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# ITALY GUIDE 2022

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Rolling slopes of Tuscan vineyards in the Chianti Classico region, near Gaiole in Chianti



PHOTOGRAPH GEORGE CLERK/GETTY IMAGES

## WELCOME

# ‘A tempting glimpse into the latest and greatest Italy has to offer...’

Welcome to *Decanter's* Italy Guide 2022. Our expert authors – all of whom are either Italian by birth, or live and work in Italy, or frequently visit and specialise in Italy's many wine regions (see *p6*) – have tasted more than 120 wines from every nook and cranny of the Italian peninsula to bring you a tempting glimpse into the latest and greatest Italy has to offer in the coming year.

Kicking off with one of the world's most in-demand wine categories, we focus on Italy's celebrated and coveted Super Tuscan wines (*from p8*) as the category hits its 50th anniversary, discovering the roots of the movement and the challenges faced by the protagonists over the last five decades. It's an intriguing story of ambition, experimentation and human connection that no fan of Italian wine should miss.

If that doesn't sate your hunger for Italy's fine wines, we've also packed in expert opinion on Barolo and Brunello vintages that are on great form for drinking now (*p20*), the premium white blended wines of Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northeast (*p66*), and Italy's top wine consultants, who are steering the industry today (*p30*).

To update you on recent developments, we profile the redefined Chianti Classico sub-zones you need to know,

newly ratified after years of discussions (*p50*), and head back to the north to discover the newest categories of Prosecco: extra brut, Sui Lieviti and DOC Rosé (*p60*).

Away from the big names, our expert authors take you off the beaten track to investigate areas around Italy's regions as disparate as Monferrato (*p42*), where Barbera reigns supreme, to the east of Barolo's heartland in Piedmont; next-door Franciacorta (*p100*) in Lombardy, central north Italy, where top-quality metodo classico sparkling wines are the order of the day; and to the south over the regional border into the small DOC of Romagna (*p91*), neighbouring Tuscany, where Sangiovese has an expression all of its own.

If that wasn't enough, we also discover 'Italy's best-kept secrets' with a tour down through the delightful Adriatic east-coast regions of Marche, Abruzzo and Molise (*p72*).

And if you're not able to visit any time soon, to whet your appetite we've highlighted 20 great-value and character-filled wines priced below £20 per bottle that you can easily find on the UK high street (*p94*). I hope you enjoy reading this guide as much as we have enjoyed putting it together. **D**

James Button, *Decanter* Regional Editor for Italy



COVER PHOTOGRAPH FRANCESCO RICCARDINO/GETTY IMAGES. MAP/MAGGIE NELSON



# Decanter Italy guide 2022



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great value from around the Italian regions, selected by the *Decanter* team

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Cover: Tuscany on a warm spring afternoon, with its classic landscape of rolling hills and cypress trees

# Meet the *Decanter* experts



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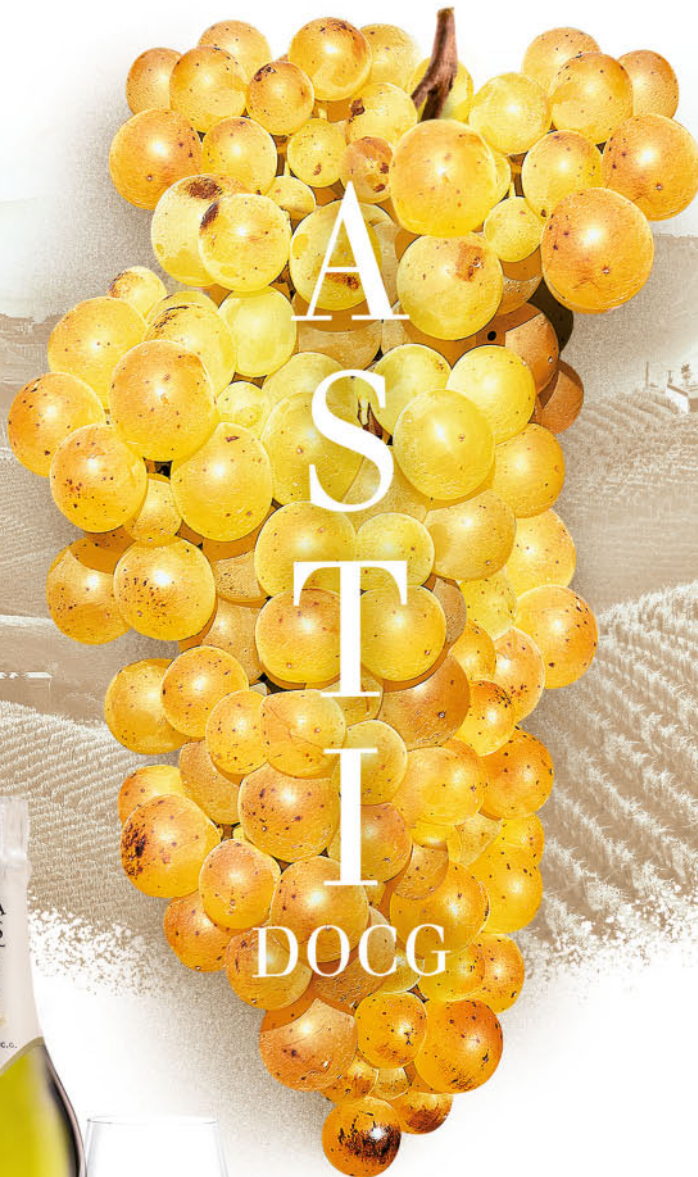
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# SUPER TUSCANS *at* 50

These superstar wines, created as a reaction against restrictive Chianti Classico rules, took on near-mythical status and began to command very high prices. As the SuperTuscans celebrate their half-centenary, how are they faring today?

STORY ALDO FIORELLI

Fifty years since their inception, the wines known widely as SuperTuscans represent some of the top expressions of Italian winemaking today. Produced outside Tuscany's most reputable denominations, sometimes using grapes not authorised within those DOC or DOCG regions, often – in a wider region well known for the typical large Italian botti – aged in small French barrels, and always having been sold at incredibly high prices, SuperTuscans have faced something of an uphill battle.

## DEFYING AUTHORITY

The term SuperTuscan was first coined in the mid-1980s by the English journalist and Master of Wine Nicolas Belfrage and was then adopted by the English and American press. 'Super' – literally 'above' – referred to their superiority in both concentration and quality over other Tuscan wines at the time. Just as a supernova is a nova with exceptional energy, or superstar a leading

protagonist, SuperTuscan wines exceeded Tuscan traditions. The category first came about in the previous decade and brought with it 'a great stir', as Marchese Piero Antinori describes it, 'because the first **Tignanello** was labelled as "vino da tavola", which would have been at the bottom of the pyramid of quality, whereas this was proposed on the market at a higher price than the DOCs'.

It was a kind of anarchy against the authorities and their winemaking regulations. Not by chance, one of the most prominent proponents was Luigi Veronelli, an Italian gastronome, wine journalist, philosopher – and wine anarchist.

'I must say, it was thanks to Veronelli that I produced Tignanello in 1971,' says Antinori. 'In 1973, I let him taste the wine blind. He was enthusiastic but I was filled with doubt: I told him I couldn't have bottled it as Chianti Classico since it was produced with 100% Sangiovese, and at that time "Gallo Nero" [Chianti Classico's official black rooster logo] required the inclusion



of white grapes. He responded, “Who cares about the appellation, call it Tignanello after the vineyard and this will be its origin”. Then I made up my mind to label it as vino da tavola.’

Another big change had taken place in Tuscan viticulture and winemaking which convinced Antinori to release Tignanello 1971: his uncle Mario Incisa della Rocchetta was producing a wine in Bolgheri from Cabernet Sauvignon, distributed by Antinori and labelled vino da tavola under the name of the vineyard: the now much-vaunted Sassicaia.

These two wines are essential in understanding the nature of SuperTuscans and the birth of the whole category. Sassicaia comes from Alta Maremma where, at that time, there was no appellation for wines, while Tignanello reigns from the heart of one of the most important DOCG territories in Italy, Chianti Classico. The Gallo Nero identity stems from Baron Bettino Ricasoli’s work in the 1870s, which in part recognised that the inclusion of some white grapes such as Malvasia and Trebbiano could be warranted for softening the firm acidity of Sangiovese in wines meant for everyday drinking.

Antinori maintains that the Chianti Classico identity (the ‘Classico’ suffix being added in 1932 to identify the original wines from within its defined territory) still had merit in the early 1970s, and he wanted to use the appellation. However, he hoped to produce a wine of improved quality, using 100% Sangiovese, and avoiding the required use of white grapes, so in the end he was forced to bottle it as a vino da tavola. ‘Our enemy was not Ricasoli’s laws,’ he maintains, ‘it was the degeneration of them due to certain growers who were searching for profit through shortcuts, operating a viticulture



## ‘After their first 50 years, there remains little doubt around what a Super Tuscan has the potential to be’

focused on quantity rather than quality. Our aim was to bypass the lean and dilute character of the [typical] wines of that era, in order to promote more concentrated and balanced reds.’

### INTERNATIONAL IMPETUS

In 1962 in the Chianti region, at Castello di Poppiano near Montespertoli, Prince Alberto Dimitri Kunz (who died in 2008) produced Tegelato ‘vino vecchio’, labelled as a vino da tavola. Based on Sangiovese, it is not possible to say whether it was blended with Cabernet Sauvignon, but it was certainly produced without white grapes and intended as a great wine for the long haul. It had been a big success up to the 1980s in Italy, but today is no longer produced.

The birth of the SuperTuscans is considered to be shared among the three wines – Tignanello, Sassicaia and Tegelato – though in 1969, Agricola San Felice also began production of a new wine, Vigorello, thanks to the efforts of Sangiovese specialist Enzo Morganti (d. 1994), who was at that time working with talented winemaker Giulio Gambelli (d. 2012), a legendary figure behind celebrated labels such as Monteverdine, Poggio di Sotto, Soldera and others. Vigorello was another 100% Sangiovese and would remain that way for its first 10 vintages. Tignanello, by comparison, introduced a small proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon from 1975.

Above left: 19th-century instigator of the modern Chianti Classico regulations, Baron Bettino Ricasoli

Above: at Castelnuovo Berardenga, vineyards of Agricola San Felice, creators of early SuperTuscan Vigorello

Right: Sassicaia’s Castiglioncello Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard



The arrival of international grape varieties on the Tuscan scene had a crucial impact – central to the development of wines with more body, more concentration, more balance and more consistency from vintage to vintage. And the use of such varieties also attracted some of the wine world's most prominent technicians to Italy.

André Tchelistcheff (d. 1994), known as 'the dean of American winemakers', travelled from California to Bolgheri and in the 1980s encouraged Piero's brother Marchese Lodovico Antinori, at Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, to plant Merlot on the blue clay of the Masseto hill, producing what today is the most expensive Super Tuscan: the 100% Merlot **Masseto**.

Professor Emile Peynaud (d. 2004), known as the 'forefather of modern oenology', advised Tignanello winemaker Giacomo Tachis (d. 2016) to 'avoid using oak casks that are too large, for too long, too many times'. The contribution of new French oak was critical to the refinement of these Tuscan wines, enhancing complexity, concentration and thus the identity of Super Tuscan. The result was nothing less than outstanding, as Sangiovese-based wines aged in small French barrels, including **Cepparello**, **Flaccianello**, **Fontalloro**,

**Il Carbonaione**, **Le Pergole Torte** and **San Giusto a Rentennano's Percarlo** all attest.

### PROMISING POSITION

Despite the wines sharing general characteristics, an official definition for Super Tuscan doesn't exist. However, it is widely accepted that they are wines produced in Tuscany using the grape varieties allowed to grow within the region – including international varieties – mostly aged in French barrels and labelled today under the regional IGT Toscana umbrella.

According to the Consorzio Vino Toscana group ([consorziovinotoscana.it](http://consorziovinotoscana.it)), based on analysis by Nomisma Spa, total average wine production in Tuscany is 2.4 million hectolitres per year, of which 637,000hl is labelled as IGT Toscana, representing 27% of the total production. The average surface area cultivated for IGT Toscana is 12,500ha, with 1,400 producers accounting for 90 million bottles released per year, of which 74% are red, 21% white and 5% rosé wines.

IGT Toscana therefore represents the second biggest 'appellation' within the region, after the wider Chianti DOCG in terms of both volume and area (just topping 14,000ha in 2020), but of

## TUSCANY

course not all of these Toscana wines are SuperTuscans. 'Of those 90 million bottles, at least 30 million are sold at €20 and higher, reaching mid-premium to super-premium levels, so about one third could be considered SuperTuscans,' explains Cesare Cecchi, president of Consorzio Vino Toscana.

The consorzio is not officially recognised yet. Although it meets the legal requirements by representing 54% of production (minimum requirement 51%), it only represents 105 wineries – 20% of producers, while the minimum requirement is 35%. The production value of IGT Toscana amounts to €495 million; 31% from domestic sales and 69% from export, of which 33% goes to the US, 46% to Europe, 6% to Asia and 15% to other markets. Going by the estimations of Consorzio Vino Toscana, the value of the SuperTuscan category equates to approximately €163 million annually. In the last 10 years, IGT Toscana has increased by 126%. 'In 2021, production has grown by 5% above the average production levels over recent years, while during the 2020 pandemic we lost just 10% of the production,' explains the consorzio's managing director Stefano Campatelli.

These are great figures, though they possibly don't paint the whole picture.

### SHIFT OF EMPHASIS

Several factors are changing the appeal of SuperTuscans. The dry or hot vintages of the past 20 years, such as 2003, 2007, 2012 and 2017, have imparted a certain lack of tension to some wines based on international grape varieties. But the SuperTuscan style really took a plunge when full-bodied, muscular wines fell out of fashion. At the point when consumers began looking for red wines focused on freshness and finesse, SuperTuscans' concentration and the strong presence of new oak – as advocated by Peynaud and as previously used to improve Chianti-style wines of the past – became a hindrance.

But not all wines were affected in the same way. For example, both climate change and the maturing tastes of informed consumers triggered a rediscovery of Sangiovese as a grape on its own, at the expense, for example, of early-ripening Merlot. In March of 2017, Ella Lister, founder and CEO of market analyst Wine Lister, launched an in-depth regional study on the greatest wines of Tuscany, in which 100% Sangiovese wines such as Fontodi's Flaccianello della Pieve and Le Pergole Torte from Monteverdine appeared in the first eight places of her classification.

According to the Bolgheri regional consorzio, since 2018 Cabernet Franc plantings here (on the Maremma coast, south of Cecina) have increased



## 'Climate change and the maturing tastes of informed consumers triggered a rediscovery of Sangiovese as a grape on its own'

by almost 55%, from 158ha to 244.6ha. Cabernet Franc is in demand because of the fresher character and late-ripening quality of the variety. The previously mentioned Vigorello was reinvented in 2011 with the inclusion for the first time of indigenous Pugnietello in the blend with Bordeaux varieties, 'to give back to the wine its Tuscan blood', notes Leonardo Bellaccini, head winemaker of the estate.

The rediscovery of indigenous grape varieties has dampened, for example, the development of white SuperTuscans. Just a few exceptions remain, such as Querciabella's **Batàr** and **Ornellaia Bianco**.

Looking at the sub-regions, Tachis used to say Cabernet Sauvignon in Tuscany is 'Chianti-esque', underlining the tension of fruit and acidity which it expresses within the region. Not by chance, one of the reasons for launching the 'Gran Selezione' upper level [above Riserva] of Chianti Classico was to entice a few celebrated SuperTuscans back into the consorzio's fold – with a new stipulation that all fruit must be estate-grown aiming to encourage producers to use the Chianti Classico designation rather than labelling their wines as IGT Toscana – as was confirmed by past president Sergio Zingarelli when launching the new category of Gallo Nero back in 2014.

### POWERFUL AMBITION

If the Chianti Classico region should be considered the cradle of SuperTuscans, it was





Clockwise from top left: respected consultant André Tchelistcheff; Marchese Piero Antinori, one of the original SuperTuscan producers; Querciabella Batâr – a rare white SuperTuscan

coastal Maremma that attracted huge investments between 1997 and 2001. Ezio Rivella was the first with Tenuta Fertuna at Grilli, northwest of Grosseto. The Terra Moretti group (of Bellavista in Franciacorta, Lombardy) sought advice and put some €30 million into its venture near Suvereto, for the Petra winery; Paolo Panerai (Castellare di Castellina) and Baron Eric de Rothschild collaborated in a joint venture investing an estimated €20 million in Rocca di Frassinello (*winenews.it*, August 2006). And seventh-generation, Veneto-based wine giant Zonin has stated it invested at least €20 million in Rocca di Montemassi.

By the end of the 1990s, the pull of the Maremma as a potential El Dorado for SuperTuscans was clear in the arrival of other top-flight producers, including Frescobaldi (Tenuta La Capitana, for DOCG Morellino di Scansano), Jacopo Biondi Santi (Castello di Montepò, north of Scansano), Antinori (Le Mortelle estate, Castiglione della Pescaia),

Cecchi (Fattoria Val delle Rose, Grosseto), Mazzei (Belguardo estate, Grosseto), and Rocca delle Macie (Tenuta di CampoMaccione, also in DOCG Morellino di Scansano).

However, results were possibly different from expectations. ‘We invested there to produce Sangiovese-based SuperTuscans,’ explains company vice-president Francesco Zonin. ‘But then we abandoned the idea of this grape, because the result fell short of what we expected. The core question was, how would you distinguish a SuperTuscan [brand] that comes from Maremma, when you have [to compete in the market with] Chianti Classico, Bolgheri and Montalcino which lie only an hour away?’

Zonin adds that over the last two decades the Maremma climate has become too hot for Sangiovese to perform at its best, while at the same time, market trends changed too fast for long-term vineyard planting programmes to keep up. ‘What we have discovered in Maremma is a great land for white wines,’ he argues. ‘And Vermentino is an emerging grape for most of the producers on the Costa Toscana.’

The Santa Margherita group, which in 2000 purchased Tenuta Sassoregale in the Ombrone valley northeast of Grosseto, recently announced a further acquisition in this coastal region, now the third largest DOC in Tuscany in terms of surface area. ‘With the acquisition of Pieve Vecchia,’ stated Beniamino Garofalo, CEO of Santa Margherita Gruppo Vinicolo, ‘Tenuta Sassoregale makes a further qualitative leap,’ adding a further 42.4ha to the group’s Maremma holdings.

It’s clear, therefore, that the extensive Maremma region as a whole still holds its appeal, and the potential for top-quality wines does exist – witness the exceptional Saffredi Le Pupille 1996, their last vintage by Giacomo Tachis. But SuperTuscan wines originating in so many different appellations do need their own specific identity.

## SUPERTUSCAN HOTSPOTS

Close to the border of the Livorno and Grosseto provinces, Suvereto has had its own DOCG since 2011, and is home to Tua Rita’s **Redigaffi** and **Gabbro** from Montepeloso, both wines to be taken seriously – each comes from an area with higher altitude and leaner soils. To the north of Bolgheri, Bibbona and Riparbella are emerging villages for SuperTuscans. Bibbona is home to the famed Tenuta di Biserno, which produces the outstanding **Lodovico**. In Riparbella, Luca D’Attoma, Tuscany’s most talented winemaker for Cabernet Franc, founded **Duemani** in 2001; while **Caiarossa**, founded in 1998, built its reputation here under the ownership since 2004 of the Albada Jelgersma family of Château Giscours in Margaux; ▶



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## SUPERTUSCANS: investment potential

According to global wine trading platform Liv-ex, in 2020 three of the world's top 10 wines [based on Liv-ex trading data from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020] were from Tuscany: Sassicaia, Ornellaia and Masseto. With the exception of Piedmont-based Gaja, the other Italian wines in the top 50 were Solaia and Tignanello.

Liv-ex notes: 'Italy saw the largest gain in brands in the Power 100 [list of 'most powerful brands in the fine wine market'], adding nine, to reach a total of 17, cutting Italy's deficit to Burgundy by half.'

The average trade price [for the full year to 30 September 2020] for Sassicaia was £1,305 (+9.31%); Ornellaia £1,171 (+9.56%); Masseto £5,457 (+5.71%); Solaia £1,908 (+14.98%); Tignanello £850 (+8.92%).

'SuperTuscans are great investments,' says Mattia Tabacco, head of buying at consultancy Oeno, 'but they must be interpreted. Exit strategy is

and in 2002, Massimo Ferragamo founded **Prima Pietra** on the highest hill in coastal Tuscany, at 450m, just out to the commune's north.

Further up country, near Volterra, **Giusto alle Balze** from Podere Marcampo, a 100% Merlot that grows on blue clay at about 250m altitude, shows stunning consistency. To its southwest, in the Val d'Arno di Sopra DOC, and also worthy of note is the Petrolo estate, where Luca Sanjust produces **Galatrona**. Petrolo is managed by one of the artists of Super Tuscan winemaking, Carlo Ferrini, who also makes **Siepi** in Chianti Classico and **Lupicaia** at Castello del Terriccio.

All of these examples are useful to highlight the identity of the best Super Tuscan wines today in terms of terroir, grape varieties and style.

After their first 50 years, there remains little doubt around what a Super Tuscan has the potential to be. However, the idea of exploiting the whole Tuscan region to produce them is no longer valid. When Piero Antinori underlines the importance of the category's birth in central Tuscany within appellations including Chianti Classico, or the fact that they contributed to the establishment of denominations such as Bolgheri, he draws specific boundaries. We can spot new sub-zones such as Bibbona, Montepeloso or Riparbella as ones to watch in the future. However, these 'grands crus' of SuperTuscans are mostly within Chianti Classico itself or in Bolgheri. This realisation led to the foundation of the new Historical SuperTuscans committee in December 2021, with Piero Antinori as honorary



crucial. Solaia and Tignanello are great products, but margins are low as they are primarily targeted at restaurants – you need quantity to make a profit.

‘We suggest buying the fresher vintages and looking at small producers. Consider, for example, Montevertine’s Pergole Torte, despite its market volatility; or Fontodi’s Flaccianello, as well as Tenuta di Trinoro due to the consistency of [the late] Andrea Franchetti’s wines in terms of ageing potential. Masseto, of course, has seen severe speculation, while Sassicaia is always a good investment as a blue-chip, but it ultimately depends on the primary or secondary market.’

founder and Paolo Panerai (Castellare di Castellina) as president – the defined goal being to represent the great Super Tuscan wines produced over the last 50 years. Experimentation with grape varieties is no longer widespread. Giuseppe Mazzocolin of Felsina, who produces Fontalloro, argues: ‘The value of Super Tuscans was confirmed by their ability to restore importance to Sangiovese following its debasement as part of the old Chianti recipe, which saw a decline in the quality of the region itself. Bottling these wines as vino da tavola could not be dismissed as a shrewd attempt to circumvent the law: it was the determination of a few producers to fight against the bureaucracy to improve the quality of Tuscan wines.’

### JUST THE BEGINNING

Today, Sangiovese is the flagship grape of the most representative Super Tuscans of the central Tuscan region, while Bordeaux blends are commonly seen in Bolgheri. In my opinion, the coastal zone could experiment more with grapes from the south of France such as Mourvèdre, Carignan or Grenache. At the same time, the trend for Pinot Noir in the Apennines could be further developed here. Last but not least, the Super Tuscan style is no longer defined by concentration, extraction and new oak, nor is it exemplified by bold or muscular wines. Nonetheless, this continues to be the main threat to the image of Super Tuscans. Wines such as Solaia, Sassicaia, Masseto or Flaccianello demonstrate that the style is best represented by ageworthy yet graceful wines of great Mediterranean elegance. ▶

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## Taste of the top: Fiordelli's Super Tuscan top six recent releases

### ① Antinori, Solaia 2018 98

£208.34 (ib)-£295 Bordeaux Index, Cru, Farr Vintners, Goedhuis & Co, Honest Grapes, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima, Starling Wines  
Produced since 1978, Solaia comes from a 20ha vineyard with a southwestern exposure at 350m-400m. The wine opens up with restrained bramble fruits, meaty hints, clove and dark chocolate framed with balsamic notes. The attack is full and soft with lively acidity, focused on the vibrancy of Cabernet Sauvignon from Chianti, with impressively refined tannins. Polished and concentrated, it finishes with an amazing salty persistency. **Drink** 2022-2045 **Alcohol** 15%

### ② Masseto 2018 97

£550 (ib)-£790 Asset Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Cru, Crump Richmond Shaw, Delivery Wine Co, Farr Vintners, In Vino Veritas, Starling Wines, Wineye  
The bright intensity of both aroma and flavour in this wine is intoxicating. Dark crimson in colour with savoury aromas of plums, bramble fruits and black cherry highlighted by graphite minerality. The subdued character of the new French oak confirms the outstanding concentration of fruit. Dense, full, smooth and velvety, with great extraction on the mid-palate, it is delicious now but has the balance to age for decades, improving in complexity as it goes. **Drink** 2022-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

### ③ Antinori, Tignanello 2018 96

£110-£160 Widely available  
Today producing 300,000 bottles annually, Tignanello was reimagined and refined through the years. The classic 2018 vintage enhances, if possible, the wine's restrained style. Tignanello is almost never fruity and this vintage shines for clove and black pepper aromas with blueberry yoghurt. Full, firm and velvety with great mid-palate weight and extraction, it shows long acidity, which carries the exotic finish of spice and cocoa. A classic with a long life ahead. **Drink** 2022-2045 **Alc** 14.5%

### ④ Fontodi, Flaccianello della Pieve 2018 96

£124.99 Alex Marton, Cru, Fine & Rare, Liberty Wines, Mother Vine, Petersham Cellar, Valvona & Crolla, Vinum Fine Wines, Wine Invest  
Produced since 1981, Flaccianello was a single-vineyard wine until 2003, then a selection of the estate's best grapes. Stainless steel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, then raked into barrels for malolactic fermentation, it ages for 24 months in the wood. Enticing Mediterranean aromas with liquorice stick, bergamot, helichrysum, raspberry and cherry. On the palate it shows extremely good volume for the 2018 vintage. Firm and youthful, with refined tannins and crisp acidity. **Alc** 2022-2045 **Alc** 15%

### ⑤ Montevertine, Le Pergole Torte 2018 96

£193.99 AGS Vintners, Buon VIno, Brunswick, Falcon Vintners, Les Cave de Pyrene, Natty Boy Wines, Petersham Cellar, Starling Wines, The Vices York, Turville Valley Wines, Wineye  
Owner Martino Manetti describes the 2018 vintage as a true Radda style, which means fierce acidity and reluctance of the wine to open up. Full of reserved character, the high-flying nose climbs with liquorice stick, potpourri and incense, while on the palate a restrained red cherry character emerges. The attack is firm yet graceful, the wine solid on the palate, with noble tannins, refreshing acidity and full body composing the tightly knit structure. **Drink** 2022-2045 **Alc** 13.5%

### ⑥ Tenuta di Trinoro 2019 95

£182.50 (ib)-£260 Astrum Wine Cellars, Cru, Field & Fawcett, Sociovino, Vinum Fine Wines  
According to owner and winemaker Andrea Franchetti, '2019 was the latest-ripening vintage we've seen in 10 years'. Bottled during the waning moon in early June 2021 after eight months in new oak and another 12 in concrete, this is less austere than usual, with an extremely pure bramble fruit character. It's lifted and mineral, with subtle aromatic herbs. The fleshy palate shines for its balance, with brilliant integrated acidity and tannins that are chiselled to perfection. **Drink** 2022-2040 **Alc** 15.5% **D**





# DONNAFUGATA IS SICILY

## From Mount Etna to windy Pantelleria

**D**onnafugata is a family-run winery based in Sicily, founded by Giacomo and Gabriella Rallo in 1983. Their children, José and Antonio Rallo, are now at the helm of the estate, confidently carrying their parents' legacy into the future. The siblings lead the company and a team of passionate people focused on producing exclusive wines from unique territories, representative of an innovative and sustainable Sicily, anchored in history and tradition.

Sicily is a wine-growing continent, with an immense diversity of

microclimates and terroirs, each with extraordinary potential and biodiversity. Donnafugata's aim is to show the history and nature of this diversity through its 410 hectares of vineyards, from Eastern to Western Sicily, in very different terroir situations.

The search is for the best combination between each terroir and its own indigenous grapes. From mountain viticulture on Etna, the highest active volcano in Europe, to the inland hills of Contessa Entellina, by way of Vittoria, situated between the Hyblean plateau

and the sea. The last stop on this journey, between Sicily and Africa, is the terraced vineyards overlooking the Mediterranean on the island of Pantelleria.

[www.donnafugata.it](http://www.donnafugata.it)

[f](#) [i](#) [@DonnafugataWine](#)



### PURE MINERALITY SUL VULCANO ETNA BIANCO DOC

This single-varietal **Carricante** wine comes from the northern slope of Mount **Etna** at about 750 metres. Sul Vulcano is a terroir-driven wine with a refined bouquet of yellow apple, delicate hints of citrus and Mediterranean herbs. Full bodied and refreshing, with notable minerality and length.

### ICON OF ELEGANCE ETNA ROSSO DOC CONTRADA MARCHESA

This **Etna Cru** is a noble expression of **Nerello Mascalese**. The label depicts the goddess of the volcano adorned with precious jewels: the flowers and fruits

that reflect the prestige of this area. Light ruby red in colour, with a fragrant bouquet of raspberry, violet and herbs. An icon of volcanic elegance with great balance and fine tannic texture.

### SON OF THE WIND BEN RYÉ PASSITO DI PANTELLERIA

Ben Ryé, named after the Arabic for "**Son of the Wind**", pays tribute to the breezes that constantly blow around the **Zibibbo** grapes on **Pantelleria**. Golden coloured Ben Ryé has a rich bouquet of apricot and candied orange peel, topped by notes of Mediterranean herbs. An intense Passito, with an extraordinary balance of freshness and sweetness.





# CARPENÈ-MALVOLTÌ

The historic Prosecco producer, with its headquarters in Conegliano, draws inspiration from an illustrious history to present a complete restyling for the modern age

Share the past to determine the future.” These words from Etilio Carpenè, the fourth generation of the longest-lived Italian Sparkling Wine Dynasty, sum up the quintessence of a strategic decision that has brought the company back to prominence through a restyling of this historic brand, strongly inspired by its philosophy at the time of foundation more than 150 years ago.

The new restyling is designed to reflect Carpenè-Malvolti’s founding values and to testify, today more than ever, to the strength of its bond with its past. The message is that the road travelled is an essential basis for projecting the Company’s activities into the future.

The restyling project itself is the result of research and reinterpretation in the context of increasingly dynamic and demanding markets, and shows the brand taking on increasingly strategic connotations in their

various distribution dynamics. The intention is to communicate excellence both in terms of reliability and recognisability, as well as to convey with a single, emblematic image, all the Company’s values.

In a single image with a strong visual impact, Carpenè-Malvolti aims to reflect 154 years of company history, using a lighter and more modern styling, after having undergone many profound changes over the years, but never compromising on the identity of the brand. The company’s history continues to be communicated in ways that are ever more innovative, and indeed bring the company into the cutting edge of modern Prosecco production and marketing.



Experimentation and repositioning are bringing the range of sparkling wines and distillates the company produces, and have made history, into the modern era. These include:

- **1924 Prosecco**, named after the first year that the word Prosecco appeared on a label, which encapsulates the characteristics of the original product, and
- **1868 Prosecco**, produced in a series of territorially specific cuvées to celebrate the region and its historic bond with the company.

## NEW PREMIUM PROSECCO WINES: HEROIC VITICULTURE ON THE SLOPES - 1868 RIVE

Even in times like the present, the Company has never stopped planning new developments, especially in terms of production. In fact, Carpenè-Malvolti

“Restyling designed to communicate excellence both in terms of reliability and recognisability”



Rosanna and Etilia  
Carpenè Larivera

has recently enhanced its list of Prosecco Superiore wines with more selections using that special method of sparkling wine vinification first developed by the founder, Antonio Carpenè.

The most prestigious example of this is the 1868 Rive from San Pietro di Barbozza, a true DOCG Prosecco cru area, commemorating the year of the company's foundation. This is a single-vineyard wine made with Glera grapes coming from steep slopes in the hills in San Pietro di Barbozza, part of the commune of Valdobbiadene. The Rive denomination of Prosecco Superiore gets its name from the steep slopes of the hills in this historic Prosecco area. They

are almost vertical, so much so as to require "heroic viticulture", managed entirely by hand.

This wine is totally consistent with the company's philosophy, which always places the place of origin and the particular method of growing and harvesting the grapes at the centre of its strategy. Fresh, delicate, dry and harmonious, the 1868 Rive di San Pietro di Barbozza Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG has a pale straw-yellow appearance, a fine and persistent perlage, and an elegant and refined bouquet with delicate fruity, floral, balsamic and mineral notes. The grapes bring reflections of the territory

into the wine, as each Riva reflects the ancient morphological origins and history of the hamlet where it is produced.

With the pioneering and innovative entrepreneurial spirit that has distinguished Carpenè-Malvolti since 1868, the company has chosen 1868 Rive to look to the future by focusing on the special characteristics of a rural territory that is atypical in terms of management. It's the home of hundreds of vigneroni, who for generations have taken care of it while respecting the roots and the history of Prosecco Superiore. It's also a landscape of surprising beauty, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2019.



Two wine glasses filled with red wine are positioned against a black background. The glass on the left is slightly behind and to the left of the glass on the right. The wine is a deep red color. The lighting highlights the rim of the glasses and the surface of the wine.

# Barolo & Brunello vintages to drink

Patience is most certainly a virtue when it comes to pulling the cork on those back vintages of prime Piedmont and Tuscan flagship reds quietly gathering dust in the cellar. But if you can't resist, what's best to open and enjoy right now?...

STORY MICHAELA MORRIS



Barolo vineyards in the commune of La Morra

**W**hen it comes to Italian wine, Barolo and Brunello di Montalcino are two of the most likely candidates for cellaring. Their respective grape varieties, Nebbiolo and Sangiovese, are undoubtedly the country's noblest and, in their most prestigious denominations, there is no question of their pedigree for long and beneficial ageing.

In decades past, both typically took years to come round in the bottle, but modern-day production can result in more immediately accessible wines. Some producers point to the warming climate and greater resulting ripeness. Evolution in winemaking also plays a part. Crucially though, Barolo and Brunello haven't lost their ability to transform slowly over the years as they rest, especially in great vintages.

## Barolo

Barolo is the reference for the most powerful, longest-lived Nebbiolo. DOCG regulations require more than three years of ageing (five for Riserva) before release, with at least 18 months spent in barrel, although many producers mature their wines for longer to mollify Nebbiolo's long, dry tannins. Even then, Barolo can still be a daunting prospect upon release. But it isn't just

Barolo's structure that needs time – Nebbiolo reveals its haunting complexities gradually.

During much of the 20th century, ripening Nebbiolo on the vine was difficult. Conversely, since the great 2001 vintage, only 2002 has been a washout. Even the rainy 2014 was salvaged by improved weather in September. Moreover, Piedmont has seen more warm than cool years; 2003 was the first year of extreme heat, across all of Europe, and producers learned from it, enabling them to better manage subsequent hot vintages such as 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2017.

Nevertheless, in the best vintages, cool nights pre-harvest generally allow for slow ripening to mature tannins and develop nuanced flavours. All three of the vintages I have selected have this in common, yet are equally marked by other influences to give them distinct personalities.

## 2013

Despite success, 2013 was not particularly easy in Barolo. Mildew attacks and slow vegetative growth meant the vines had difficulty catching up. The mild summer transitioned into a cool autumn and ripening occurred at a snail's pace. A late harvest, from mid-October to early November, made for classic, scented beauties. ▶



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Vittore Alessandria, Fratelli Alessandria

was apparent that the gulf between traditional and modern approaches was diminishing.

Above all, the greatest producers stand out by showing their skill in balancing this muscular year. Thrillingly intense and vertical with sculpted tannins, these wines will continue to drink well over the next 10 years and more.

② **Fratelli Alessandria, Monvigliero, Verduno, Barolo, Piedmont 2006 94**

£150 Nemo Wine Cellars

Vittore Alessandria says his 2006 (along with 2010) has the most substantial polyphenolic structure since 2000. It is certainly dense and compact. Still youthful ruby, it drinks younger than its age. Dried orange blossom underpins aromas of moist soil and smoked spice. Tight, tense tannins loosen up slowly in this linear yet expansive, tactile Barolo. It's minerally with soaring, citrusy acidity and a peppery, balsamic finish. Fantastic now but there's no rush to open it.

**Drink 2022-2032 Alc 14.5%**

I was charmed upon first tasting the 2013s. While restrained, they demonstrated finesse and precision. The trend toward gentler extractions highlighted the loveliness of the vintage. Eight years on, the wines are really starting to shine. It's not too early to start opening these, and they will captivate for another 10-12 years.

① **Cavallotto, Bricco Boschis, Castiglione Falletto, Barolo, Piedmont 2013 95**

£45 (ib)-£72 Asset Wines, Christopher Keiller, Fine & Rare, Goedhuis & Co, Justerini & Brooks

Harvested in the second half of October at modest yields of 38hl/ha, the 2013 is gorgeously perfumed, pressed rose and incense escaping gradually from the glass. Sweet red berries are punctuated by fennel and mint, while layered tannins are silky and toned. Expressive and finessed now, it offers palpable depth for a further 15 years. **Drink 2022-2037 Alcohol 14.5%**



①

**2001**

The 2001 vintage began with some drama – higher than average temperatures led to early bud break then mid-April frost, and some areas were hit by localised heavy hail. August and early September were fairly hot, then cooler temperatures with intermittent rainfall slowed ripening. Moderate sugar levels made for balanced alcohol and the resulting wines showed intricate flavours, mature ample tannins and the stuffing to last.

At the start of this century, the divide between modernists (characterised by techniques such as short macerations and barrique ageing) and traditionalists (long macerations and large casks) was still prevalent. Both came out with impressive 2001s. Most of those I have tried recently fall into the traditional camp and are holding on strong – in fact, Giacomo Conterno's Monfortino Riserva was still positively youthful two years ago. Tasted more recently, Bruno Giacosa's Le Rocche del Falletto is hitting a beautiful stride.

**Bruno Giacosa, Rocche del Falletto Riserva, Serralunga d'Alba, Barolo, Piedmont 2001 99**

£750-£791.67 (ib) Cru, Falcon Vintners, Starling Wines, VinQuinn, Wineye

From the first parcels acquired by Bruno Giacosa in the 1980s, the iconic red label is made only in years the family deems perfect. With intoxicating perfumes of sweet earth, dried cherry, raspberry, fennel seeds, celery root and iron, bottle No 5,430 sent shivers down my spine. Long-limbed tannins stretch out with sneaky firmness. The execution is graceful and seamless. Bitter chocolate and orange linger on the finish, leaving the palate energised. **Drink 2022-2033 Alc 14%** ►



②

**2006**

Like the juxtaposition of 1996 and 1997, 2006 was initially eclipsed by the flashier and fleshier 2007. The year was erratic in 2006 with temperatures alternating between warmer than average and unseasonably cool. Even when it warmed up towards the end of August, nights remained chilly and mid-September saw abundant downpours.

Sternly tannic and bracing in acidity, the wines were not easy to taste when first released. I revisited a handful when they reached 10 years old and still thought it best to wait. Then in 2020, the wines started turning a corner. Admittedly, some wines were languishing – either due to imposing oak regimes or over-extraction – nevertheless, it

# Brunello di Montalcino

The only grape allowed in Brunello, Sangiovese achieves a formidable expression in Montalcino. These Tuscan wines possess substantial, textured tannins. Aged even longer than Barolo, Brunello can't be released until the fifth January following harvest (an extra year for Riserva) and must include at least two years in barrel.

The Brunello consorzio assigns every vintage a ranking out of five stars. Over the last four decades, five-star years have increased from two in the 1980s to three in both the 1990s and 2000s, and a whopping five vintages in the last decade (2010, '12, '15, '16 and '19). Furthermore, only one vintage, 2014, was given three stars while the remaining years were awarded four.

Superficially, the changing climate seems to have been relatively favourable for Montalcino to date. But quality has also been driven by investments in new cellars, thoughtful viticulture and research, particularly regarding clones.

Hot, dry vintages are becoming more common and two of the vintages I have selected here – 2012 and 2007 – were exceedingly warm. Both were awarded five stars. The 1999, for which I have particular affection, was 'only' given four stars, but has proven to be a tireless long-distance runner.

## 2012

The 2012 vintage was even hotter than 2007 had been, and considerably drier. Drought stressed the vines and the heat decelerated photosynthesis. Crucially, rain in early September refreshed the plants, and the growing season concluded with sunny days and fresh nights.

Modest quantities of small grapes with thick skins gave dense wines, concentrated in all elements: fruit, tannins, acidity and alcohol, which needed a few years to come together.



Above: patches of vineyards near the town of Montalcino in Tuscany. Below, from left: brothers Lamberto and Leonardo Fattoi with their father Ofelio

Recent tastings have reiterated that 2012 is strikingly balanced in its proportions. Some wines from warmer expositions are showing their heat and slightly drying tannins. Overall, however, the wines don't necessarily present as being from a hot year and in some cases are positively racy. Many are appealing now – not the sophistication and potential of 2010, but ripe, textured and packed with personality.

### Fattoi, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany 2012 92

£73 Wimbledon Wine Cellar

The Fattoi estate is at Tavernelle in Montalcino's southwest. It's a warm zone with lots of sun, but the clay-based soil helped mitigate severe drought stress, according to Lucia Fattoi. Dusty earth, dried herb and leather make way for savoury meat and salted liquorice on the palate. This is full but not over-buffed or heavy. Oak is integrated, acidity is tangy, and terracotta-like tannins are sturdy yet supple. **Drink 2022-2028 Alc 14.5%**







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Fuligni's maturation cellar building in the former convent of Cottimelli

## 2007

A decidedly warm summer with intermittent rains giving balance, 2007 saw a rather precocious harvest, starting on 10 September. It yielded concentrated grapes with lots of sugar, ripe tannins and flavours, though moderate acidities. Trying the wines shortly after release, I appreciated producer Laura Brunelli's analogy of a wild young horse and the vintage's almost unruly yet fascinating nature. Forward, round and supple, the wines were approachable early on.

Ten years later, that youthful vigour has subsided. They still offer the pleasure of the vintage but are at their peak. Top wines, especially those from cooler sites, will continue to give maximum gratification over the next five years or so.

### ③ Fuligni, Riserva, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany 2007 95

POA Lea & Sandeman

Roberto Fuligni says 2007 was highly suitable for making a Riserva given the considerable concentration of polyphenols. A standout of the vintage, this is seductively textured and layered with impressive fruit depth all reined in by a firm hand. It offers a certain exoticism, with striking notes of curry, sweet spice, dried pressed flowers and sandalwood. Underlying succulence lends further dimension.

**Drink 2022-2029 Alc 14.5%**




## 1999

Upon release, 1999 was overshadowed by 1997, which was considered the vintage of the decade. Both were very warm years, but nights in 1999 were cooler. A relatively early harvest from mid-to end-September gave powerfully structured wines. Less obvious and less sumptuous than 1997, 1999 was austere and unyielding for many years. The wines finally came around and are outliving 1997 in my opinion; they have aged harmoniously in terms of both structure and flavours. There is no need to keep these in the cellar any longer, and yet they are not on the verge of falling apart. They represent classic Brunello from a bygone era.

### ④ Le Chiose, Riserva, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany 1999 93

N/A UK [lechiuse.com](http://lechiuse.com)

Since 1999, winemaking has passed from owners Simonetta Valiani and Nicolò Magnelli to their son Lorenzo Magnelli, who has continued with spontaneous fermentations and long ageing in large Slavonian oak casks. The bouquet offers an evocative mix of coffee, mellowed tobacco, saffron, mossy undergrowth and mushroom. While definitely not rich, this fills the palate with iron-like nuances. Slightly rustic tannins still provide authoritative support, and a brilliant streak of acidity keeps it animated. **Drink 2022-2027 Alc 13.5%** 



# MARCHESI DI BAROLO

*Antiche Cantine in Barolo*

11



2021  
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# MAI DIRE MAI

The Pasqua company from Verona makes a new iconic interpretation of Amarone that has become one of Italy's most highly reputed wines

The MAI DIRE MAI label is the product of the coming together of the time-honoured experience of the Pasqua family and the exceptional terroir of the Montevegro vineyard.

The 23 ha plot which gives life to MAI DIRE MAI Valpolicella and Amarone, has conditions which are almost completely perfect for the production of high quality wines. Altitude is key: Montevegro is a hillside vineyard at 350m exposed on all sides, but looking over the Illasi and Mezzane Valleys with the Lessini Mountains nearby to protect it. The soil is basalt and chalk, making for optimum minerality.

The first vintages were a Valpolicella Superiore 2012 and an Amarone 2010 - classics in terms of origin and denomination, but innovative in terms of vinification technique and market approach. An iconic line characterised by elegance, complexity and a unique palate.

“Our almost one hundred years of history have given us the right know-how to be able to experiment,” says Umberto Pasqua, the President of Pasqua Vigneti e Cantine. “With MAI DIRE MAI we are aiming to produce a stand-out iconic product. We are sure that the demand is there in the market after seeing the rising popularity of wines from the Veneto all over the world.”

“We'd been looking for somewhere to make really high quality wines for some time. We wanted elegance and originality

in the taste, and the right terroir situation for our plans. MAI DIRE MAI has finally given us liquid expression of the excellence that we were aiming at and planning for. We think the power and complexity of these wines will be appreciated right across the 50 markets where we operate,” adds CEO Riccardo Pasqua.

The name MAI DIRE MAI - or Never Say Never - as the saying goes, comes from the origins of the project as Pasqua, winemakers with almost 100 years of expertise, decided to collaborate with another leading Veronese family, the Dal Colle, who were not wine producers but had a piece of land with the ideal exposure and perfect soil profile for the production of top quality Amarone and Valpolicella Superiore. The first vintage was launched at Vinitaly just 5 years ago in 2016 and the wines have quickly become a symbol of Veronese collaboration and excellence.

Important trade magazines and international wine guides have recognised the project, but in 2021 independent confirmation of the wisdom of the decision to start the MAI DIRE MAI project came with two outstanding results from Decanter, one confirming the other:

- Decanter World Wine Awards 2021: Mai Dire Mai Amarone DOCG 2012 - Gold Medal 95 points
- Decanter magazine (February 2022), Wines of the Year Tasting: Mai Dire Mai Amarone DOCG 2012 - 96 points



Left: Riccardo, Umberto and Alessandro Pasqua

## MAKING A WINNING WINE - MAI DIRE MAI AMARONE 2012

Grapes (Corvina 65%, Corvinone 15% and Rondinella 10%) were selected by hand and laid in cases to dry, through appassimento for four months, to produce high sugar contents.

After crushing, a pre-fermentation cold maceration took place.

Fermentation itself took place in temperature-controlled conditions in stainless steel tanks, for 40 days.

Maturation was in new French oak barriques (70% in 225lt barriques and 30% in 500lt tonneaux) for 24 months.

Climate conditions in 2012 vintage: Mild

winter with little rain. High temperatures in summer, again with little rain, causing hydric stress for the vines, compensated for by low temperatures in August and the right low-to-high daily temperature variations to ensure perfect ripeness.

**Tasting note from Decanter World Wine Awards 2021 for MAI DIRE MAI Amarone 2012: The nose suggests refined oak notes, with tobacco leaves, mushrooms and black olive notes over ripe dark fruit. Full-bodied with firm tannins, vibrant with a long finish.**

**Gold Medal 95 points**

## Other Pasqua Amarone wines to look out for:



### **Famiglia Pasqua, Amarone DCG 2017**

Part of the Famiglia Pasqua range, designed to show the company's great links to the traditions of the territory.

**LATEST VINTAGE**



### **Famiglia Pasqua, Amarone della Valpolicella DCG Riserva 2013**

An Amarone of great structure and character, produced in limited quantities and only in the best years.

**MULTI-AWARD WINNING**

“MAI DIRE MAI...  
liquid expression of  
the excellence that  
we were aiming at.”

Pasqua Vigneti e Cantine is an historic company producing quality **Veneto and Italian wines**. Through almost 100 years of history, the company has established itself on the international scene with its products, particularly red wines, which are synonymous with great winemaking

**tradition. Tradition, innovation, quality, research and passion are values handed down from generation to generation in the Pasqua family and today are represented by native wines from the Veneto region and great Italian classics distributed in every continent.**

# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Bringing their expertise to wineries all over the country, Italy's top wine consultants have helped to create a diverse range of wines, inspiring the next generation of winemakers along the way. We profile six of the best

STORY SUSAN HULME MW



Some of Italy's most famous and exciting wines are shaped by a small number of wine consultants. This is not a new thing – Italy has a long history of influential and innovative consultant oenologists stretching back to the 1960s: the hugely respected Giacomo Tachis developed acclaimed wines such as Tignanello (see *'Super Tuscans', p11*), and Giulio Gambelli, ahead of his time, believed in the strength of Sangiovese as a single variety. Just the mention of their names acted as a seal of approval and added to the allure and value of the wines they made.

Skilled wine consultants can improve dramatically both the quality of the wine and the management of wine production. In developing a wide portfolio of clients across different wine regions and countries, consultant oenologists bring a broader vision and knowledge to the production of a wine, applying their experience to help producers decide on the style of wine they want to make.

In the vineyard, their advice can extend to making improvements to the health and quality of the soil, as well as to the health, balance and management of the vines. In the winery, their main objective is to make successful wines that suit the requirements of the producer. Engaging a consultant oenologist can add a certain glamour and prestige to a wine, attracting the attention of critics and even raising the market price. Witness the effect of Tachis and the fact that Tignanello (see *'Super Tuscans at 50', p8*), when originally labelled as a humble 'vino da tavola', became one of Italy's first collectible wines.

Over the following pages, I consider the style and influence of four of Italy's most famous wine consultants – Riccardo Cotarella, Carlo Ferrini, Luca D'Attoma and Emiliano Falsini – along with two rising stars set to become big names in the future: Gian Luca Colombo from Piedmont, and Alessandro Leoni, who works in Umbria.

## Riccardo Cotarella

One of the most famous names in Italian winemaking today, Riccardo Cotarella (pictured left) has earned the nickname Il Mago (the wizard) for his skills. President of the Italian oenologists' association, Assoenologi, and of the Union Internationale des Oenologues, Cotarella makes wines in France, Spain, Russia, Romania, Israel and Japan, as well as throughout Italy. At lower price points his wines are fresh, fruity and delicious, and at the top level, world-class.

I first met Cotarella in Campania, at La Guardiense, a cooperative in Benevento where he has created the stunning Janare Senete Falanghina del Sannio white, lifting the



**'I wanted to dedicate myself to territories mistakenly considered unsuited to high-quality viticulture'**

———— Riccardo Cotarella

reputation of not only the variety but also the co-op and the area. Indeed, Cotarella has been on a mission to champion and sometimes rescue less well-known or rare native varieties with his own family company Falesco, enhancing the profile of areas including Lazio, Umbria and the south of Italy. 'Since the beginning of my career,' he says, 'I have wanted to dedicate myself to territories mistakenly considered unsuited to high-quality viticulture.' Cotarella cites Tachis as his greatest influence: 'I was fortunate enough to first meet Giacomo in 1981 and experience first-hand what, at that time, were absolute innovations in viticulture and oenology.' Cotarella's Montiano, a Merlot from Lazio, was a turning point for him – and for his profession. It was 'a Copernican Revolution for the Lazio region and for its producers,' he says. 'It was a wine that proved to everyone, even the most incredulous, that research in the vineyard, science and cultivation could give value to territories that had hitherto been forgotten or destined for the production of wines without personality and character.'



### La Guardiense, Janare Senete, Falanghina del Sannio, Campania 2016 95

£14.95 (2019) Jeroboams

The result of a brilliantly successful combination of Cotarella's intensive research into Falanghina and the La Guardiense co-op's commitment to collaboration. Deep gold, with a rich, creamy texture, this has white flower, waxy lemon and lanolin

aromas, flavours of yellow fruit and fresh, citrus peel character, and a bitter almond finish. A beautiful expression. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%

### **Famiglia Cotarella, Ogrà, Lazio 2016 97**

£68 Tannico

Ogrà is the affectionate nickname for Riccardo Cotarella's grandmother; this wine, made with the best grapes, is said to reflect her qualities: 'powerful and decisive, gentle and enjoyable'. A wonderfully bright, concentrated Syrah, with blackberry, coffee bean, smoke and liquorice aromas and flavours. With gentle, integrated tannins, it's round, soft and juicy yet characterful. **Drink** 2022-2033 **Alc** 15.5%

### **Famiglia Cotarella, Montiano, Lazio 2017 95**

£55-£61.88 Christopher Keiller, Hic

The wine that, in Riccardo Cotarella's words, was 'a real turning point for me and my profession'. This Merlot has a lovely concentration without being heavy, and has natural harmony and balance. It has elegant hints of orange peel, iris, spice and cream, with fresh green notes and red berry fruit. A super-smooth, medium-bodied wine with a bright, juicy finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 15%



## Luca D'Attoma

After starting his winemaking career in the 1980s, Luca D'Attoma became a freelance consultant oenologist in the early 1990s, when he consulted for wineries including Fattoria Le Pupille, Le Macchiole and Tua Rita. He also established Duemani with his partner Elena Celli. His wines have beautifully precise and clearly delineated aromas, especially his own-label wines, which have signature concentration with a rich texture, but are at the same time fresh and elegant.

D'Attoma's style is defined by his strong beliefs and visionary approach: 'I take responsibility for my choices even when they may seem risky. If you want to do this job, you must be able to carry out your ideas with courage but also be able to listen to others.' D'Attoma describes himself as an innovator: 'At the beginning of the 1990s I staked everything on Cabernet Franc, when no one yet believed in it. I began to advise companies to convert to organic viticulture... now everyone is talking about organic. I was also a forerunner in focusing on some less famous vines, such as Canaiolo, Rebola and Petite Arvine, in which I believed and I've enhanced.'

In more recent years, D'Attoma has embraced biodynamic practices as well as the use of clay amphorae in the cellar. He consults to a dazzling array of wineries throughout Italy, including Cantina Toblino in Trentino and Antonella Corda in Sardinia.

### **Cantina Toblino, Foll, Trentino 2019 95**

£33.80 Hedonism

From one of D'Attoma's most northerly Italian clients comes this beautiful Chardonnay, which effortlessly combines freshness and concentration. Made from organically grown fruit from the lake area of Trentino, it's beautifully aromatic, showing peach, lime, mandarin and yellow stone fruit. Silky and voluptuous, balanced by a thrilling freshness. An exciting wine. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

### **Duemani, Cabernet Franc, Costa Toscana, Tuscany 2017 97**

£80-£91.17 (ib) Crop & Vine, Cru, Ideal Wine Co,

Starling Wines, VinQuinn, Wineye

Duemani's flagship wine is made from biodynamically cultivated grapes grown in Riparbella on the Tuscan coast. Rich dark chocolate and milk chocolate notes mingle with blackberry fruit and subtle, creamy oak. Its lavish texture is beautifully balanced by bright acidity and some savoury, liquorice flavours. There's subtly integrated oak and a little dry twist to the fine and silky tannins. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

### **Antonella Corda, Cannonau di Sardegna, Sardinia 2019 92**

£25.99 9 Vines, The Fine Wine Co, Valvona & Crolla, Vino Gusto,

Petersham Cellar

Antonella Corda in Sardinia won Gambero Rosso's Emerging Winery award in 2019. This pretty Cannonau (Grenache) is grown on pebbly old riverbed soils. There are bright aromas of red berries, cream and vanilla, while on the palate it has a range of flavours such as sweet cherry and wild strawberry. Nicely structured, with light, sappy tannins and a fresh finish. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 15%





‘If you want to do this job, you must be  
able to carry out your ideas with courage  
but also be able to listen to others’

Luca D’Attoma, pictured with Elena Celli



# Carlo Ferrini

Born in Florence, Carlo Ferrini (*right*) is one of Italy's foremost consultant oenologists. In his 20s he worked for the Chianti Classico consorzio and was involved in intensive research to find better-quality Sangiovese clones. 'I believe much more in the vineyard than in the cellar,' he tells me. 'The evolution... in the past 20 years in Italian wines we owe in part to technological evolution in the cellar, but above all it is thanks to the search for new clones of the various Italian vines.'

Probably Ferrini's biggest break came in 1992 when the Marchesi Mazzei estate asked him to be Fonterutoli's oenologist. In Ferrini's words: 'I was young. It was a great opportunity for me and a great risk for the company.' Obviously, they saw something special in the young winemaker.

Ferrini's name is now associated with a long list of top producers including San Leonardo in Trentino, Barone Ricasoli in Tuscany (Castello di Brolio) and Tasca d'Almerita at its Tascante and flagship Regaleali estates. Recently, Ferrini has developed his own wines under the Giodo label, having acquired some old bush-trained vines on Etna and some land in Brunello di Montalcino. His wines have an outstanding refinement, flowing across the palate with a kind of aristocratic ease. When asked to define his style, he replies: 'Harmony between a good perfume and a great structure, but the factor that interests me most is elegance. I always say that the most important thing is elegance, elegance, elegance!'

## Castello di Fonterutoli, Badiola, Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Tuscany 2017 97

£16.99-£17.95 (2019) *Quay Wines, Seven Cellars*

A perfect example of a Chianti Classico from Radda. At 550m, these are some of the highest vineyards in the area, resulting in cool nighttime temperatures and a longer, slower ripening season. This has beautifully pure red berry, cherry and violet aromas and flavours, but it's the seamless quality of the tannins and the melting texture that set it apart.

**Drink** 2022-2033 **Alc** 13.5%

## Podere Giodo, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany 2016 96

£89.17 (ib)-£130 *Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index,*

*Cru, Fine & Rare, Petersham Cellar, Starling Wines, Winey*  
From Ferrini's own 6ha Brunello estate, between Sant'Angelo and Sant'Antimo. Made from eight specially selected clones of Sangiovese. Aromas of warm spice, mineral, iron and subtle green herb notes interweave with delicate redcurrant. Encased in dense but super-fine tannins, mouthwatering acidity and a sleek texture combine to show real finesse. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 14%



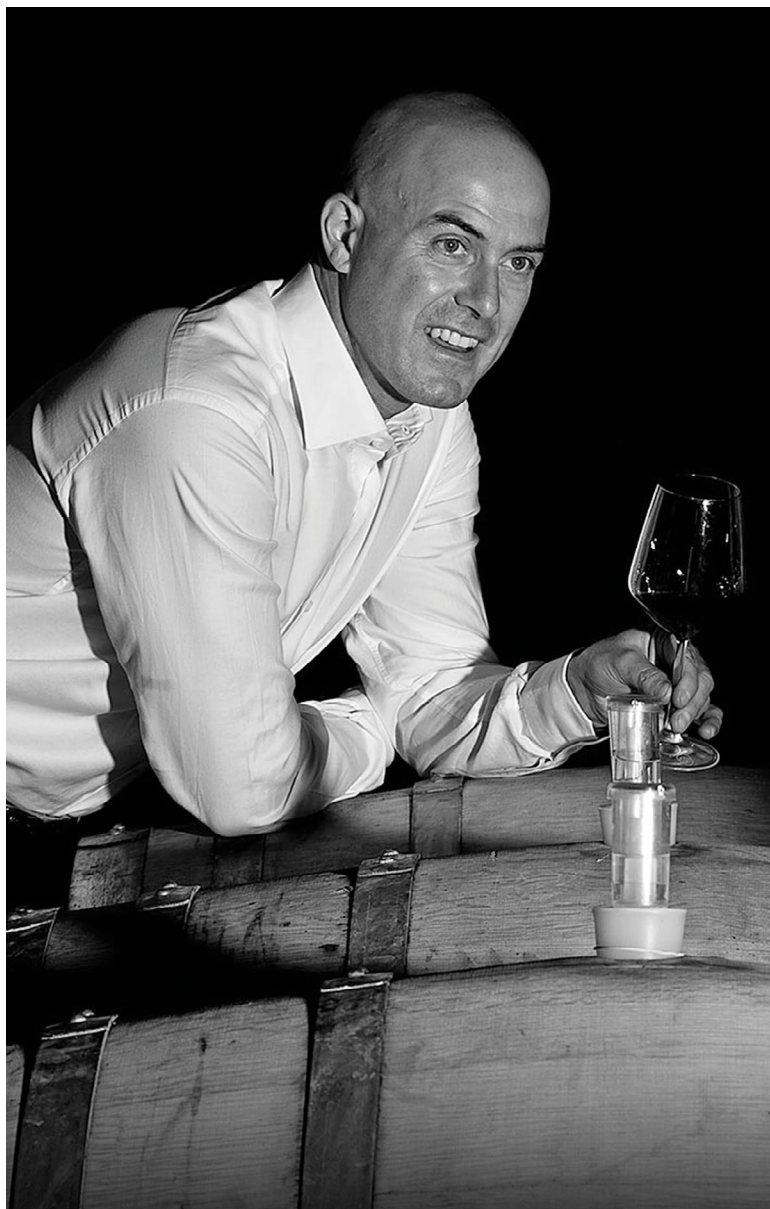
## San Leonardo, Vigneti delle Dolomiti, Trentino-Alto Adige 2015 95

£47.34 (ib)-£75 *Corking Wines, Crop & Vine, Farthinghoe*

*Fine Wine, Hic, Honest Grapes, Jeroboams, Lay & Wheeler, Nemo Wine Cellars, Petersham Cellar, The Vices York*

This flagship wine from Tenuta San Leonardo is a Bordeaux blend with a high percentage of Carmenère. A complex nose has tobacco, smoke, cigar box, cassis and a very peppery Carmenère note. On the palate it is extremely elegant with bright acidity and very fine-textured tannins. Full of flavour and intensity, with a beautiful gossamer texture.

**Drink** 2022-2040 **Alc** 13%



‘I never use the same concept to produce wines – each wine producer and their wines must be different’

————— Emiliano Falsini

knowledge to Italy’s myriad wine regions and grape varieties. He consults for several leading producers up and down the country, in particular Girolamo Russo and Graci (two leading lights in Sicily), Tabarrini in Umbria, Giacomo Fenocchio in Barolo and Giovanni Chiappini in Bolgheri.

One of Falsini’s most exciting recent projects is the development of his own wines under the Limite label, launched this year with two new wines. One of these is a stunning Cabernet Franc from Bolgheri that’s a cross between a vibrant Loire style and a richer Tuscan style; the other is a very promising Nerello Mascalese from Etna.

#### **Tabarrini, Adarmando, Umbria 2018 95**

£26.95 (2016) Christopher Keiller, Uncorked

Named after Giampaolo Tabarrini’s maternal grandfather, Adarmando is made with a special massal selection of vines from local Umbrian variety Trebbiano Spoletino. It has an intense, fragranced nose of exotic fruit, mango and sweet spice. Flavours of honeydew melon, peach and spice combine with a creamy, mouthfilling Meursault-like texture, leading to a fresh, cleansing finish. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

#### **Emiliano Falsini, Limite Cabernet Franc, Costa Toscana, Tuscany 2019 96**

N/A UK @efalsini

The name Limite refers partly to the estate’s location at the northern limits of Bolgheri, where the soils have more pebbles and clay. Ripe aromas of blackcurrant leaf, roasted coffee bean and cream come in waves. It has a beautiful texture and weight in the mouth, with juicy blackcurrant accompanied by leafy, crunchy notes and very fine tannins. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 14%

#### **Girolamo Russo, Feudo di Mezzo, Etna, Sicily 2018 95**

£58 (2017) Wanderlust Wine

From 80- to 100-year-old bush-trained vines of mainly Nerello Mascalese planted at 670m on the northern slopes of Mount Etna. This wine opens up over time – initial notes of minerals and iron give way to wild strawberries and warm spice, becoming headily perfumed with violet and iris aromas. The lively palate balances bright, tangy redcurrant fruits with a nervy, taut acidity. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14% ▶

## Emiliano Falsini

Seeing himself as very different to the ‘old school’ of winemakers in his approach, Emiliano Falsini (*above right*) is open to new experiences and encourages a relationship of equality with producers, making decisions together.

‘I think I can guarantee competence, knowledge and sensitivity in winemaking choices, and a broad vision of what the world of wine is,’ he says. ‘I never use the same concept to produce wines – each producer and their wines must be different. I prefer to help people to make their own wines. I’m an important part of a complex system.’

Falsini gained experience working in California at Robert Mondavi, in New Zealand at Villa Maria, and then in Bordeaux, Burgundy, South Africa, Argentina and Chile, before applying his



*Storie di Valpolicella.*  
STORIES FROM VALPOLICELLA

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AMARONE  
DELLA VALPOLICELLA  
DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA E SPADATO  
CLASSICO  
2012

**SANTA SOFIA**  
VALPOLICELLA DAL 1811

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## Gian Luca Colombo

At 38, Gian Luca Colombo (*above*) is one of the youngest consultant oenologists in this group, living and working in Piedmont. Colombo has studied with many well-known consultants, including Sergio Molino and Donato Lanati. In 2011, he founded Segni di Langa with 4ha of rented vineyards in Roddi, and in 2014 he won the Gambelli Award for Best Young Italian Oenologist.

Since then, producers such as Alberto Burzi, Garesio Vini and Diego Conterno, among others, have employed Colombo to advise on their wines. He styles himself as a 'true *garagista*', literally making wines in the garage underneath his house.

I first came across Colombo's wines at the regional consorzio's biennial Grandi Langhe tasting in Alba ([grandilanghe.com](http://grandilanghe.com)) a few years ago, and recognised that he had a special gift for Barbera and was making delicious Pinot Noir. In September 2019, we walked through his vineyards looking at Nebbiolo and old Barbera vines and I witnessed his meticulous care and attention to detail. He uses sustainable practices and is working towards organic and biodynamic conversion.

Colombo believes it is important to continue to learn: 'Today, I am buying and tasting a lot from all wine regions. It is really important to keep updated and open-minded.' He describes his style as 'neo-classical', matching 'new know-how and old traditions'. His wines all have a beautiful clarity of aromas, and the tannins are very refined and reflect a modern and sophisticated approach. He has recently added a Barolo to his portfolio.

### Segni di Langa, Barolo, Piedmont 2017 94

£55.25 Astrum Wine Cellars, Bottles 'n' Jars, Field & Fawcett, Sociovino

Colombo's own Barolo (*pictured below*) is a product of two different vineyards: Bricco Ambrogio, which produces more delicate aromatics, and Bussia, which has more power but 'always ripe tannins'. With a lovely delicate fragrance of strawberries, cream and violet, it's modern, clean and bright while still being traditional at heart. Very elegant, with fine, chalky tannins. **Drink** 2022-2031 **Alc** 14.5%

### Alberto Burzi, Capalot, La Morra, Barolo, Piedmont 2016 93

£42.95 Baglio

The south-facing Capalot vineyard at 300m is the oldest on this estate, with its 80-year-old vines. Made from a special clone of Nebbiolo with looser clusters and small berries (enabling perfect ripening), this appealing wine has sweet cherry and fresh earth notes, accompanied by a lovely soft, plump texture and very fine tannins. **Drink** 2022-2031 **Alc** 15%

### Diego Conterno, Ginestra, Monforte d'Alba, Barolo, Piedmont 2016 93

£65 Jeroboams, The Solent Cellar

Conterno's Ginestra vineyard is on the south-facing part of Monforte d'Alba, home to some of the most profound Barolo. This has a classic Barolo nose, with macerated cherries, spice and leather notes, and is compact and forceful on the palate, where dark berry and woodland flavours interweave with oak spice. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2036 **Alc** 15%



## Alessandro Leoni

In 2005, after completing his agricultural studies in Piedmont, Alessandro Leoni (*below*) started making wine, aged just 18. He became interested in viticulture thanks to a small plot of vineyards belonging to his uncle in Umbria. 'At that time,' he says, 'I met Riccardo Cotarella, with whom I worked until 2018 in different cellars across the "bel paese"... setting up and running start-up projects, from the soil to the bottling. Creating a new cellar is truly emotional!'

I came across Leoni's wines while I was on holiday in Capri, where some of the best local wines were from the producer San Salvatore 1988 – the San Salvatore Pian di Stio (made by Leoni and Cotarella) was such an elegant, pure and focused version of the Fiano grape. When I met Leoni in 2017, I was impressed by his desire to experiment with less famous varieties and places – he also oversees the production of a thrilling Biancolella made on Ischia in the Gulf of Naples.

Recently, Leoni returned to Orvieto in Umbria, the home of his first inspiration, where he has set up his own company, Feudi Spada. 'Riccardo Cotarella has been a great teacher,' he says. 'I owe him a lot, but I have always had an innate love and passion for the land where my grandfather was born.' Leoni's Umbrian wines include an elegant Chardonnay, an unusual blend of Grechetto and Riesling, and a red made from Alicante – all delicious and characterful wines. I love the precision, purity and joyfulness of his white wines and am intrigued by the potential of his reds. I can't wait to see what he will do next.

### San Salvatore 1988, Pian di Stio Fiano, Paestum, Campania 2018 95

N/A UK [sansalvatore1988.it](http://sansalvatore1988.it)

Made by Leoni with Riccardo Cotarella as consultant, this is a wonderfully taut, cool and elegant style of Fiano from grapes grown at 550m in the Cilento national park near Paestum, Campania. Pale gold in colour, with aromas of peach and fragrant meadow flowers, then zesty green apple and grapefruit on the palate, leading to a dry, tangy, savoury finish. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 14%

### Cantine di Crateca, Biancolella, Ischia, Campania 2020 93

N/A UK [vinicratecaischia.it](http://vinicratecaischia.it)

What a delightful, zesty example of Biancolella! Grown on volcanic soils on Ischia island, the grapes are cooled by sea breezes. Leoni's advice in the vineyard and some techniques in the winery have produced intense aromas of green tropical fruit. Brimming with bright flavours and mouthwatering acidity, with crunchy green apple, pink grapefruit and sweet lime. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 12%

### Feudi Spada, La Marchesa, Umbria 2020 93

N/A UK [feudispada.it](http://feudispada.it)

Leoni's own-label wine from Umbria is an intriguing blend of Grechetto with 10% Riesling (he says the varieties have a similar DNA and come together well with time). A beautifully subtle and elegant wine, it has delicate yet persistent aromas of white flowers, honeysuckle and sweet pea. An attractive bitter note on the finish with a twist of green olive and stony mineral flavours. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 13% **D**



PHOTOGRAPHS BEFANI & CONTICELLI, PIERLUIGI DESSI/CONFINIVISI, AGENZIA SINTESI/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



The Stio vineyard.  
Right: Owner Peppe Pagano in Paestum



# SAN SALVATORE 1988

From Magna Grecia to the heart of Italy,  
where time slows down

3000 years ago, the Greeks planted Aglianico and Greco grapes in Campania, in the heart of southern Italy, where San Salvatore 1988 comes from.

Discovering this winery means exploring the Cilento region, from the ancient city of Paestum all the way up to up the Giungano hills, where the mountains seem to touch the sky. This is where you will find the Grand Cru site of Stio, whose vines deliver wines of great structure and elegance.

San Salvatore 1988 makes wines that are long-lived and

preserve the memory of the terroirs they hail from, full of the oenological wealth that only these lands carry.

“Kalokagathia” is a word that comes from the Ancient Greek and means “Good and Beautiful”. This is the key to understanding San Salvatore 1988. Care for the land, respect for agricultural traditions, innovation, ethics, and sustainability all values that co-exist here. A biogas plant and three photovoltaic stations allow the company to be energetically self-sufficient, with minimal environmental impact.

Decanter  
OUTSTANDING  
95  
POINTS



The land must be cared for, even before it is cultivated. Traditions are respected and natural rhythms are followed in an eternal dance between man and nature that results in San Salvatore 1988's wines:

**Pian di Stio 2018** - 100% Fiano from a cru site at 650 metres altitude. Certified organic.

Straw yellow with hints of chlorophyll green. A wine that seduces with delicate floral notes and aromas of Mediterranean scrub. Elegant, with a deep and persistent taste on the palate. Good ageing potential, with great aromatic development ahead.

**Elea 2018** - An elegant, structured, and meditative Greco, like the terroir it hails from. 10% fermented in French oak barriques. Bright golden yellow colour and intense bouquet, with aromas of citrus, apple and broom. Elegant and very linear structure.

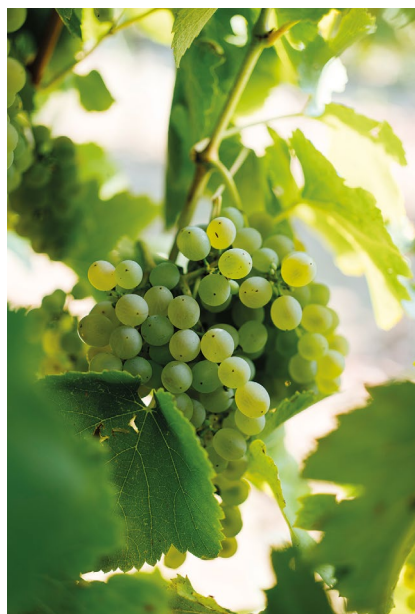
**Homage to Gillo Dorfles 2016** - Aglianico Riserva dedicated to a 20th century Italian genius who loved Paestum and its history. With its ruby colour and violet tinges, this is a serious red wine, aged in French oak barriques for 24 months. It aims to win you over from the first glass, but also to defy the passage of time. Just like Gillo Dorfles.

San Salvatore 1988  
National Park of Cilento  
Campania – Italy  
[www.sansalvatore1988.it](http://www.sansalvatore1988.it)

San Salvatore 1988  
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The late Gaetano Bertani and his sons, Giovanni (left) and Guglielmo

# TENUTA SANTA MARIA

Family history, micro-vinifications, and a focus on terroir sites in Valpolicella

Family history is an important signifier of identity for wine producers and their wines. So when Gaetano Bertani and his sons, Giovanni and Guglielmo, left the Cav G.B. Bertani company ten years ago, in 2011, they were in fact going back to the future.

The Bertani family has an illustrious history in the world of Veronese wines, making what was arguably the first modern dry Valpolicella, a pioneering dry appassimento wine called Recioto Secco in the 1920s, and the first modern Amarone in the 1950s.

Tenuta Santa Maria was created as a personal project by Gaetano Bertani in the early 1990s and named after a parish in Valpolicella. Today, the estate includes two wineries and properties with diverse terroirs in the DOC/G regions of Arbizano di Negrar (Valpolicella Classica), Valpantena and Val d'Illasi. The company headquarters is on one of Valpolicella Classica's most beautiful estates, Villa Mosconi-Bertani, just outside Verona, with its own authentic walled vineyard.

What's the future for Valpolicella

when produced by a family-owned, terroir-conscious estate?

Giovanni is quite clear about this: "We have to move away from the identification of the Verona region as a

generic style of winemaking and instead focus on the great variety of soils, climatic conditions and grape varieties, across several different valleys making Amarone, Ripasso and Valpolicella. We have to make individual wines that express each single terroir."

Family means everything in Tenuta Santa Maria, even in terms of their wine style. Guglielmo Bertani explains: "We think fine winemaking is first and foremost careful and sustainable farming with vinification techniques focused on low intervention and preserving what has been achieved in the vineyard. The family signature style is to reflect the realities of the land with elegance rather than making standardised commercial products."

"What we are all about," says Guglielmo, "is a balance between consistency and a constant search for refinement over generations. We aim to make elegant and lively wines, balanced in every aspect. They are the full expression of each parcel and of varieties grown with a great potential for ageing, even the whites."

"To achieve this we treat each parcel and its respective variety as a separate single vineyard with its own dedicated management," Giovanni says. "Each parcel has separate harvest times, separate appassimento in the case of Amarone and separate micro-vinification. In the case of blends the different varieties are handled separately until assemblage, just before bottling."

One of the most obvious vineyards for separate management is the spectacular 22-hectare Brolo (what the French would call a Clos), the vineyard enclosed by 4 metre-high walls dating back to the 1500s, erected around the best parcels on the estate in the Arbizano Valley. The limestone-over-marl soil imparts unique mineral character to the grapes and is sub-divided into smaller parcels, planted to Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella and Oseleta, used to produce Amarone Classico Riserva. The specific clone of Corvina found here is indigenous to the Brolo and there are plans to reintroduce rarer indigenous varieties, such as Dindarella, Spigamonte and Negrara, to further improve diversity and complexity.



## APPASSIMENTO AND VALPOLICELLA WINES

"Appassimento, or grape drying as a winemaking method, originated during





Villa Mosconi-Bertani  
with the Brolo vineyard  
wall just visible above it

“The family signature style is to reflect the realities of the land with elegance”

the time of the Ancient Romans as a way of making bigger and sweeter wines that suited contemporary tastes,” Giovanni explains. “Our use of appassimento today is quite different and more focused: we see it as a way of providing an additional layer of complexity to the wine, enhancing elegance, rather than looking for excessive concentration.”

Early harvests are conducted to maintain bright acidity during the full vinification. The drying process is managed with the idea of retaining the varieties’ fresh fruit while developing the wide aromatic complexity typical of the dried grapes. Long, low temperature maceration and fermentation bring low residual sugars, fine tannins and a mantle of glicerine to prioritise elegance over power. The Amarone is a Classico Riserva, matured for up to five years in traditional large barrels.

At Tenuta Santa Maria, the grapes used for Amarone Classico Riserva, Valpolicella Ripasso Classico Superiore and Valpolicella Classico Superiore come from the same vineyards. 40% are selected for Amarone and 60% for the Valpolicellas. Tasting a simple Valpolicella Classico gives the wine lover an opportunity to understand the pure fruit character of Veronese varieties, while the Ripasso gives a hint of the aromas of appassimento wines.

The same care for the vineyard origin and grape varieties goes into the Lepiga Soave, a single-vineyard wine, made from 100% Garganega from 60-year-old vines. Harvest is done over three separate pickings: an early passing for high acidity, one at normal ripeness, and one late for super-ripe grapes. Each picking is vinified separately with contact with the lees lasting up to 80 days. Assemblage comes when vinification is completed. An excellent food or aperitif wine.

**TENUTA SANTA MARIA**  
NEGRAR VERONA  
DI GAETANO BERTANI

## GAETANO BERTANI'S "SUPER VERONESE" WINES



### Torre Pieve Chardonnay

High density planting (9100 vines/ha), Burgundy clones, 50% barrique fermentation, limestone and clay soil with high mineral content.



### Merlot Decima Aurea

Produced from clones of Pomerol Merlot planted at 9100 vines per hectare. 50% given appassimento for 3 to 4 weeks. Fining in barriques for 18 months, followed by large barrels. Totally dry with sugars below 1 g/L. Elegant Merlot fruit with unique aromas from the short appassimento.

# EXPLORING MONFERRATO

Boasting a huge number of different, variety-focused denominations, Monferrato's wines celebrate the region's many indigenous grapes – including, but not limited to, Barbera

STORY MICHAELA MORRIS

The wine region of Monferrato expands across the provinces of Asti and Alessandria in southern Piedmont. It lies to the east of Cuneo, where Barolo and Barbaresco are located. But before heading directly to those hallowed hills, it's worth stopping in Monferrato to explore its wines. Monferrato embraces a dizzying number of overlapping denominations and is home to many of Italy's fascinating native varieties.

Leading the way is Barbera. Widely spread throughout Italy, Barbera is thought to have its origins in Monferrato – and the region certainly boasts some of its finest specimens. This sun-loving grape is given plenty of opportunity to shine as it typically occupies the best sites, whereas in neighbouring Langhe these are reserved for Nebbiolo.

Barbera produces deeply hued wines with a signature red cherry flavour. Mouthwatering acidity is this grape's calling card, yet Barbera is conversely discreet in tannins. Its most ambitious versions come from low-yielding vines and are concentrated. Ageing vessels provide palpable differences in style: stainless steel emphasises youthful, vivacious fruit, whereas oak ageing may be used to build up mid-palate weight, soften acidity and lend wood tannins. Depending on size, percentage of new wood and toast levels, oak barrels add notes ranging from subtle spice and toast to overt chocolate and vanilla.

Monferrato's various Barbera denominations reflect this diversity. The intersecting regions of Barbera d'Asti DOCG and Barbera del Monferrato DOC account for much of the area's Barbera bottlings. Wines labelled as such are generally fresh, unoaked examples, and more than one third of the latter are made frizzante or lightly sparkling. The Superiore category of both Barbera d'Asti and Barbera del Monferrato requires a minimum of six months in barrel, so these will have varying degrees of wood influence.

Nestled within Asti, Nizza was once a sub-zone but was promoted to a DOCG in its own right in 2014. With strict production regulations demanding Barbera *in purezza* at low maximum yields, Nizza favours high-quality production. Wines are uniform in style in that they always include oak ageing of at least six months (12 for Riserva). Yet even in the contained area of Nizza, there are differences – soils are described as clay-sandy marl of marine origin, but the terrain is varied. In the north, sandier soil is said to give lighter, racier, more immediate wines. In the south, a greater presence of marl and sandstone is associated with denser, more powerful Barbera. Subtle distinctions, nonetheless, can be obscured by winemaking.

Nizza is, without a doubt, a laudable source of complex and concentrated Barbera, and I have enjoyed many extraordinary bottles. The caveat is that they often come with heady alcohol, sometimes even upwards of 16%. 'High alcohol in Barbera can be a problem,' admits Andrea Faccio at Villa Giada. He relates the challenge to climate change and points to less drastic green harvesting as one approach to mitigating rising sugar levels.

## LESSER-KNOWN GRAPES

While Barbera reigns in Monferrato, it graciously leaves space for a host of red cohorts. Dolcetto is widely planted, with four variety-focused denominations – Dolcetto d'Asti, Dolcetto d'Acqui, Dolcetto di Ovada and Dolcetto di Ovada Superiore.

However, lesser-known grapes Freisa and Grignolino are intrinsic to Monferrato's identity and responsible for the region's repute. 'Freisa is a direct offspring of Nebbiolo,' says renowned grape geneticist Dr Anna Schneider. Assertive in both tannins and acidity, it tends to be more rustic than Nebbiolo. Asti's sandy soil accentuates its aromas, which can be redolent of strawberry – as the name freisa suggests. ▶



Vineyards in Canelli,  
which lies within the Asti  
DOCG in the southwest of  
the Monferrato region



# RUGGERI

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A distant relative of Nebbiolo, Grignolino was once as highly thought of as its famous ancestor. Alas, it fell out of favour due in part to its unfashionable expression. Pale in colour, with crisp acidity and scratchy tannins, Grignolino is definitely not fruit-plump. Rather, it is thoroughly mouth-cleansing, with crunchy berries and white pepper. While most Grignolino today is vinified in stainless steel, traditional vinification methods – such as long macerations and ageing in oak casks – are being revived to make ageworthy examples.

Then there are highly local specialties, such as the exotically scented Ruchè. Mostly limited to the Ruchè di Castagnole Monferrato DOCG, it produces a fleshy, dry, aromatic red.

Monferrato has also embraced international grapes such as Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Nero. The catch-all denomination of Monferrato Rosso allows any proportion of these, as well as native grapes Barbera, Bonarda, Dolcetto, Freisa, Grignolino and Nebbiolo. This makes for a mixed bag of wines under one umbrella.

Despite being considered Piedmont's flagship grape, Nebbiolo plantings are small-scale in Monferrato. Nevertheless, it has a long history in the zone. 'At the beginning of the 1900s, it was widely cultivated,' says Gianni Bertolino at Olim Bauda. 'Over time, it was replaced by more productive grapes like Barbera and Moscato.'

When the Monferrato DOC was established in the 1990s, it allowed varietal labelling for the Dolcetto and Freisa varieties – but not Nebbiolo.



Gianni Bertolino,  
Olim Bauda

Only as of the 2019 vintage has Monferrato DOC Nebbiolo been permitted (*see box*). Producers are pleased with this change for several reasons, not least of which is how Nebbiolo might alleviate the grave challenge of *flavescence dorée*. A type of grapevine yellowing, this phytoplasma disease is decimating vineyards in Monferrato. 'Nebbiolo is more resistant than Barbera and Grignolino, so it could be a help to local viticulture,' says Bertolino.

## BEYOND REDS

Taking a backstage to red, Monferrato's white wines are led by Cortese. Its best-known appellation is Gavi DOCG. The neighbouring Colli Tortonesi DOC occupies the far east of Monferrato and allows everything from Barbera and Dolcetto to Cortese; however, the recently rediscovered Timorasso is the grape that is

## Monferrato: four producers to know

■ **ACCORNERO**  
Besides outstanding Barbera and convincing Nebbiolo, Accornero crafts serious Grignolino.

■ **MICHELE CHIARLO**  
Despite having one foot in the Langhe, this top Barbera producer is firmly rooted in Monferrato.

■ **OLIM BAUDA**  
From Barbera d'Asti to Nizza Riserva, wines are deftly balanced and polished. Its Grignolino and Freisa are also highly recommended.

■ **SCARPA**  
A great name for beautifully aged Barbera. Scarpa's Rouchet (Ruchè) is also a standout.

## Gathering pace: Monferrato DOC Nebbiolo

Prior to 2019, Nebbiolo wines in Monferrato were only entitled to the Monferrato Rosso DOC. 'It was a handicap not being able to name the grape variety on the label,' says Villa Giada's Andrea Faccio. Finally approved, the new denomination stipulates a minimum of 90% Nebbiolo in two categories: **Monferrato Nebbiolo** must age for 12 months before release, while those labelled **Monferrato Nebbiolo Superiore** require at least 18 months, including six in wood. Maximum yields are 63hl/ha and 56hl/ha respectively.

To date, the inaugural 2019 vintage is the only one to have been fully declared at just 122,000 bottles, and 2020 numbers have yet to be finalised. However, the denomination is set to grow: as of October

2021, the consorzio recorded 248ha of Nebbiolo, which represents a twofold increase since the date of approval.

Despite this increase, plantings of Nebbiolo remain limited. 'I don't think we will see a conversion to Nebbiolo,' asserts Ermanno Accornero, a producer in Vignale Monferrato. 'Our territory remains principally designated for Barbera and Grignolino.' Faccio, however, does see a potential risk of Nebbiolo being planted on unsuitable sites, especially as Nebbiolo grapes command a higher price than Barbera. 'If it isn't planted in the right spot, it's hard to make even a mediocre wine. Hopefully, appropriate controls will ensure that this doesn't occur,' he says.

Stefano Chiarlo at Michele Chiarlo says the area around San Marzano Oliveto and

Moasca in southern Asti is well suited.

'The soil is the same Tortonian geological matrix similar to La Morra [in the Barolo region],' he explains. In Vignale, further north, Accornero says the Nebbiolo is 'more robust, full-bodied and structured' than Barolo.

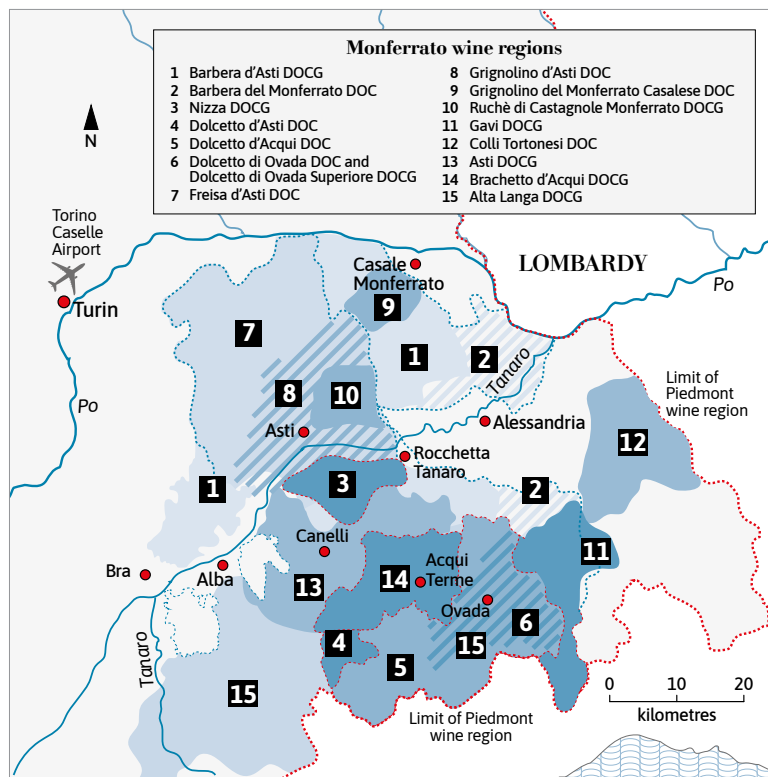
Nebbiolo from Monferrato is inevitably different from its Langhe brethren. Those I have so far sampled may not show the precision and finesse of Barbaresco and Barolo, but they do exhibit personality of place. Given the ageing requirements, wines labelled Monferrato Nebbiolo are only just trickling onto the market. Villa Giada's Trepointi, Accornero's Girotondo and Il Falchetto's Barbarossa are all worth seeking out, though pre-2019 bottlings still bear the Monferrato Rosso DOC.

## PIEDMONT

garnering all the attention (these wines are often labelled with the historic Roman name of the region: Derthona). It thrives in pockets of light, limestone-rich clay, making structured, textural and intensely mineral white wines.

Fizz fans will appreciate Monferrato's plethora of bubbles. Fragrant Moscato Bianco gives the sweet, lithe, frothy wines of the Moscato d'Asti DOCG as well as the fully sparkling Asti DOCG, which covers all sweetness levels. Likewise, the rare but delightful sparkling red Brachetto d'Acqui DOCG ranges from dry to charmingly sweet. Finally, the Langhe spills over into Asti at its southern point, where it is known as Langhe Astigiano. In this hilly area, the DOCG of Alta Langa proposes high-quality, traditional-method sparklers from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

From sweet to dry, sparkling to still – in every hue, Monferrato's offerings are boundless. The region's indigenous grapes provide plenty for the adventurous. And when only a satisfying glass of Barbera will do, Monferrato can't be beaten.



## Morris selects: six Monferrato reds to explore

### ① **Marchesi Incisa della Rocchetta, Sant'Emiliano Superiore, Barbera d'Asti 2017** 93

£23.75 **Ledbury Wine**

Barrique-aged Barbera from a south-facing vineyard just north of the Nizza zone. Polished toasty oak leaves room for pretty floral scents and an appetising mix of blackberry and dark strawberry. Rose, violet and vanilla join in on the palate. Perfectly put together with supple, velvety tannins wrapping a succulent, plush core. **Drink 2022-2029 Alcohol 15%**

Dedicated to Giorgio Rivetti's father, who was nicknamed Pin. Cedar, eucalyptus and pressed flowers open to intriguing notes of sweet wild raspberry, cocoa and liquorice. At the moment, the palate is slightly angular with dusty tannins and tangy, concentrated acidity. Wait a year or so for the oak to settle in and the structure to soften. Lots to chew on here: 65% Nebbiolo, 35% Barbera. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 14.5%**



### ② **Coppo, Bric del Marchese, Nizza 2018** 92

£61 **Mondial Wine**

Coppo makes three Nizza bottlings to highlight the diverse areas within this denomination. Bric del Marchese is in the heart of the zone on silty marl soil, giving a powerful wine. It is unabashedly oaked, ageing predominantly in new barriques. Aromas of coffee, smoky incense and baking spice mingle with macerated cherry. With a rich, round, chocolate-tinged palate, Barbera's brilliant acidity keeps it from being heavy. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 16%**

### ③ **Olim Bauda, Isolavilla, Grignolino d'Asti 2020** 90

£14.99 (2018) **Virgin Wines**

Low-yielding vines pushing 70 years old on light, sandy marl rich in marine fossils. Pale garnet in colour, it explodes with rose and rosehip scents, while cranberry, redcurrant and menthol pop on the palate. Tart acidity and mouth-scrubbing tannins refresh the palate. Light, lean and simply delightful, give it a slight chill and serve with salumi. **Drink 2022-2025 Alc 13.5%**



obvious oak. It shows good depth of flavour with soft tannins and a flattering creaminess. Refreshing acidity stimulates the appetite. **Drink 2022-2026 Alc 15%**

### **Villa Giada, Treponti, Monferrato 2016** 89

£17.85 (2015) **Bat and Bottle**

Andrea Faccio planted Nebbiolo in the Nizza township of Agliano Terme in 1998 after trying his neighbour's bottling. Surprisingly youthful, this is very bright and Barbera-esque with intense red cherry and hints of mint and pepper around the edges. Lovely purity and a cheerful frankness on the palate. Chalky textured tannins clamp down on the finish, yet it remains approachable. **Drink 2022-2025 Alc 14%**

### **La Gironda, La Gena Superiore, Barbera d'Asti 2018** 89

N/A UK **lagironda.com**


La Gena was the Galandrino family's first Barbera in 2000. This 2018 is restrained but compelling, hinting at truffles, woodland, herbs and spice. Silky and smooth, the palate is wonderfully fruity, not cluttered by

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# CHIANTI CLASSICO

Where sustainability is a way of life

Interviewed by wine journalist Monty Waldin, the President of the Chianti Classico Consorzio, Giovanni Manetti, tells him about the Consorzio's focus on sustainability and the projects the Consorzio are developing to assist its members. Manetti is clear that each step to greater sustainability "should be agreed by us all", an approach that seems to be working.

Certainly, this initiative enjoys the overwhelming support of its 500 or so wine grower members, and an astonishing 52.5% of Chianti Classico's 7,200 ha [18,000 acres] vineyard area is now certified organic, compared to 6% globally and 15% in Italy overall.

The high take up by growers stems in part from the extremely suitable terroir found in Chianti Classico where bright and breezy conditions are found in a range of altitudes from 250–700m. This promotes air flow and vine health.

A diverse range of soils including calcareous clay, schistous clay ('galestro'), and clay-limestone ('alberese') fit the fussy Sangiovese grape, which is a constituent part of 80–100% of Chianti Classico wines, like a glove. And Chianti Classico's natural biodiversity means 80% of the DOCG territory comprises

mainly forests of evergreen oak, chestnut, pine and other trees, plus the vineyards and olive groves, of course.

The creation of a viticultural research station in Panzano in Chianti, a village within the commune of Greve in Chianti, just south of Florence, was instrumental in fuelling Chianti Classico's sustainability drive.

This sounds a bit dry but winegrowers must master biology, chemistry, geology and a range of other science-based disciplines to make great wines, and even more so to do it with fewer inputs less often.

## PRODUCER PARTICIPATION

Glowing tales of organics spread by word of mouth are nice to listen to, but hard data presented and discussed openly at a round table, and small group workshops in Chianti Classico were seminal in

An astonishing 52.5% of Chianti Classico's 7,200 ha vineyard area is now certified organic

changing growers' mindsets regarding sustainability in general, and any thought of jumping to full organic certification status in particular.

Now over 70% of Chianti Classico estates work to audited spray schedules based on common sense "use only what you need" protocols. This also reduces fuel use, tractor maintenance hours and soil compaction. Streamlined spraying saves money that can be better used elsewhere. And yes, Chianti Classico's certified organic estates are required to sign up to this protocol as well.

## DATA SHARING - THE KEY TO PROGRESS

Another initiative Giovanni Manetti sees as fundamental is the development of a centralised online register where Chianti Classico winegrowers can immediately log signs of active pests or fresh evidence of any new infections in their vineyards.

"Sharing this data collectively means it might help your neighbour more than it might help you this week, but of course the following week the reverse can also be the case, depending on the pest, the weather, a change of wind and so on," Manetti says.

"The system saves time, money and worker hours whilst creating more certainty and maintaining quality. If it means staff no longer come in on Saturday and thus can catch up on family time both you and your respective families gain priceless wins in time, money and goodwill. This is the essence of sustainability," Manetti concludes.

Another benefit is seeing the local picture in its widest form, an example of which is investment in local skills, such as building and repairing the dry-stone walls that keep wild boar and deer out of vineyards - skills that seem unimportant at the time, but which are sorely lamented once lost.

"There is also a vital cultural aspect to this work," says Manetti. "Once your terroir starts bleeding its local folk, their skills, traditions and know-how, then your tribe becomes poorer at every level. Having a working lunch in a local restaurant with your wine importer, cooked by a fourth generation local using zero-miles wild boar and following a family recipe is socially, environmentally and economically priceless, and uplifting on a human level too."





*This page:* Panzano in Chianti, site of the Chianti Classico viticultural research station.  
*Facing page:* Giovanni Manetti, President of Consorzio Chianti Classico



# *A sense of place in* **CHIANTI**

Soon, Chianti Classico wines will show 11 new sub-zone names on their labels. You won't see them on shelves for a while yet, but the decision has been made, so here's a tour of the new sub-zones with a selection of the wines made there now

STORY EMILY O'HARE



The hamlet of Fonterutoli, near Siena, now in the new sub-zone of Castellina

Following much debate over several years, in the summer of 2021 the Chianti Classico consorzio approved a new sub-zone classification, the proposal having been to allow 11 Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive (UGAs: 'additional geographical units') in Chianti Classico to add the name of their commune or township to the front label of their Gran Selezione wines (in the coming years this will extend to the Riserva and annata-level wines).

The approval of this law change, said to be by a 'very large majority' of the governing consorzio's members, has encouraged producers in those sub-zones to gather together to form their own member associations, in order to unify, define and promote their own zone.

Chianti Classico is the historic centre of Chianti production, spanning some 70,000ha of territory between the Tuscan cities of Florence and Siena, 10% of which is planted to vines. Sangiovese dominates here, as it has to make up at least 80% of the blend for all Chianti Classico wines. To have more precise information regarding the origin of the wines will be greatly beneficial, believes David Gleave MW, managing director of importer Liberty Wines in the UK. Sangiovese, like Pinot Noir, is a site-sensitive variety and expresses beautifully the nuance of place, so the new move gives the consumer more opportunity to understand that specific place through the wine, he argues.

It is a challenge to explain neatly the detailed qualities of each sub-zone involved – and there are further legal hurdles to be crossed before the current nine recognised Chianti Classico commune areas are officially superseded by the 11 new UGAs. However, here we shall go on a journey to understand in broad strokes the key differences, from village to village.

## STARTING IN THE SOUTH

A 15-minute drive north from the centre of Siena, Vagliagli is a hamlet within the commune of Castelnuovo Berardenga. Wineries here will be able to add the village name 'Vagliagli' to their label – though some producers are continuing with the more familiar commune name, Castelnuovo Berardenga.

With Castelnuovo Berardenga forming a butterfly shape at the southern edge of the Chianti Classico region (see map, p54), Vagliagli now denotes the 'west wing' of the butterfly, separated from the east wing of Castelnuovo Berardenga by the Arbia river at Pianella and the sub-zone of Gaiole.

Altitude begins to creep up as you approach Vagliagli, and here the soils contain more alberese (a compact limestone rock) and less clay and tuff,

a soft, porous rock created from volcanic ash, more common in Castelnuovo Berardenga. In his *Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs* (UC Press, August 2019), Ian D'Agata notes that the wines from this zone are 'generally lighter bodied, succulent and juicy'.

At slightly lower altitude in the east wing, Castelnuovo Berardenga is among the warmest communes in Chianti Classico. South-facing and sun-blessed, wines here are ample in body and dark in their fruit character, with tightly knit tannins that in their youth can appear austere. These wines often draw comparisons with the muscular wines of Montalcino, further south.

### ① Villa di Geggiano, Chianti Classico 2018 91 villadigeggiano.com

You can tell you are in the south of Tuscany with this Chianti Classico. Ruby reds become blue-tinged in the glass; aromas and flavours marry red fruits to black- and blueberries; textures soften. I heard the tannins described here as 'dusky' – a much more evocative description than the term 'dusty'. At least three years of cellar ageing on site means Geggiano's Classicos are wonderfully composed by the time they reach the drinker. **Drink 2022-2031 Alcohol 14.5%**

## CASTELLINA

With the warmth of the south as our theme, and Siena again as our starting point, a 15-minute drive northwest takes one to Castellina. Driving to Fattoria Pomona, a family-owned estate since 1890, this warmth can be felt and seen: cactus flowers and prickly pears protrude from the dry stone walls opposite the winery.

Castellina is not just warm, it also has one of the lowest levels of annual rainfall in Chianti Classico, according to D'Agata, who found Castellina to have an average annual precipitation rate of 770mm, compared with 920mm in Greve and 970mm in Gaiole, noting that 'Castelnuovo Berardenga's data are similar to that of Castellina'.

The fruit character of the wines is unsurprisingly juicy, concentrated and ripe, however the wines do not tend to fill the mouth so broadly as do the wines of Castelnuovo Berardenga.

### ② Fattoria Pomona, Chianti Classico 2019 92 fattoriapomona.it

The aromatic fruit character of this wine is so clearly defined, it's a gloriously primary fresh fruity nose, precise cherry and pink grapefruit aromas matched by equivalent clarity on the palate. The fruit is ripe and sweet (ripening is not much of a problem here) while the acidity tempers the warm, juicy fruit and the tannins offer crunch. Delectable, invigorating, simple but not banal; an excellent wine for any meal. **Organic. Drink 2022-2031 Alc 13.5%**



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San Donato  
in Poggio

### SAN DONATO IN POGGIO

Not far from Castellina to its northwest, **San Donato in Poggio** incorporates Barberino Val d'Elsa, Poggibonsi and Tavarnelle Val di Pesa. The most westerly of the sub-zones, from its hills (at an average of 350m) you can see the towers of San Gimignano and the city of Volterra away to the southwest, towards the coast.

The wind here has a powerful cooling effect on the vines, particularly at night, fixing colour, preserving acidity and heightening aromatics in the grapes. Laura Bianchi of Castello Monsanto tells me that this past summer, the temperatures would drop by 19°C at night, from about 25°C to 6°C. The moderating effect of the cooling winds also allows for a long ripening season, crucial for the later-ripening Sangiovese.

#### ③ **Castello di Monsanto, Il Poggio, Chianti Classico Gran Selezione 2017** 96

[castellodimonsanto.it](http://castellodimonsanto.it)

Buoyant yet with such depth, the tannins are muscular, enhanced by 18 months in 500-litre French oak. Aromas and flavours of black cherry and blackberry, sandalwood, almond and orange rind; rich, concentrated but not overbearing. Acidity is high and bright. Cerebral and physical, this is a super wine from a single vineyard. **Drink** 2022-2041 **Alc** 14.5%

### SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA

Continuing north, we reach **San Casciano Val di Pesa**. It is, alongside Greve commune, at the northernmost point of the Chianti Classico zone and just minutes from the city of Florence. Notably, it is the sub-zone where harvest is likely to happen first. The soil is rich in *ciottoli di fiume* – small pebbles and large smooth stones, remnants of ancient river deposits – and sandy

silt. The stones hold and radiate warmth, ensuring the vines achieve full maturation. The wines here have a beautiful fluidity to them, light and deft in tannins. These qualities are sympathetically expressed here in the wines of young winemakers Maddalena Fucile and Matteo Vaccari at Fattoria Cigliano di Sopra (*see below*).

Where San Casciano meets Greve the altitude rises, as does the volume of galestro in the soil. Galestro is a brittle stone, flaky and crumbly – very different to the impenetrable alberese found in vineyards further south in the region. It is said to release precious elements into the soil for the plant – and the wines display a more steely character, more mineral and tense.

#### ④ **Fattoria Cigliano di Sopra, Chianti Classico 2019** 90

[ciglianodisopra.it](http://ciglianodisopra.it)

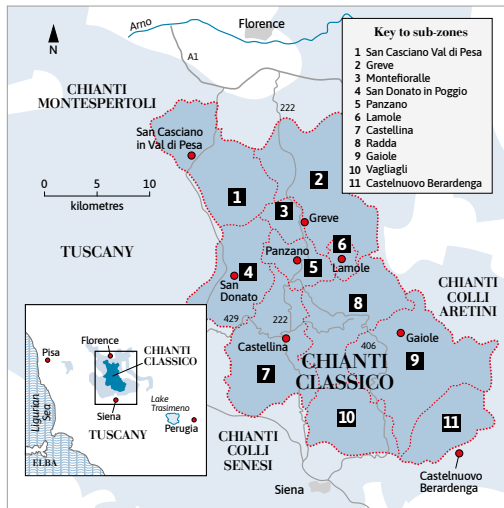
Winemaking duo Maddalena Fucile and Matteo Vaccari headed to California to work with Pinot Noir at Domaine de la Côte, the estate run by Rajat Parr, whose philosophy to make wines 'with clarity, detail and authenticity' evidently resonated with them as this, their fourth vintage of Chianti Classico, has those qualities, with a lightness of touch and lack of ego that is refreshing and beguiling. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13.5%



### GREVE

Crossing to the east and spiralling south, we are in **Greve**. The Greve river cuts through this region and styles of wine can vary according to which side of the valley and at what altitude a vineyard sits. On the eastern side it is warmer; vineyards face south and west, enjoying the potent afternoon sun. Here, just out of town to the north, works Englishman Tim Manning at Montecalvi, a 3ha estate at zoom with some very mature vines up to ▶

## CHIANTI CLASSICO



The town of Greve



80 years old. His wines have an explicit red fruit character and a freshness and sweetness to them that raises a smile for the drinker.

### ⑤ **Montecalvi, Chianti Classico 2019** 94

£21.60-£24.90 *Justerini & Brooks, Shrine to the Vine, Theatre of Wine, Wine & Greene*

From its lightness of colour, you wouldn't expect the impact to come. The nose is salty, sweetly spiced and faintly herbal, with star anise, peppered tartare and fresh mint, but the palate is really where you can lose yourself. The tannins do not occupy centre stage, but leave room for the flamboyant interplay of acidity and fruit, and a long finish. More acts to follow, one might say. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2031 **Alc** 13.5%

### MONTEFIORALLE

Lying just west of Montecalvi, above Greve town, are the vineyards of Conte Sebastian Capponi, of Villa Calcinaia. His family have owned property in Greve since 1524 (their Villa Calcinaia is just outside Florence). His estate's vineyards are all within the sub-zone of **Montefioralle** – the second smallest sub-zone after Lamole. Its rare combination of soil types for Greve – a mixture of montemorello (alberese and galestro-shale) and sillano (siltstone and claystone) – are also found at Ama in Gaiole and Monteverdine in Radda, Capponi says. The vineyards of Montefioralle face east, appreciating morning sun and afternoon shade. In hotter years the wines retain a coolness and grace which, with the influence of the chalky, limestone-rich soil, makes for ease of drinking in youth but also allows them to age beautifully.

### ⑥ **Villa Calcinaia, Chianti Classico 2018** 92

£21.75 (2015) *Cava Spiliadis Collection*  
Magenta in colour, in the way ripe mulberries

‘Panzano wines, always deliciously ripe and full in body, show great balance and suppleness’

stain the fingers on picking. Sweet and soft summer fruits on the nose and the palate, which is exquisitely balanced, entirely charming, with intensity of fruit and yet delicacy of touch, as comforting as cashmere, with tantalising acidity. Easy even to drink on its own, no mean feat for Sangiovese. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14.5%

### PANZANO

A township within Greve, **Panzano** now has its own sub-zone to the west of the Greve river at a high altitude of about 500m. In Panzano, south-facing vineyards line the form of a natural amphitheatre-shaped basin known as the ‘Conca d’Oro’. The vines are bathed in sunlight and heat during the day, and thanks to their high altitude enjoy the drop in temperature as night becomes duly cool. Panzano wines, always deliciously ripe and full in body, show great balance and suppleness with chewy, satisfying tannins and flavoursome plum and cherry fruit flavours.

### ⑦ **Le Fonti, Chianti Classico Riserva 2017** 91

*fattorialefonti.it*

The small addition of Cabernet Sauvignon is a delight on the nose and the palate. It lends a spiky note of blackcurrant, an appetising crunchiness, and almost piquant acidity that feels revitalising. East-facing vineyards enjoy the morning sun and late afternoon shade and there is not a hint of cooked fruit here, even in the hot 2017 vintage. Fresh and focused, with exotic spices on the finish.

**Drink** 2022-2031 **Alc** 14.5%



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**LAMOLE**

Only a 7km drive away, and still within the municipality of Greve, there is **Lamole**. Along with Radda, Lamole is one of the highest sites within the Chianti Classico zone, rising up to 650m. There are vineyards here with vines trained to stakes, and dry stone terraces snaking down steep, sandy-soiled hills. The growing season is long because of the cooler average temperatures, and the wines are fine: slender yet persistent in tannins, long in flavour and nervy in acidity, they seem to vibrate with energy.

**Podere Castellinuzza, Chianti Classico 2016 93**

POA A&B Vintners

On the sandy, warm and well-drained soils of Lamole, Sangiovese vines and iris flowers thrive, and the aromas of purple flowers and camomile seem so present in this soft, sweet, creamy wine. It is wonderfully active on the palate, the tannins fine and plentiful, with primary flavours of fresh, ripe raspberries. This sees no oak but spends 30 months in cement before bottling. Shows a great sense of place. **Drink 2022-2031 Alc 14%**

**RADDA**

Moving south in the direction of Siena, but still at an altitude of 600m, we arrive at **Radda**. The medieval walled town with panoramic views of the surrounding countryside (pictured below) is gloriously atmospheric, and that sense of atmosphere undoubtedly translates into the sub-zone's wines. Rich in detail, they read on the palate like an illuminated manuscript. Tannins thread through, neatly woven; a beautiful presence but weightless, like gold leaf. The perfume of Radda wines is heady, aromatic and colourful – of purple flowers, iris and violet, of blood orange, red cherries and sweet thyme.

**⑦ L'Erta di Radda, Chianti Classico 2019 93**

ertadiradda.it

There is an identifiable purity, lift and nervous tension to the Sangiovese grown in Radda. Like

looking at a map of the blood vessels throughout the body, there is a coursing, driving energy to this wine, full of youthful exuberance with finely grained, supple tannins and ripe red cherry and cranberry fruit aromas and flavours. Clean and fresh finish.

**Drink 2022-2031 Alc 13.5%**

**GAIOLE**

We bring our tour to a close in the sub-zone which 'is more Classico than thou', as Nicholas Belfrage MW wrote in *The Finest Wines of Tuscany & Central Italy* (Aurum, 2009). In this sub-zone there is Castello di Brolio, the estate at which Baron Bettino Ricasoli in 1872 formulated the recipe for Chianti (see 'SuperTuscans at 50', p10).

Like Radda, **Gaiole** is also atmospheric, rugged and rocky. I meet winemaker Maurizio Alongi, Gaiole born and bred. He has worked in the region since the 1990s, initially in a cooperative in town before buying the 1.3ha Barbischio vineyard from a local centenarian who planted this vineyard aged 50. These are intent, vertical wines – the tannins are magnificent: sustained by the acidity, they are polished and persistent. I find myself captivated by the structural components of the wine.

**⑧ Maurizio Alongi, Vigna Barbischio, Chianti Classico Riserva 2018 94**

maurizioalongi.it

At 460m, surrounded by woods, on mainly sandy soils, the aromatics are enchanting with intricate bramble fruits and thyme. The palate has grace typical of Gaiole. Refined and regal in tannins, and a sense of charge that will repay time in decanter or in the cellar. **Drink 2022-2031 Alc 13.5%**

How glorious it is to be at the beginning of the Chianti Classico sub-zone conversation, to watch, wait, swirl and taste the attempts of winemakers here to decipher their sites through – as Enogea publisher and expert map maker Alessandro Masnaghetta expresses it – that 'exceptional and demanding... Sangiovese'. **D**



The medieval walled town of Radda





# NARDI: Reflections on Brunello

**E**milia Nardi, owner of one of Montalcino's leading estates, gives us some thoughts on her wines and her attitude to sustainability:

*Brunello di Montalcino is Italy's most famous red wine. As a producer, what do you think makes it so special?*

I have always seen Brunello di Montalcino on our family's table; for me it's part of the Italian landscape! But for the wider wine world audience "Brunello" means mostly quality and identity. The terroir of Montalcino is literally predestined for the production of the most fantastic Sangiovese wines. In a sip of Brunello di Montalcino you will find the softer tannins of Sangiovese, the earthy smell of our soils, the beauty of this unique territory.

*The whole world is talking about ecology and sustainability now. What are you doing in this respect?*

At Tenute Silvio Nardi we strongly believe in the necessary world project to protect what Nature offers us, and in our wine estate we aim to preserve the typicity of Montalcino. Since 1996 we have been selecting ancient varieties of Sangiovese Grosso from our oldest vineyards and we have chosen the five best clones for our new vineyard



"I am happy when our wines are the voices of our vineyards."

Emilia Nardi

plantations. It's our way to preserve and revalue what Nature offers, while striving to deliver the highest possible quality to our consumers. Regarding agronomic practices, our approach is ecofriendly. We do not use pesticides, we control weeds by mechanical systems, we employ organic fertilizers and recycle waste products.

*Tell us about your cru Brunello wines, Poggio Doria and Manachiara, what's the*

*difference and why are they so special?*

Manachiara and Poggio Doria are two single-vineyard expressions from different areas, which show how multifaceted the spirit of Montalcino can be. Brunello di Montalcino Cru Manachiara displays superb structure and character, with seductive fruit and a silky mouthfeel, while Brunello di Montalcino Poggio Doria, a more refined and aristocratic expression of Sangiovese, stands out for its complexity, velvety tannins, and succulent finish.

*Which is your favourite wine in the Nardi portfolio, and why?*

Tenute Silvio Nardi produces every single wine with full respect for the identity represented by its denomination. Personally, I like our classic Brunello di Montalcino on special occasions, our Rosso di Montalcino when I need a sip of Montalcino with a hint of freshness, and our 43° when I need something simple but with character. I am happy when our wines are the voices of our vineyards, and Montalcino offers fantastic voices.



# CASTELLO COLLEMASARI

## Flagship of Tuscany's Montecucco DOC

The ColleMassari estate, owned by siblings Claudio Tipa and Maria Iris Bertarelli, lies just south of Montalcino in Tuscany's bucolic Maremma region, the hilly coastal area that forms the new frontier for Tuscan wines.

ColleMassari has 1,200 hectares of land of which 10% are under vine. Existing vineyards were immediately converted to organic by Tipa after he purchased the estate and all new plantings have been organic from scratch. Bar 90 hectares planted with olive groves, all remaining land is wild habitat.

In 1999 the family purchased the 13th century castle and ancient hamlet of Montecucco, allowing the ColleMassari estate to extend its hospitality activities in a charming rural location.

### WINEMAKING: MONTECUCCO SANGIOVESE ON STAGE

Trials showed ColleMassari's main grape variety, the enigmatic Sangiovese, was best aged in large vats of French and Slovenian oak, rather than in smaller barriques. The bigger format, tighter-grained oak regime means Sangiovese wines retain greater typicity, freshness and longer drinking windows.

Head winemaker Luca Marrone says "Montecucco provides Sangioveses with deeper colour than other regions. The wines have distinct spice and menthol notes too, which barrel ageing would have muted."

The wines are fermented in a spacious, four-level eco-friendly cellar dug into a cool, rocky hillside.

Its design and location allow for all work to be conducted by gravity, providing a cost-free, natural, and environmentally sensible alternative to pumping. The cedar wood roof paneling carries organic compounds that combat mould naturally.

### ORGANIC VITICULTURE

What is interesting about ColleMassari is that its range comprises smooth and even-textured wines, yet the micro-climates can be very varied. There are hot dry

spots in higher altitudes, plus sunny, windier, self-draining vineyards and cooler, wetter, slower-ripening conditions on lower sites where water drains less easily.

'To even things out we sow cover crops between the vine rows for biodiversity and as a tool to even discrepancies out,' says Luca Marrone. 'On higher self-draining sites, broad beans (*Vicia faba*) provide nutrients for the vines, protective shade for the soil, and organic matter for overall vine and vineyard health. Only every other row is cover cropped to avoid excess vigour or stress. Cover crops are not needed on mid-slope sites which can hold enough water for wild plants to thrive without human intervention. Sowing fescues on lower, more fertile sites provokes light vine stress by stealing moisture. The big win is more homogeneous ripening. You can then pick in a single pass rather than two passes, saving time and tractor diesel. And we get easier drinking wines with enhanced drinking windows. These little victories lead to bigger wins for all.'

### RED WINES: FRESHNESS WITH AGEING POWER

Rigoletto Montecucco Rosso DOC, ColleMassari's everyday red is made from Sangiovese for freshness, Cilieggiolo for its violet notes, especially vivid due to the sea air, and Montepulciano for staying power. This makes Rigoletto an everyday wine that is capable of ageing, too.

ColleMassari's signature wine is its Super Tuscan, **Rosso Riserva Montecucco DOC**, made from 80% Sangiovese and 10% of both Cilieggiolo and Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine ages mainly in large barrels, plus French barriques for the Cabernet, for around 14 months. Bright in colour with well-judged oak, broad appeal and a wide drinking window.

ColleMassari's flagship single-vineyard red is the **Poggio Lombrone Montecucco DOCG Sangiovese Riserva**, made from heritage strains or biotypes of Sangiovese. This means each individual vine is



Claudio Tipa with head winemaker, Luca Marrone

genetically similar to all the others, but all are nevertheless also naturally diverse showing slightly different behaviour.

These original Sangiovese grapes used for Poggio Lombrone, already part of the property when it was taken over by the Tipa family, have adapted well to gradual



The spacious, four-level eco-friendly winery

“Sangiovese wines... with greater typicity, freshness, and longer drinking windows.”

climate change, which is possibly part of the reason for the lack of any sense of stress in this Brunello-esque wine.

Poggio Lambrone's complexity derives from traditional fermentation in open wood vats followed by at least 30 months ageing in oak barrels. This gives the wine a notable array of subtleties in terms of texture, colour, and of course, flavours and aromas.

Interestingly, all ColleMassari's Sangiovese plantings derive from cuttings taken from Poggio Lambrone's now fifty-five-year-old vineyards.

### WHITE WINES: VERMENTINO KISSED BY THE SEA

ColleMassari overlooks the Tyrrhenian Sea whose buffeting winds bring out the best in the Vermentino grape.

The smooth and salty undertow in both of its white wines comes not from Poseidon but from a jigsaw of small, diverse and individually expressive plots, and the natural freshness which is imparted by having the vines at altitudes of 300 metres.

**Montecucco DOC Vermentino Melacce** is a deliciously engaging mid-weight dry white whose mix of yeasty savouriness and lively lemony-

orange fruit makes it so mouth-watering that it is salivatingly hard to put down.

**Montecucco DOC Vermentino Irisse** is an off-beat one-of-a-kind bone dry Vermentino with the addition of 20% Grechetto di Todi grapes originating from neighbouring Umbria. Vermentino delivers its almost oily but layered yellow fruit richness whilst the Grechetto di Todi provides its customary fresh lemony acidity, creating mouth-watering inner tension.





# PROSECCO ON A HIGH

Prosecco's popularity shows no signs of waning: why would it? Buoyed by its unarguable success, producers are adopting innovative styles to bring new flavours to fizz lovers everywhere

FEATURE RICHARD BAUDAINS



The verdant, rolling slopes of Conegliano Valdobbiadene

The combined annual production of Prosecco DOC [exceeding 500 million bottles for the first time in 2020] and Prosecco DOCG [92m bottles] has long since overtaken that of Champagne, which averages about 300m bottles shipped annually. And easy accessibility has possibly created a certain over-familiarity and perception of uniformity among consumers. But Prosecco is evolving, offering diverse and exciting new routes into Italy's most popular sparkling wine, in ways that challenge the stereotypes. As Luca Giavi, director of the Prosecco DOC consorzio says, the mindset needs revising. Today we have to think not of 'Il Prosecco', but of the plural 'I Proseccchi'.

### **CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE SUPERIORE DOCG**

Modifications to the production norms in 2019 introduced two new categories into the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore DOCG: extra brut (up to 6g/L residual sugar) and the bottle-refermented Sui Lieviti (on the lees). Incidentally, both categories were already officially recognised in the smaller DOCG of Asolo Prosecco, across the Piave river.

Bottle-refermented Prosecco – rather than by the commonly used Charmat 'tank' method – has long been produced in the DOCG area, but until recently it lacked official recognition. Following a method pre-dating modern vat refermentation, Sui Lieviti (also known as 'col fondo') is made by bottling still wine in early spring with its own sugar and fine lees to make a delicate, finely integrated bubbly and a bone-dry, tangy, citrus-minerally character. The issue currently engaging producers is the carbonic pressure of this style of wine. Sui Lieviti is for full-on, bubbly 'spumante', while traditional wines, with roughly half the atmospheres, are officially 'frizzante'.

Many producers, including the prominent Loris Follador at Casa Coste Piane and Christian Zanatta at Ca' dei Zago, the winemaker who most closely represents the artisan tradition, have preferred not to move up into the spumante category on the grounds that the extra creamy texture that comes with it detracts from the character they wish to achieve in the wine. Others, such as Adami, Marsuret and Sorelle Bronca, make the more sophisticated spumante style without losing the slightly rustic authenticity. Both styles work.

If Sui Lieviti is about bubbles, the debate around the new extra brut category is about sugar. Despite the general trend towards ever drier styles, many producers have preferred not to take up the extra brut option and to stay in the comfort zone of the brut style (up to 12g/L

residual sugar), where well-judged residual sugar helps to bring out the fruit and give flesh on the palate, without leaving a sensation of sweetness.

Brut wines tend to be more consistent than extra brut, but it could be argued that with their low sugar, the latter are a more direct expression of terroir. It has to be said, however, that not all sites are equally suited to the production of extra brut, and in this context the steep-sloped Rive sub-zones of the DOCG area acquire particular significance. The generally more subtle, delicately floral wines of Valdobbiadene can come across hard and lean in very dry styles, but can also have an exhilaratingly crisp, incisive purity if from, among others, the Rive of Colbertaldo (Miotto), Santo Stefano (Le Colture), Col San Martino (Bortolomiol), Farra di Soligo (Adami; La Farra), and Farrò (Sorelle Bronca). Wines from Ogliano in the Conegliano side of the DOCG (Biancavigna; Borgo Antico), on the other hand, are naturally broader and more structured, which makes for a very successful, rounded style of extra brut.

If bone-dry Prosecco is an invitation to revise expectations, late-bottled and mature vintages pose even more of a challenge to the common perceptions. In 2014, Paolo Bisol from Ruggeri put to one side a 4,000-litre vat and waited... He released the extraordinarily multifaceted Ruggeri, Cinqueanni (£55 The Great Wine Co) in 2019. The experiment proved that Prosecco can evolve finesse and complexity with age. The current vintage of Nino Franco's outstanding Grave di Stecca Brut is 2015 (£20.32 Lay & Wheeler) and bottles back to 2008 are drinking perfectly (the 2013 is sublime). Also splendid are the 2016s from Bianca Vigna, Merotto's Cuvée del Fondatore, Bortolomiol's Grande Cuvée del Fondatore and Ruggeri's Vecchie Viti from 80-year-old vines (2019, £32.99 Valvona & Crolla). Though these may not be easy to find, they offer a glorious dimension to Prosecco that is rarely glimpsed, but which deserves to be cultivated.



From left: Stefano and Marco Spagnol

## Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore DOCG

### ① Bortolomiol, 70th Anniversary Rive di Col San Martino Extra Brut 2020 94

N/A UK [bortolomiol.com](http://bortolomiol.com)

This is the first vintage of a refined limited edition sourced from the Col San Martino slopes, which are noted for producing fresh, crisp wines with complex aromas. There is lemon and lime, with a hint of bergamot and a touch of aromatic herbs on the nose, and a very fine, creamy texture on the palate. Long and dry, with potential to evolve over two to three years. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alcohol** 11.5%



### ② Mongarda, Extra Brut 2020 94

N/A UK [mongarda.it](http://mongarda.it)

The Tormena family owns 7.5ha on some of the best sites of the Farra di Soligo hills, from which the young Martino Tormena makes light, dry wines that are a masterclass in finesse. His extra dry has apple peel and green pear on the nose, with floral nuances and a faintly salty background. Fresh, agile and long, it's got everything you could ask for in a Prosecco.

**Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 11.5%



### ③ Spagnol Col del Sas, Qundici16 Extra Brut NV 94

£21 Tannico

To get the depth and complex aromas he seeks, Marco Spagnol uses 50% reserve wine from the previous vintage in this cuvée. Pear and Parma violet notes on the nose, and a hint of seaside stones. The palate has length and complexity and the finesse that comes from long lees ageing. A great example of the less immediate, more nuanced style of Prosecco.

**Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 11.5%



### Antica Quercia, A Sui Lieviti Brut Nature 2019 93

N/A UK [anticaquercia.it](http://anticaquercia.it)

Antica Quercia is a certified organic estate at the eastern end of the DOCG. This bottle-refermented 'A' (for artisan) comes from a selection of the best grapes of the vintage and has 12 months on the lees. Intriguing, mature aromas of acacia honey and ripe pear, and a palate that's satisfyingly round despite no residual sugar. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 11.5%



### ④ Silvano Follador, Extra Brut 2020 93

US\$24.99 Astor Wines

Brother and sister Alberta and Silvano Follador have run this boutique estate since 1999, using organic methods in the vineyard and minimal intervention in the cellar. Silvano's trademarks – low sugar and minerally intensity – emerge to the full in the clarity

of expression of his 2020 vintage. Uncompromising, but huge personality. **Drink** 2022-2026 **Alc** 11.5%

⑤ **Sorelle Bronca, Difetto Perfetto Sui Lieviti Brut Nature 2019** 93

£19 (2017) Harvey Nichols

A new release from a producer known for its brut and extra brut single-vineyard selections, this 'sur lie' Prosecco maintains its impeccable standards. A *piéd de cuvée* is used to restart fermentation in this beautifully crafted wine, which has aromas of lemon and lime, savoury herbs, almonds and brioche. Light and creamy on the palate with a long finish; simply delicious. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

**Col Sandago, Costa dei Falchi Extra Brut 2020** 92

£18.90 Bat and Bottle

Col Sandago sources the grapes for this selection from the calcareous-clay soils of Conegliano's Rive di Collalto. There is citrus and a hint of aniseed on the nose, and on the palate the concentration that comes from low yields. Bone-dry and slightly austere, perhaps, but an excellent food wine that would not be daunted by tangy cheeses or mildly spicy curries. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

⑥ **Gregoletto, Sui Lieviti Brut Nature 2019** 92

US\$21-\$23 Kermit Lynch, The Underground Bottle Shop

By far the biggest producer of the style, the late Luigi Gregoletto maintained the artisan 'sur lie' tradition before it attracted international attention. His sons and daughter remain faithful to their heritage with this version of the Gregoletto classic. Intense lemon rind and dried apricot with a touch of wet stones on the nose, while broad and dry on the palate; this is the real thing. **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 11.5%

**Marsuret, Extra Brut NV** 92

N/A UK marsuret.it

Like many growers, until the arrival of the Charmat method, the Marsura family produced artisan 'frizzante' by bottle refermentation. The technology has changed but the vineyards at Guia, one of Valdobbiadene's most sought-after sites, are still the same. This is delicately floral on the nose, with structure and intensity on the palate; a superb food wine. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 11.5%

⑦ **Sanfeletto, Bosco di Fratta Extra Brut 2020** 92

US\$31.99 Enoteca Vino Nostro

This long-established family-owned estate is in the east of the DOCG zone, at San Pietro di Feletto, where the red ferrous soils give wines with fresh acidity and a mineral twist. This has aromas of white peach and melon with a touch of lilac blossom, and super-fine perlage on the palate, which has tangy

intensity. Closes with a long, bone-dry, savoury finish. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

⑧ **Santa Margherita, Rive di Refrontolo Extra Brut 2020** 92

£20.45 (2017) Alivini

This vineyard selection was previously released as a brut but now comes as extra brut – an indication of the general trend to reduce sugar levels. Refermented by the 'Charmat lungo' (extended lees-ageing) method, this has a nose of sour apple and Mediterranean scrub, with great texture on the mid-palate and a long finish. A food wine to match with risotto or baked fish. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

**Adami, Col Fondo Brut Nature 2020** 91

£19 Astrum Wine Cellars, D Vine Cellars, Field & Fawcett, Highbury Vintners, Sociovino, Symposium, The Whisky Exchange

Franco Adami's versatile range goes from the renowned Vigneto Giardino dry to the Col Credas extra brut. The newly released spumante version of his Col Fondo maintains the house style of pristine elegance with its tight, persistent perlage and subtle aromatic herb character. A rapier-like entry, with creamy volume on the palate and a long, firm finish make this an ideal aperitif. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

**Ruggeri, Saltèr Extra Brut 2020** 91

£18.50 The Great Wine Co

Ruggeri was acquired by Rotkäppchen-Mumm in 2017, but the vineyard and cellar teams have remained unchanged, as has the classical house style of its top wines. The extra brut has precisely defined notes of lemongrass and green apple, with a touch of bread crust on the nose. Very fine, perfectly integrated perlage gives elegance to the palate, which has a long, bone-dry finish. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

**La Farra, Extra Brut 2020** 90

£15.75 Terra Wines

Founded by the Nardi family in 1997, La Farra was one of the first estates to bottle an extra brut. The vineyards, planted 100% to Glera, are located at about 300m, on south-facing slopes that favour full aromatic ripeness. Fresh citrus, apple and spring blossom are the key notes of the 2020, together with a winning grapey quality on the palate. An attractive classic. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%

**Ronfini, Cuvée 5 Extra Brut NV** 90

N/A UK ronfini.com

Leonardo Ronfini is the third-generation producer at this family-owned estate. For his Cuvée 5 he complements the Glera grape with the local, fairly rare, Verdiso, Bianchetta and Glera Lungo. A full-on aromatic style of wine, with a rich floral character and a toothsome palate at the soft end of extra brut. A wine of personality. **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 11.5%



## PROSECCO DOC ROSE

The big news from Prosecco DOC in 2021 was the rollout of Prosecco Rosé – which finally received its official approval in late 2020.

Big is the operative word: the initial release was estimated at about 60 million bottles – a demonstration of the extraordinary productive potential of the zone, which stretches from Treviso in the Veneto across Friuli-Venezia Giulia to Trieste on Italy's eastern border with Slovenia.

Take-up of the Rosé DOC has been immediate, not least because more than half of the current Prosecco DOC producers were already making a generic sparkling rosé prior to the arrival of the new denomination. The task of the Prosecco consorzio, which coordinated the various stages of research that led to the creation of the new DOC, was to establish stylistic consistency and quality standards for this heterogeneous production and pave the way for what is destined to become *the* Italian pink sparkler. It would make an interesting case study.

Prosecco Rosé is based on a quite strictly defined cuvée of 85%-90% Glera and 10%-15% Pinot Nero (vinified as red wine). There was canvassing for the inclusion of native varieties such as Raboso in the Veneto or Refosco in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, but Pinot Nero was the logical choice, since it has been widely grown in both regions since the late 19th century.

Refermentation is by the widely used Charmat method, in tank, and wines must age on the lees for a minimum of 60 days. Declaration of the vintage is mandatory.

Much of the research that went into the formulation of the production norms for Prosecco Rosé revolved around the fundamental issue of colour, with micro-vinification experiments juggling the variables of yield, percentages of the blend and time on lees.

The outcome is a shade of pink which corresponds closest to 'peach' on France's Côtes de Provence scale and also, given the presence of Pinot Nero, recalls a pale Sancerre rosé. In terms of sugar levels, nearly three-quarters of the current production is extra dry (12-17g/L) and most of the rest is brut.

The consorzio's declared objective is to maintain the charm and immediate appeal of Prosecco, with an extra touch of individuality. The first impression, in this regard, is that the wines hit the spot; the Pinot adds a little structure and a note of red fruit to the gentle floral character of the Glera. At the top end of the extra dry scale, the wines may come over a little sugary for some tastes, but the drier Prosecco Rosé styles add a quintessentially Venetian touch to light fish dishes at a candlelit supper.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALCANTARELO PIAI

## Prosecco DOC Rosé

### ⑨ **Conte Collalto, Rosé Extra Dry, Treviso 2020** 93

£17-£17.99 Corks of North Street, Selfridges

Treviso, as a sub-zone of the Prosecco DOC, is the source of fresh and lively wines that can rival those of the more prestigious DOCG. This sprightly, pale peach-tinted rosé has a nose that is precise but not overstated, with notes of pomegranate and sweet violets. The palate has a light and airy quality and a mouthwateringly refreshing zing that make it a perfect aperitif. **Drink 2022 Alc 11%**



### ⑩ **La Tordera, Tor Sè Rosé Brut, Treviso 2020** 93

N/A UK [latordera.it](http://latordera.it)

This leading Prosecco Superiore estate sources its new rosé from the hills just outside the DOCG zone. The Glera comes through in the floral and citrus aromas on the nose, complemented by red cherry and almond from the Pinot. Dry, but not too much, the finely textured palate has breadth and underlying structure, and finishes with tangy intensity. Deliciously drinkable. **Drink 2022 Alc 11.5%**



### ⑪ **Villa Sandi, Il Fresco Rosé Brut 2020** 93

£14.95-£16 Bellavita, Cellar Door Wines, Dolce Vita Club, Tannico

An addition to the extensive range of this top Prosecco Superiore producer, known for its award-winning Cartizze. This has trademark charm on the nose, where delicately aromatic violets and rose mingle with cherry pie, while the palate has a rich, creamy texture with underlying acidity and salty almonds on the long finish. An irresistible aperitif that would also work with shellfish. **Drink 2022 Alc 11.5%**



### ⑫ **Le Rughe, Rosé Brut 2020** 92

£13.61-£14.95 Beverage Boys, Master of Malt

This Prosecco Superiore producer based in Conegliano also has a property north of the DOCG zone, at the foot of the Dolomites, where the cool, pre-alpine climate gives wines with terse intensity. Delicate pear and violet aromas, with a hint of raspberry, lead to a crisp, dry palate with finely judged perlage and a long, mineral finish. Refined in a classic, international style. **Drink 2022 Alc 11.5%**



### **Masottina, Collezione 96 Rosé Brut 2020** 91

£12.38 Christopher Keiller

This new addition to Masottina's top-quality DOCG range is a rosé with a full-on nose of ripe red fruit, honeysuckle and hibiscus, combining the floral notes of Glera with the juicy fruit and lightly tannic influence of Pinot Nero. The palate, at the soft end of the brut scale, has volume – and the finish is long and toothsome. An 'anytime' rosé. **Drink 2022 Alc 11.5%** **D**



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masottina.it

# The art of BLENDING

The two scenic, northeastern areas of Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia are at the forefront of Italy's top-level white wine scene. Both regions produce characterful blends that celebrate their diverse terroir and get the best from local plantings

STORY MICHAEL GARNER



**T**rentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia make up Italy's very northeastern tip, and their most renowned vineyards lie near the national frontiers with Austria and Slovenia. In Alto Adige, the main growing areas form a 'Y' shape with the city of Bolzano at its intersection and the conjoining valleys of the Adige and Isarco stretching outwards and upwards to the north, towards Austria. In Friuli (as it's commonly called) the key denominations of Colli Orientali, Rosazzo, Collio, Isonzo and Carso run right up to the border with Slovenia.

The influence of the shared heritage as part of the old Austro-Hungarian empire is still evident today: Alto Adige (an autonomous region since 1972) embraces its links with Austrian culture and German is still the first language for many; but while surnames over to the east often reveal Slavic origins, most of Friuli feels distinctly Italian.

The two areas spearhead Italy's burgeoning fine white wine scene: according to the regional consorzi, 68% of wine production in Alto Adige is

white and in Friuli almost 75%. Both regions are probably best known for their single-varietal wines produced from many of the same grape varieties: Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon [Blanc or Vert]. The growing tendency, however, is to place greater emphasis on distinctive and often unique 'top-end' blends that are designed to show off the character of their local terroir.

The idea has been gathering momentum since the 1970s in both areas. The release of Jermann's Vintage Tunina – a blend of Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Malvasia Istriana and Ribolla Gialla (2017, £45.55-£47.76 Field & Fawcett, The Drink Shop) – in 1975 was a milestone for white wine production in Friuli. In the same year, Terlano was recognised as a separate sub-zone of Alto Adige and granted its own denomination, specifying for the 'cuvée', or white blended wine, a minimum of 50% Pinot Bianco along with smaller proportions of other grapes, in practice usually Chardonnay and Sauvignon.



The village of Scena,  
north of Bolzano  
in the Adige valley

## NORTHEAST ITALY WHITES

The 'international' white varieties were introduced in the latter half of the 19th century into both areas through their Dual Monarchy ancestry and the necessary replanting of vineyards following phylloxera. Nowadays, many wineries are following in the footsteps of Jermann and Cantina Terlano, and clear patterns of production are beginning to emerge.

In Alto Adige, producers have adopted the classic Terlano mix of Pinot Bianco, Chardonnay and Sauvignon, while Friuli has seen a major shift towards varieties considered as autochthonous: Friulano [Sauvignon Vert], Malvasia Istriana and Ribolla Gialla. They often form the backbone of Collio Bianco and Colli Orientali Bianco wines, and, alongside Chardonnay, Sauvignon and Pinot Bianco, are permitted constituent parts of Rosazzo, a former sub-zone of Colli Orientali that was granted its own DOCG in 2011.

### ALTO ADIGE

The vineyards of Alto Adige share a bewildering mixture of soil types, elevations, altitudes and microclimates, and understanding them is key to knowing which variety works best in each locale.

Pinot Bianco-Chardonnay-Sauvignon blends are mainly produced from vines planted on the limestone-based soils of the hillsides along the right bank of the Adige as it flows southwest (between Bolzano and the southern boundary with Trentino), much the largest expanse of vineyard in the province. They are often 'personalised' with the addition of smaller proportions of other grapes – for example, in the village of Tramin, local hero Gewürztraminer gives a real sense of place to Stoan, Cantina Tramin's proprietary blend (2019, £23.95 Fintry Wines). A few kilometres up the road, Hans Terzer, oenologist at Cantina St Michael-Eppan, adds Pinot Grigio to his premium white blend Appius. Pinot Bianco, the region's iconic white grape, remains the heart and soul of Terlano, the village sitting on the left bank and higher up the Adige river, just to the northwest of Bolzano, in an area where the soils are of volcanic origin (mainly porphyry). Cantina Terlano's super-premium Rarity leans heavily on the variety; the current vintage (2008) is a cuvée of 85% Pinot Bianco, 10% Chardonnay and just 5% Sauvignon Blanc. 'Sauvignon can dominate if you're not careful,' maintains Terlano's sales and marketing director Klaus Gasser. 'In any case, Pinot Bianco is the variety we always come back to.'

Towards the more extreme limits of the vineyards, producers look to other varieties for their inspiration. Conrad Pixner's Bergkellerei Passeier sits high up in the Passeier valley, north of Merano, at St Martin in Passeier. His *Giovo*



**'The premium blend typifies the white wine of real substance, majestically rich in aroma, flavour and texture, and built to last'**

blend is made from equal parts Chardonnay grown at Tirolo just above Merano, and Solaris from vineyards close to the winery, the highest of which sits at 1,100m. Solaris, a disease-resistant variety originally bred at the Freiburg Institute in Germany in the 1970s, is finding favour in this area as its short growing season enables it to flourish at high altitudes. 'When it ripens fully up here,' says Pixner, 'Solaris can accumulate enough sugars to achieve about 14% alcohol and still maintain 10g/L of acidity.'

At the southern tip of the area, the Franz Haas winery ([franz-haas.it](http://franz-haas.it)) sits on the left bank of the Adige, across from Tramin. Back in the mid-1990s, Haas put together an eclectic blend of Riesling, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Sauvignon called Manna, from vineyards at up to 800m in nearby Aldino, Egna and Montagna. His idea was to create a wine versatile enough to match a wide range of foods. In recent vintages he has cut back on the proportions of Riesling and Gewürztraminer in favour of Kerner, sourced from the Valle Isarco where this Trollinger/Riesling cross seems to perform at its best.

Andreas Huber, winemaker at Pacherhof ([pacherhof.com](http://pacherhof.com)), blends Kerner with Sylvaner and Riesling high up above Bressanone, northeast of Bolzano, where these more aromatic varieties come into their own. His Private Cuvée epitomises the fresh, fragrant, mineral-toned wines with racy acidity that the Valle Isarco excels at.



From top: Hans Terzer, Cantina St Michael-Eppan; Robert Princic of Gradišciutta; Conrad Pixner, Bergkellerei Passeier





Jermann, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia



## FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

Almost 10% of Friuli's registered vineyards are planted to Friulano, the main grape behind most of the region's premium blends. Blending with Malvasia Istriana and Ribolla Gialla is the favoured option in the Collio and Colli Orientali DOC and Rosazzo DOCG areas, though Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon Blanc are also frequently used. Ribolla is not, however, authorised for DOC wines in Isonzo and Carso.

Collio and the premium areas of Colli Orientali (including Rosazzo) are made up of low-lying hillside sites of marl and sandstone soils known locally as *ponca*, and growing conditions are much more homogenous than in Alto Adige. The varying proportions of grape varieties used and individual choices made by the winemaker thus have a more obvious bearing on style – for example, fermentation with extended skin contact is a popular way of maximising aroma, flavour and texture.

On his small family estate at Pradis between Cormons and Capriva, Roberto Picéch uses a relatively high proportion of Ribolla (40%), ferments Friulano on the skins and then ages his Collio Bianco Jelka in barrel, cement and bottle before release some five years after the harvest.

A little to the east, towards San Floriano del Collio, Robert Princic's Gradis'ciutta blend is composed of 50% Friulano, 30% Malvasia and 20% Ribolla ([gradisciutta.eu](http://gradisciutta.eu)). He ferments in wood and the wine spends one year in barrel followed by 18 months in stainless steel before bottling; the extra



**“The growing tendency is to place emphasis on “top-end” blends designed to show off their local terroir”**

ageing allows him to market Gradis'ciutta as an example of the rarely seen Collio Riserva.

Using that same mix and proportions of grapes, Ivan Muzic ([cantinamuzic.it](http://cantinamuzic.it)) ferments his Collio Stare Brajde, a Decanter World Wine Awards Best in Show winner in 2021, in tonneaux followed by a year in bottle, for a style built on purity and freshness of fruit.

The legendary Picolit, the grape behind one of Italy's rarest but very finest dessert wines thanks to its exceptional sugar/acid balance, also has a part to play here. A healthy percentage can transform a dry white blend into something really quite distinctive according to Marco Sara ([marcosara.com](http://marcosara.com)), one of a small group of producers at Savorgnano del Torre in the northern Colli Orientali, north of Udine, who have come up with the idea of creating a unique blend of Friulano and Picolit to best define their territory. ‘Using 30% of Picolit really sweetens up the slightly herbaceous fruit that can characterise Friulano in slightly cooler areas like ours,’ he notes. Usually playing more of a bit-part in blends (mostly at about 20%), Ribolla Gialla, as in Jermann's Vinnac, can also perform extremely well as the dominant variety.

## BEST OF THE BEST

Though overshadowed by the rise in popularity of varietal wines over the past few decades, the blend is now back with a bang. Historically, vineyards throughout Italy were planted to an *uvaggio*, or a mix of grapes, and these ‘field blends’ are behind many of today's premium blends.

However, another interpretation of the idea is designed to scale new heights. ‘With Nama, we wanted to create a wine that is the very essence of Nals Margreid,’ insists Gottfried Pollinger, CEO of Cantina Nals Margreid ([kellerei.it](http://kellerei.it)) in Alto Adige. Homing in on vineyards from two of their top growers – a plot of Chardonnay at Magré, northeast of Trento, and small blocks of Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon at Nalles further north – oenologist Harald Schraffl came up with the Nama blend to express the character of their terroir in such a way as to appeal to international taste. The concept of ‘the best of the best’ allows the premium blend to take its place alongside the top varieties in a winery's range. Nama captures that combination of ripe, succulent fruit, racy acidity and silky texture that represents the quintessential characteristics of the best Alto Adige wines.

Similarly, in Friuli, the premium blend typifies the white wine of real substance, majestically rich in aroma, flavour and texture that has earned the region its stripes. In both areas, these wines are built to last: a lifespan of 10 years or more in the best vintages is certainly realistic. ▶

## Garner's selection: 10 white blends that demonstrate the best of the northeast

### ① Cantina Terlano, Rarity, Trentino-Alto Adige 2008 97

£132.50 Astrum Wine Cellars, Field & Fawcett, Harrogate Fine Wines, Sociovino  
Bottled after 11 years on its lees, this 85% Pinot Bianco with Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc is broad, ripe and waxy, with pear aromas supported by tarragon and oregano, and a hint of mint. There's real swagger here. Finely textured, with stony, almost savoury fruit flavours and hints of nutmeg and clove. Wonderfully persuasive. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alcohol** 13.5%

### ② Gradis'ciutta, Riserva, Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2016 97

N/A UK gradisciutta.eu  
A Friulano-Malvasia-Ribolla blend that's broad and ripe with a clear stony edge, fragrant lemon peel, white pepper, evening primrose and a touch of seasoned oak. Full and juicy with ripe fruit flavours and notes of linen, dried flowers and lightly toasted spice. Lovely balance and definition, with fresh acidity leading to a glorious finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

### ③ Muzic, Stare Brajde, Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2019 97

N/A UK cantinamuzic.it  
The archetypal Friulano-Malvasia-Ribolla blend, this is broad, fresh and limey with notes of pink grapefruit, aromatic herbs and light floral tones: all in all, tremendous clarity. The palate is gloriously fresh and juicy, with incisive but balanced limey acidity to lift the ripe fruit flavours. Good texture, excellent balance and a lingering finish of aromatic herbs and citrus peel. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

### Nals Margreid, Nama, Trentino-Alto Adige 2016 96

POA Vindependents  
A blend of three top vineyards for the three separate varieties: Chardonnay (85%), Pinot Bianco and Sauvignon. Fresh and candied fruit aromas are joined by notes of angelica, iris and cardamom. Rich melon, pear and lime flavours are carefully wrapped up in silky oak and balanced by fantastic acidity. Immaculate length and precision. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

### Roberto Picéch, Jelka, Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2016 96

£36 Bat and Bottle  
Understated skin contact influence in this Ribolla-Friulano-Malvasia blend is most impressive. It's broad, ripe and full, with scented floral and citrus notes and a hint of seasoned oak. Ripe, round and juicy with good freshness; gentle fruit flavours mingle with notes of wood, hay and spice. Good acid gives balance and a lingering finish of angelica, yellow peach, clove and white pepper. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

### ④ St Michael Eppan, Appius, Trentino-Alto Adige 2016 96

£126 Drinks & Co  
Fermented and aged in wood plus a further three years on its fine lees in stainless steel, this blend of 58% Chardonnay with Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco and 8% Sauvignon Blanc is oaky but full of ripe, floral-toned aromas of honey, preserved lemon and Seville orange curd. It has mouthfilling texture and lashings of candied fruit flavours. A highly convincing study in opulence. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

### ⑤ Marco Sara, Monte della Guardia, Colli Orientali, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2019 95

N/A UK marcosara.com  
Broad and full with lurking power, this Friulano with 30% Picolit has scented notes of citrus blossom, angelica and yellow peach with hints of seasoned oak and spice. Full, fresh and juicy, with saffron and lime-

infused ripe yellow fruit flavours, it's very accessible with good length and precision, finishing with scented tangerine zest and floral notes. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 14%

### Bergkellerei Passeier, Giovo 18, Trentino-Alto Adige 2018 94

N/A UK bergkellerei.it  
An unusual vino da tavola mix that works really well: the steely, limey notes of Solaris combine beautifully with the buttery Chardonnay. Broad and oaky with nutty and slatey aromas, ripe, juicy lime flavours and floral notes. Good length, and an expansive aromatic finish. **Drink** 2022-2027 **Alc** 13.5%

### ⑥ Franz Haas, Manna, Vigneti delle Dolomiti, Trentino-Alto Adige 2019 94

£32.99 D Byrne & Co, Must & Lees, The Fine Wine Co, Vinvm  
A touch of Gewürztraminer (with Riesling, Chardonnay, Kerner and Sauvignon Blanc) is evident on the very ripe, perfumed nose – an exotic fruit cocktail of aromas. A broad palate teems with juicy flavours; good acid and structure give a long, perfumed and juicy finish. Impressive, a kaleidoscope of fruit flavours. **Drink** 2022-2028 **Alc** 13%

### Jermann, Vinnæ, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2020 94

£27.50-£27.95 The Fine Wine Co, The Great Wine Co, Wine Direct  
Clean and floral toned, with the slightest note of oak and a hint of white pepper. A lively palate with great freshness and acidity; lean but shapely with subtle notes of lemon, flowers and white pepper. Lovely balance and length, and a fresh, zingy, salty finish. The other varieties (5% each of Friulano and Riesling) really do lift the Ribolla Gialla. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 12.5% **D**



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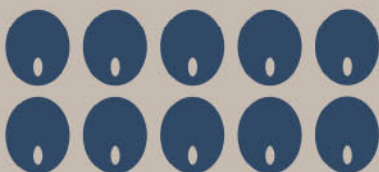
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# MARCHE, ABRUZZO & MOLISE

The appeal of the Adriatic coast alone is surely enough to draw us to Italy's central eastern regions. But once there, you can discover many up-and-coming wine treasures too

STORY ANDREA BRICCARELLO





Italy is known in the wine world for its multitudinous grape varieties, stunning scenery and outstanding food. While many wine lovers head straight for the cypress-covered hills of Tuscany, or the foggy heights of Piedmont in the northwest, there are three regions that – in my opinion – are Italy’s best-kept secrets, adjoining north-south down the country’s central Adriatic coast: Marche, Abruzzo and Molise.

Here, where the sea meets the mountains, some of Italy’s finest grapes – white Pecorino and Trebbiano, or red Montepulciano and Tintilia – give their best expression.

## Marche

Sandwiched between the perhaps better-known regions of Emilia Romagna in the north and Abruzzo in the south, Marche has approximately

‘Dry Verdicchio is best enjoyed with seafood and, thanks to its crisp character, it makes a great aperitif’

17,000ha under vine, according to the Istituto Marchigiano di Tutela Vini, and more than 12,000 growers. Production here is largely white, with Trebbiano widely planted all over the territory, but Marche is also home to one of the most famous grapes in Italy: Verdicchio.

The region plays host to the vineyards of two main types of Verdicchio: Castelli di Jesi DOC and di Matelica DOC. Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi is the better-known and more prestigious appellation and, due to the close proximity of the sea, it can offer a range of styles, ▶

Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi vineyards near Montecarotto in Marche

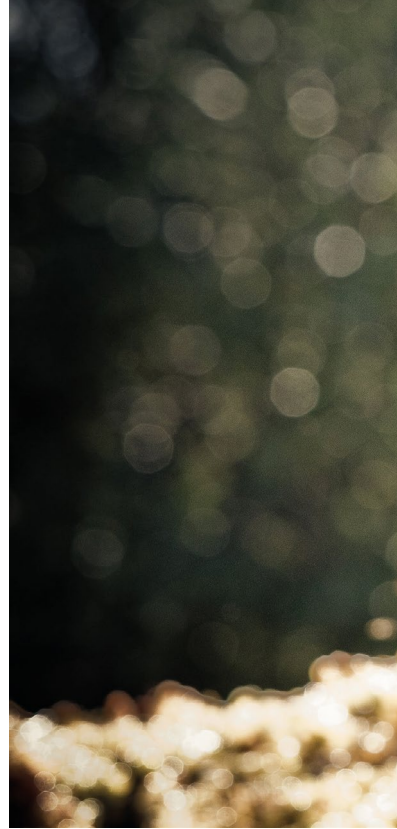


from light and fresh to rich, full and complex, largely depending on how and if the wines are aged, and on the level of lees contact during production. Verdicchio di Matelica, being more inland, tends to have a higher-toned and fresher character and can offer great ageing potential.

Verdicchio is a very versatile grape, and it can be found not only in its still form but also in sparkling (both Charmat and traditional method), and even sweet passito wines. The dry wine is best enjoyed with seafood and, thanks to its crisp character, it makes a great aperitif; the more complex and aged wines can be easily matched with chicken and veal, or alternatively monkfish or sea bream.

If you're looking for great Pecorino and Passerina, the wines from Offida have structure, richness and length. Promoted to DOCG status in 2011, Offida is a small area, just 463ha in 2019, in the far south of the Marche by the border with Abruzzo, reaching inland almost as far as Ascoli Piceno town. Likely the more familiar of the two, Pecorino is incredibly versatile, allegedly named after the local sheep ('pecora') and their fondness for the grapes grown locally. The vines prefer cooler areas where the grapes can benefit from breezes, allowing a long ripening season. Pecorino wines can be simple and refreshing if fermented in stainless steel, or rich and complex if aged in oak, offering a wide range of aromas and textures.

Even though the Marche region is famous for the production of white wines, there are also a



Above from left: Michele Bernetti from Umani Ronchi in Marche; Emidio Pepe, Abruzzo

few red appellations producing notable wines. Lacrima di Morro d'Alba, produced just up the coast from the city of Ancona, is a very particular and interesting wine; the Lacrima grape has intense, almost perfumed notes of violets, strawberries and lavender, with firm tannins. It can be produced in a passito style as well. The name Lacrima, literally 'teardrop', could relate to the shape of the grape, or the fact that the skins of the ripened grapes can split, causing juice to seep out. Montepulciano in Marche produces deep,

## Briccarello's pick: top Marche whites and reds to try

### ① De Angelis, Pecorino, Offida 2020 93

US\$17 56° WIne, Discovery Wines, Stone Ridge  
Straw yellow with golden hints, this Pecorino displays a mixture of flowers, white stone fruits, nectarines, apricots and citrus. Medium-bodied, it has great texture and a long finish. Organic.

**Drink** 2022-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%

### ② Sartarelli, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico 2020 92

£11.50-£13.50 Barrique Fine Wines, C&C Wines, JN Wine

Straw-gold with a green hue, this shows plenty of peach, nectarine and grassy notes. Fresh, vibrant and crisp, it's well balanced with plenty of apples and pears followed by a classic bitter almond finish.

**Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 13%

### ③ Umani Ronchi, Campo San Giorgio Riserva, Cònero 2016 93

£65-£74.50 Vinvm, Waud Wines  
Deep ruby in colour. Complex and spicy notes rise out of the glass, with splashes of Morello cherries and ripe dark plums. It's meaty and savoury on the palate with round, gripping tannins and rich layers of wild blackberries and dark spices. Organic. **Drink** 2023-2029 **Alc** 13.5%

### De Angelis, Superiore, Rosso Piceno 2018 90

£12.42 Jascots  
A blend of Montepulciano with 30% Sangiovese, this Rosso Piceno has a vibrant ruby colour and plenty of wild berry notes. It's loaded with crunchy blueberries and blackberries on the mid-palate – an intense, deep wine with

a lovely, generous summer-fruit character. **Drink** 2023-2028 **Alc** 13%





## ‘Montepulciano can be grown all over Abruzzo, but it thrives in the highest vineyards at 300m-400m altitude’

in a fresher, lighter style. Alighiero De Angelis produces a unique sparkling Passerina, zingy and citrusy, and a Pecorino aged in oak for 12 months, capturing the great versatility of the grape.

Another key player in the Marche has to be Umani Ronchi, the reference on Verdicchio and Rosso Cònero – DOC reds produced from a minimum 85% Montepulciano. With more than 100ha in the Verdicchio area, Umani Ronchi has been making high-quality wines for more than 40 years. Now run by Michele Bernetti, the estate’s best wine is its Rosso Cònero Campo San Giorgio, a stunning example of pure Montepulciano, aged for two years in small and large oak casks.

juicy reds, sometimes blended with Sangiovese and sometimes international varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The results are medium- to full-bodied wines that are packed with rustic tannins, layers of red forest fruits and plenty of earthy undertones.

Marche producers are increasingly becoming completely organic, such as third-generation family-run Tenuta De Angelis in the province of Ascoli, who believe that Passerina and Pecorino have a great future, especially when produced

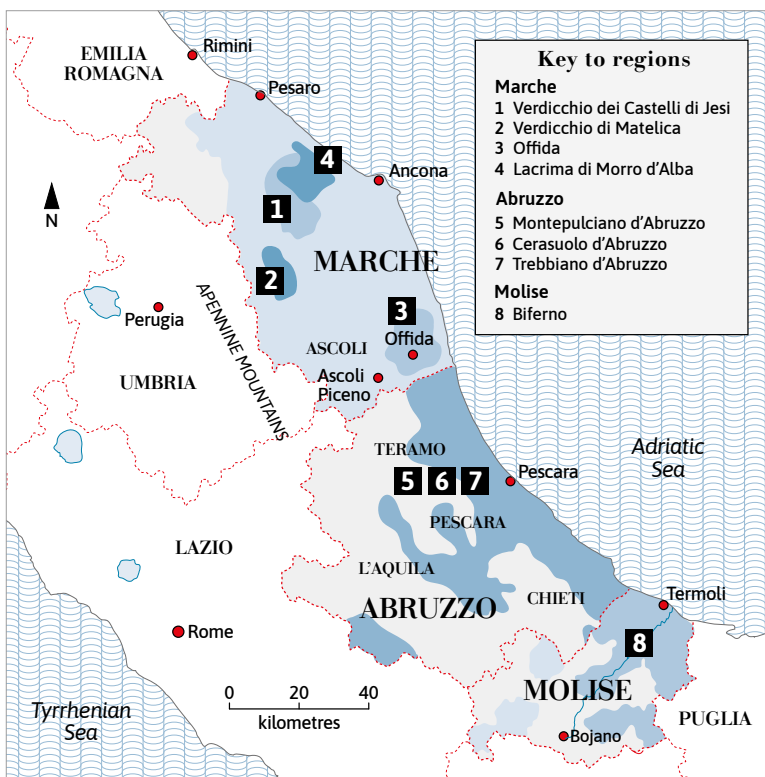
## Abruzzo

Lying between the Apennine mountains and the Adriatic, Abruzzo is the home of Montepulciano d’Abruzzo DOC red wines, familiar to many, as well as several white varieties including Pecorino, Passerina and Cococciola. The region is blessed with a favourable climate; the vines grow in a sort of amphitheatre, protected by the high mountains and warmed by the sea breezes. In the last few years, Abruzzo has seen a huge increase in small and independent producers going back to their roots, rediscovering traditional grapes and terroirs.

Montepulciano is the most important variety in Abruzzo, grown on some 17,000ha in 2019 and representing more than half of the region’s total plantings (source: Consorzio Vini d’Abruzzo). Being a generous and vigorous variety, Montepulciano has always been seen as a table wine grape, but producers such as Emidio Pepe, Masciarelli and Valentini have produced world-class wines showing that, if planted in the right areas, this is a variety worthy of attention. It can be grown all over the region, but it thrives in the highest vineyards at 300m-400m altitude.

Another wine unique to Abruzzo is Cerasuolo d’Abruzzo, a rosé whose distinctive intensity and depth is given by the richness and intensity of the Montepulciano grape. Valentini’s Cerasuolo has become one of the most important rosés in Italy.

Trebbiano is the queen of the white grapes in Abruzzo, produced all over the provinces of



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## SANTI

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Gianni Masciarelli, Abruzzo

Chieti, L'Aquila, Pescara and Teramo. Known for its racy, crisp, zesty character, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo can be vinified in stainless steel or aged in oak, giving layers of texture and aroma. One of the most planted varieties in Italy, it is often seen as an everyday wine, high in acidity and with little or no personality, but the Abruzzo wines are a different matter – often with huge ageing potential due to the high acidity.

Most of the Trebbiano grown in Abruzzo is actually Trebbiano Toscano. Second-generation winemaker Cristiana Tiberio says that at her family winery they have replanted 5ha of Trebbiano Abruzzese, the native Trebbiano, through a massale selection [taking cuttings from top-quality, established old vines on an existing plot] to preserve the genetic structure of their vine stock. The variety is prone to rot and burns easily in the summer sun, and this explains why the 'pergola Abruzzese' training is the best way to grow this native variety, with the vines trained across an overhead trellis system to provide their own shade. At the Tiberio estate, the Trebbiano is produced without any pressing, using simply the free-run juice of the grapes from 90-year-old vines. The delicate Trebbiano Abruzzese is then fermented with natural yeast and fermented in stainless steel. With age, the wine gains almost waxy and honeyed notes.

When talking about Trebbiano, you cannot forget Emidio Pepe's creations. Starting out in the 1960s, at the northern edge of Abruzzo, Pepe established a reputation as a pioneer for extensively ageing his wines in his cellars.

## Abruzzo highlights

### ④ Tiberio, Fonte Canale, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2018 95

£72.99-£80 Armit, Handford, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism  
Elegant notes of green apples and flowers with hints of citrus and flint lead to a dry palate. Harmonious and mineral, with refreshing citrus and a creamy texture. **Drink** 2023-2026 **Alc** 12.5%

### ⑤ Emidio Pepe, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2016 94

£64.95-£90 Dynamic Vines, Natty Boy Wines, The Solent Cellar, Vinified Wines  
Rich and complex confit lemon, white spices, generous salinity and plenty of white flowers accompanied by an almost balsamic character. Dry and elegant with plenty of citrus notes, the palate has hints of dried mushrooms and a stony minerality on the finish. **Drink** 2022-2029 **Alc** 12%

### ⑥ Valentini, Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo 2018 94

POA Les Caves de Pyrene  
Very deep, almost red in colour – hence the name Cerasuolo ('cherry red') – this is voluptuous and complex with notes of ripe cherries and roses. The palate is also very complex, displaying layers of plums and wild cranberries. **Drink** 2023-2029 **Alc** 13%

### Masciarelli, Villa Gemma Riserva, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2015 95

£56.49 L'Art du Vin, Les Caves de Pyrene, Millésima, Starling Wines, Wineye  
Deep and intense, with dark and meaty notes followed in the mouth by red forest fruits and a spicy undertone with luscious jammy fruits. It has round tannins, long and persistent on the palate, showcasing plenty of cherry and dark plum. **Drink** 2024-2030 **Alc** 14.5%





Above: Claudio Cipressi of San Felice del Molise

He created a unique style that nobody even comes close to replicating; released slowly, and only when ready, the wines have stunning complexity, richness and depth. They are aged in concrete, and it's here that the Trebbiano gives its greatest performance – released late, the wines are best enjoyed after 15-20 years.

## Molise

Tucked in between Abruzzo to the north and Puglia to the south, Molise is the second smallest region in Italy, after only Val d'Aosta in the far northwest. Molise is not the typical Italian tourist spot, even though it is rich in history, with breathtaking mountains and hills and more than 200 castles. The region is one of Italy's best-kept secrets – it was never promoted as much as other wine regions such as Tuscany or Campania.

When it comes to wine, the best expression is from the **Tintilia** grape, an indigenous variety with only about 70ha to its name in its Tintilia del Molise DOC stronghold, according to the local consorzio, and small amounts grown elsewhere in the wider region. Tintilia yields are very low. To qualify as DOC, vines must be grown above 200m, with cool night temperatures providing the freshness required to make balanced wines. The sandy soils and sea influence of the Campomarino area north of the Gargano promontory (the 'spur' of Italy's boot) provide the perfect combination of conditions for Tintilia (as well as Montepulciano).

Tintilia is, for producer Claudio Cipressi, not only a passion but also a true expression of a native grape from Molise. Situated in San Felice del Molise at nearly 600m, Cipressi has some 12ha of Tintilia. He produces several versions, usually aged in oak, but he also has a rosé, Collequinto,

## 'The Molise region is one of Italy's best-kept secrets'

and a sparkling cuvée – Tintilia can produce metodo classico sparkling wines, since the grape has high natural acidity and plenty of freshness.

The most famous appellation in Molise is Biferno DOC. The white is a blend of Trebbiano and **Bombino Bianco** that gives wines with plenty of citrus notes, fresh and zingy, while the red is a blend of Montepulciano and **Aglianico**, usually medium- to full-bodied with plenty of structure. One producer of Biferno, Di Majo Norante, is a top producer in the Molise region – its history dates back to 1800, and it now makes wines from a wide range of grapes in a very traditional way, respecting and valuing the terroir of Molise.

**Falanghina**, the white variety that has established a name for itself in the neighbouring southern region of Campania, is also grown in Molise. Thanks to the soils, rich in limestone and sand, the variety here produces wines with more freshness and higher salinity.

From light, crisp whites to rich, complex reds, Marche, Abruzzo and Molise offer the consumer a wide spectrum of wines and styles to explore and enjoy. This eastern coastal slice of Italy will surprise you, not only for its memorably rugged and rustic scenery, but for its incredible wines that hitherto have largely flown under the radar.

## Molise reds: charm and character

### ⑦ Claudio Cipressi, Macchiarossa, Tintilia del Molise 2015 94

£41.90 Hedonism

Generous forest fruits, balsamic touches and ripe Marasca cherries lead to a harmonious, round, soft, juicy palate showcasing ripe plums and pomegranate with plenty of spices and balsamic undertones.

**Drink 2022-2027 Alc 14.5%**

### ⑧ Cantine Belisario, Lacrima di Morro d'Alba 2020 90

£14.99 Hay Wines, Latitude Wine,

Valvona & Crolla

Layers of violets, blackberries, blueberries and ripe cherries on the nose. Medium-bodied, it has a soft and juicy core making for an

elegant and easy-drinking wine.

**Drink 2022-2028 Alc 13% D**





# GERARDO CESARI

Amarone and Ripasso recognised for their quality

## SOME WINES IMPROVE WITH AGE, OTHERS ARE ALWAYS THE BEST

Gerardo Cesari, the historic Veronese winery founded in 1936, celebrates 50 vintages of Amarone Classico this year and opens the doors of its winery in Fumane, in the heart of Valpolicella Classica.

A passion for the “fine and beautiful”; an affinity with tradition and ancient roots; the courage to innovate - these are the principles on which the company’s philosophy has always been based upon. Founded in 1936, Cesari exports to 52 countries and has become a symbol of Veronese values throughout the world. Cesari make unique wines of great quality, viscerally linked to their terroir of origin, made with respect for tradition, deep understanding of viticulture and environmentally sustainable production standards.

## GERARDO CESARI: A LIFE DEDICATED TO AMARONE

The story that began in 1936 continued with Franco Cesari, a man of great common sense, who realised, as far back as the 1970s, that the then little-known Amarone had all the necessary qualities



“Unique wines of great quality, viscerally linked to their terroir of origin”

to become an icon of the Italian wine world. A pioneering shipment to the USA in 1973 was met with instant success - so much so the client is reputed to have asked if there was any “Amarone Bianco” available too. Franco Cesari’s instinct was proved right!

Today, Cesari’s commitment to Amarone is not just faith in a wine, but a pact with the territory, a commitment to a denomination and a vocation as standard bearer of Italian excellence on the international stage.

Over time, the company has grown while maintaining its identity, with one foot firmly planted in the past and one eye on the future. Cesari now has two cellars: one in Cavaion Veronese, where the Amarone, Ripasso and pure Corvina Jèma are aged; and one in Fumane, where the Amarone and Ripasso appassimento wines start their lives in a modern, state-of-the-art, fruit cellar that is one of the largest in Valpolicella.

The most important wine magazines in the world have recognised Cesari’s work and given it multiple accolades. One that gives particular satisfaction is the Gold Medal (96 points) awarded to Cesari Ripasso Bosan 2017 by Decanter. The company doesn’t like to show off, but the saying “Render unto Cesari what is Cesari’s” is one of their favourites.



# GARDA DOC CHARDONNAY

A popular grape finds a natural home around Lake Garda

Gazing out onto Italy's largest lake, Garda, is a unique sensation to be experienced at least once in a lifetime. The lake is an expressive feature of the landscape, like an eye looking benevolently upon her fruits: lemons, agaves, olives and most notably, vineyards. Indeed, Garda derives its name from the Germanic word *warda*, watchpost. And as a landscape, this "eye" inevitably also influences how we perceive its wines. To quote Lévi-Strauss, 'goodness goes hand in hand with beauty'.

The Consorzio Garda DOC presides over an umbrella appellation, founded to promote the wine production of three cities: Verona (with six DOCs), Brescia (with three) and Mantua (with one). All in the name of Garda, a cradle of viticulture since at least the 1st century BC. A recently commissioned study of the terroir in the Garda DOC zone reveals that there is marked agro-climatic variability, resulting in some wonderfully diverse wines. The study outlined different styles in different areas, among which it emerges that the zone of the Brescia and Mantua DOCs benefits from higher temperatures than

the area of the Veronese DOCs. It also appears that the sunlight and rainfall conditions of the Garda DOC appellation resemble those found in the finest winegrowing areas of Italy and abroad. Moreover, the favourable microclimate means that conditions of hydric stress are rare in this zone.

## GARDA DOC CHARDONNAY

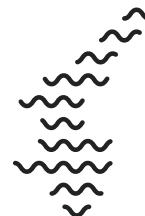
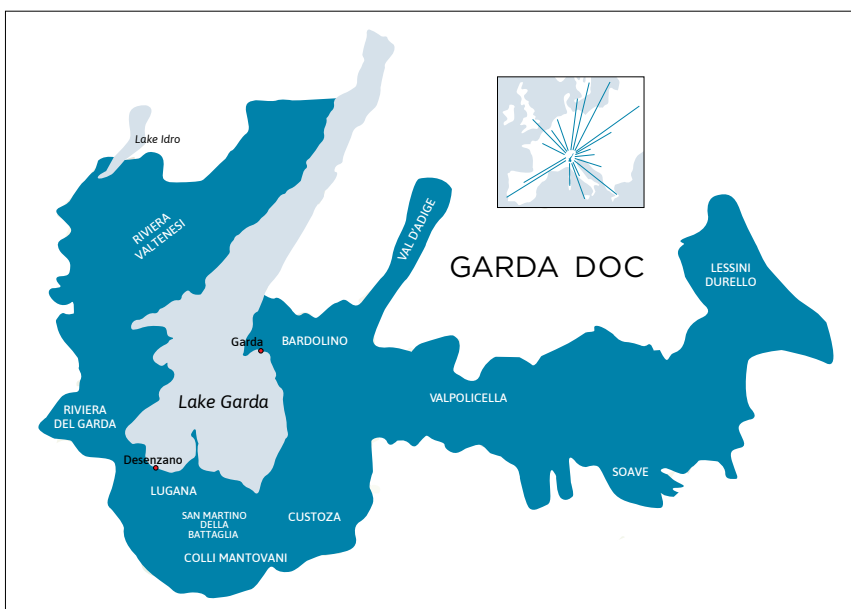
As a world famous international grape variety, Chardonnay has its own history in the Garda DOC, especially in the Brescia and Mantua zones, as well as around Verona. Since the vines were planted in the 1980s, this variety has been a constant fixture for local producers. Today, around 1140 ha of the Garda DOC are planted with Chardonnay, accounting for around 4% of the appellation. Some 4 million bottles have been produced in the past year, up 5% on the previous year. A unique microclimate helps in the fight against diseases on the vine, to which Chardonnay is particularly prone, allowing for sustainable vine management. This versatile grape is able to adapt to very different soils and climates; and it's right at home in this



appellation's hilly areas, with their calcareous and marly glacial soil.

Garda DOC Chardonnay is ideal as an aperitif, conjuring memories of flame-red sunsets over the lake, or to drink throughout a meal. Pair it with antipasti of freshwater fish, raw seafood or fried fish, fish or vegetable-based pasta or rice dishes, and stuffed pasta. It's excellent with main courses of fish, chicken or pork. Great with goat's cheese, and worth trying with sushi.

Visitors to the area who are curious about Garda DOC products should stop off at the Garda DOC Point at Peschiera to see the full range.



GARDA  
DOC

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TO EU REG. N. 1308/2013





## TOP 5 GARDA DOC CHARDONNAYS

### **Villabella, Villa Cordevigo, Garda DOC Chardonnay 2019 89**

[www.vignativillabella.com](http://www.vignativillabella.com)

The Delibori and Cristoforetti families' successful partnership has endured for more than fifty years. This Chardonnay comes from the organic vineyards at Villa Cordevigo in Cavaion Veronese, in an outstanding natural landscape. Its generous bouquet (peach, yellow plum, herbs, jasmine) unfolds into a sapid, long, dynamic palate that leaves you wanting to taste more. **Alc 13%**

### **Zenato, Santa Cristina, Garda DOC Chardonnay 2020 88**

[www.zenato.it](http://www.zenato.it)

Founded by Sergio Zenato in 1960, and now run by his wife Carla and children Nadia and Alberto, who is the in-house oenologist. This Chardonnay's thirty-year-old vineyards are in Peschiera (Verona), on clayey soil. A nose of apricot, peach and citrus; an elegant palate with a taut opening and a long, saline finish. **Alc 13%**

### **Cantina Gozzi, Colombara, Garda DOC Chardonnay Riserva 2019 87**

[www.cantinagozzi.com](http://www.cantinagozzi.com)

The Gozzi family founded their winery in 1920, but it was brothers Cesare and Franco

who revived it. Now it's run by their children, the fifth generation, on 36 ha in Mozambano (Mantua). A complex bouquet of vanilla, saffron, balsamic and smoky notes. Round and full-bodied, underpinned by freshness and savouriness. **Alc 14%**

### **Diego Baroldi, Disidoro, Garda DOC Chardonnay 2019 87**

[www.agricolabaroldidiego.it](http://www.agricolabaroldidiego.it)

Formerly a consultant oenologist for various wineries, Baroldi set up on his own in 2015, having found suitable land for his winemaking project, with just 2.5 ha and plenty of passion. This Chardonnay comes from forty-year-old vineyards in Cavriana (Mantua) located on pebbly limestone soil. Intense, fragrant aromas, and a well-structured, harmonious body. **Alc 15%**

### **Francesco Averoldi, Cantera, Garda DOC Chardonnay 2020 87**

[www.averoldifrancesco.it](http://www.averoldifrancesco.it)

Francesco Averoldi is the fourth generation of a family that's been making wine for centuries. Their 17th-century estate in the village of Cantrina (Brescia) covers fifteen hectares. Fine, delicate notes of citrus, pear and blossoms. Inviting, sapid and taut on the palate, well-paced with good freshness and length. **Alc 13%**

# Etna's diversity OF STYLES

Established winemakers and young guns alike have fallen under the spell of Europe's highest active volcano and the potential of its myriad soils, altitudes and aspects. Ever-shifting, what lies beneath really does influence the styles of the wine you taste here

STORY TIZIANO GAIA

Mount Etna and Taormina,  
on Sicily's east coast



**H**omer's *Odyssey* tells of a place on Earth where the inhabitants 'plant nothing with their hands nor plough; but all these things spring up for them without sowing or ploughing, wheat, and barley, and vines, which bear the rich clusters of wine, and the rain of Zeus gives them increase'.

According to Odysseus, this place, the home of the Cyclopes, is in Sicily, on the slopes of Mount Etna. Europe's highest active volcano lies in the province of Catania, and, leaving legend aside, the fact remains that at the end of the 19th century the province had the most vines on the island, with about 90,000ha. That's not much less than the total area under vine across all of Sicily today – back then, a flourishing economy revolved around wine. In the 1890s, a railway, the Circumetnea, was even built to transport the precious product to the port of Riposto (which, in local dialect, means 'cellar') from where it was shipped around Europe. But phylloxera and post-war agricultural reforms led to the abandonment of the volcano's vineyards in favour of other crops. All traces of the Cyclopes' paradise were lost.

## STARTING OVER

'Many of us came to Etna in a short time. But there's a reason: there was nothing left here, so there was space to start over.' Marc de Grazia speaks with a pioneer spirit. His Tenuta delle Terre Nere is now 20 years old – an age that, around here, gives it 'historic winery' status. As he talks, de Grazia is looking through his home library for old texts that mention Etna's viticulture, knowing full well that they are few and far between. Unlike other renowned terroirs, there are no sources to draw on with regard to style or tradition. 'We have to start from this aspect in order to understand the strong push towards experimentation that characterises this area,' he says.

While the Italian-American de Grazia belongs to the romantic wave that also carried the late Andrea Franchetti (of Tenuta di Trinoro in Tuscany) and Belgian-born natural wine exponent Frank Cornelissen to Etna's slopes in the early 2000s, Antonio and Salvino Benanti represent a generation born and brought up in the volcano's shadow. Their family winery was founded by their father, Giuseppe Benanti, in 1988. Benanti wines, refined and of great character, are considered 'classics' today, but in the 1990s they were perceived as surprisingly new.

Innovation is a distinctive feature of everyone who engages with Etna's diverse terroir. Those rare wineries of long standing, such as Scammacca del Murgo and Barone di Villagrande, with their austere wines, seem to have come ▶

# Cavit. A great tradition in every wine.



For 70 years, Cavit has represented the Trentino area's winemaking expertise, thanks to the unstinting efforts of more than 5.200 growers belonging to 11 wine-growers' associations.



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[www.cavit.it](http://www.cavit.it)



‘The best wine in the world will come out of Etna, and it might be “not red”’

— Alberto Graci (left)

areas is red. In the Sicilian case, Nerello Mascalese, the base for Etna Rosso, prevails over Carricante, the backbone of Etna Bianco, even if the white grape is catching up. In 10 years, the consorzio says, the ratio has shifted from 85% Nerello Mascalese and 15% Carricante to 65% and 35% respectively.

And when it comes to quality, the gap is even smaller. ‘Our great reds are our great whites,’ says Graci, winking. An enigmatic provocation, or is Etna really ready for a historic overtaking?

‘It’s too early to say; we lack experience,’ maintains de Grazia. ‘Nerello is more versatile and resistant, there’s no competition,’ says Benanti.

## ON THE SLOPES

The volcano has its own response. The area planted with vines curves like a horseshoe, a scarf wrapped around the mountain’s neck. Nerello Mascalese is the undisputed ruler of the northern slope (the municipalities of Randazzo and Castiglione di Sicilia). The reds are influenced by the cool, dry climate and they take on a mineral character. While opulence was not disdained in the past, now refinement is prioritised, obtained thanks to longer macerations and less-invasive wood ageing. What counts most of all, however, is harvesting fully ripened grapes, to avoid ending up with what Graci calls ‘tannins like paper’. Work is also being done on retaining the stalks during fermentation, to tone down the alcohol without losing energy.

Carricante, meanwhile, has conquered the eastern side (Milo and Santa Venerina), looking out over the Gulf of Taormina. When it stops raining (this is the rainiest part of Sicily) and the clouds open, the sun reflects off the shimmering sea, flooding the mountain with light. The white grapes lap it up. Vinified with the idea of maintaining the integral expression of the fruit, they give profound, pure wines impregnated with the scents of the Mediterranean scrub, minerally and lingering. And they’re capable of ageing, too – a source of palpable pride for wine-growers.

The influence of the sea continues to the southeast (Trecastagni and Viagrande), then the volcano ‘turns’ and the land becomes wilder, almost arid. The new frontier is here, between Belpasso and Biancavilla, where producers in search of a challenge are enthusiastically exploring. The arrival of a legendary name, Gaja ▶

straight out of the pages of Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s 19th century-set *Il Gattopardo*.

Etna’s funnel is forever smouldering. In the past decade, with the exception of the rainy 2018 vintage, production has increased by 20% a year on average, arriving at 4m bottles of Etna DOC annually, according to the regional consorzio – in effect, the volume of grapes harvested in 2020 was double that of 2014. ‘Freedom of growth and creativity have been the values underpinning the area’s success, but Etna is not infinite. Now we need to focus on scientific research and control of the production zone,’ reflects Antonio Benanti, who until recently chaired the local consorzio.

## BEYOND REDS

While every new vigneron arriving in Etna has contributed to shaping the wide-ranging styles of its wines, the common path forward has remained focused on quality. ‘The best wine in the world will come out of Etna, and it might be “not red”’. An ambitious pronouncement from Alberto Graci, another ‘volcano millennial’, brings up an interesting concept – what we could perhaps call oenological ‘gender’.

Etna is one of the few wine-growing areas in the world where red and white grapes produce equally happy outcomes. The most obvious parallel is Burgundy. Yet the first type of wine that comes to mind when thinking about these ambidextrous



from Piedmont, already has an air of consecration. Both red and white grapes grow together as equals here, often above the 1,000m line. The harvest is early and the soil varies from white and smooth to black and sharp. The reds made here are moody, with a soul that is a bit decadent, while the whites are citrusy, electric and sapid. Graci's prophecy could also be an allusion to the rosés, a wine type in constant ascension that today accounts for 10% of all Etna DOC production. The winemakers consider them comparable to the finest sparkling wines, and the comparison holds up: the rosé grapes come from an initial early harvest of the vineyards used for red wines – crisp bunches full of acidity. The style veers towards a muted vinosity and a thirst-quenching quality. Freshness, however, can be maintained for two to three years.

### GROWING ON LAVA

While it might be rash to hypothesise that Etna's greatest wine could be a white or a rosé, it would certainly fit with the chameleon-like nature of the place, where the landscape is constantly being reshaped based on the rhythms of the volcano's breath. 'That's where the 1981 flow stopped,' de Grazia points out. 'It buried the Circumetnea railway and came to a halt a kilometre from the town of Randazzo.' He has counted Etna's 'breaths' one by one, and loves to show them off.

But this is not some kind of macabre tourism. Between the pattern of historic eruptions and that of Etna's viticulture lies a relationship of cause and effect. Tomorrow's vines grow on yesterday's lava, after the magma has cooled, the rock has split from heat and cold, and time has reduced everything to a soft, face-powder dust or a layer of stones so thick it seems unending.

This is the wonderful, unique world of the *contrade* – a concept introduced by Baron Villagrande but translated into the bottle by the

## 'Freedom of growth and creativity have been the values underpinning the area's success, but Etna is not infinite'

———— Antonio Benanti (centre, with father Giuseppe and brother Salvino)

'Etna boys'. One mustn't give in to the temptation to compare the *contrade* with the French *crus*, because that ignores what really distinguishes them: not geography, but time.

The boundaries of a *contrada* are established by the age of the lava flow, meaning they can have any one of 60 different types of soil: sandy, basaltic, porous, gravelly... The viticultural map faithfully follows the geological one. 'It's impossible not to be enchanted by so much variety in such a small area,' says Antonio Rallo from the Donnafugata winery, who, like the Tasca d'Almerita family, came here from the wide valleys of western Sicily. Benanti feels the same: 'In building the wines' character, soil comes before grape variety.' The consorzio is working on a map of the *contrade*. There are 133 and they form a girdle of vineyards around the volcano's great mouth. To echo the evocative words of oenologist Salvo Foti, here the land is made of what comes down from the sky.

Anyone keen to get into Etna wine, however, won't find the means to do so falling from the sky. Investing in the volcano is a difficult business, although the area is still managing to maintain its dynamism. Small wineries such as Monteleone on the northern slope or Tenute di Nuna to the east have sprung up and are worth keeping an eye on. Other projects are still in the planning stage.

If Etna can support its talented children, it will truly have triumphed over its challenges. And who knows, maybe one of its proponents will, one day soon, actually make the greatest wine in the world. ▶

# CAPOFARO

LOCANDA & MALVASIA



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[www.tascadalmerita.it](http://www.tascadalmerita.it)



## Beyond Sicily there is another Sicily

Few places in the Mediterranean have the eternal charm of this piece of land, painted with rows of six hectares of Malvasia, sloping towards the cobalt-coloured sea of Salina, in the Aeolian Islands. A place of uncontaminated soul and a unique wine destination where the lighthouse, silent guardian of the cliff, and its lantern are the first sign for those arriving by night on the Tyrrhenian Sea. At Capofaro, one of five viticultural estates of Tasca d'Almerita, nature reigns in all of her elements, and Tasca d'Almerita is a caring custodian.



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# Of the soil: Gaia's 10 to try from the slopes of Etna

## ① Benanti, Pietra Marina, Etna Bianco Superiore 2017 96

£85 Astrum Wine Cellars

From the head-trained vines of Milo, the only area for which the Superiore designation can be used for Carricante wines. This is straw yellow with bright greenish reflections. Lovely refined aromas of orange blossom, thyme, hay, ripe apple and flint. It's taut and vertical, with a savoury finish and remarkable persistence. Sharp, expressive purity. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alcohol** 12.5%

## Graci, Arcuria, Etna Bianco 2019 95

£50 Bancroft, Berry Bros & Rudd

From the renowned area of Passopisciaro, this is a Carricante white of great character. Aged partially in concrete tank and partially in large oak barrel, it's a brilliant straw-yellow colour with a rich bouquet of broom and aromatic herbs, white melon and grapefruit. In the mouth it's juicy, supported by balanced acidity and saline notes. Long, tense and electric. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 12%

## ② Idda, Sicilia 2020 95

£33-£40 Harvey Nichols, Hatch Mansfield, Petersham Cellar

Gaja's bet on the south-southwest side of Etna, in partnership with Graci, has been won, and the 'prize' is this pearl of finesse: a 100% Carricante white that evokes orange blossom, marzipan, graphite and flint. On the palate it displays body and agility with persistence and balance. Classy. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 12.5%

## Nicosia, Contrada Monte Gorna, Etna Bianco 2020 93

£22 Vinexus

Made from Carricante (90%) and Catarratto (10%) grown on the mineral-rich soils of the steep slopes of Monte Gorna, one of the dormant volcano cones surrounding the village of Trecastagni, this has a delicious bouquet of apple, grapefruit, hawthorn and camomile, with a nutty edge. Very fresh and mineral. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13%

## ③ Graci, Etna Rosato 2020 93

£21-£22.49 Bancroft, Berry Bros & Rudd

The intriguing pale pink colour makes you think of Provence, but that first impression is deceiving because this is definitely pure Etna - the Nerello Mascalese variety, and you can feel it. The nose is all citrus juice seasoned with floral and mineral hints, while the palate is joyful but not frivolous. Rocky, sapid, pounding with acidity: it's an enthralling wave of taste. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 12.5%

## ④ Tenuta delle Terre Nere, Calderara Sottana, Etna Rosso 2019 97

£42-£61.67 Delivery Wine Co, Justerini & Brooks, Millésima

Sottana lies on an ancient lava flow and hosts centenarian vines. Spice and graphite mix with violet, berry fruits and garrigue. Long and dynamic in the mouth, with a splendid savoury note, a flinty, mineral undercurrent followed by lithe tannins. Captivating complexity, from Nerello Mascalese with just 2% Nerello Cappuccio. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

## ⑤ Donnafugata, Contrada Marchesa, Etna Rosso 2018 95

£69.99 Liberty Wines

Located inside a natural amphitheatre surrounded by millenary sciare (lava flows) and bare of vegetation, this site experiences a notable temperature range. 100% Nerello Mascalese, a fragrance of sour red cherry and plum with herbal notes and sweet spice paves the way for a palate balanced between acidity and structure. A fine tannic texture gives persistence and pure elegance. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

## ⑥ Giovanni Rosso, Etna Rosso 2017 94

£38 Berry Bros & Rudd, Bibendum Wine

Piedmontese Davide Rosso captures the soul of Etna in this vibrant red, which is mostly Nerello Mascalese with small amounts of 'other local varieties'. The aromatic nose is packed with Morello cherry and undergrowth, sweet spices, iron filings and wet stone. On the palate, the harmony between soft and silky tannins and the acid-alcoholic component stands out. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

## Tenuta Tascante, Contrada Rampante, Etna Rosso 2017 94

£38.34-£45.95 Millésima, NY Wines, Vinvm, Wine Direct

Tasca d'Almerita's Etna estate produces this 100% Nerello Mascalese wine, which has a ruby-red colour with an orange rim. The nose combines red berry fruits and blood orange peel with mineral sensations against a delicately spicy and balsamic background, while the mouthfeel is juicy with a lively freshness, a distinct sapidity and nuances of graphite. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 13.5%

## Torre Mora, Cauru, Etna Rosso 2020 92

£19 Tannico

Torre Mora belongs to historic Tuscan wine family Piccini. The name Cauru ('hot' in Sicilian), referring to the endless fire of the bubbling volcano, suits this red, made from Nerello Mascalese with 15% Nerello Cappuccio. On the nose it displays red fruits, flint, sweet spices and bay leaf. Tasty and savoury in the mouth, with fine tannins, this has an excellent quality-price ratio. **Drink** 2022-2032 **Alc** 13.5% **D**





  
**GIOVANNI ROSSO**



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# SANGIOVESE on the other side

Across the Apennines, northeast from Tuscany, the Sangiovese grape is finding a new identity in Romagna DOC. The former inferiority complex towards its more illustrious neighbour has disappeared and today the region, established only in 2011, is full of energy and ambition

STORY ASA JOHANSSON

When you ask for water and someone gives you wine, that's when you know you are in Romagna,' laughs Giovanna Madonna. She started the winery that bears her name in 1992, and together with one of her four daughters she makes wine in a small and unpretentious 18th-century wine cellar. In the beginning, she made Sangiovese with a lot of extraction and aged the wines in barrique.

'In the late 1990s, everyone tried to make structured wines with a lot of oak ageing. We wanted to be similar to Tuscany, but were unsuccessful,' she says. Today her focus is on better expressing the local terroir of the Bertinoro sub-zone, just south of the city of Forlì, using concrete tanks and large vats.

It is not easy to work with the most common red variety in Italy. For most wine drinkers, the grape is synonymous with Tuscany, Romagna's famous neighbour on the other side of the Apennines. So in 2011, to better define these wines (and with the help of wine journalist and map maker Alessandro Masnaghetti: *enogea.it*), Romagna DOC was formed, incorporating the five previous DOCs, including Sangiovese di Romagna, as official styles and represented by one consorzio rather than five, with 12 sub-zones (see p92) and a plan to add four more. Romagna DOC starts south of Via Emilia – the Roman road that connects Rimini at the Adriatic sea with Piacenza further north – and ends at the border with Tuscany in the Apennines.

Even though 'Emilia Romagna' is one wine region, there are significant differences between them. Historically, Emilia was influenced by the Germanic Longobards (or Lombards), who brought their foods and architecture to the region – whereas Romagna, close to the Adriatic sea, was

an important centre for the Mediterranean Byzantines, who created the beautiful mosaics in Ravenna and influenced the food culture and architecture. For wine production, Emilia's main grape varieties are Lambrusco, Croatina and Barbera, while Romagna's focus has instead always been on Sangiovese and the white Albana, which has its own DOCG. Sitting between the two is Bologna, where the majority of grapes are Bordeaux varieties and Pignoletto.

Most vineyards in Romagna are on hillsides at between 100m and 300m, rising higher as they get closer to the Apennines down the central spine of the country. Soils are primarily sedimentary, rich in clay compared with the soil in Tuscany, which is more complex, varied and less fertile.

Until 15 years ago, Sangiovese in Romagna lacked real reputation. But recently, ambitious and passionate wine producers have been



bringing Romagna DOC into the spotlight, with the focus now on finding a distinct identity. Wines are made using less oak and with the aim of expressing the different terroirs in the region. Many of them show great drinkability, complexity and a somewhat charming rustic character.

## REDEFINING ROMAGNA

There are three macro areas in Romagna. In the west is Faentino, which surrounds the town of Faenza. This is the most important viticulture zone in the region in terms of hectares, with soils varying between iron-rich clay and more sandstone as you move closer to the Apennines. Here you find the sub-zones of Serra, Brisighella, Modigliana, Oriolo and Marzeno.

‘Here in Romagna, we have fruit and fragrance,’ says Villa Papiano’s agronomist and winemaker Francesco Bordini, about the local Sangiovese. A winery in the sub-zone of Modigliana in the Apennines, Villa Papiano’s vineyards reach altitudes of up to 500m. Modigliana is well known for the elegance, finesse and age-worthiness of its wines, due to this altitude as well as the sandstone and calcareous clay soils.

‘The positive thing about our soils is that they retain water, something that is more and more important due to climate change,’ says Vittorio Navacchia. He runs winery Tre Monti with his brother David and father Sergio in the sub-zone of Serra, close to Imola, a town famous for its Formula 1 circuit. Here the soil is iron-rich with almost no calcareous content, giving wines that have plenty of generous fruit.

The second macro area sits around the city of Forlì, and is characterised by three valleys where the vines grow in clay-rich soil, with four sub-zones: Bertinoro, Castrocaro Terra del Sole, Meldola and Predappio.

Chiara Condello is one of the youngest winemakers in the region. She produces wines labelled under her name and also runs her father’s winery Condé, with about 100ha and an impressive wine resort. Both are in the sub-zone of Predappio. ‘The creation of the sub-zones made us begin to collaborate, and we started to better understand our territory and the potential it has,’ says Condello. ‘There are currently 15 wineries in Predappio, and we meet, taste and discuss things together to improve our skills.’

Giovanna Madonia’s vineyards are in Bertinoro, which has a distinct soil character with calcareous elements and rich in marine fossils. ‘We have a lot of calcareous clay known locally as spungone, which gives elegant tannins and a distinct saltiness to the wines,’ she explains.

The third area is around Cesena, in the heart of Romagna between Forlì and the coastal town of



## ‘We are rediscovering the joy of making wine again’

———— Francesco Bordini (above)

**Below: Fattoria Zerbina’s Pietramora Riserva, Romagna Marzeno 2016 (see right)**

Rimini. It has the strongest coastal influence, with soil consisting mainly of clay, and three sub-zones: Cesena, Longiano and San Vicino.

## THE REGION TODAY

There are about 5,000 grape-growers in the Romagna DOC region and seven cooperatives make up 75% of the production, which in total reaches 11.5 million bottles a year. In 2019, Sangiovese plantings covered 6,235ha in the DOC, however the majority of the fruit is destined for IGT or vino da tavola wines – in the same year, some 1,800ha (29%) of Sangiovese was bottled as the DOC wine.

Even though Romagna is so close to the Adriatic, it has a continental climate, with long, cold winters and warm summers. The average rainfall is 700mm near the coast but increases by some 200mm in the Apennines. Compared with most places in Tuscany, Sangiovese in Romagna ripens later, which means a bigger risk of autumn rains while still on the vine, but there’s also excellent phenolic ripening. The grape here seems to have the same origin as the Tuscan grape: monks living on the Apennines helped to spread the variety on both sides of the mountain range. But with time, different biotypes have developed, and the one found in Romagna has bigger bunches than the Tuscan variety.

The DOC allows producers to make three categories of wine. The first, annata, is young Sangiovese released a few months after harvest. The second level in the pyramid is Sangiovese Superiore, which is often a selection of some kind.



Typically, the Superiore category has a more tannic structure and the wines are aged longer, even though they can be released in the April following harvest. At the top of the pyramid is the Sangiovese sottozona ('sub-zone'), and these must consist of at least 95% Sangiovese. The sub-zones also require lower yields; the officially stated maximum is nine tonnes per hectare instead of the 10.5 tonnes for Superiore and 12 tonnes for annata. It is possible to use the term Riserva for all three categories if the wines are aged for longer than two years.

'Compared with Tuscany, here in Romagna there is no tradition of blending Sangiovese with other varieties, even though it is allowed,' says

Cristina Geminiani from Fattoria Zerbina. Geminiani took over her grandfather's winery in 1987 and is one of the leading figures behind Romagna's revival of Sangiovese. She has 40ha in the sub-zone of Marzeno, where the vines grow as albarello (bush vines), and she maintains low yields. 'We will always be seen as second after Tuscany when it comes to Sangiovese, but after 2011 and the creation of the sub-zones we have new energy and more attention from the press, something that motivates us to improve,' she says.

'We are rediscovering the joy of making wine again, and our Sangiovese is straightforward, rustic and welcoming, just like the people in Romagna,' concludes Villa Papiano's Bordini.



Åsa Johansson is a writer on wine, food and travel, and an educator at the Swedish school of sommeliers. Born in Stockholm but based in Tuscany, she writes for prominent titles in Sweden, Norway, Canada and Italy

## A taste of Romagna Sangiovese: Johansson's six to try

### ① **Enio Ottaviani, Dado, Romagna 2018** 93

N/A UK [enioottaviani.it](http://enioottaviani.it)

Cousins Davide and Massimo Lorenzi, with Milena and Marco Tonelli, produce just 4,000 numbered bottles each year of this special project wine, the Sangiovese grapes coming from four different parcels, all vinified separately. Light ruby in colour, it has subtle and elegant aromas of wild cherry, violet, balsamic tones and wild mint. Fine-grained tannins, a silky texture and bright, refreshing acidity lead to a long, savoury finish.

**Drink** 2022-2030 **Alcohol** 13.5%

### ② **Giovanna Madonia, Ombroso Riserva, Romagna Bertinoro 2018** 93

£24.50 [Drinks & Co](http://Drinks&Co)

Produced only in the best vintages, from bush vines in a 6ha vineyard in the Bertinoro sub-zone, this has spontaneous fermentation and extended skin contact for about 30 days followed by 12 months in French tonneaux, half new. Refined for two years in bottle, it has aromas of vibrant plum, dark cherry and wild herb nuances. Firm, tight tannins are balanced by refreshing acidity. Rich, sapid and mouthwatering, with an elegant long finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%

### ③ **Villa Papiano, Probi Riserva, Romagna Modigliana 2018** 93

POA [Swig](http://Swig)

From vineyards surrounded by wild nature and forests at 500m, close to the

Apennines, the soil is poor and rocky. After spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeast, the wine is aged for one year in concrete and large casks, and another year in bottle. Attractive nose of strawberry, sweet red cherry, black pepper and hints of dried herbs. Sophisticated tannins, a fresh yet weighty palate and generous, wonderful balance. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 13.5%

### **Fattoria Zerbina, Pietramora Riserva, Romagna Marzeno 2016** 92

POA [Dolce Vita Wines](http://DolceVitaWines)

Cristina Geminiani is one of the leading figures behind the revival of Romagna DOC. In 1985 she started to make wine on her grandfather's property. The vineyards are planted as bush vines, and the wines have personality and technical precision. Pietramora has an elegant, restrained nose of dark plums, black cherry, dried roses, cacao and tobacco. Rich, intense fruit with grippy tannins, balanced by savoury acidity with a persistent, spicy finish. **Drink** 2022-2035 **Alc** 15%

### **Noelia Ricci, Il Sangiovese, Romagna Predappio 2020** 92

£18-£21 [Drinkmonger](http://Drinkmonger), [Jesmond Wine Co](http://JesmondWineCo), [Kask](http://Kask), [Mother Vine](http://MotherVine), [Pip of Manor Farm](http://PipofManorFarm), [St Andrews Wine Co](http://StAndrewsWineCo), [Sugarbird Wines](http://SugarbirdWines), [The Good Spirits Co](http://TheGoodSpiritsCo)

This project started in 2013, the first new vintage produced by Marco Cirese, Noelia Ricci's nephew, at family estate Tenuta Pandolfa. Made as a tribute to the fruity, fragrant Sangiovese of Romagna,

fermentation and six months ageing takes place in steel. Nose of wildflowers, roses and violets with red cherry and hints of spice. On the palate, vibrant and dynamic fruit is balanced by firm yet ripe tannins and zesty acidity. Juicy, graceful finish. Organic. **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

### **Chiara Condello, Romagna Predappio 2019** 91

£16.50 [Cru](http://Cru)

Chiara Condello made wine in her father's winery Condè, but 10 years ago bought her own vineyard in Predappio. The focus is on Sangiovese, production is artisanal, using natural yeasts, and in some cases she partially vinifies without destemming. Intense aromas of red cherry, orange zest and white pepper are followed by a palate with grippy tannins, fleshy and succulent fruit and refreshing acidity, then a pleasant, energetic finish.

**Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14% **D**



# 20 under £20

While independent wine merchants remain the go-to choice for a small portion of the wine-drinking public, in the UK it's the national high-street chains and supermarkets which continue to attract the lion's share of wine sales. Accessibility, price and the ability to fling a few bottles into the trolley along with the weekly shop all play into the hands of the big operators. And there's seemingly no better time than now to hit the high street and pick up some bottles of Italian wine – despite Brexit-related supply chain concerns, the global pandemic has helped to kickstart a shift in consumer behaviour to which the high street has been quick to react.

## TRADING UP

A trend towards premiumisation allied with an increased appetite for experimentation was borne of the pandemic's 'stay-at-home' mantra, during which time consumers increased their per-bottle spend on wine to drink at home. 'Spend levels appear to have risen in the second half of 2020 as the initial shock of the pandemic wore off,' notes a December 2020 report from analyst Wine Intelligence. And a market report from the UK's Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) covering the 12 months to 27 March 2021 supports this, showing that wine sales across all price brackets from £3-£4 up to £10-plus were in growth year-on-year, with healthy double-figure increases in all categories from £6 up.

In this context, Italy was the world's leading exporter of wine in 2020, according to market data providers Statista, exporting 20.8 million hectolitres worldwide. With its myriad varieties and styles, Italian wines have been perfectly positioned to benefit from this new consumer trend.

'Italian wine is very popular with Tesco customers, with the favourite being Pinot Grigio [starting at £4.50],

Now is the perfect time to explore the depth and breadth of delicious and characterful wines emerging from regions across Italy. To help inspire you, our in-house tasting team has sought out eight whites and 12 reds, all great value, and all available on the UK high street

FEATURE JAMES BUTTON

said Charlotte Lemoine, wine product development manager for France, Italy, Germany and sparkling at Tesco, the UK's biggest supermarket chain with 4,008 stores nationwide last year (*Statista*). 'There seems to be a trend of customers favouring the richer, more flavourful styles of premium Pinot Grigio. This premium trend is also true for reds and other white varieties, as customers are clearly enjoying exploring

'Customers are clearly enjoying exploring the numerous Italian grapes and styles'

Charlotte Lemoine, Tesco

the numerous Italian grapes and styles, instead of basing decisions on low price points,' she added.

Majestic Wine, Decanter Retailer Awards 2021 National Wine Shop category winner, opened its 201st store last July. 'We see customers who are happy to trade into more premium wines from well-known areas such as Gavi and Soave, but are also venturing into other premium wine areas such as Lugana,' says Majestic buyer Elizabeth Kelly MW. 'The £10-£15 price point is particularly strong.'

## GOING GREEN

There have been marked improvements in quality across the board in Italian wines over the last couple of decades. With growers and winemakers moving to organic or sustainable practices and adopting modern techniques in the cellar, the biggest beneficiaries have arguably been wines at the lower end of the price spectrum. Majestic currently offers more than 70 organic wines, including 16 from Italy. 'We have tried to offer a breadth of organic options in different styles,' explains Kelly.

## WIDENING RANGE

Of the 20 wines selected by *Decanter's* editorial team for this feature, it's good to see some wines from less well-represented regions – including Campania, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Marche. Eleven of the 20 wines scored 90pts or higher, while nine wines didn't even break the £10 barrier – Aldi's Specially Selected Lugana (£6.99) and Morrisons' The Best Negroamaro (£7.25) stand out as particularly good value given the quality on offer. The wines on the following pages are, of course, only a tiny cross-section of what is available in 2022, but it's heartening to see that the UK high street is enabling consumers to experience more of Italy's diverse and wonderful wines.

James Button is *Decanter's* regional editor for Italy



**1 Aldi, Specially Selected Lugana, Lombardy 2020 90**

£6.99 Aldi

A new wine to Aldi's range from Castellore (as is the equally good Specially Selected Greco di Tufo, £7.99), this fruit-forward white shows lots of juicy stone fruit, pear and floral notes on both the nose and palate, with green apple acidity to help balance the ripeness. It's a crowd-pleaser that works just as well on its own as it would with a seafood platter. *Tina Gellie* **Drink 2022-2023 Alcohol 13%**

**2 La Guardiense, Janare, Falanghina del Sannio, Campania 2020 90**

£9.50 Booths

La Guardiense is an important cooperative in the Campania region, and this tropical fruit-led Falanghina comes from vineyards in the hilly region north of Naples. Enticing notes of mango, melon, lychee and peach on the nose and palate are underpinned by fresh acidity and a mineral edge. It's very ripe and floral, finishing with roses and pink grapefruit. *Natalie Earl* **Drink 2022-2024 Alc 13.5%**



**3 Planeta, L'Amistanza Fiano-Grecanico, Sicily 2020 90**

£10 Tesco

White blossom, peach and apricot aromas unfold onto a tart, yellow apple palate. This is fresh and intensely flavoured, with almond, yellow plum and lemon curd emerging softly. Balancing zippy tartness with soft ripeness and nutty tones, this



honey-tinged wine is a must-try as an aperitif or with oily, herb-infused grilled vegetables. *NE Drink 2022-2024 Alc 12%*

**4 Monte del Frà, Custoza, Veneto 2019 89**

£9.75 Booths

The little-known Custoza DOC borders the edge of Lake Garda in northern Italy and produces fresh, elegant white blends. This has light waxy lemon, peach and almond aromas with a touch of kerosene intrigue. The palate is more tropical, with pineapple, kiwi and mango upheld by zippy acidity and a bitter, textured finish. *NE Drink 2022-2024 Alc 12.5%*

**5 Sainsbury's, Discovery Collection, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore, Marche 2020 89**

£13 Sainsbury's

Part of the new Sainsbury's limited-edition Taste the Difference Discovery Collection. A proportion of the Verdicchio grapes are harvested late, and this lends a honeyed tone to the fresh, citrus and herbal nose (the blend also contains 10% Malvasia). The creamy, textured palate – 5% of the wine is aged in barriques – features notes of pear, white peach and blossom, balanced by good cleansing acidity. *Julie Sheppard* **Drink 2022-2024 Alc 14.5%**





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**6 Tesco, Finest Passerina, Terre di Chieti, Abruzzo 2020** 89

£7 Tesco

Italy is home to hundreds of native grape varieties, many of which are rarely seen beyond Italy's shores, so it's refreshing to find this ancient variety, Passerina, in Tesco at such a decent price. From limestone vineyards between the Apennine foothills and the Adriatic coast, this offers grapey aromas twinned with peaches and orange rind. In the mouth it's packed with flavour and takes on a bitter almond, walnut, green olive and honey character. **NE Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 13%

**7 Normanno, Terra Madre Catarratto, Sicily 2020** 88

£6.50 Co-op

This has fragrant Asian pear, orange candy and a hint of sweet herbs on the nose. The palate is filled with juicy yellow fruits, lemon zest and sweet vanilla on the finish – despite the fact that this 100% Catarratto hasn't been near any oak. It's a lovely, well-priced and organic food wine. **Sylvia Wu Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 12.5%

**8 Visionario, Bianco Trevenezie, Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2020** 88

£11.99 Laithwaite's

A fruity blend of Friulano, Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, Malvasia Istriana and Chardonnay from northern Italy. Floral, citrus aromas are accompanied by some peachy ripeness and honeyed sweetness. It's rich in the mouth, with some zesty orange and floral notes and more of that honey character. Enticing, although it

finishes a bit shorter than you might expect. **James Button Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 12.5%

**9 Antinori, Villa Antinori Rosso, Tuscany 2018** 92

£16 Tesco

The Villa Antinori label was created by Piero Antinori's father Niccolò, back in

1928. Roast meat and coconut add complexity to a rich nose of dark fruits. There's a great concentration of fresh but ripe cherry and mulberry, spiced by liquorice and dark coffee. Ageing in French, Hungarian and American oak provides a chewy texture, poised with elegant acids. Warm coconut and dark spices on the long finish. A treat, at an affordable price. **SW Drink** 2022-2026 **Alc** 14%

**10 Morrisons, The Best Amarone della Valpolicella, Veneto 2017** 92

£16 Morrisons

A powerful, cooperative-made Amarone with ripe red berry perfume and a touch of wild game, showing some development. The grapes are dried for three months before the resulting wine is aged in large oak barrels for 24 months. Concentrated red and dark berries are joined on the palate by sweet spices and velvety tannins. Dried herbs and prunes linger on a long finish. It's sweet but balanced, with 10g/L of residual sugar and 5.6g/L of acidity. **SW Drink** 2022-2026 **Alc** 14.5%



8



9



10



**11 Aldi, Winemaster's Lot, Barbaresco, Piedmont 2018** 91

£17.99 Aldi  
 Winemaster's Lot is Aldi's new premium brand, representing just 10 top wines in the supermarket's range. Produced by Castellore, this Barbaresco is one of the best: it's very pale in colour and shows elegant notes of fresh cherry, autumn leaves and earthy minerals supported by firm tannins and bright acidity. The Winemaster's Lot Amarone 2018 (£19.99) and Luigi Giovanni Barolo 2017 (£14.99) are also top buys. **TG Drink 2022-2025 Alc 14%**



**12 Terre del Barolo, Barolo, Piedmont 2016** 91

£19.99 Waitrose  
 The Terre del Barolo cooperative in Castiglione Falletto was established in 1958 and today has more than 300 members. This release from the 2016 vintage – rated five stars and 'exceptional' by *Decanter's* Stephen Brook – shows lovely evolution, with red berry and cherry fruit, some spicy oak notes from 18 months' ageing in 50hl and 100hl French and Slavonian oak barrels, and a good balance of acidity and tannic structure. Delicious. **Amy Wislocki Drink 2022-2025 Alc 14%**

**13 Caruso & Minini, Corte Ferro Frappato-Nerello Mascalese, Sicily 2019** 90

£11.99 Majestic  
 A blend of Nerello Mascalese for structure and Frappato for juicy cherry fruit, this Sicilian red represents fantastic value for

money. It's a lighter style that lends itself well to light chilling, and it's bright with red strawberry and raspberry fruit, compote-like, and some cinnamon spice. Delicious, uncomplicated everyday drinking. **AW Drink 2022-2023 Alc 13.5%**

**14 Castello Vicchiomaggio, Villa Nardelli, Cuvée Carolina, Tuscany 2019** 90

£9 Co-op  
 This Sangiovese-driven red blend has a perfumed nose of red berries and sour cherry. Without any oak influence, the palate is ripe but fresh. Red cherry and blueberry fruits are soaked in a lovely tone of dried herbs and milk chocolate, with textured ripe tannins in support. More prune-like flavours follow to the finish. **SW Drink 2022-2026 Alc 13%**



**15 Morrisons, The Best Negroamaro, Puglia 2020** 90

£7.25 Morrisons  
 This unoaked Negroamaro is pure and concentrated, showing a rich bouquet of fresh blackberry, dark cherry and prunes on the nose. Residual sugar sits at 11g/L, providing a lovely roundness and weight on the juicy, dark fruit-driven palate, which has plenty of acidity to refresh. Perfumed prune and dried berries through the finish. **SW Drink 2022-2026 Alc 13.5%**





**16 Villa Cafaggio, Chianti Classico, Tuscany 2018** 90

£29.99/magnum Waitrose

Villa Cafaggio's vineyards are in the heart of the Conca d'Oro ('Golden Basin'), considered a prime location for producing Chianti Classico. This easy-drinking organic wine (also available in a 75cl bottle at £13.99) ages for 12 months in 65hl Slavonian oak barrels and a further 12 months in cement vats. It's expressive on the nose, fragrant with dark cherry fruit which continues onto the palate alongside some plum notes and a spicy length. AW **Drink** 2022-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

**17 Cavalchina, Bardolino, Veneto 2020** 89

£10 Marks & Spencer

Lifted and welcoming aromas of grenadine syrup continue on the medium-bodied palate, joined by tarter flavours of pomegranate and red cherry. An easy and uncomplicated fruit-forward red with a creamy strawberry yoghurt mouthfeel, balancing acidity and a little pepper on the finish. One for pizza and movie night. TG **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 13%

**18 Pazzia, Primitivo di Manduria, Puglia 2019** 89

£11.99 Waitrose

Inky-dark in the glass, this southern Primitivo is all about ripe, fleshy, sweet dark fruit. There's black cherry and plum on the nose with some violet floral perfume. Appealing and easy-drinking with medium tannins and acidity, it's for relatively short-term drinking and would be perfect

to accompany a bowl of bolognese in front of the TV. AW **Drink** 2022-2023 **Alc** 14%

**19 Sainsbury's, Taste the Difference, Valpolicella Ripasso, Veneto 2017** 89

£11 Sainsbury's

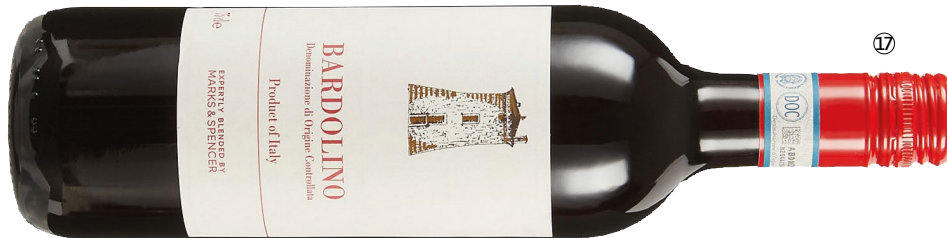
Great value for money, this is a lovely and

harmonious blend of 55% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, 15% Corvinone and 5% Croatina. The grapes are macerated with the skins of dried grapes that were used to produce Amarone, which adds depth and velvety texture to the palate. There's a coffee-mocha note alongside the bright berry aromas on the nose, followed by a lightly spiced palate of juicy red and black fruits, with good persistence on the finish. JS **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

**20 Sainsbury's, Discovery Collection, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Tuscany 2016** 89

£12 Sainsbury's

Part of the new Sainsbury's limited-edition Taste the Difference Discovery Collection, this Vino Nobile is another wine that reflects the retailer's effort to broaden its Italy offer. The wine is blended mostly from Sangiovese, alongside 10% other grape varieties, giving appealing earthy, brambly aromas. Medium-bodied, with soft tannins and a palate of spicy, brambly black fruit seasoned with dried herbs. JS **Drink** 2022-2025 **Alc** 13.5% **D**





# SENSI ORGANIC WINES

Preserving life and nature in Tuscany

**E**co-friendly principles and sustainable production methods can create a powerful synergy, giving life to wines that respect the terroir and genuinely evoke their heritage while safeguarding future generations. This is the philosophy that has always guided Sensi in Tuscany.

“Making sustainable wines is our natural and conscious choice. Much more than a trend, it is a guiding principle that gives us the chance to enjoy life and

nature,” says Massimo Sensi.

Tuscany, with its 54,000ha of vineyards, of which about 30% are organic, is one of the leading regions in the production of DOC/G wines. In great Leonardo’s home town of Vinci, Sensi grows 80ha of vineyards according to organic methods and produces iconic Tuscan wines, such as Chianti and Chianti Superiore, tailored to sustainability-conscious consumers – the great classics of the Tuscan tradition in a green version.

Ever-increasing customer demand for sustainable products, social responsibility, and wines that speak of their time and place is part of a global process of awakening. After decades dedicated to technological innovation, we are rediscovering ways of living and eating that are healthier because of their respect for the immutable laws of nature.

History, tradition, and nature all inspire our winemaking methods. Campoluce, Ninfato and Vegante particularly stand out for their sustainability certification and eco-friendly labels made from recycled paper and printed with eco ink.

**SENSI**  
1890  
FAMILY OF WINEMAKERS SINCE

## **Campoluce Chianti DOCG Organic**

Chianti Campoluce (“field of light”) is named after the fireflies that roam the vineyards. 70% Sangiovese 30% other permitted varieties, fermented and aged in stainless steel for 6 months with micro-oxygenation and ageing on fine lees. Ruby red in colour, with a delightful aromatic profile of red and purple fruits. Smooth texture and good structure.

## **Ninfato Sangiovese Toscana IGT**

A wine named after the rare Charaxes Jasius butterfly, a glutton for sugary and tasty grapes. The freedom and lightness of a butterfly is translated into the taste of Ninfato, a Sangiovese according to ancient Tuscan methods with no added sulphites.

## **Vegante Chianti Superiore DOCG**

An organic and vegan

Chianti Superiore, produced without any animal-based products at any stage, and showing amazing elegance and balance. 90% Sangiovese with 10% Trebbiano and Malvasia, giving a lovely freshness and aromatic complexity, supported by fine tannins.

## **18K Treviso DOC Prosecco Brut Organic**

Glamour and sustainability meet in this organic Prosecco hailing



from the Valdobbiadene hills. Delicate notes of citrus and orchard fruits

topped by a hint of herbs in a delicious, refreshing and elegant fizz.

# Franciacorta

Most famous for its prestigious sparkling wines, Franciacorta in Lombardy is not often high on the tourist itinerary. But with its stunning hills and lake, pre-Roman history and many wineries to explore, you won't want to leave

STORY CARLA CAPALBO



**H**ave dinner in any self-respecting restaurant in Italy, or a pre-dinner aperitivo in a bar there, and you'll be offered a glass of Franciacorta. The sparkling wines from this small, terroir-driven DOCG wine area in Lombardy, northern Italy, are Italy's answer to Champagne: high-quality, home-grown bubbles of prestige. If these wines are less well known outside Italy it's because the majority of the 17.5 million bottles produced in Franciacorta each year are drunk in Italy.

'Up and down the country, a glass of Franciacorta is our preferred way to celebrate or start a meal,' says Silvano Brescianini, the president of the Franciacorta consorzio. 'It's an expression of *Italianità* – Italianness.'

Franciacorta is as tied to Italy's national identity as Parmesan cheese or Parma ham.

There's a long history behind this loyalty: Franciacorta has been known for its wines since

at least the Middle Ages, when Germanic tribe the Lombards held a seat of power in Brescia, in the southeast. The most likely origin of the region's name is from the Latin *franchae curtes* – 'exempt from paying taxes' – due to the tax-free zone created there in the 11th century, although some theories suggest Charlemagne named it Franciacorta, to mean Little (or short) France. It's a scallop of land near Bergamo, less than one hour's drive east of Milan within a crescent of hills, bordered by the Lago d'Iseo lake to the north and the flat Po valley to the south.

## PERFECTLY FORMED

Unlike many more sprawling wine regions, Franciacorta is compact, just 25km by 10km, with almost 3,000ha of vineyards. So it's the perfect place to spend a long weekend or take a detour for a few days from Milan. You can quickly get a feel for the landscape, visit wineries small and

Monte Isola in the middle of the deep blue Iseo lake





## ‘The sparkling wines from this small, terroir-driven DOCG wine area in northern Italy are Italy’s answer to Champagne’

large and eat some great food. There’s also a selection of complementary activities to make it more fun, such as horse-riding through the vineyards or exploring the *Strada del Vino Franciacorta* wine route ([franciacorta.net](http://franciacorta.net) – click on ‘The road’ tab) on e-bikes. The pre-alpine Iseo lake is small but spectacular, with Monte Isola, the largest inhabited lake island in Europe, at its centre. Boating is available on the lake, and those who fancy a romantic getaway can stay at lakeside hotels, a short drive from the vineyards.

Franciacorta DOCG is a sparkling wine made using the ‘metodo classico’ – or traditional method – during which the wine undergoes a natural second fermentation in the bottle as in Champagne (as opposed to in a large tank in the Charmat method used for Prosecco).

For Franciacorta DOCG wines, the release date cannot be less than 25 months from the harvest, and many wineries age their more prestigious wines even longer. During this long ageing process, the wines acquire complexity and staying power. As is the case with Champagne, the dosage added after disgorgement of the spent yeast deposits determines the level of dryness, ranging from extra brut to demi-sec; some are also made without dosage, completely dry. Franciacorta can be paired with a large assortment of foods, from

savoury antipasti to pastas, seafoods and even some meats and cheeses.

The Franciacorta wine route weaves in and out of the vineyards, so the most direct way to visit wineries is by car. A good start is at the Berlucchi cellars (see ‘My perfect day’, right). Guido Berlucchi and his oenologist Franco Ziliani were the ‘grandfathers’ of Franciacorta, who began making sparkling wines in the area 60 years ago. Before then, still wines were the norm in the region.

### THE WINERIES MAKING WAVES

‘Franciacorta’s character derives from its terroir – the pebbly, well-draining morainic soils that are interspersed here with marine sediments, and the lake that tempers our weather,’ says Silvano Brescianini as we tour the vineyards of the **Barone Pizzini** estate ([baronepizzini.it](http://baronepizzini.it)), where he is executive vice president. ‘That’s why Chardonnay, Pinot Nero and Pinot Bianco do so well here.’ Brescianini has also been a champion of the only local variety to be included in the blend for Franciacorta, Erbamato. This rare white grape has been known since at least 1564 and has large, compact bunches and higher acidity than Chardonnay, so it’s perfect for Franciacorta. ‘Very few plants of Erbamato remained but we’ve been cultivating it and we now have two vineyards.’



Carla Capalbo is an awarded food, wine and travel writer, author and photographer, and a regular contributor to *Decanter*. Since 1998, among other titles, she has authored three books focusing on the regional food and wines of Italy. See [carlacapalbo.com](http://carlacapalbo.com)



Daniele Gentile,  
Corte Fusia

## MY PERFECT DAY IN FRANCIACORTA

### MORNING

Wherever I'm sleeping in Franciacorta, I have breakfast at **Pasticceria Roberto** ([pasticceria roberto.com](http://pasticceria roberto.com)) in Erbusco. The pastries and buns are excellent, including the cloud-light brioche veneziana (filled with crème pâtissière). For extra calories, try the cappuccino della nonna, enriched with egg. I'm happiest with a spremuta d'arancia, freshly squeezed orange juice. From there, it's a short drive to visit the most historic winery in Franciacorta, **Guido Berlucchi** ([berlucchi.it](http://berlucchi.it)). At its heart is the handsome 17th-century palazzo where, in 1961, the first 3,000 bottles of a sparkling wine 'in the French style' were made by Franco Ziliani. Today, award-winning wines are still made by the Ziliani family and aged in the palazzo's imposing underground cellars.

### LUNCH & AFTERNOON

Lunch is on the spectacular terrace of **Albereta Relais** ([albereta.it](http://albereta.it)). Once the working home of the late great Italian



Pasticceria Roberto

chef Gualtiero Marchesi, the kitchen has maintained the maestro's focus on clean flavours and excellent ingredients and technique, even if the menu has been internationalised. If you, like me, love organic wines and heroic viticulture, the two young owners of **Corte Fusia** winery ([cortefusia.com](http://cortefusia.com)) focus on reclaiming abandoned hillside vineyards from which they make characterful wines, and you can arrange to walk with them in their sloping, rocky vineyards on Monte Orfano with views over the Po valley before a tasting in their courtyard headquarters. From there it's a short hop to the cellars of

**1701** ([1701franciacorta.it](http://1701franciacorta.it)). Silvia and Federico Stefini's cellars may be less picturesque, but their biodynamic viticulture and winemaking (for some of their wines) in large Italian clay jars makes this a must for natural wine lovers. You can also visit their large walled vineyard.

### EVENING

I've saved room for dinner at my favourite traditional trattoria in Palazzolo sull'Oglio. Award-winning **Osteria della Villetta** ([osteriadellavilletta.it](http://osteriadellavilletta.it)), which dates back to 1900, is a classic: family-run, hospitable and fairly priced. Sample wonderful home cooking and selected local wines at wooden tables in rooms that are rich in atmosphere. Just nearby I'll happily retire to **Cappuccini Resort** ([cappuccini.it](http://cappuccini.it)). The former 18th-century monastery was completely abandoned until Rosalba Tonelli Pelizzari lovingly restored it – with her own artistic style – and now includes 14 rooms, terraced gardens, a restaurant and a uniquely picturesque spa.



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Biking the Strada del Franciacorta wine route



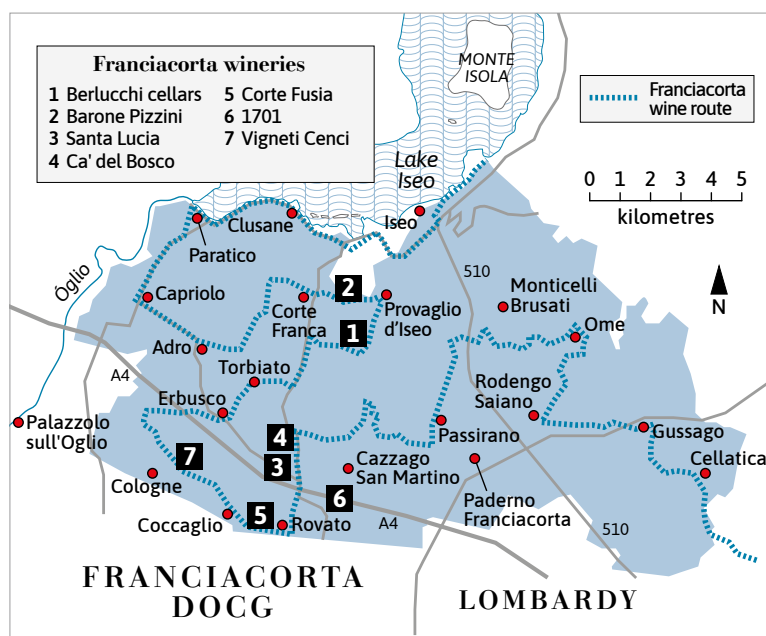
Silvia Stefini, 1701

The hope is to produce even more distinctive wines from Erbamato in the future.

Pierluigi Villa, of *Santa Lucia* winery ([santaluciafranciacorta.it](http://santaluciafranciacorta.it)), is another fan of Erbamato and has played a central role in its recent history. An ampelographer by profession (one who studies and classifies grape vines), he studied local grapes in Brescia and helped to classify the variety. He even makes small quantities of a pure Erbamato sparkling wine. 'This grape's natural higher acidity means we can let it ripen longer than Chardonnay and make wines that can't be mistaken for any other part of the world.'

Impressively, 80% of Franciacorta's vineyards are now being grown organically. That includes those of the trendsetting *Ca' del Bosco* ([cadelbosco.com](http://cadelbosco.com)), where huge investment has produced a modernist cellar and sculpture park that shouldn't be missed by fans of modern art.

While the biggest estates boast showstopping cellars and landscaped gardens, it's visits to the smaller, family-run estates that are the most illuminating about the Italian way of life. Giuliana Cenci and her son Maurizio Bassi live in an 18th-century *cascina*, or country farmhouse,



## Getting there

Two airports are close to Franciacorta: **Milano Linate** and **Orio sul Serio**, which is close to Bergamo and operated primarily by Ryanair. From there it's easiest to rent a car.

*Vigneti Cenci* ([vigneticenci.com](http://vigneticenci.com)), on the slopes of Monte Orfano. Its courtyard, with shaded tables and overhanging vine pergola, is the perfect place to taste their wines after a walk into the vineyards to see the views. 'My father started out making still wines but realised that the sparkling wines made here were more exceptional,' says Cenci. 'We're carrying on that tradition and offering the hospitality that makes Franciacorta so special.'



The waterfront, Iseo

## YOUR FRANCIACORTA ADDRESS BOOK

### ACCOMMODATION

#### **Agriturismo Locande le Quattro Terre**

For a restful stay immersed in the countryside at Corte Franca, this winery agriturismo offers spacious rooms, a restaurant with local dishes and easy access to the lake and wineries. [quattroterre.it](http://quattroterre.it)

#### **Corte Lantieri, Capriolo**

The agriturismo of a fine winery, Lantieri di Paratico, is surrounded by vineyards and has its own restaurant and pool. [cortelantieri.it](http://cortelantieri.it)

#### **Hotel Araba Fenice, Iseo**

If it's the lake you fancy, stay at this gorgeous hotel right on the shore, with lake views and a real feeling of the Grand Tour. [arabafenicehotel.it](http://arabafenicehotel.it)

### RESTAURANTS

#### **Dispensa Pani e Vini, Torbiato**

Wine shop, wine bar and restaurant, this is a perfect place for a meal or for sampling wines accompanied by assorted cheeses and salumi in a handsome contemporary



setting. You can also buy bottles to take away. [dispensafranciacorta.com](http://dispensafranciacorta.com)

#### **Ristorante Radici, Iseo**

In the centre of the lakeside village of Iseo, with an outdoor terrace, this is a great place to sample fresh lake fish and local pastas after a stroll along the lakefront. [radici-ristorante-iseo.business.site](http://radici-ristorante-iseo.business.site)

#### **Ristorante Dina, Gussago**

A gem for fans of Italian modern cuisine: chef Alberto Gipponi's idiosyncratic five-table restaurant in a vaulted interior

successfully explores textures and flavours, emotions and ideas. [dinaristorante.com](http://dinaristorante.com)

### SHOPS & MARKETS

#### **Cantine di Franciacorta, Erbusco**

This is the place to find a huge range of the area's wines at cellar prices. Great for tastings and for buying bottles to take home. [@cantinefranciacorta](https://www.instagram.com/cantinefranciacorta)


#### **Gelateria Leon d'Oro, Iseo**

On the waterfront, this is the best ice cream in the area. Don't miss their fresh fruit flavours. [@gelaterialeondoro](https://www.instagram.com/gelaterialeondoro)

#### **Iseo market**

Friday morning is the time to explore the big busy weekly market in the streets around Piazza Garibaldi in Iseo. [comune.iseo.bs.it](http://comune.iseo.bs.it)

#### **Find out more...**

Details about the Strada del Franciacorta wine route, sports, hospitality and the wineries are available on the consorzio's excellent website, [franciacorta.net](http://franciacorta.net) 

# SPARKLER OF THE YEAR 2022

GAMBERO ROSSO



VILLA SANDI

VILLASANDI.IT

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