

Cascina degli Ulivi

Profile

Gavi, one of the foremost denominations of white wine in Italy and one of the first white wines to be granted the DOCG status, is entirely from the Cortese grape which is an indigenous grape to the southern Piedmont province of Alessandria where it also shows its finest expression. After the phylloxera epidemic of the early 1900's exterminated the more widely planted red Dolcetto vines in the rolling hillsides of the towns that surround the town of Gavi, the majority of replanting was made with the white Cortese in order to satisfy demand from the nearby Genoa and the Ligurian province that lie directly south over the coastal mountains. During the 1960's, Gavi enjoyed tremendous success on the domestic and international markets thanks to some fine producers in the region. Over the next twenty years, however, competition from other white wine producing regions of Italy, higher yield allowances by the DOC and less scrupulous winemaking led to a glut of commercial and uninspired Gavi.

My recollections of Gavi I'd tasted recently were not memorable. Joe and Denyse were neither familiar with the region nor the grape. Stefano Bellotti of Cascina degli Ulivi is a good friend of the Bera family and they recommended him to us. We met with him to taste his wines and immediately were pleased. On first taste, we knew that this was the type of estate we were seeking and that these wines were wines of terroir. They evoked the soil, climate and grape from which they came.

Cascina degli Ulivi produces wines from vineyards of around 16 hectares that have been worked using biodynamic viticultural methods since 1985. The estate has been in the Bellotti family since the 1930's and is now run by Stefano and his wife Zita. They are committed to the fundamental beliefs of Biodynamism and, in the Gavi town of Tassarolo, run the estate as an organic farm with a restaurant and accommodations where practically everything served is biodynamic organically raised on their farm. "We consider that the soil is a 'companion organism' for everything that lives. In working our vines, we foster the potential harmony of all those forces that contribute to the flow of vitality (of the vine)" according to Stefano. The hard work and dedication is immediately evident in the vineyards where Stefano's parcels are adjacent to other producers of the area and from which the health of the vines is immediately apparent to the eye.

The estate handpicks in small boxes and uses only the indigenous yeasts to ferment the wines. Use of oak is limited to large, successively-used barrels of traditional provenance. Filtration is limited to a light pre-bottling using a wide plack filter.

The Gavi DOCG comes from three parcels of red limestone clay soils and vines of various age. It is completely a stainless-steel wine. The wine is bottled in the late spring of the year following the harvest.

Gavi Filagnotti DOCG comes from a particular site of the estate's best vines that are also in red limestone clay. The wine is made in large botti, oak casks of 35-50K liters. It is named for the Bellotti's dog, who unfortunately, is deceased.

The estate also produces fine Dolcetto, Barbera and Passito.