

The Riviera Grapevine

A blog for all things wine related along
the French & Italian Riviera

TAG ARCHIVES: FILIPPO RONDELLI

Tasting Diaries: Terre Bianche, Dolceacqua

Posted on [23/12/2013](#) by [Chrissie McClatchie](#)

When you work for a wine company, visiting a supplier is generally a pleasure not a chore. Their offices are usually found in pretty lovely locations. It's even less difficult a duty on a Friday afternoon and when blessed with an unseasonably warm mid-December day. And when the supplier in question is a vineyard in Italy.

A visit to the white earth of **Terre Bianche** in Dolceacqua has been top of my to-do list since I started this blog. Their Vermentino and Rossese di Dolceacqua are the extent of our Ligurian wine list at work and are probably to blame for my love affair with not only Vermentino but anything Ligurian really. Finally getting the occasion to visit these vines high in the hills of Dolceacqua has been a definite highlight of this year.

These wines, crafted by Filippo Rondelli, are widely regarded as some of the best of the region, and most of the 45,000 bottles produced annually have sold out by this time of each year.

Up on the plateau between the valley of the Roya (Ventimiglia) and the Nervia (Dolceacqua), at an altitude of 400 metres, the roads are narrow and the landscape alternates between vines and olive trees. The views are spectacular and just a little vertiginous. Can you see Dolceacqua?



Wine has been made here by the Rondelli family for generations, common in these hills. In the past most families made enough wine for private enjoyment. It's only in the last few decades that some of these vineyards are becoming the primary business, a by-product (or perhaps catalyst) of the renaissance in quality Rossese di Dolceacqua coming out of these valleys.

The winery takes its name from the chalky earth near one of its vineyards. The limestone is full of fossils, a slice of history which can be tasted in the Pigato grapes grown here. Terre Bianche's land amounts to just over 8.5 hectares in total, with various plots spread out over the plateau.



There's an amazing amount of named *cru* vineyards for such a small region. Terre Bianche's single plot wines are prefaced with **Arcana**, the *localita* where the winery itself is situated. Different plots scattered over the hills and in the Nervia valley belong to different *crus*, each claiming distinct characteristics thanks to each specific *terroir*.



A permanent fixture in Italy's respected Gambero Rosso guides, Terre Bianche's wines are now finally starting to receive recognition within the international wine community. Only last month [Jancis Robinson](#) wrote some very positive reviews of Rondelli's wines.

Sitting on a terrace amongst the vines, under the setting December sun, we felt like kings of the plateau basking in the most glorious views from the Ligurian Alps to the Mediterranean Sea. A plate of deliciously fresh pizza/bruschetta hand-made by Rondelli's grandmother was the only distraction from the wines waiting to be (re)discovered.

Sometimes the day job is pretty tough.

These are the wines we sampled:

Rossese di Dolceacqua 2012: Really the most amazing coloured wine I have seen, an incredibly vivid ruby-red colour. A tantalising nose of cranberry (just like a glass of Ocean Spray cranberry juice!) and Rose Hip tea. To taste, a red berry delight with a peppery kick to finish. A delicate, light bodied wine with very mellow tannins, perfect for the festive season – I'd happily have a glass with my Christmas Turkey!

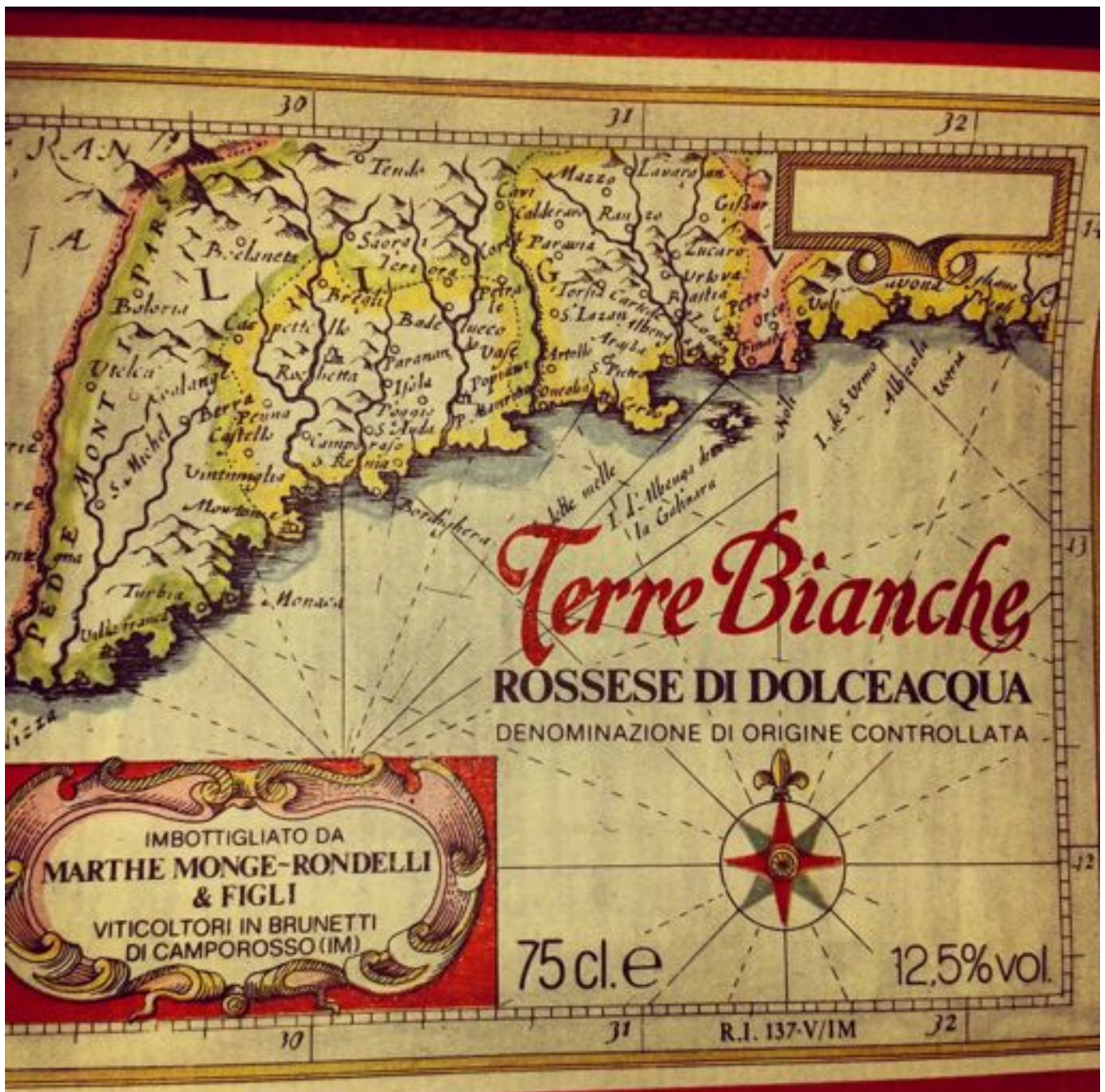


Vermentino 2012: Oh, how I love you Vermentino! Terre Bianche's offering is the perfect example of the variety. A real crisp, agrumey and floral wonder and the perfect accompaniment to lazy Mediterranean days. The wine was perfectly structured with certain minerality and we detected hints of resin. Perhaps a reflection of the local *terroir*?

Pigato 2012: If Vermentino is the expression of summer in a glass, than Pigato is what to fill your glass with as the seasons change into autumn. A slightly richer, creamier wine with a welcome almond nuttiness to the finish. Rondelli spoke of how the crispness of his Vermentino was almost alpine-like. Well, the Pigato definitely shows its Mediterranean roots. There's more sun, a slightly baked 'hot' aspect to this wine.

Arcana Bianco 2010: Terre Bianche's *cru* white wine, made from Pigato grapes found at the actual *terre bianche* vineyard. A more delicate example of Pigato, softer and creamier. Interesting biscuit hints which add a yeasty tone to the wine. Another drop with fullness to cope with the white meats of Christmas dinner, although I also think a Moroccan tagine with dried apricots would be a perfect match as well!

Most now agree that Vermentino and Pigato is essentially the same grape (Pigato a clone of Vermentino), yet tasting the two side by side provided a fascinating insight just how individual each grape, however closely related, actually is.



The descent back to sea level, along perilously narrow and unfamiliar roads (and Italian drivers), was at the forefront of my mind, so I took great care to take full advantage of the *crachoir* (the awesome word for spittoon in French). Which did feel extremely sin-like but very necessary. However like many Italian winery's, Terre Bianche is also an *agriturismo*, a bed and breakfast of sorts, so next time I plan to settle in!

If you're looking to undertake your own journey of discovery into the wonderful world of Ligurian wine, here's a great place to start.

Terre Bianche - Loc. Arcagna snc, Dolceacqua (IM), 18035 Italy www.terrebianche.com

Like 14

Tweet 2

+1

Like this:

Like Loading...

Tagged [Dolceacqua](#), [Filippo Rondelli](#), [Ligurian Wine](#), [Pigato](#), [Rossese di Dolceacqua](#), [Terre Bianche](#), [Vermentino](#)

2 Replies