

## Ottimista Enoteca-Cafe Newsletter

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Ciao Melissa,

Today, on the vernal equinox, the world officially celebrates the Rite of Spring. Yet in San Francisco we awoke to yet another soggy day, wondering if this marathon rainy season would ever end. Despite the indecisive weather of late, there does seem to be a hint of exuberance in the air - especially evident on those stolen sunny weekends, when Ottimista's patio fills quickly with groups of friends, dogs and many glasses of white wine.

And on Sunday afternoons, it's also been the place to *parle italiano* with your vino at our the weekly Italian language & wine tasting class. We apologize that we haven't been able to accommodate everybody who has expressed interest, but are happy to report that there will be many more opportunities moving forward, as Italian classes will now be a regular Sunday afternoon event at Ottimista. See the event calendar for upcoming dates and themes, as well as information about other events we've added.

At the beginning of April Jerad and I head to Verona, Italy, for the annual VinItaly wine fair and visits with several producers in the Piedmont region. You'll notice a short gap in wine event programming (except the Italian lessons & Vino series). But our adventure should inspire some great food and wine offerings, as well as some fun new educational events next month. Look for a full report in May.

*Ci vediamo presto!*  
Melissa

### Catering from Ottimista

Hosting a party at home, and wish you could serve Ottimista's olives, pizzas, crostini and ricotta doughnuts? Now you can. Our entire menu, plus an extended selection of wine-friendly finger foods, is available for order for private parties. We'll work with your budget to develop a menu, and can even deliver within San Francisco. For more information, please contact [melissa@ottimistasf.com](mailto:melissa@ottimistasf.com).

### Upcoming Events



*All events will be held on Ottimista's front patio. Tasting, educational materials and small bites are included. Attendees also receive 10% off wine bottle purchases the day of the event. To sign up for events, please email [melissa@ottimistasf.com](mailto:melissa@ottimistasf.com) or call 415.674.8400. Credit card required for class registration. Cancellations must be made 72 hours in advance.*

**Tuesday, March 21st 6-7:15pm**  
**Wine Pairing: Amarone & Cheese**

Experience a decadent treat, and join Wine Director Jerad Ruhl for a casual, fun way to learn more about Italy's big, rich red, Amarone, and how it pairs with the hearty cheeses of the Veneto and Lombardy regions. We'll start with a 20-minute lecture on what makes Amarone unique, followed by a tasting of 3-4 Amarones with cheese pairings.

Cost: \$40 per person.

*Always wanted to learn Italian, the language of amore? Want to spend Sunday afternoons on a sunny patio drinking wine? You can do both at Ottimista, since we've continued our popular **Italian lessons & Vino** series through the spring. Join Timothy Morzenti, native of Bergamo, Italy and Italian language tutor, for a one-hour lecture and conversation practice followed by 30 minutes of wine tasting. Snacks will be served throughout the session. Each week will focus on a different practical theme, and students will walk away with basic conversational skills on topics relevant to travelers.*

Cost: \$45 per person - Includes lesson, wine flight & nibbles.

**NO CLASS SUNDAY MARCH 26 ? OTTIMISTA WILL BE CLOSED FOR A PRIVATE PARTY FROM 3-6PM THAT DAY**

**Sunday April 2nd 3-4:30pm**  
**Italian Lessons & Vino: Weekend in Roma**

Learn how to navigate the eternal city, with insider tips on best places to visit, stay, eat and drink.

**Sunday April 9th 3-4:30pm**  
**Italian Lessons & Vino: Cocktail party conversation**

Learn how to make small talk (and perhaps flirt a bit) in Italian.

**Saturday April 15th 3-4:30pm (no class Easter Sunday)**  
**Italian Lessons & Vino: La famiglia**

Today's lesson will cover vocabulary and conversation about family relationships ? mine, yours and ours.

**Sunday April 23th 3-4:30pm**  
**Italian Lessons & Vino: Fare spese (How to buy things)**

Very important lesson for the fashion conscious - how to shop in Italy. (Prada outlet, anyone?).

[Find out more....](#)

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**Newsletter drawing winners**

Congrats to the following customers, who each won a bottle of the Mosby ?Stelline di Cortese? wine for signing up for Ottimista?s newsletter.

- ? Sandra Peterson
- ? Steven Bowman
- ? Ryan Dolphin
- ? Meredith Miller

## Jerad's wine picks: March



*Most of Ottimista's wines by the bottle are available for to purchase and take home, at 20-30% below the on-premise wine list. And each month, wine director Jerad Ruhl features two wines at a special price. For March, we think you'll enjoy:*

### **2004 Vietti Roero Arneis**

Arneis, a lively Italian white (the name means "little rascal"), is a crisp, food-friendly wine from the Piedmont region of Italy. Our featured wine, the 2004 Vietti Arneis, exhibits a nose full of hazelnut & white gardenia, while the palette is full of peaches, pears and green apple, finishing up with a

dry mineral finish.

But what makes it so distinct? Let's start with the area: Roero is a small sub-region of Piedmont known mostly for the Arneis grape. Most say this would not be the case if wasn't for one man Alfredo Currado (Luciana Vietti's husband), who in 1967 began experimenting with Arneis, which at that time was nearly extinct. The grape, which was very popular all the way back to the Roman era, fell out of popularity over the years due to its pesky habit of oxidation. Modern producers, mostly due to the research and the passion of Mr. Currado, now use a special production technique to prevent this - they halt the regular fermentation leaving a very tiny amount of residual sugar. Then after bottling, Arneis producers allow the wine in bottle to ferment this tiny amount of sugar. Remember from high school chemistry that one of the major by-products of fermentation is carbon dioxide. So this method raises the amount of carbon dioxide in the solution and decreases the amount of oxygen, thus allowing for a fresher, more stable white wine.

A great aperitivo and sipping wine, also try this Arneis with grilled fish or shellfish, seafood chowder or asparagus risotto.

Retail Price: \$20

### **2000 White Rock Vineyards Estate Claret**

The 2000 Claret (only 1,000 cases produced) is a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Cabernet Franc, 14% Merlot & 3% Petite Verdot. This wine spends 22 months in French oak, one-third of which are new. The 2000 Claret exhibits California fruit with bordelaise restraint in its hints of black cherry, rose, tobacco, jasmine, violets and just the right dash of sweet oak. This wine is drinking perfectly right now, but will cellar and develop for another 5 + years.

White Rock gets its name from the white, mineral rich soils that are found in the small valley just off the Vaca Mountains in Napa Valley (for reference the Vaca range is on your right as you head north on the Silverado Trail). In 1979, the Vandendriessche Family bought the original 1870 vineyard and winery, and today White Rock produces only two wines, claret and chardonnay, for a total of around 3,000 cases. So even by cult wine standards, their production is tiny. Hillside vineyards, mineral rich soils, vines with an average age of 37 years, small production and incredible dedication to making the best wine possible, make this wine nearly impossible to match for the price in Napa or almost anywhere. I think that the production level of 1000 cases screams, "get the amazing wine while you still can!"

Retail Price: \$40

### Love is in the air

*Bartender Rory ties the knot*



Congrats to our favorite bartender Rory, who spontaneously said "I do" this week. While the lovebirds Rory and Jessica are still on cloud nine, Rory has since returned to his perch behind Ottimista's bar. So lift your glass of prosecco in a toast to Rory next time you're in....

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### Don's Corner: Varietal Adventures

*The misunderstood Sylvaner*



In keeping with this month's focus on the wines of **Alto Adige**, I would like to draw attention to one of my favorite varietals, the enigmatic yet much maligned white grape, Sylvaner. Although most producers of this wine in the Alto Adige will proudly claim it as an indigenous varietal, my own research has continuously failed to trace a definitive home for the grape. Most sources seem to think that it probably came from Austria, which would lend some credence to the theory of it being from the Sudtirool, as Alto Adige was known for most of its history. I even found one source that claimed it probably came from what is now known as Transylvania, and others that simply give up and say that it came from "southern Europe". From wherever it hails, Sylvaner is now certainly a varietal struggling to regain some of its past glory.

Sylvaner, once a major varietal in Alsace and the numero uno grape in Germany, now comprises less than 10% of Germany's total plantings, and is fading away in Alsace as well. The reasons for the decline of Sylvaner's reputation in the wine world seem to be twofold. First, it is a somewhat finicky grape that is extremely sensitive to changes in terroir - meaning that descriptions of the varietal's character will vary wildly depending upon where it is grown. I've read some attempts to pin down its nature that label it as a wine "high in body and low in acid", while others claim its "light and lean, with firm acidity". This highly variable nature would indeed make a risky choice for modern wineries that demand a reliable return on their investment.

The other thing that seems to have hurt Sylvaner, especially in Germany, was the simple act of crossing it with Riesling to create M?ler-Thurgau. This new hybrid is a much more prolific producer that is also more resistant to the cold winters in northern vineyards, and far less affected by changes in terroir. Thus, most of the German Sylvaner vineyards have now been replaced with M?ler-Thurgau.

Despite this rocky history, and the emergence of a new aromatic kid on the block with M?ler-Thurgau, Sylvaner continues to emerge as an intriguing and sometimes magnificent wine in both Alto Adige and Alsace, and we have wonderful examples of both at Ottimista.

First up is the extremely sleek and sexy Eisacktaler Sylvaner from Taschlerhof. This offering has everything I love about Alto Adige whites in one bottle - an enticingly aromatic and floral nose, lovely, and somewhat steely, peachy fruits, and that unmistakable minerality that makes it both refreshing and food friendly. It also

displays a lime-zest scented acidity that for me makes it a natural choice with aromatic herb fish preparations or herb-roasted pork loin.

We also have a lovely Alsatian example from the legendary producer Dirler, and as you would expect, it shows the fuller, more unctuous side of Sylvaner. Its fruit is richer and rolls across your tongue with an opulent viscosity that seems to exist only in Alsace. Again, the wine finishes with a flash of acidity and mineral that makes it extremely food-friendly. The broader weight of this wine would make it a natural choice with richer dishes such as our gnocchi with garlic cream sauce, or a decadent salumi or cheese plate.

Both of these wines are great examples of what Sylvaner is capable of, and both very reasonably priced, so there?s no reason not to experience this wonderful wine.

Salute!

[Find out more....](#)

### **Bon Appetito!**

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