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2018 Italian Whites - An Outstanding Vintage



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Red wines are usually judged according to vintage, and it's easy to understand why, given that the most powerful reds will age for a decade or longer. One year can be average or perhaps even poor, given weather conditions, which means that these wines will be best enjoyed young. The following year though could be outstanding, if the conditions are right, and that's when the issue of cellar potential becomes important. As some reds, be they from Burgundy, Bordeaux, Napa Valley, Tuscany or Piedmont are ranked according to how long they will drink well, the question of vintage is an important one.

But what about white wines? Aren't vintages important as well? The answer is yes, but the reality is that too many people, be they in the media or in the trade or even consumers, just don't care. As soon as the current vintage runs out, we'll move on to the next one - they're pretty much the same, seems to be the thinking.

Well just as certain reds have cellar potential, so too do some whites; white Burgundies and Alsatian whites immediately come to mind. But even for most whites that tend to be at their best within five years of their vintage, there are vintage differences that make one year good and another very special.

Take 2017 and 2018 in Italy, for example. 2017 was a very warm year throughout much of the country; some would call it hot or even torridly hot. Harvest was very early, so acidity was questionable (for whites and reds), and while there was no problem ripening the fruit, the finished wines, while undeniably rich, lacked heightened perfumes as well as overall harmony. Nice whites from Italy in 2017, but not anything really special, in most instances.

Now take 2018, which was an outstanding vintage for white wines throughout Italy. Temperatures were not too hot, there was the proper amount of rainfall and the growing season was long, allowing grapes on the vine extra time to achieve glorious aromatics.

The region of Marche was typical for excellent white wines from 2018. Ampelio Bucci, proprietor of the eponymous Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi estate, noted the “favorable conditions of medium intensity rains in May, June and July that mitigated the rising heat in 2018.” Andrea Felici, another accomplished Verdicchio producer from the same area recalled that “summer extended its long arms until September ... the high temperatures, combined with a nice thermal day-night excursion, perfectly completed the maturation.”

Giovanni Casati, winemaker at Torre Rosazza and Poggiobello in Friuli, recalls that “the grapes arrived at perfectly healthy maturation ... the vineyards before the harvest guaranteed a good maintenance of the acid content, an exaltation of the aromas and good alcohol for whites.” To sum it up in Casati’s words, “2018 will be remembered as a vintage of great elegance and finesse, with a good propensity for aging and evolution.”

Here are notes on a wide array of 2018 Italian white wines I have tasted recently (there have been many), arranged by region.

Campania

Ciro Picariello Fiano di Avellino - Beautiful aromas of melon and yellow poppies. Medium-full, this has excellent varietal purity, notable persistence, very good acidity and complexity. Delicious! Enjoy over the next 5-7 years. **Outstanding**

Donnachiara Fiano di Avellino “Empatia” - Lovely aromas of honey, jasmine and melon. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Generous mid-palate, beautiful texture, lengthy finish. Great complexity and varietal character. 5-7 years, perhaps longer. One of the year’s best wines. **Superb**

Feudi di San Gregorio Falanghina “Serrocielo” - Lovely aromas of orange blossom, red apples, cinnamon and yellow iris. Medium-full, this has beautiful texture, excellent persistence, lively acidity and lovely harmony. From vineyards in Sannio situated 600 meters above sea level, this is one of the finest examples of Falanghina made today. 3-5 years. **Outstanding**

Mastroberardino Greco di Tufo “Nova Serra” - Enticing melon and red apple perfumes. Medium-full with a rich mid-palate, very good acidity and complexity, with subtle minerality and excellent persistence. Beautiful varietal purity. 5-7 years. **Outstanding**

Petilia Greco di Tufo - Cinnamon, Bosc pear and melon aromas. Medium-full with excellent concentration. Beautiful varietal purity, sublime complexity, very good acidity and distinct minerality. One of Italy’s greatest whites! 5-7 years. **Superb**

Sicily

Donnafugata Anthilia (Sicilia Bianco DOC) - Primarily Lucido (aka Catarratto). Aromas of green apples, lime and peony. Excellent freshness, bright fruit, good acidity, well balanced and good persistence. Nicely done! This wine has become a Sicilian classic. 2-3 years. **Excellent**

Donnafugata Lighea 2018 (Sicilia DOC Zibibbo) - 100% Zibibbo (the name for Moscato on the Sicilian island of Pantelleria). Aromas of yellow peach, jasmine and golden poppy. Medium-bodied, with attractive varietal fruit that is somewhat muted. Good persistence and acidity with a finish with a hint of bitterness. 2-3 years. **Very Good**

Firriato Le Sabbie dell’Etna 2018 (Etna Bianco) - Aromas of Bosc pear, oolong tea and orange zest. Medium-bodied with very good concentration. Rich mid-palate, good acidity and notable persistence; very good harmony and complexity. A more subdued style of Etna Bianco. Enjoy over the next 2-3 years. **Excellent**

Marche

Bucci Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi - Brilliant light yellow; intriguing aromas of spearmint, lemon zest and green tea. Medium-bodied with very good concentration, this is a lovely wine with impeccable harmony, very good acidity, notable persistence and outstanding varietal purity. Just perfect! Enjoy now and over the next 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Andrea Felici Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi - Light yellow; aromas of melon, chamomile and lilacs. Medium-full, this has outstanding varietal purity, very good acidity, notable persistence and a nice finesse. 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Tuscany

Bibi Graetz “Testamatta” Toscana Bianco - 100% Ansonica from the island of Giglio; barrique fermented and matured. Straw/light yellow; aromas of vanilla, Bosc pear and caramel. Medium-full

with excellent concentration. Rich, generous mid-palate, ample oak, but not overdone. Very good acidity and persistence; excellent complexity. Quite distinctive. Peak in 5-7 years. **Outstanding**

Bibi Graetz “Colore” Toscana Bianco 2018 - 100% Ansonica from the island of Giglio; 80 year-old vines. Bright, light yellow; aromas of chamomile tea, Anjou pear and cinnamon. Full-bodied, with excellent concentration. Beautiful texture, lively acidity, excellent complexity. Light creaminess on the palate and a lengthy, fruit-packed finish, with hints of caramel. Peak in 7-10 years. **Superb**

Liguria

Cantine Lunae Bosoni Vermentino “Etichetta Grigia” - Beautiful aromas of melon, magnolia and quince. Medium-full with very good concentration. This is a lovely wine with very good acidity, beautiful varietal character, impressive persistence and excellent harmony. So delicious now, with a lovely juiciness, enjoy this over the next 2-3 years, perhaps longer. **Excellent**

Cantine Lunae Bosoni Vermentino “Etichetta Nera” - Orange blossom, golden apple, Bosc pear and lime aromas. Medium-full with lovely texture, lively acidity, distinct minerality and outstanding persistence. One of Italy’s greatest white wines! 5-7 years. **Superb**

Cantine Lunae Bosoni Vermentino “Cavagino” - This is a new wine for Lunae Bosoni, a single vineyard Vermentino that was partially fermented in barriques. Light-medium yellow, aromas of grapefruit and Meyer lemon with delicate wood notes. Medium-full, this has a rich mid-palate, beautiful texture and impressive persistence. While I prefer Vermentino treated solely in steel or cement, this is a very successful wine with excellent varietal character and very good acidity. Peak in 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Friuli

Torre Rosazza Friulano 2018 (Friuli Colli Orientali DOC) - Bright yellow; aromas of Anjou pear, saffron and magnolia. Medium-full with ripe pear and apple fruit, impressive balance and persistence. Well made, this has good acidity and delicate notes of yellow spice (saffron and turmeric). Enjoy over the next 3-5 years, best in its youth. **Excellent**

Torre Rosazza Pinot Grigio 2018 (Friuli Colli Orientali) - Fragrant aromas of honeysuckle, red apple and a hint of cinnamon. Medium-bodied with very good to excellent concentration, this is beautifully balanced with lovely varietal purity delicate white spice notes and ideal harmony. This is delicious! Enjoy over the next 2-3 years. **Excellent**

Marco Felluga “Just Molamatta” (Friuli Bianco) - A blend of 56% Pinot Grigio, 30% Pinot Bianco, 14% Friulano. Light yellow; aromas of chamomile, lilacs and lemon zest. Medium-full with very good concentration. Nice freshness, very good acidity and harmony; attractive high-tone fruit. A bit short in the finish, but otherwise well made. 2-3 years, perhaps longer. **Excellent**

Marco Felluga Pinot Grigio “Mongris” (Collio) - Light yellow with a hint of copper. Aromas of ripe red apples, pear jelly and yellow crocus. Medium-full with very good concentration and varietal intensity. Excellent complexity, very good acidity and persistence. This will improve for 2-3 years and could be enjoyed at age five. **Excellent**

Borgo Convento Pinot Grigio 2018 (Collio) - Light yellow/copper; aromas of apple peel, pectin and pecan. Medium-bodied with good concentration. Quite dry with good acidity, this has good varietal character and persistence and offers impressive complexity. Enjoy over the next 2-3 years. **Very Good**

Borgo Convento Sauvignon 2018 (Collio DOC) - Varietal aromas of bell pepper, pippin apple and oolong tea. Medium-full with very good concentration. Very good ripeness, very good acidity, excellent varietal character and good persistence. Enjoy over the next 2-3 years. **Excellent**

Poggiobello Chardonnay (Friuli DOC) - Light yellow, aromas of Bosc pear, yellow peach and yellow crocus. Medium-bodied, this offers good freshness, very good acidity and is nicely balanced overall. 2-3 years. **Very Good**

Alto Adige

Alois Lageder Pinot Bianco “Haberle” - Aromas of red apple, spiced pear and lilacs. Medium-full, this has excellent varietal character, very good acidity and complexity and excellent harmony. Enjoy over the next 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Alois Lageder Pinot Grigio “Porer” - Light copper; aromas of orange rind, chamomile and mango. Medium-full with lovely texture. Very good texture, very good acidity and impressive persistence. Excellent complexity and harmony, this is a beautifully crafted Pinot Grigio with impeccable style and balance; clearly one of the best of its type in Italy. Enjoy tonight or over the next 3-5 years. **Outstanding**

Abruzzo

Il Feuduccio Pecorino 2018 (Colline Teatine IGT, Abruzzo) - Aromas of lemon cream, green tea and lilacs. Medium-full with very good depth of fruit and acidity, impressive complexity and a rich, lightly spicy finish with notes of grapefruit and orange. Quite stylish and subtly appealing. Enjoy over the next 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Lombardia

Travaglino Riesling “Campo della Fojada” 2018 (Oltrepo Pavese) - Aromas of yellow peach, apricot and dried yellow flowers. Medium-full with very good concentration. Very good acidity, excellent varietal character, impressive persistence and lovely freshness; Notes of ginger and a light touch of minerality in the finish. Nicely styled – this is a charming and delicious Riesling. Enjoy over the next 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Piedmont

Franco Martinetti Gavi - Light yellow; touch of petillance. Lovely aromas of honeycrisp apple, jasmine and pear jelly. Medium-full with very good concentration. Beautiful freshness and varietal character, very good acidity and impressive persistence. Just delicious! Enjoy over the next 2 or 3 years, if you can wait that long. **Excellent**

La Giustiniana Gavi “Lugarara” - Very pretty aromas of green melon, spearmint, Bosc pear and lilacs. Medium-full with very good concentration. Very fruit focused with beautiful varietal character, lively acidity, excellent persistence and a delicate note of minerality. Quite delicious now – enjoy over the next 2-4 years. **Excellent**

Francesco Rinaldi Gavi - Beautiful aromas of spearmint, melon, peony and jasmine. Medium-full with a richly textured mid-palate. Excellent concentration, very good acidity and impressive persistence. 3-5 years. **Excellent**

Ettore Germano Riesling “Herzu” - Expressive aromas of lime, jasmine, orange blossom and a hint of passion fruit. Medium-full, this has excellent varietal purity, very good acidity, impressive persistence and a light touch of minerality. Enjoy over the next 4-6 years - perhaps longer. **Outstanding**