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Report #63 The Wines of Friuli: Collio's Special Whites

Introduction



Cormòns & Collio Vineyard

Italy's Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region produces some of the finest white wines of Italy. Sandwiched between the Adriatic Sea to the south and the Julian Alps to the north, the region's cool climate is uniquely suited for white wine production. This is especially true for Collio, one of Friuli's ten regional appellations and the only one exclusively on hillside vineyards having special soils.

Collio's rolling hills allow winegrowers to use diverse exposures, soils and altitudes to fine tune the planting of grape varieties for optimal quality. Collio's unique flysch soils of limestone, marl, and sandstone further contribute to the pure, vibrant, ripe wines of intense mineral character for which it is famous.

Located on the far eastern side of Friuli, bordering Slovenia, Collio consists primarily of family wineries with just 1400 hectares of vines, about 10 percent of the total in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. [See Annex 1 for a detailed map of Friuli.] Despite its small size, the grapes it grows go into Italy's most famous white wines made by producers like Livio Felluga, Marco Felluga, Russiz Superiore, Jermann, Borgo del Tiglio, Edi Keber, Renato Keber, La

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Castellada, Schiopetto, Gradis'ciutta, Gravner, Radikon, and many others.

We recently visited the region to prepare this review of Collio's special white wines. The report initially examines Collio's recent wine history. Collio's Oslavia region, which sits on the border with Slovenia, has seen ever-shifting frontiers between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a result, Collio has been heavily influenced by winemaking in Austria and Germany as well as France. Mario Schiopetto introduced modern, temperature controlled winemaking to Collio (and Friuli) in the 1960s, adapting German methods. A couple of decades later, Gravner, Renato Keber, and Nicola Manfredati of

Borgo del Tiglio started aging in barriques, influenced by French Burgundy practices. And in the 21st century, winemakers like Stefano Bensa of La Castellada, Franco Sosol of Il Carpino and Stanko Radikon reinvented the traditional practice of extended maceration of white wines, producing natural, “orange” wines. These three styles all co-exist in Collio at present.

Next, we examine some of the factors that contribute to the excellence of Collio’s wines: its terroir, the traditional and indigenous grapes, and winemaking practices. Collio’s calcareous and clay soils (called *ponka* in the local, Friulano language) and its naturally air-conditioned climate combine to create the perfect conditions for producing refreshing, mineral-infused, elegant wines that marry ripe fruit to vibrant acidity. Skilled winemaking, attributable in part to outstanding training at wine programs in Cividale and Udine, also help explain the consistently high quality of wines coming out of Collio.

Collio’s polyglot of grape varieties is a particular focus of this report as many of these varieties are unfamiliar to consumers outside Italy. The traditional grapes of the Friuli region—Ribolla Gialla, Picolit, Malvasia, Friuli (formerly, Tocai Friulano) and Verduzzo white varieties and the Schioppettino and Refosco del Peduncolo Rosso red varieties—sit side by side with French and other Italian varieties, especially Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon. While Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon are the most produced and exported wines, due to their familiarity to international wine consumers, much of the excitement today is around Friuli’s traditional varieties.

In the last section, we provide profiles of the key producers of Collio wines and reviews of their wines,

more than 300 in total. Most of the wines tasted for this report are superbly balanced white wines showing fine aromatics, rich and complex flavors, and Collio’s hallmark vibrant acidity and chalky minerality. Readers who have not tasted Collio wines are urged to become familiar with them and to enjoy them with food, especially with the regional cuisine. This report provides a helpful summary of Friuli cuisine and recommends wines to pair with it.

This report on Colio wines is the first in a series of reports on the wines of Friuli we plan to produce in the near future.



The **Consorzio Tutela Vini Collio** was established in 1964 when, with remarkable foresight, Count Douglas Attems took the lead in founding it. He went on to serve as the Consorzio’s president for 35 years until 1999 when Marco Felluga assumed the post. After carrying out extensive soil

studies to ensure that territory within the appellation has the proper *flysch*, or *ponka*, soils, Collio was granted DOC status in 1968. In 2003 Count Attems was the first to receive the Collio Award in honor of his contributions to Collio wine. In 2009, the Consorzio introduced a unique Collio bottle designed by winemaker Edi Keber. It has a distinctive shape and a yellow capsule bearing the Collio logo. The current President of the Consorzio is Roberto Princic, who also owns the Gradiš’ciutta winery.

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