



Band-Aid-flavoured wine? I'll drink to that

Have you detected nuances in wine that struck you as coming from a place other than a vineyard? Things like kerosene, pencil lead, lavender or licorice?

Welcome to the club; you're an official wine bore. I know I'm one because, at the risk of being accused of flavour stereotyping, I occasionally find some Italian wines taste like salami. I jotted the word down recently while sampling a red from the southern Puglia region, **Rivera Cappellaccio Riserva Aglianico 2005**, released this week in Ontario Vintages stores.

There's no cured meat in the wine, of course.

Nor had I just scarfed down a Calabrese sandwich. (It was morning and I'm a Shredded Wheat man.) Complex aromatics in fermented grapes can align into molecular configurations that, to the nose, mouth and brain, suggest something other than fruit. It's usually an olfactory illusion that draws on our deep biases, like spotting patterns in clouds or a Rorschach inkblot.

But in some cases the connection is literal, as in a "buttery" chardonnay that contains lactic acid, the stuff that gives churned cream its flavour. Aglianico (the g is silent) grows almost exclusively in the Italian south. It's an ancient variety, the name a phonetic bastardization of ellenico, or Hellenic.

Increasingly fashionable among wine enthusiasts, the grape exudes two qualities that will likely prevent it from ever being what I'd call a crowd-pleaser, astringent tannins and sharp acidity.

It is, shall we say, an acquired taste. In addition to its long cellaring potential of up to 20 years, aglianico is all the rage among the grape in-crowd because it can telegraph complexity in the form of savoury flavours. It's robust and often sweaty, suggesting old leather, herbs and, yes, cured meat, especially after a few years in bottle.

The vine flourishes in its historic homeland of Campania, the region south of Rome that includes Naples. But there are fine examples grown all over the south, including Puglia, the heel of Italy's boot. The bottle of Rivera Cappellaccio 2005 I tasted also gave off a whiff of Band-Aid, the plastic medicinal smell that mothers of active five-year-olds know well.

I suspect it was due to *brettanomyces*, a yeast found in some wines and beers. In small doses it's considered by some experts, notably old-school winemakers in Europe, to be pleasant. The celebrated reds of Château de Beaucastel in France and Château Musar in Lebanon wear their "brett" proudly, like expensive cologne.

As with cologne, though, too much is considered a no-no. I found the Rivera Cappellaccio's Band-Aid to be within the acceptable limit and made the wine taste – as brett can – slightly older than its stated age. At the table, Aglianico pairs well with hearty meats, such as game and braised beef. It also stands up nicely to charcuterie. At a tasting two years ago at Mastroberardino, the most distinguished aglianico producer in Campania, staff laid on a glorious spread of cold cuts and cheese. In Italy, even professional tastings often are accompanied by snacks because wine there is all but irrelevant in the absence of food. The Rivera Cappellaccio is one of several medium-full- and full-bodied reds that inspired some savoury adjectives in my notebook lately. I hope you like them as much as I do. [BEPPI CROSARIOL](#)

Rivera Cappellaccio Riserva Aglianico 2005, Italy

SCORE: 90 PRICE: \$18.95 The dominant flavour here is cherry, but it's the other stuff that gets the heart racing, such as the subtle aromas of horse stable, plastic bandages and salami. Pair it with braised beef or the cheese course.