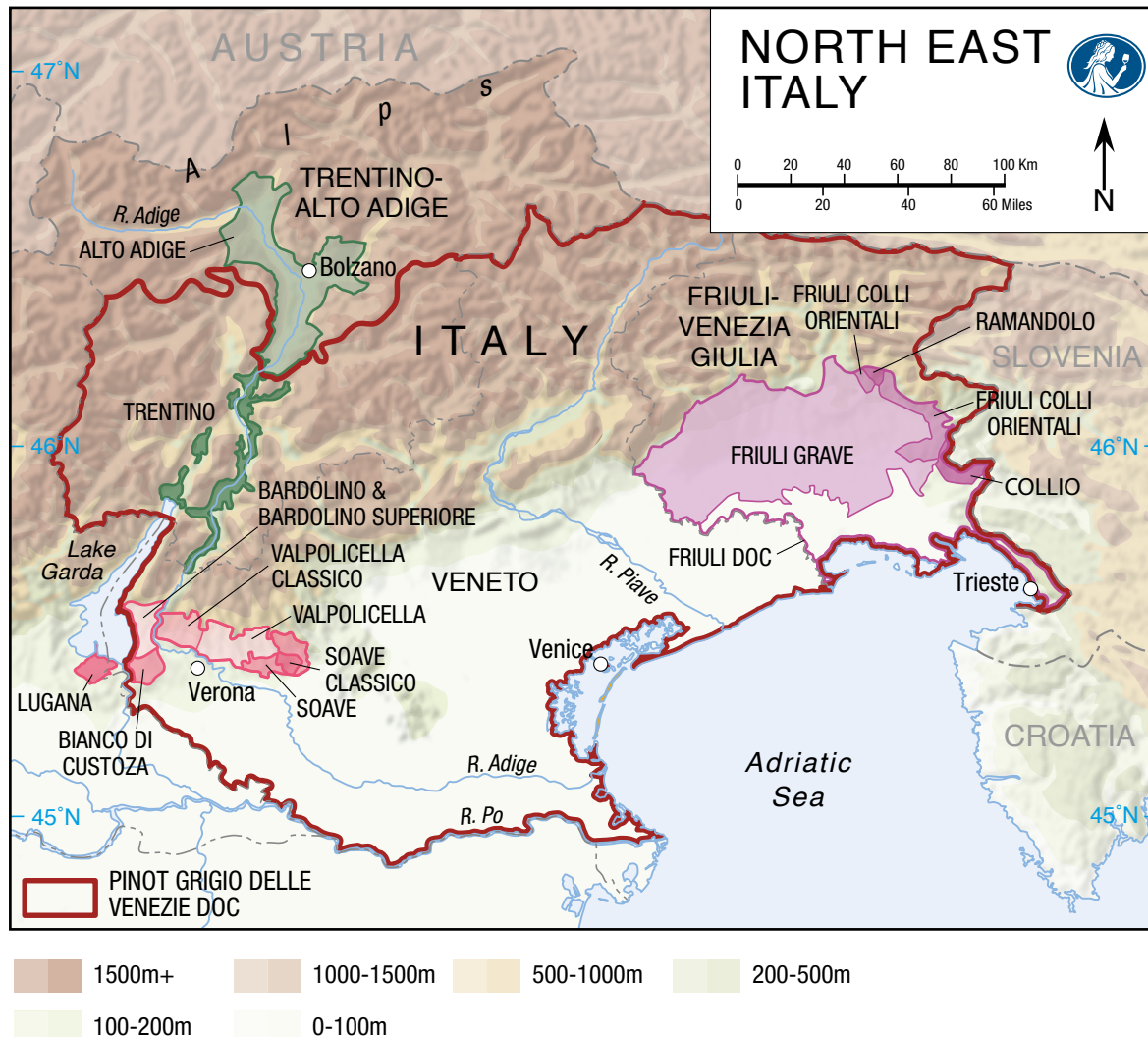


16. North-East Italy



In this section, the wines of Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the Veneto will be discussed.

16.1. Trentino-Alto Adige

While regarded as one region for some administrative purposes, Trentino and Alto Adige are best dealt with as two wine regions. Both are influenced by an Austrian heritage and became a part of Italy one century ago in 1919. Today the province of Trentino is a predominantly Italian-speaking region, while in the province of Alto-Adige, also known as Südtirol, the majority first language is German. (In this study guide, the Italian names of places will be adopted.) The entire region is in the foothills of the Alps with fruit growing (especially apples) taking place on the plain between the mountains and viticulture being predominantly practiced on the lower slopes of the hills. Trentino-Alto Adige grows both international varieties and local ones. Most wines produced are single-variety wines. The typical wines are described below.

TRENTINO

Trentino typically produces mainly white wines (unoaked, fresh, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay and Müller-Thurgau) as well as red wines from Teroldego, Merlot and Marzemino that are good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced. A few producers' wines are very good to outstanding in quality and are in the premium to super-premium range. Co-operatives continue to be very important. Production levels over the last ten years have remained broadly stable.

The Growing Environment and Grape Growing

While being in the north of Italy and in sight of the Alps, Trentino has a moderate, continental climate but with cooling influences. Daytime summer temperatures can be high due to the mountains providing protection from cold north winds, the moderating presence of Lake Garda to the south and heat building up on the valley floor during the growing season. However, there are large day/night temperature differences due to cold air descending from the mountains at night. The cold nights enable grapes to retain acidity and prolong the growing season, allowing flavours to intensify. Vineyards on higher and steeper slopes require working by hand, including harvesting.

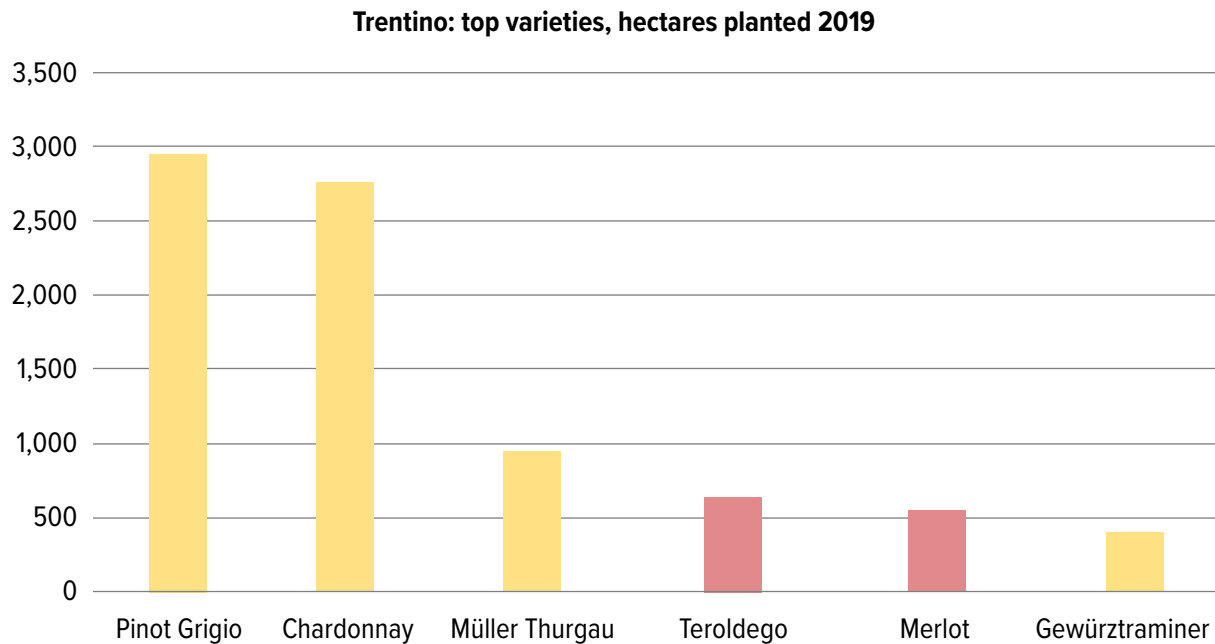


Vineyards below the mountains in Trentino

Grape Varieties

Overall, just over 75 per cent of the vineyard area is planted with white grapes.¹ Maximum yields are high: dependent on variety, whites are around a maximum of 100 hL/ha, reds around 90 hL/ha.

The region grows a large number of varieties. The overarching Trentino DOC allows ten white varieties to be bottled as single variety white wines and nine black varieties



Source: Consorzio di Tutela Vini del Trentino²

as red wines. International varieties widely grown are Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Müller-Thurgau, Pinot Bianco, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer in whites and Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir in red. However, the larger volumes are represented by Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay that together represent about half of the hectares planted.

The region is also home to a range of local grape varieties, the most important of which are outlined below. Three black varieties Teroldego (black cherry), Marzemino (red cherry) and Lagrein (red cherry and black plum), are all closely related to each other. They are all vigorous, mid- to late-ripening varieties making deeply coloured, medium tannin wines. They are mostly good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced.

Teroldego – This is the most common black variety in Trentino. Historically it was trained on pergolas for high yields. Quality minded growers now are also using Guyot. It can suffer from drying out of stems but is less susceptible to mildews than the other two varieties. The best clones are 145 and 152 for intense aromas. The best quality wines come from the Teroldego Rotaliano DOC on sandy and gravelly soils in the far north of Trentino. Outside the geographical area of Teroldego Rotaliano DOC and despite being the most grown black variety in the province, Teroldego cannot be bottled as Trentino DOC but as Vini delle Dolomiti IGT (which includes wines from both Trentino and Alto-Adige).

Marzemino – This black variety is prone to botrytis bunch rot and powdery mildew. Older vines were usually trained on pergolas; newer lower-yielding clones have been trained as spurred cordons. The best, ripest, wines come from the Ziresi subzone of the Trentino DOC due to full sun exposure and rich calcareous/clay and basalt soils.

Lagrein – This variety needs a warm site with plenty of sunshine to ripen fully. It can be subject to poor fruit set and thus low yields. Bitterness and some harshness on the finish is being addressed by shorter maceration times and ageing in wood. Because of its deep colour, the variety is also used for rosés. The wines can be labelled in either Italian or German as ‘red’ and ‘rosé’: Lagrein rubino/dunkel and Lagrein rosato/kretzer.

Moscato Rosa – This variety is a member of the Moscato family and is made into rose-scented sweet wines. Poor fruit set and susceptibility to botrytis bunch rot make it difficult to grow successfully. The wines are made either by the *appassimento* method or by picking late harvest fruit. The wines are premium priced.

Nosiola – The white variety Nosiola is grown in the Valley of the Lakes, the warmest area with a sub-continental climate. It produces a small volume of distinctive white wines with a light hazelnut flavour. It is also made in a semi-dried fruit version, called Vino Santo (not Vin Santo). The hazelnut flavour is from the fruit, not from oak. It is vulnerable to spring frosts, powdery mildew and sour rot. The dry wine is mid-priced, the Vino Santo premium priced. For **Schiava**, see [Alto-Adige](#).



Experimental vinification of disease resistant varieties

Winemaking

The great majority of white wines are made by soft pressing of the grapes and fermenting the juice in stainless steel vessels at low temperatures (12–16°C/54–61°F) to retain primary fruit character. They may be briefly aged on the lees and released promptly for their fruitiness. Some top whites may be aged in small oak barrels, a small proportion being new, for an added layer of vanilla and spice notes.

Red wines are made in two styles. Most are again made to be fresh and fruity in style with medium level of tannins and medium body. This is achieved by maceration on the skins during alcoholic fermentation (5–7 days) and moderate fermentation temperatures (17–20°C /63–68°F). They are briefly aged in stainless steel or old, neutral wooden casks. By contrast, a minority of premium reds go through a period of maceration after alcoholic fermentation (additional 7–14 days) and warm fermentation temperatures (26–32°C/79–90°F). These wines will typically be aged in small oak barrels with a small proportion of new oak. These wines have medium (+) to intense fruit flavours and an additional layer of vanilla and sweet spice oak.

Wine Law and Regulations

Trentino DOC allows wine to be made from many varieties, international and local. They can be:

- Bianco (minimum 80 per cent Chardonnay and/or Pinot Bianco)
- Rosso (single variety or blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Carmenère and Merlot)
- single variety wines, minimum 85 per cent of the named variety
- two variety blends from shorter lists of varieties. For example, for white wines, 50–75 per cent of one of Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc plus the remainder of one of these named varieties.
- Rosé, also called Rosato or Kretzer.

In addition, there are DOCs for the sweet wines. Certain important subzones can appear on labels in conjunction with DOC Trentino, e.g. Val di Cembra.

For the **Delle Venezie DOC** (for Pinot Grigio) available to growers in Trentino but not Alto Adige, see the [Veneto](#).

Wine Business

Trentino is a province with many small growers with an average holding of 1.7 ha.³ Due to this, co-operatives and to a lesser extent merchants are very significant for wine production. The co-operatives account for 70 per cent of total production⁴ with the largest, Cavit, producing 60 per cent of all wine made in the province.⁵ Smaller estates only produce about 10 per cent of the total production. The main denomination Trentino DOC allows for the production of most of the common varieties, with the alternative option of Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT. While a very high proportion of the wine is bottled as DOC, it is questionable if Trentino DOC as such has promoted uniformly high quality as its yield allowances are high, as already stated. This has encouraged some of the most high-quality growers not to use Trentino DOC, for example Foradori.

The wines of Trentino have very good penetration in the restaurant sector in Italy,⁶ especially Trentodoc (see D4: Sparkling Wines), Müller Thurgau and Teroldego Rotaliano.

Cavit is a consortium, of 11 co-operatives spread around Trentino. It processes the fruit of 5,250 growers. This [press kit](#) gives insights into its structure, exports (80 per cent of turnover) and regional sustainability programme.



Concrete tanks at co-operative winery



New stainless steel tanks at co-operative winery

ALTO-ADIGE

Viticulture has been practiced in the valleys and on the lower slopes of the Dolomites for centuries. Today Alto Adige produces mostly international varieties Pinot Grigio, Gewürztraminer (here regarded as a local variety; the village of Tramin is in the province), Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. Pale red wines from Schiava are also made. (40 years ago this was the most planted variety but in volume terms is much less important today.) The wines are mostly good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced. Some top wines are very good to outstanding in quality and mid-priced to premium in price, especially Pinot Noir. 60 per cent of wine produced is white and 40 per cent red.⁷

The Growing Environment and Grape Growing

Alto Adige has a mild Alpine continental climate. It is protected from cold winds by the mountains to the north. Vines typically are grown between 300–700 m of altitude. Warm air currents in the valleys, nearly 300 days of sunshine a year and large day/night temperature differentials create very good conditions for ripening grapes and retaining acidity. There is sufficient rainfall, spread throughout the year with a low amount in winter. Rainfall can sometimes be a concern at harvest time. There is a large variety of soils: volcanic porphyry, quartz and mica rock and Dolomitic limestone, giving producers a range of soil types suitable for a range of varieties. Training systems are either the traditional pergola or Guyot. Leaf picking to encourage exposed bunches to ripen has been practised for some time but now, with rising temperatures, this has to be done carefully to avoid the risk of fruit burning or drying out. Vineyards on higher and steeper slopes require working by hand, including harvesting.

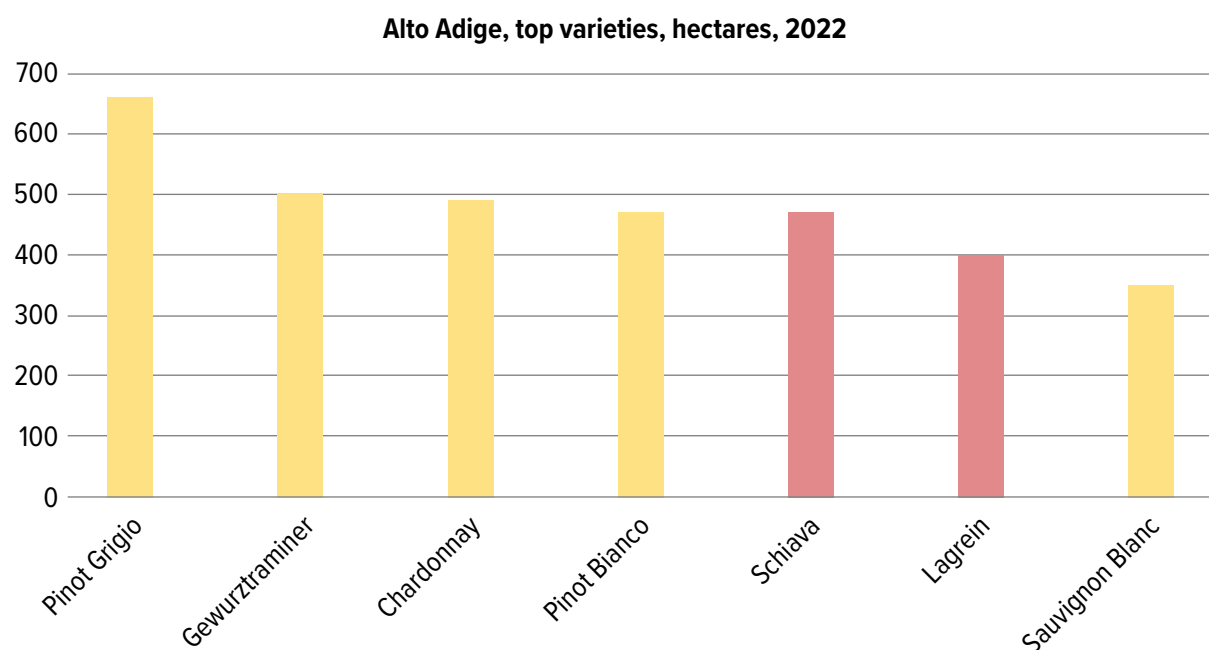


Vineyard at foot of mountain, Alto Adige

There are a number of growing zones (not technically subzones within the DOC) in the province according to topography, climate and soils. The two largest are:

- **Bassa Atesina** in the south of the province with the warmer climate: all the main varieties are grown except Schiava. Müller Thurgau is grown at high altitude.
- **Oltradige**, including the Lake Caldaro area for Schiava, with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in the valleys and Pinot Noir and white varieties at higher altitudes.

Grape Varieties



Source: Consortium Alto Adige Wines⁸

Schiava – Schiava is also known by its German name Vernatsch. While four separate varieties have been identified, they are normally grown and vinified together. The vines are typically grown on a pergola to cope with their natural vigour and the vines produce high yields. The wine is typically a pale ruby wine with perfumed violet and strawberry aromas with a medium to light body and low tannins. In the Santa Magdalena DOC Schiava can be blended with up to 15 per cent Lagrein producing a deeper coloured and fuller bodied wine.

Lagrein – See under Trentino.

Winemaking

The emphasis in most white winemaking in Alto Adige is on preserving fruit aromas and flavours. The must is fermented at low to moderate temperatures (12–15°C/54–59°F) with selected yeasts and aged in stainless steel vessels. Mid-priced wines may be kept on fine lees for 4–6 months to fill out the body of the wine, premium wines for nearly a year. Some top white wines and reds (Lagrein, Pinot Noir) are aged in French barriques.

Wine Law and Regulations

Alto Adige is proud of the fact that 98 per cent of the wines are DOC. The Alto Adige DOC is used for the typical range of varieties grown in the province. 11 white varieties are allowed within the DOC and seven black varieties. Within Alto Adige DOC the wines can be:

- Bianco (minimum 75 per cent Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco or Pinot Grigio – two of these varieties must be present but no single variety can exceed 70 per cent of the whole blend). There is no corresponding Rosso category.
- single variety wines, minimum 85 per cent of the named variety.
- two variety blends, for example, Chardonnay-Pinot Bianco or Cabernet-Lagrein in which both varieties must be more than 15 per cent of the blend each.

It is also possible to label wine in this DOC with one of the six subzones. The largest of these is Alto Adige Valle Isarco (mostly whites). The separate Lago di Caldaro DOC is devoted to Schiava.

Allowed yields are slightly lower than in Trentino, for example the maximum for whites is around 90 hL/ha.

Wine Business

Vineyard holdings in Alto Adige, totally 5,700 hectares, are typically very small, on average about one hectare per grower. Co-operatives are a very important part of the industry and account for 70 per cent of production including some high-quality wines.⁹ Even the better-known private estates have a limited number of hectares, with the result that they need to make mid-priced and premium wines. For example, Alois Lageder has 50 hectares (plus twice as much additional contract fruit) and Elena Walch, 60. The top co-operatives work hard to encourage quality and pay high prices to growers to incentivise quality. These include Cantina Kaltern (the largest winery in the province) and Cantina di Tramin.

In general, the wines of the province are sold principally in Italy (65 per cent with a focus on whites and aromatic varieties) of which just under half are sales in the province itself with its very important tourist business. The most important sales sector in Italy is hospitality, then specialist wine shops with only a small proportion of supermarket sales. The most important export market is Germany and then the USA. The province is currently promoting its wines actively in nine overseas markets. Schiava is sold locally and is exported to German-speaking countries.¹⁰

The [Consortium Alto Adige Wines](#) is the overarching body that promotes the wines. The wines are all branded with the Südtirol logo on the capsule of bottles.



Alto Adige logo

16.2. Friuli

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, commonly known as Friuli, is Italy's most north-easterly region. Bordering both Austria and Slovenia, its wine culture reflects influences from German-speaking and Slavic countries. The region is responsible for three per cent of Italian production,¹¹ and is best known for its high quality white, mainly single-variety, wines. 76 per cent of the wine produced is white.¹² However, there are some significant differences between the leading varieties in Friuli as a whole, planted on the plain, and those planted in the more prestigious, small and hilly denominations such as Collio DOC.



Hillside vineyard in Collio

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

The region has a warm maritime climate where warm air from the Adriatic Sea meets cooler influences from the Alps. It has high rainfall (for example, 1,400 mm per year in Collio, more half as much again as Bordeaux), with accompanying humidity. This requires extra work in the vineyard to combat diseases and makes organic viticulture challenging in this region.

The region can be divided into two zones, the plain and the low hills. This corresponds to a broad distinction between acceptable to good quality



Compacted marl known locally as *ponca*

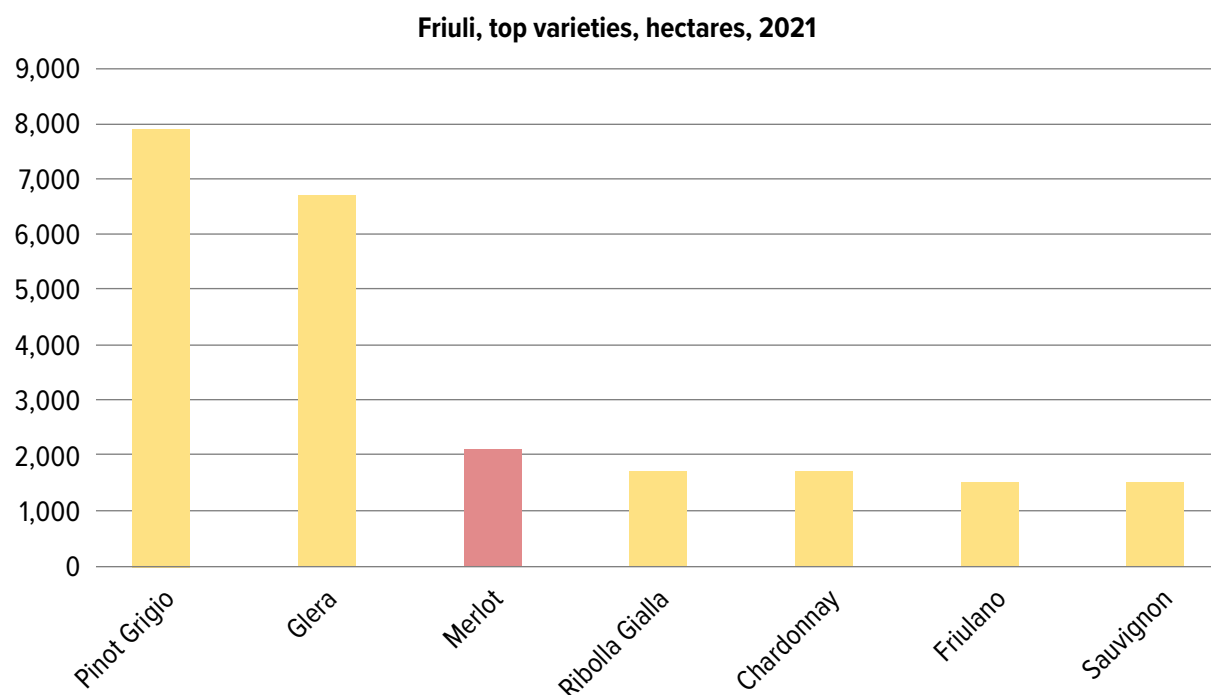
wines and higher quality wines. The former are made from higher-yield fruit grown on the alluvial plain with rocky deposits, soils that are more fertile than the hillside sites. This includes five DOCs, the most important of which are **Prosecco DOC**, **Friuli DOC**, **Delle Venezia** (for Pinot Grigio), **Grave del Friuli DOC** and **Friuli Isonzo DOC** (which also produces quality wines from sites on right bank of the river Isonzo, neighbouring Collio).

The higher quality wines come from the hillside vineyards of **Collio DOC** and **Friuli Colli Orientali DOC** with calcareous marl and sandstone. Soils include compacted marl, known as *ponca*, with excellent drainage. While the altitude is modest (200–300 m), a range of slopes and exposure to wind contribute to lower yields and higher quality, greater costs and price.

Grape Varieties

A wide range of varieties is grown in the region. The charts shows the main varieties planted. Pinot Grigio and Glera make up 51 per cent of the total vineyard area planted in Friuli.

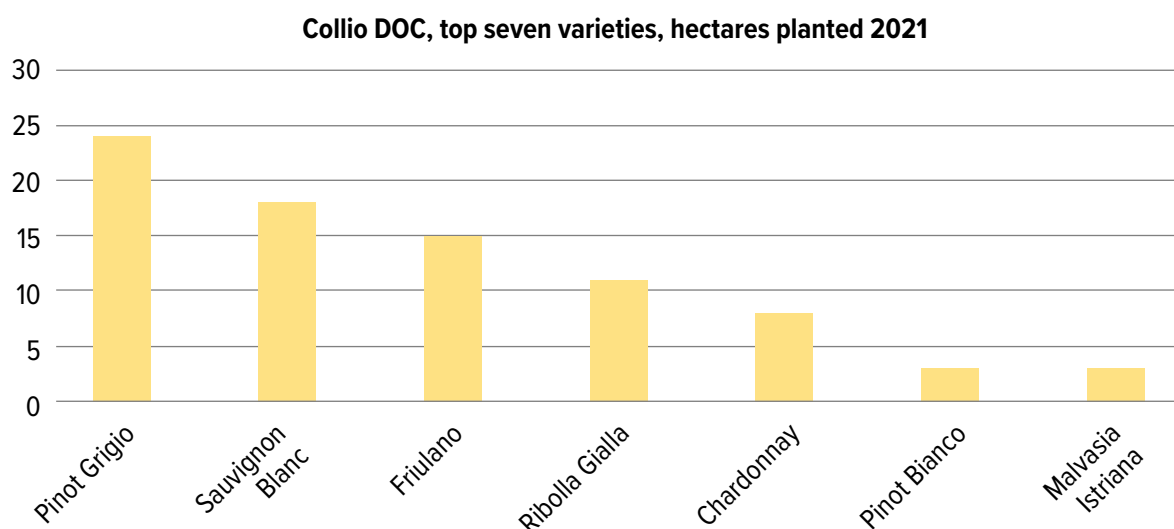
However, as noted, there is a marked difference in the scale of plantings and the varieties planted on the plain and in, for example, Collio (which accounts for less than five per cent of all hectares planted in Friuli).



Source: Matteo Bellotto¹³

Many varieties are grown:

- **Local varieties** – the white varieties Glera (see Prosecco DOC in the Sparkling Wine unit), Ribolla Gialla, Malvasia Istriana, Verduzzo and Picolit and the black varieties Refosco, Schiopettino, Pignolo and Tazzalenghe.
- **Varieties in common with Austria/Middle Europe** – Riesling, Welschriesling (in Italy called Riesling Italico), Gewürztraminer, Müller-Thurgau, Blaufränkisch (called Franconia)
- **French varieties** – Merlot, Sauvignonasse (i.e. Friulano), Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Carmenère.



Source: Consorzio Collio DOC¹³

The most significant difference between the varieties grown in Collio and Friuli Colli Orientali is that in the latter black varieties account for more than 30 per cent of the hectares planted, especially Merlot and Refosco.

As can be seen from the charts, Friuli has significant plantings of grape varieties that are commonly grown around the world. Three grape varieties in which Friuli specialises are:

Friulano – This variety, formerly known as Tocai Friulano, was renamed Friulano (‘from Friuli’) when the EU ruled that the name Tokaj was only to be used for the wine style in Hungary. The variety is known elsewhere as Sauvignon Vert or Sauvignonasse. It has good disease resistance, important in a region with high rainfall. The wines have medium (–) floral and apple flavours, medium to high alcohol with medium (+) acidity. They can either be made entirely in stainless steel to preserve the aromatics (most common) or be lightly oaked. The best wines have a capacity to age. They typically range from good to very good in quality and from mid-priced to premium.

Ribolla Gialla – This white variety is only grown in Collio and Colli Orientali, as it needs hillside sites to prevent it growing too vigorously. It is prone to shot berries. The wines have citrus and pepper notes and high acidity. Many styles are being experimented with as the profile of the variety has grown: oak-aged or not, tank or traditional method sparkling wine, extended skin contact for orange wines, fermentation and ageing in amphora.

Refosco – Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso is the most planted of the local black varieties. It is another vigorous variety that produces its best wines when grown on hillside sites with lower fertility. It is late ripening and resistant to botrytis. The red wines produced are red cherry flavoured with herbal aromas. It has small berries that produce wines with high tannins that are best smoothed out by time in wood.



Friulano

WINEMAKING

The style of clean, mainly unoaked, white wines associated with Friuli was introduced by Mario Schiopetto and others from the late 1960s. It drew on German technical expertise especially the use of stainless steel for fermentation and ageing vessels, temperature control, cultivated yeasts and, latterly, pneumatic presses. Friuli became the go-to region within Italy for this style of wine. In the wake of this success, in recent decades, experimentation with late harvest fruit, skin maceration, lees stirring and the use of oak has followed.

The region also produces red wines from international varieties (mainly Merlot) and from a range of characterful, often tannic local ones. As in neighbouring Slovenia, traditional orange wines are made. Small volumes of sweet wine are also made from local varieties.

Orange Wines

Friuli, and especially the small Oslavia sub-region of Collio, like neighbouring Brda in Slovenia, is a centre for the production of orange wines. These wines are made from long maceration (8 days up to 6–8 months) on the skins of white varieties followed by long ageing (2–6 years) in large format barrels. The pioneers of this movement, returning to old winemaking ways in the face of the perceived industrialisation of winemaking, included Joško Gravner (who also introduced amphora), Stanko Radikon and Dario Prinčič. They share a commitment to:

- organic methods in the vineyard
- the use of local varieties (especially the celebration of Ribolla Gialla), alongside international ones
- long maceration on the skins

- fermentation with ambient yeasts with no temperature control
- long maturation in large format oak or other wood
- no fining or filtration
- low or no added SO₂.

The resulting wines are amber, orange or gold in colour. They have pronounced flavours, unlike white wines from the same varieties, of dried fruits, dried herbs, hay and nuts, and medium tannins. They sell for premium prices and are particularly appreciated by sommeliers, those committed to natural wines and adventurous drinkers.



Orange wine

DENOMINATIONS

In terms of production, the largest DOCs are Prosecco DOC, Friuli DOC, Delle Venezia (for Pinot Grigio). **Friuli DOC** was introduced in 2016 and allows growers to produce wine to a DOC standard across all the authorised areas of Friuli. Permitted yields are high (e.g. 98 hL/ha for the most popular whites). For the **Delle Venezie DOC**, see the [Veneto](#).

The two most important DOCs for high quality wines are **Collio** and **Friuli Colli Orientali**. These two DOCs share similar growing conditions and are mainly divided by political history. Friuli Colli Orientali became part of Italy in the nineteenth century while Collio was only brought into modern Italy in 1914. The same geology and wine culture continues into Slovenia across the border.

Collio DOC restricts yields to 77 hL/ha. The principal wines in these two DOCs are the single-variety whites – Friulano, Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay. The DOC wines can have a variety name for example, Friuli Colli Orientali Sauvignon Blanc or Collio Friulano. This is extended to 18 approved varieties, reflecting the range of varieties grown.

For **Grave del Friuli DOC** and **Friuli Isonzo DOC**, see under [The Growing Environment and Grape Growing](#) above.

Two sweet wines have denominations of their own and are two of Friuli's four DOCG wines. **Friuli Colli Orientali Picolit DOCG** is an historic wine that once was a competitor for Hungarian Tokaj. Volumes produced have always been small as the variety Picolit has bunches each with only 10–15 berries due to problems with berry set. The wine is made from air-dried grapes. **Ramandolo DOCG** is made from air-dried grapes of the Verduzzo variety.

WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

These have been dealt with in the preceding sections.

WINE BUSINESS

The two main growers' organisations for high quality wines are:

- Consorzio Tutela Vini Collio
- Consorzio Tutela Vini Friuli Colli Orientali e Ramandolo which oversees four DOC(G)s: Friuli Colli Orientali, Ramandolo, Picolit, Rosazzo

Friulian wine continues to have a good reputation in the Italian restaurant and specialist retail market. It is very successful in national wine competitions, such as the Gambero Rosso. Exports grew by 55 per cent by value between 2013 and 2018 and then grew modestly 2018–2020,¹⁴ partly but not exclusively due to the popularity of Prosecco and Pinot Grigio. Competition has come from other north Italian regions, especially Trentino-Alto Adige, which have entered the market for clean, modern, well-made whites. Competition at the lower end of the market has also come from inexpensive Pinot Grigio grown both from the rest of Italy and in Eastern Europe where costs can be lower.

16.3. Veneto

The large Veneto region (emphasis on the first syllable, VEN-e-to) extends from the southern end of Lake Garda in the west to Venice in the east and ranges from the foothills of the Alps in the north to the flat plains of the Po delta to the south. The Veneto is Italy's largest wine-producing region (in most years), not least due to the worldwide popularity of sparkling Prosecco (dealt with in the unit on sparkling wines) and Pinot Grigio. However, it is also the home of the well-known DOC(G)s, Valpolicella and Soave. These make both entry level and high-quality wines. The wine styles, quality and price are described under the DOC headings below.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

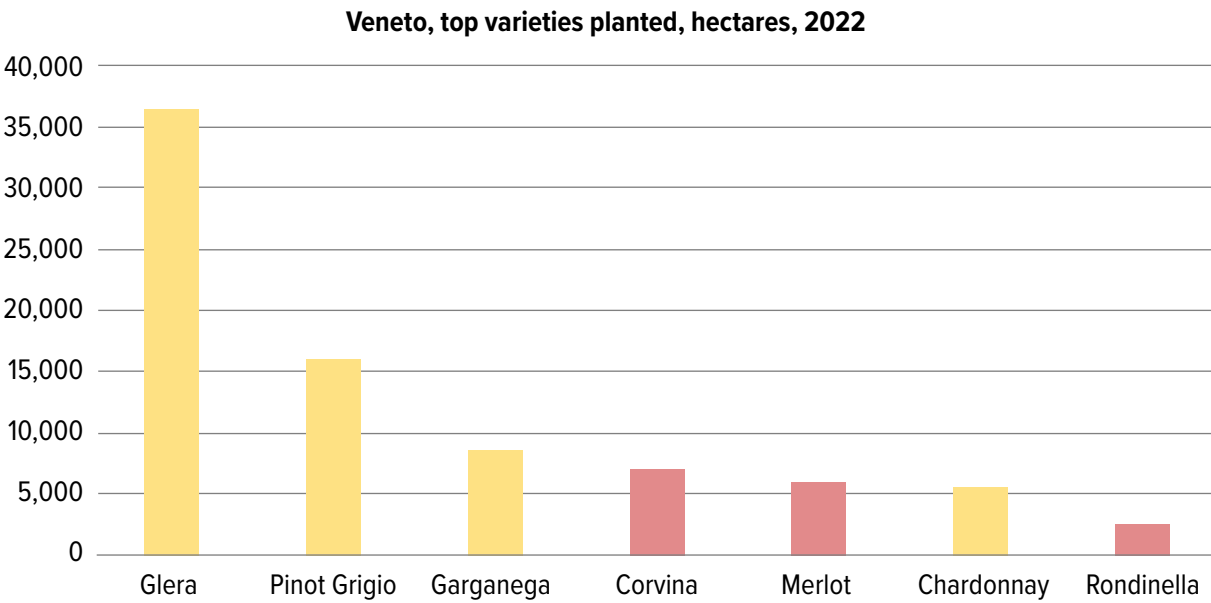
The climate in the Veneto is warm and moderately continental, with moderate rainfall. Cooling influences may come from altitude, exposing the vineyards in the foothills to a large diurnal temperature range, and from breezes from Lake Garda that cool the vineyards in the west of the region. The flat plain is affected by moist air and fog from the River Adige and the broad Po River valley, Italy's largest expanse of flat land, thus increasing the number of sprays needed to combat disease and rot. The trunk disease Esca has become an increasing threat.

Soils are generally very fertile contributing to high yields. This is particularly the case in vineyards on the plain that have rich soils with high fertility. Hillside sites are better suited to quality production due to a combination of better drainage and less rich soils. The DOCs for Valpolicella and Soave extend to the plains. This extension, in combination with the high yields allowed, means that quality varies from good to outstanding.

The chart below of the top six varieties planted shows the dominance of Glera in the region as a whole; for Prosecco, see D4: Sparkling Wines. Also notable is the volume of Merlot grown (alongside local varieties) that mainly goes into inexpensive wines for the local market.

The flat fertile plain is a source of fruit for inexpensive, high volume brands growing international grape varieties such as Pinot Grigio, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Merlot and for the local varieties Corvina, Garganega and Trebbiano. High yields mean that

these wines are usually simple and fruity. They may be labelled Veneto IGP. There are a number of DOCs outlined in more detail below: Valpolicella, Soave, Bardolino, Bianco di Custoza and Lugana.



Source: Veneto Agricola¹⁵



Vines on trellises



Pergola trained vines

SOAVE

Soave is east of Verona and has two distinct parts: foothills to the north and a flat plain in the south, near the River Adige. The hillside soils are limestone and clay and/or volcanic rocks (basalt). These soils are naturally cool, and this together with the influence of altitude, slows down ripening, leading to grapes with full flavour ripeness yet high acidity.

Garganega

This is the historic white variety of the Veneto and is vigorous, very productive and late ripening (October). Traditionally it was trained on a pergola system (still the predominant system) but nowadays it may be trellised. It is sensitive to winter cold and to mildew and botrytis. The grapes are mainly handpicked.

The wines typically have high acidity levels, a medium body and medium intensity of lemon, apple/pear, white pepper and, in the ripest examples, stone fruit. They do not typically display any aromas or flavours of new oak, though some high-end examples are oaked. The best examples can age, developing aromas of almonds and honey. They are typically good to very good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced. The top producers' wines are very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium priced.

The vines on the plain are planted on fertile sandy and alluvial soils. Grapes produced here on the plain are fruity with medium acidity and the wines are meant to be drunk young. They are acceptable to good in quality and inexpensive in price.

Quality producers will typically employ a short cold maceration period, cool fermentation at 16–18°C (61–64°F) and a few months of ageing on the lees before bottling. A few producers ferment and/or age their leading wines in oak barrels.

Wines are also made by the *appassimento* method (see below).

Wine Law and Regulations

For Soave, there are three main DOCs for dry wines, with slightly rising minimum alcohol levels.

Soave DOC – Grapes from the entire Soave region (now three times larger than the original region of 1931), of which a minimum of 70 per cent must be Garganega, with up to 30 per cent of Trebbiano di Soave (local synonym for Verdicchio) or Chardonnay. Of this 30 per cent, a maximum of 5 per cent can be any other authorised variety. Maximum yield is a substantial 105 hL/ha. The wine can be sold very young, after 1 December of the year of harvest. Production is around 80 per cent of all Soave.¹⁶

Soave DOC Classico – Grapes from the hilly Classico region, same rules about varieties as Soave DOC, marginally lower yield at 98 hL/ha. Wines can be released on 1 February of the year after harvest. Production is around 20 per cent of all Soave.

Soave Superiore DOCG – Grapes from same hilly zone as Recioto di Soave (see below), same rules about varieties as Soave DOC. Lower yield than the two other Soave DOCs at 70 hL/ha. Wines can only be released on 1 September of the year after harvest. However, production is tiny by comparison with the two above.

The details above show that high to very high yields are permitted in both Soave and Soave Classico. This led to the introduction of Soave Superiore DOCG with its markedly lower maximum yields. However, leading producers work with yields close to the maximums allowed and still produce concentration and flavour intensity in their wines, showing that Garganega when well grown on favourable sites can produce fully flavoured wines at relatively high yields.

Recioto di Soave DOCG – Grapes from a delimited hilly zone, this is made from the same blend as Soave but from semi-dried grapes. As a result, the yields are a low maximum of 36 hL/ha, producing rich, floral, honeyed, sweet wines with high balancing acidity.

Wine Business

Soave is a region of small growers (average vineyard holding two hectares) and large bottlers. Less than 10 per cent is bottled by small family wineries. The largest co-operative, the Cantina di Soave, bottles just under half of the total wine made. The demand for Soave was at its peak in the 1960s and 70s but in recent decades, it has lost ground in the volume market to Pinot Grigio from the Veneto and elsewhere. As a result, old, low quality Garganega vines within the Soave DOC are being replanted with Pinot Grigio. However, Soave continues to be in demand in export markets with 85 per cent being exported, especially to Germany and the UK. Over the last ten years, the value of exports has held up with the volume dropping, indicating that slightly higher prices are being achieved.¹⁷

Until recently, the quality reputation for Soave was conveyed either by reference to the Classico zone or by the names of individual producers (examples include Pieropan and Inama). As part of an effort to re-position Soave as a higher quality wine, the [Soave Consorzio](#) has now carried out a classification of single vineyards across Soave as a whole. This followed detailed study of soils, aspect and elevations and their combined effect on wine style. These subzones (formally called UGAs) are all on hilly sites and most but not all of them are in the Classico zone.¹⁸ In 2020, 33 named single vineyards were approved.

VALPOLICELLA

The Valpolicella area is immediately north of Verona. The foothills in the north of the denomination have limestone and clay or volcanic soils which are cooler than those in the south, and which slow down ripening so the grapes have more acidity and ripen more slowly, producing wines of greater concentration. The soils in the flatter south of the denomination are gravel and sand, which are warmer. As a result, the grapes are fruitier with less acidity and lower concentration.



Hillside vineyards in Valpolicella DOC Classico

Grape Varieties

Corvina Veronese – This variety, commonly known as Corvina, is by far the most planted in Valpolicella with over half of all hectares planted. It is vigorous and dependable, producing high yields. It has thick skins making it suitable for drying (see *Appassimento* below). However, it is prone to downy mildew, botrytis and esca and is sensitive to drought. It is mid to late ripening.

It is well suited to pergola training as it does not fruit on the first few buds of the cane and the shade prevents sunburn to which the variety is prone. The height of the pergola also helps with good air circulation helping to reduce disease. Studies have shown that temperatures can be significantly lower in pergola systems, but they do also lose more water through evaporation. If carefully grown, Corvina can be grown on trellises.

Corvina is mostly blended in Valpolicella and related wines. In blends, it contributes violet, red cherry and red plum fruit with a herbal note and low to medium tannins and high acidity. There are a few single-variety Corvina wines following the success of Allegrini's La Poja, a concentrated barrel-aged red.

Corvinone – Despite its name, ‘big Corvina’, probably arising from its big clusters, this variety is not related to Corvina. It is prone to downy mildew. The principal problem in growing the variety is that the berries do not ripen uniformly and therefore the fruit must be picked over bunch by bunch at harvest, adding work and cost. Corvinone is a good complement to Corvina in blends as it supplies tannins, while also contributing red cherry fruit flavours. It also dries well – see below on *appassimento*.

Rondinella – This very reliable and productive variety can grow on a range of soils. It has good disease resistance (and therefore is good for drying) but is prone to esca. It can give rather neutral wines with light, simple cherry fruit. It accumulates sugar very fast and so is useful for Recioto (see below).

Molinara – This is a high yielding variety that has been grown less in recent years, due to the pale colour of the wines, with producers (and the market) preferring deeper coloured wines. It contributes acidity, red-berried fruit and lightness.

Winemaking

The aim in making inexpensive Valpolicella is to create fresh, fruity wines for early consumption. After crushing the grapes, fermentation is carried out at controlled temperatures of 20–25°C (68–77°F) to retain primary aromas. Maceration times are typically short, 5–7 days, as the aim is for wines with light to medium tannins. The wines are aged in stainless steel or large neutral barrels for 6–8 months before release.

However, wines made by the *appassimento* method, using semi-dried grapes, have become increasingly important and common.

Appassimento – Both Soave and Valpolicella make use of the *appassimento* method. The resulting wine style is called *passito*. In the Veneto and in many other parts of Italy (e.g. in



***Appassimento* in trays**



Appassimento: grapes hung up to dry



Appassimento: grapes showing signs of drying

Tuscany for Vin Santo) the grapes are picked and allowed to reach a semi-dried state before they are crushed. The grapes are stored for 3–4 months in well-aerated drying lofts. It is a historic method for concentrating flavour, raising alcohol levels and making sweet (and today, dry) wines. It may well have arisen in antiquity to make wines robust enough to transport.

The grapes may be picked early at 11–11.5 per cent potential alcohol to maintain acidity and to ensure perfect bunches. Completely healthy grapes with open bunches are left to dry, either on the vine or, more usually, off the vine. The grapes are hung up or, in volume production, laid one bunch deep in well-spaced trays, to prevent the growth of moulds. The grapes must be checked regularly and rotated occasionally. Today humidity, temperature and air movement are carefully controlled.

Depending on the speed and length of drying, the grapes lose around one third of their weight. This loss of water leads to higher levels of sugar, potential alcohol, acidity, anthocyanins (colour), tannins and concentration of flavours. In addition, chemical changes occur in the drying grapes. For example, more glycerol is produced, giving a softer, fuller mouth-feel. In this way, because of the differing production methods, the Corvina blend can produce both pale ruby, simple, fresh, fruity wines (Valpolicella) and deep ruby, concentrated, complex, high alcohol wines with tannic and acidic structure (Amarone and Recioto).

Wine Law and Regulations

A range of wines is produced within Valpolicella. The wines are all Corvina/Corvinone-dominant blends. The DOCs and DOCGs listed below all have the following in common:

- Corvina and/or Corvinone must be 45–95 per cent of the blend.
- Rondinella: 5–30 per cent
- Other authorised varieties including Molinara.

From these blends, the following wines may be made.

Valpolicella DOC – maximum yield is 84hl/ha, resulting in some wines of low flavour concentration. As noted, the wines are typically made with a short maceration on the skins. Wines show bright purple tints in youth and have red cherry and rose aromatics, no oak flavour, low to medium tannins and medium to medium (+) acidity. The wines are typically good quality, with some very good examples and are inexpensive to mid-priced.

Valpolicella DOC Classico – the grapes must come from the hilly, defined, historic Classico zone. Wines typically have greater concentration than the wines of the preceding DOC. The wines are typically good to very good in quality and are inexpensive to mid-priced.

Valpolicella DOC Valpantena – wines made from grapes grown in the Valpantena valley.

Superiore – an additional optional for Valpolicella DOC and Valpolicella DOC Classico or Valpantena for wines with a marginally higher minimum alcohol level, which are often aged in large wood vessels for one year. They must be aged for one year after 1 January of the year after the harvest. Thus, in Valpolicella, Superiore is used in the traditional way for Italian wines as a higher grade of the basic DOC. (By contrast, in Soave and Bardolino the term Superiore is used as a separate DOCG wine in an attempt to reposition the wine in terms of its commercial status.) Wines are ruby in colour, with greater concentration than basic Valpolicella.

A few producers make wines of outstanding quality sold for super-premium prices labelled as Valpolicella Superiore. Examples include Quintarelli or Romano dal Forno. However, these wines are made from a significant proportion of semi-dried grapes and have been aged for many years before release, reflecting the traditional winemaking practices for the very high-quality wines of the region. As a result, they are not representative of this category in general.

Recioto della Valpolicella DOCG – the historic, sweet, semi-dried grape wine of Valpolicella. The grapes can be sourced from anywhere within the Valpolicella DOC, though if Classico is stated on the label, the grapes must come from the Classico area. (Thus Recioto, Amarone and Ripasso are not additional distinct geographical appellations but are based on winemaking styles.) The grapes must be dried off the vines for 100–120 days. The final yield (after drying and pressing the semi-dried grapes) is a maximum of 48 hL/ha. The wines have intense red, fresh- and dried-fruit flavours, a full body, and medium (+) to high tannins. Production is typically small scale and often artisan. As a result, the styles differ in terms of alcohol and sweetness levels (minimum 12% abv and approximately 50 g/L residual sugar). Despite the labour involved and the much lower allowed yields than for Valpolicella, prices received do not match those for the more fashionable Amarone. The wines are very good to outstanding in quality and typically premium priced.

Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG – is the modern (twentieth century) dry or just off-dry semi-dried grape wine of Valpolicella. As with Recioto, the grapes can be sourced from anywhere within the Valpolicella DOC and final yield (after drying and pressing the dried grapes) is a maximum of 48 hL/ha. The grapes are vinified usually after 100–120 days of drying. The minimum abv is 14 per cent but more typically 15 per cent and above, and often with 5–9 g/l residual sugar. (The maximum residual sugar is 9 g/L) The wine must be aged for a minimum of two years (four years for the ‘Riserva’ category).

The wines have intense cherry and dried fruit flavours accompanied by spice and wood notes, medium to high tannins and a high acidity, which balances the richness. According to the style preferred by the producer, the wine may have new oak flavours or nutty and volatile notes from mildly oxidative ageing in large wood casks if these are not kept entirely topped up. Due to the popularity of the style and the high volumes being made, quality ranges from good to outstanding. Equally there is a wide range of prices from mid-priced to premium and super-premium.

Valpolicella Ripasso DOC – In the *ripasso* method, unpressed grape skins with some residual sugar are taken from the end of the fermentation phase of Amarone or Recioto. Newly made Valpolicella wine, having been pressed off its own skins, is then added to these grape skins for a second maceration. Yeasts, which are also transferred in this process, ferment the remaining sugar, during which time the grape skins give more colour, flavour and tannins to the wine. 10–15 per cent of Amarone or Recioto must also be added to contribute further flavour, tannins and alcohol.

The finished wine must have a minimum 12.5 per cent abv and 13.0 per cent for Superiore. They must be aged for one year after 1 January of the year after the harvest. This is often in large wood vessels. They are medium- to full-bodied with medium (+) tannins and flavours of fresh and stewed red cherries and plums. Given the popularity of the Ripasso style, producers are also making wines from a blend of dried grape wine and standard wine and selling it as IGP. The wines are good to very good in quality and mid- to premium priced.

Wine Business

The [Valpolicella Consorzio](#) represents more than 80 per cent of the producers who make DOC(G) wines. In addition to marketing and promotion activities, it is involved in research and in an initiative to sign up growers to a common standard for sustainability (see below).

The popularity of Amarone and Ripasso has had profound effects on the wines being produced. In the past Recioto and Amarone were rare and exceptional wines. Recioto has remained a niche market, while Amarone production has grown six-fold since the mid-1990s and that of Ripasso nearly fourfold in the decade to 2016. Production of Valpolicella has dropped significantly (40 per cent over the decade to 2016).¹⁹ Growers receive around three times the price for Amarone grapes as for basic Valpolicella. Approximately 65 per cent of Amarone produced is exported with Germany, the United States, Switzerland and UK being the principal export markets.²⁰

Is the recent increased production of Amarone a success story or a threat to quality? Consider the issues raised [here](#).

The Valpolicella Consorzio has launched an externally certified sustainability project designed to incorporate 60 per cent of members by 2018 and ultimately the entire region. It has three themes: 'reduce, respect, retrench' (i.e. 'save'). More details are available [here](#).

OTHER DOCS IN THE VENETO

Delle Venezie DOC

This new DOC was introduced in 2017 replacing the Pinot Grigio delle Venezie IGP with stricter production requirements. The principal wine made within the DOC is Pinot Grigio. (At the same time, it was no longer permitted to bottle Pinot Grigio under the new Trevenezie IGP that replaced delle Venezie IGP.)

The grapes for Delle Venezie DOC have to be grown in the three regions of the Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the southern Trentino province of Trentino–Alto Adige. This area produces 85 per cent of all Italian-grown Pinot Grigio and more than 40 per cent of the world's Pinot Grigio.²¹ In comparison to the former IGP, while the maximum yield remains high it has been reduced (152 to 126 hL/ha). The new DOC is proving very popular among growers with high take-up of the opportunity to bottle Pinot Grigio under the DOC. (There are many other DOCs for Pinot Grigio available to growers in smaller, defined zones within the individual regions. As a result, growers have a choice between the new overarching DOC and a local DOC.) The wines typically have light to medium (–) intensity apple and lemon fruit, with light to medium (–) body, medium alcohol and medium (+) acidity. They are typically good in quality (with some very good examples) and inexpensive to mid-priced.

Bardolino DOC and Bardolino Superiore DOCG

Bardolino DOC, and Bardolino Superiore DOCG, including its small Classico subzone, is immediately adjacent to Lake Garda with its moderating influences. Three named subzones for red wines were introduced in 2021. It produces mainly light bodied reds and rosés. The DOC wines are Corvina blends (35–95 per cent Corvina), broadly similar to Valpolicella, with 5–40 per cent Rondinella but with the possibility of up to 20 per cent of other authorised red varieties (10 per cent maximum for any single variety with the exception of Molinara which may be up to 15 per cent). In practice, this means that Merlot can be used to boost the red fruit character and to reach the minimum alcohol level of 10.5 per cent (DOC) or 11 per cent (DOCG). Maximum yields are 84 hL/ha for DOC wines and lower for the Superiore. The rosé, called Chiaretto, is a light, fresh, red-fruited wine with a medium salmon colour.

Bianco di Custoza DOC

This DOC is situated between Verona and Lake Garda. It produces mostly easy-drinking, lightly aromatic, fresh white wines made from a blend of mainly Trebbiano Toscano, Garganega, Friulano and optionally Cortese. The wines are mainly sold in the Italian market. Two large co-operatives are the biggest producers.

Lugana DOC

South of Lake Garda, the Lugana DOC crosses the boundary into neighbouring Lombardy. Most of the vineyards are in Lombardy but the majority of wine is bottled by big producers in the Veneto. The principal grape variety here is now called Turbiana (previously known as Trebbiano di Lugana) and is very similar to Verdicchio. The soils typically are high in clay content. The best examples of the wines are moderately aromatic with ripe apple, citrus and hazelnut notes with lively acidity and a saline finish. Some producers may age a part or all of their top wines in oak. Some wines can age for five years plus. The denomination has seen a doubling in production and sales in the last ten years, partly driven by the large local tourist market and exports of 60 per cent.²²

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