to various kinds and cuts of speck.

All around, in dimly lit modern-looking glass cells, bottles of a huge variety of wines are stored, with silvery spouts under which a glass can be placed to enjoy the results of these fine vintages.



While tasting a small piece of cheese, a sweet and spicy bite of a product made in far away mountains, one can see the contrast between a setting of almost perfect beauty and the rough, simple pleasures of life: this contrast is also perfectly captured by the Alto Adige area in the North-East of Italy.

In Trentino-Alto Adige the nature around you is spectacular: the Dolomites with their white crests of snow and the shade of rose that tinges them every dusk, the perfect mountain-like architecture of the wooden chalets, houses and hotels with decorated windows, roofs white in the winter and shiny and silvery in the summer. These mountains and the area around them has been preserved incredibly well: there are still plenty of animals and trees species that are unique to this location and the paths and walks around the hills and mountains seem like a painted landscape. The rivers and falls seem to be placed perfectly where they have to be. In the summer the green pastures and the colorful flowers cover up all the white and brown of the winter and surround the stones and the shiny rocks.

Alto Adige, which welcomes thousands of tourists every year, still maintains though a very basic life-style. Although launched into modernity, most people living there are still following the way of life of their ancestors, the agricultural and farming traditions of centuries ago. They are still in touch with the land, the original products, the natural way of making something but their specialties and brands have reached out around the world and sometimes can be seen in gourmet menus or in stores on the other side of the globe.

One of these stores is [Di Palo Fine Foods](#) [3], in the heart of Little Italy, New York, where constant efforts to bring the best and authentic Made in Italy products has turned this store in an affordable and unique food shopping experience.

Fourth generation of an Italian-American family, Lou Di Palo has traveled many times to Italy, getting to know the territory, its big companies or small farms, meeting people and trying new tasting experience, exploring the land. He can very eloquently tell you a story about one of these trips but, more important, he can tell you a story behind every product he sells: he makes it a priority to explain not only the origin, but the history, sometimes the legends or personal stories behind a piece of cheese.

He perfectly contextualizes every product for his American clients, as his very personal "Italian American point of view" perfectly combines with a strong knowledge of modern Italian culture, terms and traditional and modern way of life.

Thus, celebrating Trentino-Alto Adige through an event sponsored by the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [4], [EOS](#) [5] (Export Organization Südtirol) and the [Italian Ministry of Economic Development](#) [6] was a much more complete and enjoyable experience with Lou DiPalo hosting the event.

The guests, in fact, were invited to sit back and guided through each single bite, slowly and carefully. As an example, Lou gave precise instructions on how to taste the Asiago cheese and the wines to which it can be and was paired. The small cuts of speck brought other stories to his mind, and he described for us the physical feeling of flavors and images that came with those memories. Eating together should always be about sharing past experiences, ideas and laugh. Hearing about the beauty of seeing a cow giving birth or the legends behind the famous rosy color of the Dolomites, can actually stimulate the five senses all at once.

Trentino-Alto Adige is a border region. The "Alto Adige" part on which this event focused is also called South Tyrol and confines with Austria to the north and Switzerland to the north-west.

The languages spoken are both Italian and German but also a local dialect, which comes from a mix of both, and the ancient idiom called ladino that is spoken only in few communities.

A well-known vacation spot for Italians (and not only) during the winter, it offers one of the best skiing experience in the world, with hundreds of ski resorts, slopes and endless opportunities for snow sports. On a snowy day, most of its cities, sometimes built in the Middle Ages or even centuries before, look like a fairytale landscape.



When the snow goes away, the sun beats down on the rivers, the small lakes and the grass as families and tourists hike or enjoy the pure mountain air.

Being an area always contended between Italians, Austrians and Germans its identity is still nowadays very complex to define. The new generation feels Italian but the previous one might still try to identify itself in an autonomous community, somehow independent both from Austria and Italy. However, as Lou Di Palo beautifully said, you can get the best of both worlds by combining their best ingredients. It happens just this with speck that is a variation on the sweet and tender Italian prosciutto, but has elements of the smoked and more tough Northern European ham.

Food is central in this area and after a long day of skiing or walking there's nothing you will crave more than some cheese with spicy honey, speck on rye bread and a glass of red wine...

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