

MIANI

Reviews of Ribolla Gialla Pettarin: 2000-2015

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Enzo Pontoni is a uniquely talented man. The red and white wines he crafts out of a tiny, no frills winery that is also his home are of simply mind boggling quality. The soft spoken, humble Pontoni is equally skilled with both international and native varieties. Picking a favorite wine from his star-studded lineup is admittedly a very hard thing for most people to do. Not for me. While I love the two Friulano wines, the Buri and the Filip (reviewed recently in a vertical tasting on *Vinous*), for a variety of reasons I have always loved Pontoni’s magnificent Ribolla Gialla Pettarin even more. In my opinion, the Pettarin is one of Italy’s greatest white wines.



A glimpse into the stripped down cellar during harvest

The Pettarin Vineyard

The Miani Ribolla Gialla has carried the Pettarin name since the 2011 vintage in honor of the family that used to own the vineyard. Pontoni was finally able to buy the three-hectare vineyard a few months ago, which is fantastic news for all those who love fine wines because it means that Pontoni will be able to keep making his Ribolla Gialla without losing the source of grapes, as unfortunately happened with the mesmerizingly great Refosco del Peduncolo Rosso from the Calvari vineyard. I do not refer to “the source of the grapes” haphazardly. Anyone who knows what Miani is all about realizes that the magic starts in the vineyards. It is no different with the Pettarin. These Ribolla Gialla vines are anywhere from 80-100 years old, and the combination of Pontoni and old vines makes magic. Of course, it helps that the vineyard is located in the Rosazzo subzone of the Friuli Colli Orientali denomination. Rosazzo has always been one of the two true Grand Crus for Ribolla Gialla in Italy, the other being Oslavia in the Collio. Soils here are the classic ponca, a mixture of marl and sandstone that can give

remarkably complex, deep and refined wines. Ribolla Gialla is a very vigorous variety characterized by small bunches and grapes with thick skins. Yields need to be drastically reduced in order to get the best results. Of course, old vines help, as they are naturally self-regulating. Soils need to have good drainage and the microclimate needs to be warm, dry and breezy (Ribolla Gialla likes heat), all of which Rosazzo has in spades.



I have died and gone to heaven

The Wine

Pontoni spends virtually every moment of the day in his vineyards. During my last visit this November, Pontoni told me he hadn’t left Friuli in the last seventeen years. Listening to him, I get the feeling it actually might be just as long since he last left his home in Buttrio too. But beneath the quiet, subdued and kind face, there is a sharp, keen mind in which neurons certainly don’t lack for synaptic connections. A sign of intelligence is being able to adapt and change one’s mind and the way things are done. Years ago, Pontoni did not care too much for the native Friuli white grapes, believing that world class white wines could be achieved only with the likes of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. However, the sterling goodness of his Malvasia and Ribolla Gialla wines has since made him change his mind. “The last few vintages especially convinced me that I was maybe underestimating these two varieties,” Pontoni told me recently. “Plus, everyone kept telling me what amazing varieties they were and so I started paying more attention to them. I think the turning point was the 2015 vintage, when I stopped using selected yeasts and turned to natural yeasts only. I think that has made the biggest difference.” Another development is that Pontoni is now using 100% new oak for the Ribolla Gialla, a recipe for disaster if the wine doesn’t have the concentration it does

because Ribolla Gialla's delicate aromas and flavors are easily overwhelmed by new oak. Pontoni harvests the Ribolla Gialla grapes fully ripe, usually in early October and presses it very gently in order to avoid all skin contact, for Ribolla Gialla's skins are very rich in tannins. The wines are fermented in French barriques and aged on the lees, with no bâtonnage or rackings, for about eight months to a year.

Pontoni's Ribolla Gialla is a unique, world-class white wine that is lighting years better than any other Ribolla out there. It is not just a great wine, but also a teaching tool for all those willing to listen. First, it speaks of the importance of old vines, putting to shame all the self-serving mumbo jumbo of virused grapevines, too low planting densities, low productivity and poor grapevine material and rootstocks typical of old vineyards – the usual excuses dug up when estates start uprooting old vines. Second, and most importantly, Miani's outstanding Ribolla Gialla shows that the variety can yield fantastic wines simply by treating it like every other white wine grape. Ribolla does NOT need to be macerated on the skins for months, or aged in amphoras, and oxidized beyond redemption, turned into an orange-red wine wannabe, morphed into a Prosecco doppelganger or into a sparkling wine made by secondary fermentation in the bottle. All of which are perfectly legitimate attempts at crafting something new, if it weren't that the sparklers aren't that interesting and the macerated wines provide little joy to most consumers (some macerated Ribolla Giallas, like those of Gravner for example, can still be very interesting, though.) Most consumers are simply not interested in chewy white wines full of earthy and astringent notes. At least sparkling wines are a logical thing to try with the Ribolla because of the grape's intrinsically high acidity. Pontoni demonstrates just how great Ribolla Gialla wines could be, when made "normally". The grape really doesn't need to be put through any gimmicks to show well. But of course, there is no substitute for old vines and talent.



Tasting with Enzo Pontoni in his cellar

I always enjoy visiting with Pontoni and his mother, even if there were not wines to taste. Just listening carefully to everything Pontoni says (mumbles, actually) helps make me a more knowledgeable wine lover and a better wine writer. Therefore, any time I can spend with them is a treat. This

time around the treat was even sweeter than usual, for I sat with Pontoni through a truly magical vertical of the Ribolla Gialla Pettarin. This Vinous exclusive is the first ever vertical of the Pettarin that Pontoni has done, and I am immensely grateful to him for having made it happen.

All the wines in this tasting were sourced from Enzo Pontoni's private cellar, except for the 2015 and the 2000 that I pulled from my own collection to help make the vertical more complete. With the exception of three vintages, all of the wines were tasted from magnum.



Enzo Pontoni and assistant winemaker Mirko

2000 Miani Ribolla Gialla

Bright deep yellow. Captivating aromas of vanilla bean, caramel, cinnamon apple pie, orange liqueur and peach. Rich, dense and tactile, with a luscious mouthfeel and flavors that are very similar to the aromas. Finishes with outstanding clarity and cut and whiplash of well-integrated acidity that provides lift to this large framed, opulent wine. Incredible just how rich and dense old vine Ribolla Gialla wines can be, and how well they age. This wine is unbelievably fresh, all the more impressive for, unlike most of the wines in this tasting, it was not served out of a magnum.

94 Drink: 2017 – 2021

2003 Miani Ribolla Gialla (Magnum)

Bright medium-dark yellow. Subtle but clean and remarkably fresh hints of citrus oil and quince paste on the enticing nose, with a touch of diesel fuel adding complexity. Enters rich, dense and suave, then slightly monolithic in its orange jam, dried pear and chamomile flavors. Finishes long, clean and tactile, and with truly remarkable freshness for the furnace-like year. Served from a magnum, this is still remarkably good and fresh for a 2003 white wine. It speaks volumes about Pontoni's talent. Easily one of the top 5 Italian whites from the impossibly difficult 2003 vintage that I have memory of. Outstanding, and still very young.

92 Drink: 2017 – 2024



2005 Miani Ribolla Gialla

Dark yellow; this is by far the darkest wine in the tasting. Slightly muted nose hints at almond paste, caramel and crystallized apricots. Then similar flavors to the aromas, with a slightly astringent mouthfeel. Finishes long, but a little drying and tight. This was a very difficult year, full of rain, hail and cold weather. In fact, 2005 was not unlike 2014, and the two wines share an uncanny resemblance.)

89 Drink: 2017 – 2020

2006 Miani Ribolla Gialla (Magnum)

Bright golden-tinged straw yellow. Ripe aromas of citrus (bergamot, tangerine, lemon curd), crystallized apricot and almond paste are complicated by a very string floral and minty quality. Rich, dense and multilayered, with a flinty mineral note that provides clarity and cut to the fresh citrus and orchard fruit flavors. This complex, very deep long 2006 has an almost endless finish. The vintage was characterized by very good acidity. Cool weather in August helped the wine develop its minty note. Served from magnum, the 2006 is still remarkably young. This was Pontoni's favorite wine in the tasting, and I can see why. The 2006 is classic Ribolla (the otherworldly 2012 is atypical given the noble rot), a wine that really puts to shame all those who say the variety cannot give especially complex or deep wines.

96 Drink: 2017 – 2028

2007 Miani Ribolla Gialla (Magnum)

Bright dark yellow. Hints of white mushroom and menthol complement baled cinnamon apple and dried pear on the nose and palate. Finishes long and very fresh but with an enticing oily quality. About 5% of the grapes were hit by noble rot in 2007, one of the earliest harvests on record for Pontoni. Because of the hot growing season, Pontoni picked these grapes in mid-September, a real rarity for him.

93 Drink: 2017 – 2022

2011 Miani Ribolla Gialla Pettarin (Magnum)

Bright yellow. Curious strong notes of vanilla and almond paste complicate the pear and peach aromas and flavors. Finishes classically dry, long and tactile, with a repeating resinous note and a hint of Ribolla Gialla's typical tannic bite. The 2011 vintage did not have the rain spell that 2012 did, so there was no noble rot and, as a result, the wine is less honeyed.

94 Drink: 2017 – 2025

2012 Miani Ribolla Gialla Pettarin (Magnum)

Bright pale golden-tinged yellow. Peach crystallized apricots, honey and bergamot are just some of the nuances on the absolutely outstanding nose. Then rich, dense and multilayered, with a strong dollop of marmelady botrytis adding noteworthy complexity and richness to the ripe pomaceous fruit and orange nectar flavors. Finishes long and suave, with an almost opulent mouthfeel and hints of dried pear and lemon curd. There was a little rain between the harvest of the white and red grapes in 2012, and as Ribolla Gialla is picked at the same time as the reds, it was still hanging around when a burst of noble rot hit the vineyard. Almost 30% of the grapes were affected by rot, and it is quite evident. If this isn't the best, most layered and complex Ribolla Gialla wine I have ever tasted, it's close. Almost Alsace-like in style.

96 Drink: 2017 – 2025

2014 Miani Ribolla Gialla Pettarin

Bright yellow with golden tinges. Very clean, vertical nose that hints at bergamot, sage, and dried white flowers, but comes across as a little one-dimensional presently. Then also very clean and linear on the palate with hints of fresh citrus and aromatic herbs, but lacks the usual depth and complexity of this wine. Finishes medium-long and fresh. A very good wine for the vintage, but just doesn't have the power, depth or complexity for a higher score. Ribolla Gialla is not a variety that does well with rain and the 2014 vintage was just not right weather-wise for this cultivar. That said, there's an underlying hint of rawness here, and so this might still develop more nuances and stuffing over the next year or so.

89 Drink: 2018 – 2023

2015 Miani Ribolla Gialla Pettarin (Magnum)

Luminous bright straw yellow. Complex, deep aromas of tangerine, yellow stone fruit, and chamomile are complicated by a honeyed nuance. Rich, dense and yet light on its feet, this classic Miani white has a refined texture and a long piercing finish. This is a rare Ribolla Gialla in which about 10% of the grapes were hit by noble rot. The presence of botrytis really adds to the wine's complexity. Memorable stuff that's good to drink already but I'd actually cellar this for a few years, if you can defer gratification.

93+ Drink: 2019 – 2027