

Abstract

Incredible Verdicchio: the potential to produce Italy's greatest white wine.

Motivation for the study

My professional wine life is strongly connected with family business – Italian restaurant. I'm always inspired by Italian grapes and wines - the fact that moved me to study at Vinality Wine Academy and to become Italian Wine Ambassador. Working much with Italian wines I was curious why in spite of an impressive diversity of native grapes (more than 500!) Italy still doesn't have its great white wine like Riesling in Germany, like Gruner Veltliner in Austria, like Chardonnay in France (Burgundy). So maybe Verdicchio will soon become number one among Italian whites.

Objective of the Thesis

The objective of the thesis is to explore Italian native grape variety Verdicchio from the point of view of its uniqueness and its potential to produce Italy's greatest white wine. How is this grape perceived by the wine industry and by consumers nowadays? What are its perspectives on the Italian and global market? Could it become a strong Italian brand – not just in the affordable segment like Prosecco, but in the top league like Barolo? In considering these points, extensive research will cover specialist literature, professional tastings, published opinions of wine experts and journalists, data from wine producers databases, as well as a SWOT analysis of the potential Verdicchio brand.

Methodology

My research work covers a review of scientific literature, internet resources, Collisioni educational project's papers and documents provided by Istituto Marchigiano di Tutela Vini (IMT). The practical part includes interviews with wine-producers of both Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Verdicchio di Matelica DOCs and the comparative analysis of Verdicchio with great varieties of the world (Chardonnay, Riesling, Gruner Veltliner) and other famous varieties of Italy (Pinot Grigio, Glera, Garganega). In order to evaluate the current value of Verdicchio and its potential to produce Italy's greatest white wine the SWOT-analysis was made.

Structure of the thesis

Section 1 – Introduction.

Italy has a huge number of native grape varieties to produce wines in commercial volumes: about 380 according to Jancis Robinson or even over 500 by Ian D'Adagata.

However, for a long time, Italy was mostly known by its top-grade red wines, first of all by Barolo and Brunello – both made of indigenous cultivars. Against their background, it becomes obvious that Italy lacks a great white wine of the highest quality from a native grape like Riesling in Germany, Gruner Veltliner in Austria or Chardonnay in France.

At the beginning of XXI century Pinot Grigio became globally popular but its success was more about quantity than quality. Pinot Grigio was so much replicated that it lost its authenticity and personality, becoming a synonym of a cheap casual white.

Now the image of Italian whites is changing. Unique Italian white autochthons of the highest quality, with distinctive aromas and flavors, are entering the scene. But the question is which of them could make a serious brand and enter into world's top league?

It could be Verdicchio, a great cultivar with a strong identity and a diversity of styles. Its impeccable clarity, versatility, ability to express terroir and to age give Verdicchio potential to produce a great Italian white wine.

Section 2 – What is a great white wine?

- The dramatic influence of terroir on wine.
- Human factor as a key-feature. On the one hand, most of outstanding vineyards have long history and traditions. On the other hand, there is conception that making fine wine is not only tradition, it is an art. Importance of personality in the perception of wine and the wine region as a whole.
- The role of the aging potential. Comparative analysis of this factor in the world's great white wines.
- Price as a measure of quality.

Section 3 - Uniqueness of Verdicchio profile.

- Distinctive characteristics of the Verdicchio grape variety. Verdicchio's potential for a diversity of wine styles – sparkling, light, sweet.
- Verdicchio's capability to express terroir. Justification of the existence of two Italian DOCs the same grape (Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Verdicchio di Matelica).
- Verdicchio among other whites. Comparison Verdicchio with other world's white grapes (Chardonnay, Riesling, Gruner Veltliner) and other famous Italian white grapes (Pinot Grigio, Garganega, Glera).

Section 4 - Possibility of development the Verdicchio brand.

- Market positioning of Verdicchio in the past, at present, in the future.
- Domestic market and main foreign markets - differences in consumer's perception of the Verdicchio grape.
- SWOT- analysis of the Verdicchio brand. Reasoning for its potential future success.

Conclusion.

The concept of great wine is complex and includes points of how the wine is made, how the wine tastes, how the wine ages and how the wine is valued. A great wine not only needs great grape and outstanding terroir to be produced, but also a talented winemaker. When these factors converge they give birth to the wine with outstanding organoleptic which can also improve with age. The age potential of wine increases its demand and value. Some great wines cost as much as best works of art as they are art themselves.

Verdicchio potential to produce Italy greatest white wine is obvious. It is a high-quality grape which can express terroir, be versatile and give diversity of wines. The best of them are dry. They are authentic product of the place they derive from, with distinctive characteristics of aroma and taste, and with age potential up to 20 years or more.

Primarily domestic market positioning and the lasting association with budget wine have concealed Verdicchio's true potential from the global consumer, and the lack of awareness among the professionals is even more aggravating. Obviously, the grape needs careful rebranding, as well as multiple educational programs and tastings to familiarize the vast wine community with it. Current economic conditions do not seem to favour such efforts, but attempts are being made, and some results have been achieved, which means with competent promotion the greatness of Verdicchio wines will become undeniable.