

The Soave Family and Its Near and Distant Relatives

*** Soave ***

(D.O.C., VENETO)

Soave is such an inoffensive, good-natured wine that to reproach it for not having a bolder personality seems peevish. Its role is to soothe, not to arouse.

I like to drink Soave from a carafe during one of the most deliciousty inconsequential moments of an Italian summer afternoon: the late lunch by the pool at the Cipriani in Venice, keeping equally abreast of gossip and the procession of antipasti, painlessly bridging the gap between a midday swim and the predinner nap.

I like to drink it again in the evening at Harry's Bar, when one's attention is divided between watching the coming and going of beautiful women and choosing the most tempting of the day's *risottos*.

I like to drink it at the shore, where what I am really drinking in are the smells of fish grilling and of the spiced sea air.

I like to drink Soave best when I have to think about it least. But not because it is a poor wine. If it were, its defects would be distracting. Soave balances firm but unobtrusive fruit with a neat measure of acidity, wrapping it up with a tart yet not emphatic aftertaste. It is clean-tasting and refreshing in a pleasingly self-effacing way. These are the qualities that have made it popular and at the same time so adaptable to large-scale production.

Soave is produced on primarily flat land midway between Vicenza and Verona. The luxuriant vineyards, from which very large yields are permitted, are plainly visible from the superhighway that runs parallel to them. The more desirable portion of a now greatly enlarged zone is the traditional production area around the pretty town of Soave. Wine from this area bears the qualification *classico*. Soave is a blend of two grapes, garganega and a local variety of trebbiano called trebbiano di Soave. The latter is a lighter and more delicate trebbiano than the varieties referred to elsewhere in these pages, in descriptions of Tuscan whites, Frascati, and Trebbiano di Romagna. The ratio of garganega to trebbiano is approximately 80 percent to 20 percent. The two grapes are widely cultivated in the Veneto and in neighboring Lombardy, where they are used in varying proportions, or so;ometimes just one or the other grape is used alone, for other white wines.

Soave Bolla, which some people think is one word, has earned its vast market through its soundness, reliability, and uniformity. Like all virtues, these too have their dark side. In the achieving of a never varying standard of taste, charm is blurred and those small peaks of character of which even Soave is capable are flattened.

For a more complete manifestation of Soave's winning ways one may look to Bella's own fine estate-bottling, Soave di Castellaro (not yet available for export); to Picropan (although this erratic producer can falter); and to Tedeschi's Capitel delle Lucchine. Among the producers of commercial Soave, Bertani offers a product as consistent and acceptable as Bella's.

--Victor Hazan, *Italian Wine* (1984)