A DAY IN MONTA D'ALBA
Wines, Soils, and Cheese.

Yesterday, some of my colleagues and I went to visit Giovanni Almondo, a small, family-owned winery in Piedmonte's Monta d'Alba. There, amongst hills that are famous for truffles and fog, we had lunch and drank wines with founder and wine-maker Domenico Almondo. Here are some of the highlights.

by damarisdeere via Instagram

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Piedmonte's wines are as singular as its soils--calcareous marl in the west, iron-rich clay in the east, in addition to rocks and clay. Almondo has made a display of them in his kitchen. Presented in little glass bowls, they almost look like Indian spices.

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On the other side of the kitchen Almondo keeps a collection of shells. They are pale and small and seem very fragile. Almondo did not find them at the beach. He found them in his vineyard, which was completely submerged in water millions of years ago. That Almondo's grapes are grown in a prehistoric seabed filled with fossils is part of makes their flavors so distinct.

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For instance, the wine in this glass is made from a grape called Arneis. Arneis is Piedmonte's version of Sauvignon Blanc, but in Piedmontese dialect, it is also slang for *tool* ... a word for a child who is quirky, eccentric, or brilliantly strange. What came first, the wine or the slang, I can't say, but the style of Almondo's Arneis--called Bricco delle Ciliege, or "Hill of Cherries"--fits its etymology to a tee. Mineral-y and bright, it smells like anise and acacia, and tastes like oysters and lemons and flowers. Only 3,000 cases are made every year, which helps explain why the wine sells for $20 a glass at a high-end wine bar in NYC. You can also find it at Eleven Madison Park, which was recently celebrated as one of the world's best restaurants.

After plates of salami cotto, frittata with onions, and slices of hazelnut cake, we ended the meal on a high-note--with a plate of gooey cheese.

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