

The Impossible Dream: An Exciting Pinot Grigio

Alois Lageder's Riff is the Intersection of Quality and Quantity

September 18, 2017 by [Mark Spivak](https://www.palmbeachillustrated.com/author/markspivak/) (<https://www.palmbeachillustrated.com/author/markspivak/>).



(<http://www.palmbeachillustrated.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/riff3.jpg>) Alois Lageder is a man of many refinements: the fifth-generation proprietor of a wine estate dating back to 1823, and a gentleman with a keen intellect and a deep respect for nature. His 125 acres of family-owned vineyards are cultivated organically, sustainably and biodynamically. Those parcels are scattered throughout the finest areas of the Alto Adige and South Tyrol, yielding single vineyard wines with stunning purity of fruit.

However, single vineyard wines are not the drink of the masses (nor are Sciava, Lagrein or Moscato Giallo, the grapes grown on of some of Lageder's dedicated sites). In the wine industry, quality and quantity seldom coexist. You either want to produce the bottle people buy to celebrate their anniversary, or the one that goes into their refrigerator every day. It's hard to have it both ways.

His desire to reach a wider audience first drove Lageder to forge long-term contracts with 90 local growers and produce a line of classic varietal wines. He took a further step about ten years ago and founded Cantina Riff, to answer a simple question: could the elevated Lageder standards be applied to Pinot Grigio and a Merlot/Cabernet blend that were both affordable and generally available in retail stores?

The underlying issue, of course, is whether anyone would care. Pinot Grigio has replaced Chardonnay as the generic quaff of the moment, and public expectations are low—in large part because of the popularity of Santa Margherita, which tastes like grapefruit-flavored water mildly spiked with alcohol. Remember the *New Yorker* cartoon some years back of a tanker truck with “Cheap White Wine” stenciled on its side? Getting people excited about Pinot Grigio today is truly the impossible dream.



<http://www.palmbeachillustrated.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/riff1.jpg>

Even so, Riff Pinot Grigio 2016 (\$11) represents the intersection of quality and quantity. The wine is blended by Lageder from vineyards in the foothills of the Northeastern Italian Alps. Riff is German for reef, and the name signifies the geological origin of those mountains: the coral reefs and fossilized limestone deposits that remain from the bodies of water that covered the region in prehistoric times.

The wine has a light straw color and a sexy nose with aromas of citrus, melon and ripe tree fruit. In the mouth, it displays mouthwatering acidity and vivid flavors of lemon, lime, peach and green apple. Peach and melon flavors expand in the mid palate and gain in intensity as the wine warms. The texture is nicely balanced between crispness and amplitude, and the fruit lingers on a generous finish. In addition to all the usual food pairings (hors d'oeuvres, finger food, fish and shellfish), Riff would make an elegant companion to poultry and white meats, and is a charming wine to sip on its own.

Mark Spivak is the author of *Iconic Spirits: An Intoxicating History* (Lyons Press, 2012) and *Moonshine Nation* (Lyons Press, 2014); his first novel, *Friend of the Devil*, (https://www.amazon.com/Friend-Devil-Mark-Spivak/dp/1626944520/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1491221764&sr=1-2) is now available from Black Opal Books. For more information, go to amazon.com.