

Vint-ed

A wine critic's sips and swirls, by Edward Deitch

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Swirls: The coming out of organic wine -- some things to keep in mind

Suddenly, it seems, the organic wine crowd is coming out of the woodwork. From growers to importers to supermarkets and other retailers, the wine world is seizing on "organic" as never before. Some growers, of course, have been making natural wines for years, including quite a few in France's Loire Valley where most choose not to call attention to the fact, preferring to let the wines speak for themselves. And many of them do as wines of distinction. So the bar is high for wineries that trumpet the fact that they are producing organic wines or wines made from organic grapes (I'll explain the difference in just a minute). My guess is that the market is ready to embrace the organic wine movement more broadly, but the wines will have to demonstrate that they have character, passing the same critical (and consumer) taste tests that non-organic wines must endure.



One that does is **Cirelli's 2010 Trebbiano d'Abruzzo**, a delightful and refreshing non-oaked white made from organic trebbiano grapes in the Abruzzo region of southern Italy. A group of friends really liked this \$14 wine when we served it at a holiday dinner party a couple of weeks ago, and my only regret is that I didn't buy three or four bottles of it from Chambers Street Wines here in New York, which, speaking of natural and organic and biodynamic wines, has pioneered the trend among retailers for some years now. With stone fruit, pear, herb and citrus notes, Cirelli's trebbiano is enhanced by an underlying minerality and was excellent with cheeses and other appetizers. Alcohol is a modest and welcome 12.5 percent. (A Zev Rovine Selection, imported by Fruit of the Vine, Long Island City, New York.)

Few wines in this country are labeled "USDA Organic." That's because under Department of Agriculture rules, organic wines cannot contain *added* sulfites, which are used in varying degrees by the vast majority of wineries as a preservative (and which some people say gives them headaches). If a wine is made from organically grown grapes but has sulfites added, the label can only say that it is made from organic grapes, as with the Cirelli wine.

Before the other day, I couldn't recall the last time I received a wine with the USDA Organic designation. The bottle was from Italy, **La Cantina Pizzolato's 2010 Organic Cabernet Sauvignon NSA**, from the Piave appellation in the Veneto region. NSA refers to "no sulfites added," and the labeling on this wine makes the point that it contains "naturally occurring sulfites."

I didn't quite know what to expect but was pleasantly surprised. It's a light cabernet with an almost unheard of alcohol level of 12 percent (most New World cabs are in the 13.5-15 percent range). It has good varietal character with red fruit and blueberry notes and a subtle herbal touch. Made without oak, it reminded me more of Beaujolais than Bordeaux and was stylistically as far away from California cab as you can get. Delicate and refreshing and a bargain at a suggested price of \$11. Try it slightly chilled with chicken, pork and veal.

The wine was sent to me by Natural Merchants, an importer of organic and biodynamic wines in Grants Pass, Oregon. Interestingly, I received a press release the other day from Whole Foods Market announcing the fact that it was the only national retailer to carry NSA wines from Italy and Spain, including the cabernet and others from Pizzolato, which it described as “Italy’s top-selling organic winery.” Organic and NSA, it seems, are about to go mainstream.