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MUMELTER WINERY

BOLZANO * ALTO ADIGE

The meteoric rise in quality of most Italian wine regions is clear. Nowhere is this more true than in the Alto Adige, where you'll find ripe, bright whites, the inimitable Lagrein, the delicious Santa Maddalena (made primarily from the Schiava grape), and passionate winemakers. All of this set in beautiful Alpine valleys, just south of the Austrian border. The people who live here speak mostly German and think of themselves as Tirolese (the local name for the area is the Südtirol), rather than Italian or Austrian.

Georg Mumelter's farm, Griesbauerhof, is situated outside Bolzano, the principal city of the Alto Adige. His tiny cellar is underneath the house, with the vineyards just outside. Mumelter is meticulous and quiet; his wines show great character and are exceedingly well-made. Santa Maddalena, which is made primarily from the Schiava grape, is Mumelter's calling-card. This delicious berry-ish red is Italy's answer to Beaujolais, and a foil to his other red, Lagrein Dunkel, which is one of the great Italian red grapes and deserves to be much more well known. The best examples are deep purple in color, with aromas of blackberries and Assam tea. Very small quantities.



SANTA MADDALENA CLASSICO

Some wines try to be impressive on their own, others make food taste good. I can't think of a better example of the second kind (my favorite kind) than Santa Maddalena. The best wines (called 'Classico') are grown in the amphitheater around the village. Georg Mumelter's vineyards are in this area, the winery just below it on the valley floor. At the end of my annual visit, Mumelter's wife Margareth sometimes serves a supper of cured meats, including the lightly smoked ham called Speck; their Santa Maddalena is the bottle that disappears first. Perhaps that is the most important test of a wine, that it is

drunk first. ('Griesbauerhof' is the name of the farm; both the family name and the name of the farm can be used in the Alto Adige.)

Made of Schiava (in German, Vernatsch) with a small amount of Lagrein, this wine is fermented and aged in stainless steel. Notes: pale red color; aroma of strawberries and tomato leaf, very appetising; the palate is bigger and more assertive than the color would suggest but still very drinkable. A faint hint of apple-skin bitterness on the finish adds to its appeal with food. It is delicious paired with most any pork dish, especially ham. I've also drunk it with grilled salmon.

