

White grapes undergoing appassimento at Tommasi.



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USING AN AGE-OLD TECHNIQUE, PRODUCERS MASI AND TOMMASI CREATE “SUPER VENETIAN” DRY WHITES

The New Appassimento Wines

by Christy Canterbury, MW



PHOTO COURTESY OF MASI

Masi’s zesty Masianco pairs well with casual food.

SOMETIMES IT’S NOT ABOUT REINVENTING the wheel: It’s about making the wheel with different materials.

The Veneto is world-famous for its majestic amarone and hailed for its recioto—both made with dried grapes. Few imbibers, however, know that two producers now make dry whites using the appassimento (“drying or shriveling” in Italian) technique.

The Greeks—not California labs—invented the concentration process, and they did so without the expensive gadgetry of a reverse osmosis machine. They simply allowed grapes to desiccate before pressing and fermenting them.

Dried-grape wines were likely born of necessity: Sweet, higher-alcohol wine is more stable than light table wine—a necessity in the days before refrigeration and fast transport. While this clever innovation may have stemmed from storage and trade needs, today it is used to provide pleasure. And, the Italians are masters at appassimento.

Veneto leaders Masi and Tommasi recently created a new “Super Venetian” style that is largely under the radar. Both producers use two varieties and a portion of appassimento grapes, but they produce definitively different bottlings. What both do deliver is textural freshness combined with flavor intensity.

Masi’s Masianco combines Pinot Grigio with Verduzzo, a Friuli native. Nicknamed “the petite Sauternes of Friuli,” Verduzzo takes well to desiccation. Masi harvests it later than the Pinot Grigio, when it shows the signs of over-ripeness. Then,

in a few weeks, it loses an impressive 25% of its weight while drying on bamboo racks. Already the richer of the two components, this third of the wine undergoes malolactic fermentation in large, old Slovenian barrels for three weeks to give the final wine additional creaminess. When this more decadent portion is combined with the crisply fresh, stainless steel-fermented Pinot Grigio, the result—Masianco Pinot Grigio e Verduzzo delle Venezie IGT (SRP \$14.99, imported by Kobrand)—is a light-bodied, zesty wine with hints of honey.

For its Adorato Appassionato, Tommasi blends the native Garganega along with Chardonnay picked from the Soave and Lake Garda areas. While the final wine is 90% Garganega, 10% of these grapes undergo one month of appassimento aging—losing 12% of their weight in the process—before being pressed and vinified in stainless steel. The remaining 80% Garganega and 10% Chardonnay are co-fermented in stainless steel. The two wines are blended and aged six months before bottling. As would be expected, the wine shows the rich yellow color and almond flavors typical of Garganega. Like Masianco, it is also spicy, but with a richer, more medium-body profile. The Adorato Appassionato has an approachable price (SRP \$15, imported by Vintus) that, like Masianco, makes it an ideal by-the-glass selection with an unusual story to tell.

The adage “everything has been done before” carries some truth. But these producers demonstrate that ingenuity thrives, especially in the world of wine. **SJ**



The result of some very involved winemaking, Tommasi’s Adorato Appassionato is nevertheless affordably priced.