



## *The British Chamber of Commerce for Italy*

### **TOURING LAKE GARDA PART 3**

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*The circle closes and from San Felice del Benaco, after a pleasant 20 minutes along the curving roads and rolling hills to the south, we move towards Polpenazze and arrive at Lonato...*



On a summit, considered strategic even well before the battles of the Risorgimento were fought on the plains of San Martino below, and where Vittorio Emanuele the future King of Italy was quartered, we find the **Azienda Agricola La Spia d'Italia** ([www.spiaditalia.it](http://www.spiaditalia.it)).

We were welcomed by **Dr. Andrea Guetta** who invited us to make ourselves comfortable in the handsome restaurant rooms annexed to the winery. The estate offers not only restaurant facilities, but also those of horseback riding and in the near future it will also be possible to stay overnight. The wines, it goes without saying, are tasted as matches to the dishes planned for our luncheon. The prices listed below are those for private sales directly at the winery.

We begin with the estate's **Garda Brut**, 100% Chardonnay, Charmat method, with a lovely fruity nose, specifically golden apple and ripe peach. Round in the mouth, dry but not extremely so, it closes in a pleasantly citrus manner. Then, leading us into the meal: salmon-trout, delicious steamed pike with spinach and deep-fried bleak which are very small freshwater fish.

As we dine, the discussion turns towards the search for quality in the vineyard, and how this objective carries costs in terms of a higher need for greater manpower. We learn that in the past, the months of July and August prior to the harvest were relatively less demanding, in that work was limited to protective care. Today these are months of intense labour, because of the need to de-leaf and prune the plants to obtain quality healthy grapes, and at the same time reducing the need to resort to treatment.

Our first course arrives – a risotto with greens and lake fish. Into our glasses flows a **San Martino della Battaglia Bianco dell'Erta 2005**, (available at € 4,50). Made and matured in stainless steel, this wine is produced with unblended tocai grapes from the nearby hills. These very steep hills in by-gone days caused the beasts of burden to



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strain against the loads they pulled and today are training grounds for professional cyclists (even the Giro d'Italia has swung by here!), and courageous Sunday peddlers. The wine is golden yellow, intensely fruity and floral, soft and long in the mouth with a finish that calls to mind the grape itself and melon. We're talking about the DOC San Martino which is regulated by the Consortium responsible for of Garda Classico. In total there are 30/40 hectares with only three or four estates claiming the greater part of that. Standing in the territory that includes the DOC Lugana, Tocai has been fighting a battle for position from the start, and today when it does find a bit of space it is generally in the hilly areas near the tower of San Martino, on the Brodena plateau and the environs of Pozzolengo where conditions are ideal for bringing out its qualities.



The cheese arrives, presented on a round platter – to be sampled in a “clockwise” direction – and we're talking about a 24 hour clock here! Beginning with the milder robiola we move to slivers of Bagosso, and pause to delight in the marbled aged Gorgonzola, creamy Gorgonzola and Stilton, closing with a marbled goat cheese. For the first “12



hours” we were invited to sample a **Garda Classico Rosso Superiore 2000**. A wine costing between €9,50 for the 1999 version and €7,50 for the 2001. Don't look for the 2002 and 2003 because it wasn't made in those years. Aged for 2 years in large oaken vats, it present notes of blackberry and cherry jam, hay, spices and hints of tobacco. Austere with good body, long persistence with an aftertaste of black currant. The cheeses are wonderful, but thoughts cannot help but run to the traditional Brescian spit served here in the cooler months: a ritual which is infinite in its variations from town to town. On the shores of Garda a rich variety of barn-yard animals are combined cut in calibrated sizes so that they may easily be cooked together on one spit. Sage and pork loin add the final touch to any recipe – and small birds are an option. The spits are made of vine or olive wood.

With the marbled cheese our host plays his ace: **Gefide 1999 San Martino della Battaglia VLQRPD**, where the “L” is understood to mean “liquoroso”. For less than 20 euro you can bring home a sensational bottle. Sensational not only in the glass, but right from the label which reminds us of how, in 1999 a certain Luigi Veronelli, when attributing his



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rating of 3 hats to this wine described it as “gefide” – the most brilliant type of diamond - and “bugizio” a particularly intense shade of yellow. The steps, the energy and care necessary for producing it make it more than worth while to pay a visit to the winery – as certainly its taste-aroma profile deserves to be sampled on the field.

And then of course, our dessert! An amazing concoction of ricotta gelato with a sauce of figs (by the way, a visit to [www.fattorialaregina.com](http://www.fattorialaregina.com) will allow you to carry home many of the cheeses as well as the gelato cited here). This delicious combination is accompanied by a most particular sample of natural honey-comb. We close with an unexpected wine: **Groppello Chinato, Inchino**, produced in the area by Azienda Agricola La Guarda ([www.laguarda.com](http://www.laguarda.com)).

In closing, thanks are due to the President of the Garda Classico Consortium Paolo Turina, and Orietta Papini the consortium’s Public Relations Officer, who made my 27 June – with the three stops I’ve described to you, a truly wonderful day. Thanks to Cheryl Sullivan who was great company on the adventure! Prosit!