



Elin's Wine Pick: 2011 Uvaggio Primitivo

by: Elin McCoy, 10.1.12

I was in Northern California last week judging at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair wine competition, and I spent some of my time tracking down interesting producers whose wines I'd never tried. This racy, floral-scented 2011 Uvaggio Primitivo, a deliciously balanced red from the Lodi region with a taste of spice and juicy berries and layers of flavors, is one of my discoveries. I think it's the ultimate gourmet pizza wine — soft and easy to drink, yet surprisingly complex for its well-under-\$20 price.



Uvaggio's opinionated winemaker, Jim Moore, is no wine newcomer.

Years ago, he was a force behind the now-defunct La Famiglia di Robert Mondavi label that specialized in Italian varietals such as Sangiovese, as well as helping launch Luce, the Mondavi collaboration project with Tuscany's Frescobaldi family. Moore made California's first Vin Santo.

Moore believes some Italian varietals have a bright future in California, especially in the Lodi region, where Uvaggio grows its grapes.

Compared to the world-famous Napa Valley, where Moore and I were tasting his wines at Ma(i)sonry in Yountville, Lodi has zero glamor. Nevertheless, it's recently made inroads into the label-conscious Chinese market.

Uvaggio Primitivo: Part of Lodi's alternative to Napa

About a half-hour drive south of Sacramento, [Lodi](#) has weather that mimics Napa's. Its vineyard land and grape prices, however, are much, much lower, which allows Uvaggio to sell its wines for modest amounts. Making tasty, food-friendly affordable wines has been one of Moore's goals since founding what he jokingly refers to as l'Uvaggio di Giacomo (he's Giacomo; the name means the blends of James) in 1997.

Uvaggio focuses on Italian varietals. Its flagship white is Vermentino, closely identified with Liguria, Sardinia and [Tuscany](#); the newest addition to the line is Primitivo, widely grown in [Puglia](#). DNA testing has shown that Primitivo and Zinfandel are both clones of a Croatian grape with the unpronounceable name of Crljenak Kastelanski. Moore says his Primitivo selection ripens later and more evenly, which translates into wines without the high alcohol and raisiny overripe flavors that characterize so many of today's Zinfandels from California.

All the Uvaggio wines I tried had vibrant flavors and very reasonable alcohol levels, unlike most California Zins. This 2011 Uvaggio Primitivo will make you want to open another bottle.

Top photo composite:

2011 Uvaggio Primitivo label and winemaker Jim Moore. Photo credits: Elin McCoy

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