



Alois Lageder vineyards with the Dolomites looming large. (photo: <http://www.aloislageder.eu/home>)

Welcome to the Italian Food Wine & Travel group, a friendly fellowship of bloggers that happen to love Italy and her wines. The first Saturday of each month we gather (virtually) to share our discoveries, always centered around a theme. Sometimes that's a particular grape variety or region, other times we focus on food and wine pairing. This month we've taken on the simple, black-and-white issue of biodynamic viticulture.

I'm kidding.

Not about the topic, but the nature of it. As consumers become more fastidious about sourcing their food from farmers committed to a healthy environment, it should come as no surprise that they bring similar scrutiny to the wines they purchase.

Are the grapes organic? Are the vineyards certified sustainable-organic-biodynamic? Does the label sport the seal of a worldwide accrediting organization?

None of this is simple. Many grape growers have hewed to environmentally conscious practices for generations, even though they may not be certified. And then consider the costs associated with seeking such credentials: approval can take years and many farmers struggle to see the value in spending money and time that may not be rewarded by market demand.



My featured wine this month. Alois Lageder is Demeter-certified, but the whole story is a little more complicated.

Our thoughtful debate this month comes courtesy of Gwendolyn Alley of [Wine Predator](#), who originally intended our discussion to highlight the biodynamic wines of Italy. As you can see from her [invitation post](#) and [preview post](#) the more she dug into it, the more complicated the topic became. We ended up widening the scope to include wineries working in concert with the vineyards' natural rhythms, regardless of certification.

What do you think about the topic? If you've got something to say then please join our live chat tomorrow, March 2nd, at 11 am ET. Follow the hashtag #ItalianFWT and make sure to add it to your tweets. I'm really looking forward to the conversation because there are many valid points of view. I hope you'll add your two cents' worth

As an appetizer, here is a list of what each of the participants will share:

Cultivating Nature as a Habitat of Life

In searching for a biodynamic wine for this month's event, I combed through the online inventory of [La Centrale Enoteca](#), a local wine shop featuring Italian wine. I came up with a bottle of Pinot Bianco from Alois Lageder, a family winery in Alto Adige that farms 50 hectares of vines and purchases from 90 contract growers. While those 50 hectares are certified biodynamic through [Demeter Italia](#) not all of the contract growers have been certified.

That said, all of them follow rigorous, sustainable practices that adhere to the overall philosophy of the Lageder family, what they term "biodynamic with a respect for Nature." It's a credo that extends beyond the vineyards, one that includes ranchers whose cattle graze next to the grapes during summer. A few of the farmers grow organic produce that inspires the chefs at the on-site restaurant, [Vineria Paradeis](#). (Click [here](#) to learn more about the farmers.)

It's an agricultural tapestry that weaves together multiple threads in the community, a concept known as *anthroposophy*, popularized by Rudolf Steiner, pioneer of the biodynamic movement. By definition, it is a formal educational, therapeutic, and creative system, seeking to use mainly natural means to optimize physical and mental health and well-being.

In terms of the certification debate, I rather like this approach, especially the phrase "seeking to use mainly natural means." To me that resonates as common-sense, bigger-picture thinking. And it's beautifully reflected by the headline on the [Lageder website](#): Cultivating Nature as a Habitat of Life.



Original artwork from [Marcello Maloberti](#) decorates this bottle of Pinot Bianco.

The Alois Lageder Story

The family's first foray into winemaking dates to 1823, when Johann Lageder, a local craftsman, bought a few hectares of vineyards. Over the years, he added to his holdings and initiated the process of purchasing grapes from local farmers whose methods he respected. As successive generations took the mantle of leadership, they did so with an eye toward innovation and evolution.

Speaking of innovation, there's plenty of it evident in the winery's offerings. I was intrigued by the Comets, a selection of wines that use indigenous grapes in unexpected ways, or non-traditional grapes to craft wines according to local style. There's a Tannat-based wine called "Stranger Things" and a whole-cluster-fermented Pinot Grigio called PiPo. I'm most curious about the Che XVI, based on a field blend of grapes that are harvested together and co-fermented, resulting in a panoply of flavors – some super-ripe, some tart and acidic. It's meant to represent chaos, with diverse forces acting in concert or at odds with each other. Sometimes all at the same time. (Read more about [The Comets](#).)

All this speaks to another philosophy underpinning the work at Alois Lageder:

"It's exciting to discover connections between seemingly incongruous things."

I think it's a beautiful way to look at the world and our interactions with it. And I think it sheds light on how we might better understand the complex issue of "certified" methods of viticulture. Perhaps it's a prism through which a formal seal of approval can be appreciated for what it represents. And one that encourages us to respect the honest efforts of a multi-generational farming collective for its commitment to the land.



2017 Alois Lageder Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT Pinot Bianco (13% abv; about \$15 retail)

Pinot Bianco has been grown in the Alto Adige since the mid-19th century, faring best on the cooler, elevated sites in the southern terroirs that reflect the diversity of the region. Soils are sandy with gravel and a considerable limestone component. This wine spent four months on its lees in stainless steel tanks and was fermented in temperature-controlled stainless steel as well.

Color: Pale lemon-green with a clear rim.

Nose: Medium+ intensity aromas of green apple and pear; a lovely note of white flowers.

Palate: Medium acidity, with a noticeably creamy texture (lees); riper fruit than on the nose, with flavors of Golden Delicious apple and baked pears. There's a hint of citrus too, prickling the tongue on the finish, which also tastes of almond.

Pairing: Great as an apéritif or with simple dishes featuring mild chicken or fish. I served it with with homemade turkey burgers topped with a dollop of fresh arugula-basil pesto and salad. A decent match.



Sliders topped with arugula and basil pesto from [Glaser Organic Farms](#) here in Miami.



All plated up. An easy weeknight meal!