

BENITO'S WINE REVIEWS

"The great evil of wine is that it first seizes the feet, it is a crafty wrestler." –Titus Maccius, 190 BC

About Me

BENITO

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2007

Benito vs. The Farmers Market: Polenta

"Pasta has become so universally accepted as the national dish of Italy that it is difficult to believe that not much farther into the past than two generations ago, pasta was as foreign to certain Italian regions as it might have been to, say, Lapland. For a quarter of a millennium, in the Vento and Friuli, as well as in much of Lombardy, it was *polenta*, more than any other food, that sustained life.

Preparing it was a ritual, eating it was like receiving a sacrament." –Marcella Hazan, *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*, 1973.

I love polenta, but I don't think I've written about it here before. I've had it both in Italy and back home *negli Stati Uniti*, but I was delighted to see it offered at the Downtown Farmers Market on Saturday. While at the stand for Delta Grind (purveyors of many wonderful ground corn products), I bumped into Papa Squirrel. He introduced me to the proprietors and I went home with a container of masa as well. Tamales soon to come—watch this space!

When it came time to cook I ignored dear Signora Hazan and followed the interesting recipe on the back of the Delta Grind container. It's unique but quite tasty. To find out the secret, go to the Farmers Market and buy some for yourself. I topped the polenta with cremini mushrooms and Swiss chard, and braised some chicken thighs in beer, broth, and onions.

For the wine, I stuck to Italy and poured a glass of the 2006 Campo al Mare Vermentino di Toscana, around \$14. It's got a light citrus fruit aroma with an almost fizzy crispness. It's an uncomplicated wine but is a great Italian white and should pair with a wide range of dishes. Overall the dinner was simple but a success. One of the diners had never had polenta before but ended up asking for seconds. While that's often one of the best compliments a cook can get, I'm really looking up to forming the leftovers into discs and pan-frying them tomorrow.

