

Houston Press

Low-Alcohol Vermentino from California Makes Me Happy

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Photo by [Tracie P.](#)

The winemakers behind Uvaggio Vermentino from Lodi have a theory. "If we grow the right grape in the right place," they write on [their Web site](#), "we can manage to get by with our respective degrees in psychology and geography. (If one of us gets lost then other can figure out why.) However, when you grow grapes in the wrong place, you probably need a Master's Degree from UC Davis to make the wine taste good (if you are lucky)."

As we wrote in [our June cover story devoted to the the wine industry here in Texas](#), our own state's winemakers have also struggled with the balance between growing grapes suited to local growing conditions (think Vermentino, Tempranillo and Touriga) and grapes more easily marketed to local consumers (Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon).

Beyond the humor in the manifesto by the couple at the Uvaggio winery, U.S. wine industry observers generally agree that there are two schools of thought when it comes to the production of fine wine on U.S. soil: 1) Grow grapes that perform well in local growing conditions and manipulate the wines only as necessary in the cellar; or 2) grow whatever-the-hell grape varieties you want

and then "correct" the wine in the cellar in order to make the wine palatable to your target demographic.

But there's more to the winemakers' humor than meets the naked eye. As they point out, neither of them was formally trained as a winemaker before deciding to get into the business of making wine (they studied psychology and geography respectively, they write). As for many American winemakers, fine wine was a *second chapter* in their lives. The difference between them and the many doctors, lawyers and Wall Street types who become wine producers in California is that they chose to vinify grapes naturally suited to the place where they live instead of planting ill-suited "fantasy" grapes. (By *fantasy* I mean the pie-in-the-sky grapes of Napa: "I am rich; I can afford to drink expensive white Burgundy; therefore I will plant Chardonnay grapes in a region ill-suited to farm them correctly, aka Napa, and I'll simply manipulate the hell out of the wines even though they still won't resemble the expensive wines from Burgundy that I can afford to drink.")

Even though Uvaggio's 2009 Vermentino is beginning to get a little tired (and I'm looking forward to tasting the 2010 when it makes its way to our market), it had all of the vibrancy (read *acidity*) and citrus and white fruit to pair wonderfully with a simple dish of *spaghetti al pomodoro* last night. But the thing I liked the most about it was the 11 percent (yes, 11 percent!) alcohol.

"Our whites...rarely exceed 12.5% alcohol," write the authors of the Uvaggio marketing material. "Our barrel-aged reds are rarely over 14.5% alcohol."

At around \$12 a bottle (at the [Houston Wine Merchant](#)), I say amen and pour me another glass!

http://blogs.houstonpress.com/eating/2012/07/uvaggio_vermentino_lodi_califo.php