



Etude senior winemaker/
general manager Jon Priest
is pictured in the winery's
sustainably farmed Grace
Benoist Ranch.

ON GRACE
BENOIST'S

green EARTH

WINEMAKING IN
CONCERT WITH
NATURE AT ETUDE'S
CARNEROS ESTATE

PHOTO: ALEXANDER FARRIN

The **ransom** note
with David Ransom



The Ransom Note is a column by Tasting Panel editor-at-large David Ransom. Each issue, David connects readers with some of the people, products, and events making news along the Eastern Seaboard.

How to Break Your Holiday Wine Routine

Too often, I think, we tailor our holiday wine selections to fit pairing ideals cemented generations ago when there were fewer regions and fewer grapes to choose from. But times have changed, and we now have more options than ever before. I recently found a couple of wonderful wines from regions you may not think of as producing go-to bottles for the season but that I think will work beautifully with the festive meals we all gather for.

Perfect for apéritifs and first courses—and also great for restaurant programs by the glass—is the crisp yet unctuous Falanghina from Campania. I've long said that Italy's best and most ageworthy whites come from the southwestern and northeastern regions of Campania and Friuli, respectively; of the three main white varieties grown in the former—Falanghina, Fiano, and Greco—Falanghina is the star.

Nearly extinct by the 1960s, the grape was resurrected by vintner Leonardo Mustilli, who started bottling varietal examples in 1979. In the decades since, the grape has been widely planted around the region, most notably in the inland areas of Sannio (home to Mustilli's eponymous winery) and Benevento and the coastal area of Campi Flegrei. Best with a few years of bottle age, Falanghina boasts a rich mouthfeel and citrus and tropical notes that make it a wonderful accompaniment to richer white wine-friendly fare—think the Feast of the Seven Fishes.

Hailing from the Italian Peninsula's landlocked region of Umbria a little further north is another uniquely Italian wine, Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG. My early remembrances of Sagrantino are that it was a rustic, highly tannic red that needed years to become drinkable. While it still retains some of these traits, today's examples are much more refined and present lovely notes of



Chiara Lungarotti produces some of Montefalco's most respected Sagrantino wines.

spice and black fruit on the palate. The grape is said to have the highest levels of phenolic compounds in the world; due to the extended hang time it's given to reap those benefits, it presents as fairly hot—most of the wines I tried during a recent outing in the region hovered at around 16% alcohol—making it a slam dunk for the fatty meats served during the holidays, including goose, beef rib roasts, and game.

So this holiday season, include Falanghina and Sagrantino in your recommendations and incorporate them into your menu. You—and your customers—will be delighted with the results. **LT**



PHOTOS: DAVID RANSOM

Sagrantino grapes on the vine.



A historic 1979 bottle of Falanghina on display at Mustilli in Campania.