

## IMBIBE: Dramatic Alto Adige

By Ted Scheffler on April 26, 2016

### Italy's northernmost wine region.

JACKSON HOLE, WY – Like many other Italian wine enthusiasts, I relish the Italian white wines from Alto Adige. And so, I (and, I assume, others) am baffled by the lack of those wines in Utah. I could be wrong, but with a pretty thorough search of the Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control website and product inventory, I could only find two producers of Alto Adige wines generally available here: Lageder and Tiefenbrunner, which I'll get to later. You might be able to find Alto Adige wines in restaurants here and there, but if you really want to get to know these wines, you'll have to special-order them.

Italy's Alto Adige wine-growing region is comparatively small—about 13,000 acres. But the region is also one of the wine world's most dramatic. Tucked away in northernmost Italy—just below Austria—you'll find vineyards in Alpine valleys as high as 3,600 feet in elevation. The region is characterized by a mild, Alpine-continental climate, which boasts more than 300 days of sun per year and an average temperature of 64 degrees Fahrenheit. The Alps protect vineyards from cold winds, while air currents from the Mediterranean and Lake Garda help warm the wine-growing zones. German is the primary language spoken here, not Italian. And, like the language, the wines from Alto Adige are quite Germanic in character.



Francis Fecteau, wine expert and owner of Libation Inc., recently shared an Alto Adige fun-fact with me: Despite the Alpine aspect of the area, it boasts wide (and wild) temperature swings. "Tropical plants grow on the valley floors while there are glaciers a few thousand feet up," he said. The fun fact is that Alto Adige actually has the highest number of days in Italy where the temperature exceeds a certain point. "It's a wonderful diurnal temperature swing."

Well, what about those wines? The most popular white wine varieties in Alto Adige are Pinot Grigio/Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc/Pinot Bianco, Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc and, to a lesser extent, Müller Thurgau, Kerner, Veltliner, Sylvaner, Riesling and Moscato Giallo.

Alois Lageder produces some of Alto Adige's most ravishing wines, and has done so since 1823. You might not think of Pinot Grigio as "ravishing," but many from Alto Adige are outstanding—and in my opinion, some of Italy's very best. Flowery aromas and spicy notes accompany **Alois Lageder Pinot Grigio 2014** (\$15.99), a rich, powerful Pinot Grigio with a tinge of smoke. I'd drink it with lightly smoked fish or poultry dishes and appetizers. **Alois Lageder Chardonnay 2014** (\$15.99) has bracing acidity—a food-friendly Chardonnay—with tropical fruit notes. It's excellent with roasted chicken or just to sip by itself. **Alois Lageder Pinot Bianco 2014** (\$14.99) is light, fine and fruity, with peach and apple scents. It's a versatile wine that pairs well with a range of lighter salads, seafood and pastas, and also works well as an apéritif.

**Tiefenbrunner Pinot Grigio 2014** (\$16.99) is a classic example of Northern Italy Pinot Grigio. It's delicious just to enjoy on its own, but it also pairs exceedingly well with seafood and chicken dishes. The stony minerality of this medium-bodied wine would even lead me to sip it with raw oysters on the half-shell.

I recently had the opportunity to taste my way through a trio of Kettmeir wines from Alto Adige, and was duly impressed. Steel-fermented **Kettmeir Pinot Grigio 2014** (\$20) was marvelously dry and a perfect companion to steamed mussels with chorizo, while **Kettmeir Pinot Bianco 2014** (\$20) reminded me that Italian Bianco can be bold, not bland. And for an out-of-the-box apéritif, serve your guests **Kettmeir Müller Thurgau 2014** (\$20), with gorgeous peach notes and hints of nutmeg.

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