Damp despatch from Piemonte

22 Nov 2004 by JR

Rain makes *vignerons* sad and truffle hunters happy so make what you will of my damp experiences filming here. I don't think I have been offered Alba's white truffles quite so profusely ever before. The first were shaved on to fried eggs over breakfast at the very well appointed new *agriturismo* Tra Arte e Querco (tel + 39 0173 792156) just above Monchiero about 15 km south-west of Alba yesterday. It's run by a family of truffle hunters so every time you open the door into the main house you are assailed by the deeply fungal whiff of *tartufi bianchi*.

At dinner they smothered slices of raw veal, pancakes stuffed with fonduta cheese *and* the pasta course of tagliatelle.

At dinner tonight in the superior Cannon d'Or restaurant in Cocconato (tel +39 0141 907794) between Asti and Turin they were shaved just as generously over a sort of tartare of veal, fresh cheese, risotto and yet more tagliatelle. Each of these was a separate course, of course.

(I mentioned *sushi* to one Piemontese tonight and he shuddered. You should know, he explained to me solemnly, that the only fish we are prepared to consider in this region are salted anchovies. I must tackle him on the tuna for *vitello tonnato* - a dish served at both dinners so far.)

No wine producer is ecstatic over 2002 in Piemonte, but then they know it has ended the most unprecedented run of successful vintages ever.

Here they are busy touting Monferrato as the next big thing - the Langhe hills now being so intensively planted with vines. Monferrato is a big DOC north-east of Langhe, east of Turin. 'The new Bolgheri' and 'Antinori has bought here' are the sorts of things being said. It won't be until towards the end of the decade that we see whether this optimism is justified.