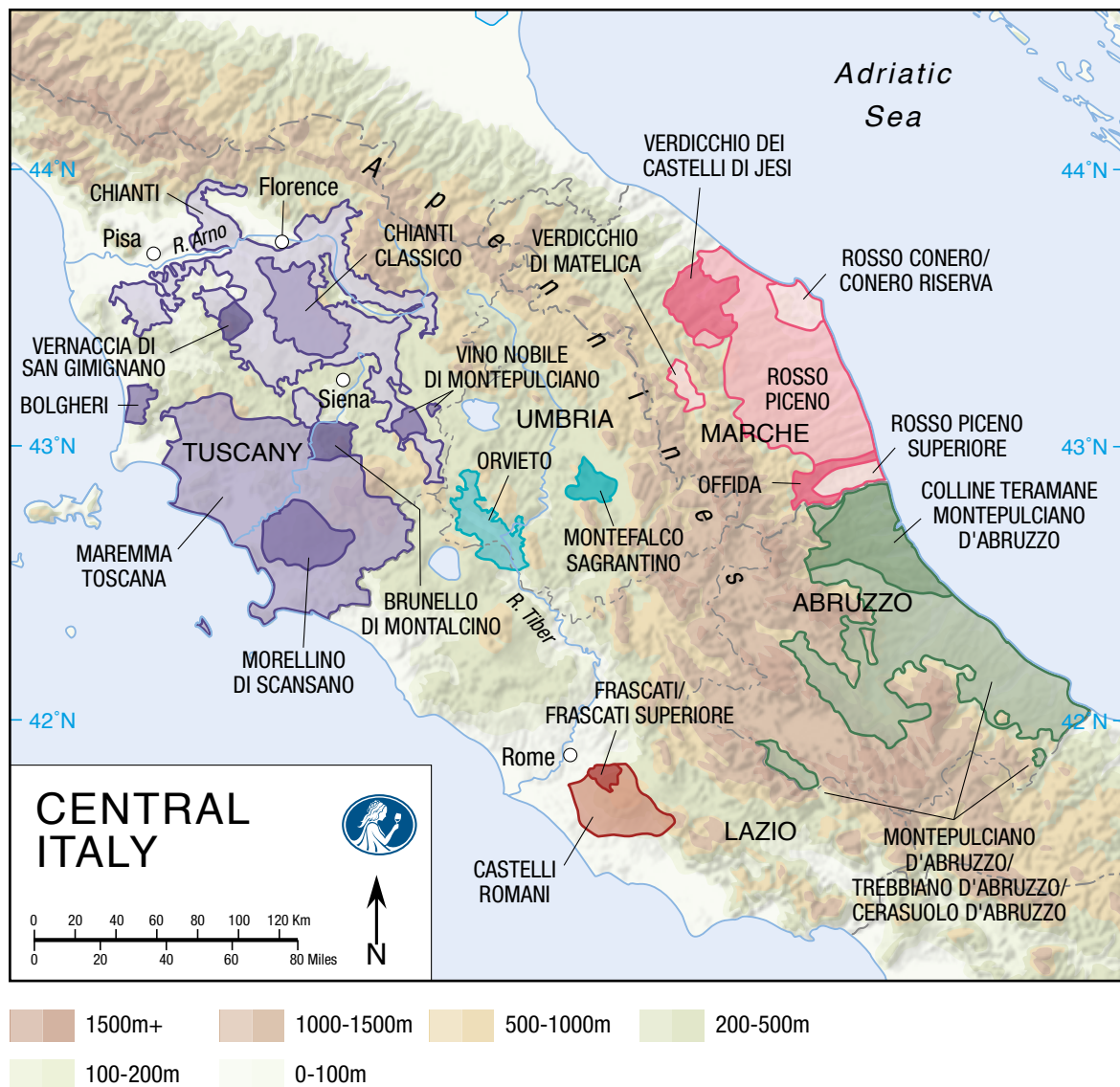


18. Central Italy

In this chapter the wines of Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Lazio and Abruzzo will be considered. All these regions grow a significant volume of Sangiovese, while also having red varieties characteristic of the individual regions. Similarly for white wines, Trebbiano Toscano is widely grown, although in far smaller volumes.



18.1. Tuscany

Tuscany is a historic and prestigious region of central Italy. The great majority of its wines are red, with Sangiovese as the dominant variety.

The first exports of wine from this region to other regions of Italy and to Mediterranean countries go back to the Etruscan period (7th century BCE). However, concerns about consistent quality have been a long-standing feature for the region. In 1444 a prohibition on

picking grapes before a certain date was issued to protect the quality of wine coming from Chianti.

Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici designated four regions of wine production in Tuscany in 1716, a precursor of the modern systems of geographical indications.

In 1872 Baron Bettino Ricasoli, later prime minister of Italy, recommended that Sangiovese should be the dominant variety in Chianti and that the white variety Malvasia could be used to soften wines for early drinking. This became the standard approach for Chianti, with the result that a proportion of white varieties were required by the DOC of 1967.

In 1932, the government's Dalmasso commission created a much-enlarged area, now called Chianti DOCG, with seven subzones. This was to enable large producers and bottling companies to sell wine from the wider region with the prestigious name of Chianti. It gave the name Chianti Classico to the original, hilly Chianti. Much of the extended Chianti does not share the same soils or elevation as Chianti Classico.

Up to the Second World War, a system known as sharecropping was in place. Landowners allowed farmers the use of the land in return for half of the production, which resulted in little incentive to improve quality. After the War, aristocratic owners of estates were joined by investors, first from Italy, and then from around the world. This transformed the level of investment in the wine business in Tuscany, especially initially in Chianti Classico.

The creation of Sassicaia in 1968 and Tignanello in 1971 inspired the category of Super Tuscans and led to many similar wines in the 1980s. These wines were made from Bordeaux varieties or included Bordeaux varieties and were aged in French oak barriques, not the traditional large cask. They were made in a style that appealed to international markets (deep colour, fruity, with vanilla and sweet spice notes from the use of new French oak barriques). They were released as *vino da tavola* (lowest classification) as they either came from non-traditional areas or did not follow the rules of the DOCs as they were then. They acted as a stimulus to raise the quality and price of Tuscan wines in general.

Many DOCs were created, and some DOCs promoted to DOCG, starting in the 1980s and accelerating from the 1990s. Chianti Classico became an autonomous DOCG in 1996; in other words, it is no longer a subzone of Chianti.

Recent decades have seen the focus return to indigenous varieties, especially Sangiovese, and to less evident new oak flavours in the finished wine. This includes the use of larger casks (locally known as *botti*) and of tonneaux.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

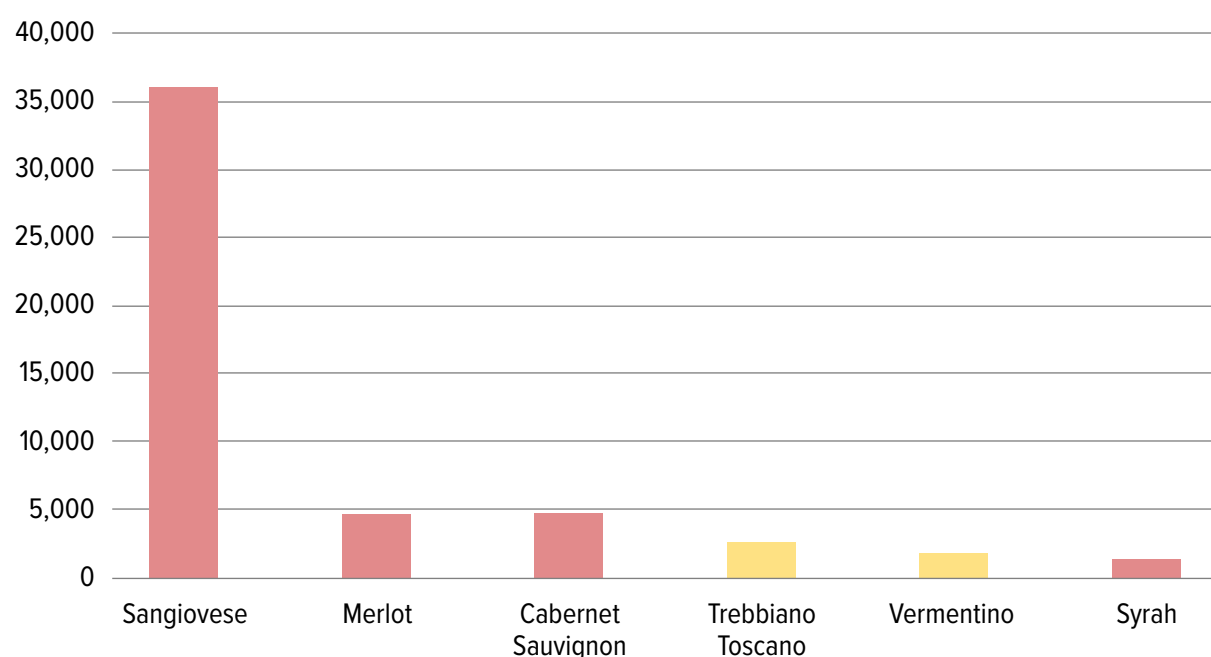
Climate

The climate in Tuscany is generally warm Mediterranean with adequate rainfall for grape growing. Altitude in the inland areas is an important cooling influence. Most of the rain falls in autumn and winter. Inland, summers can be hot and winters cold. The growing season normally has some rain. The climate hazards are occasional spring frost, hail, and rain during the harvest period. Summer drought and prolonged high temperatures (leading to the cessation of photosynthesis and therefore incomplete ripening of skins and seeds) can be hazards in some years.

Grape varieties

Sangiovese – As noted, Sangiovese is the dominant variety grown in Tuscany (see chart below). It is widely grown across central and southern Italy and accounts for 10 per cent of all vines grown in Italy as a whole, making it the most planted variety in the country. Wines made entirely or mostly from Sangiovese are typically medium intensity ruby in colour, with red cherry, red plum and herbal notes, medium to full bodied, with high acidity and high tannins. Quality ranges from acceptable to outstanding and prices from inexpensive to premium with a few super- premium examples. For more details on individual Tuscan denominations see [Denominations, Wine Law and Regulations](#).

Tuscany, top varieties, hectares, 2021



Source: Regione Toscana¹

The variety has a number of different names in Tuscany in addition to Sangiovese, some of which appear in the names of denominations, for example Morellino di Scansano. In Montepulciano, the variety is known as Prugnolo Gentile.

Sangiovese has a reputation of being a difficult variety to grow successfully. It buds early (and therefore is prone to late spring frosts) and it ripens late (and thus can be affected by early autumn rain). It does best on sunny south and south-east facing slopes where it has the best chance to ripen. Grapes for the better quality wines tend to be grown between 200 and 550 m above sea level to enable full ripeness achieved over a long season, although this risks rain at harvest time. With a warming climate, growers are looking to plant on higher sites or those with less sunny aspects.

Sangiovese does best on friable, shale and limestone soils (providing excellent drainage) and is reasonably



Sangiovese

successful on clay. As it is a vigorous variety, its canopy needs to be trimmed regularly to avoid shading. Thin skins make it is very susceptible to botrytis bunch rot. It can produce high yields, and growers have to decide whether to produce volume or, by pruning, cluster thinning and green harvesting, reduce yield to raise quality.



Cordon-trained, VSP, with irrigation pipe



Cane-trained, VSP

The main types of training are cordons pruned to spurs or cane pruned with vertical shoot positioning. There is a large choice of clones available. Growers have been replacing their previous choices, planted to produce high yields, with moderate yielding, higher-quality clones or, latterly, vines created by mass selection from best performing plants. The Chianti Classico 2000 project produced seven clones that have been widely planted. The aims were smaller berries, thicker skins and more-open bunches to produce wines with deeper colour, more flavour intensity and greater disease resistance. Newer releases from a range of sources are also popular and vines with less vigour that are thus less labour intensive are seen as desirable.

Esca has become a significant hazard in recent years, with growers learning to avoid large cuts in old wood to reduce the vulnerability of vines. Wild boars can do considerable damage in vineyards also. More skilled methods of pruning to reduce the threat of esca and fencing to keep out wild boar add to the cost of grape growing.

Trebbiano Toscano – A late budding white variety and therefore not vulnerable to spring frost. Vigorous and high yielding (and therefore very popular in the past when yield was the most highly prized characteristic), it is prone to downy mildew and eutypa dieback but otherwise has good disease resistance. It ripens well in sunshine and heat, while retaining high acidity. The flavours are neutral (medium (–) lemon, herbal). In France, the same variety is called Ugni Blanc and is mainly used for brandy production.

The variety is declining in popularity; although it was previously valued for being high yielding and reliable, its lack of fruitiness and low flavour intensity has led to a reduction in plantings and, because of increased demand for red wine, it has often been replaced by black varieties. Its characteristic high acidity makes it an important part of the blend for sweet Vin Santo. For that wine, it is regularly blended with other local varieties.

Varieties used to blend with Sangiovese – Most Tuscan DOC(G)s allow Sangiovese to be blended with a small proportion of other black varieties. Growers can choose from local options (see, for example, Canaiolo below) or international varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and, latterly, Syrah.

Canaiolo Nero – This used to be the most popular variety in Chianti before the 19th century but now has become merely a blending option in most Tuscan denominations. On its own, it provides red-berried fruit and some floral notes with only light tannins. As such, it is said to promote the floral and red-berried character of Sangiovese when blended with that grape. By contrast, some think that **Merlot** and especially **Cabernet Sauvignon** as a blending partner are too dominant in terms of the taste of the final wine, even in small proportions.

WINEMAKING

Historically, Sangiovese was part of a blend that could include white varieties. It was typically kept on the skins for very long periods (30 days and more) and aged in large, neutral casks for an extended time (e.g. 3–4 years) to soften the tannins. More recently, and in the absence of white grapes, maceration times have been reduced to 7–10 days for early-drinking wines with medium tannins and to 15–25 days for wines with high tannins intended for ageing. Investment in the 1990s helped to spur the change through the use of temperature-controlled stainless steel fermentation tanks to preserve primary fruit. However, for some producers, concrete fermentation tanks are making a comeback.



Barriques and large casks for maturing wine

Trends in maturation in wood for wines intended for ageing have also changed. The latter decades of the last century saw the widespread use of a proportion of new oak barriques, adding a layer of vanilla and sweet spice to the flavour of Sangiovese. Since the beginning of the new century, there has been a move to using older barriques, 500-litre tonneaux and the traditional large, neutral, oak cask. The aim is for the subtle sour red cherry fruit to be the main point of interest of the wine, not the additional flavour from oak. Inexpensive wine is aged for short periods in stainless steel tanks.

DENOMINATIONS, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

Chianti DOCG

Modern Chianti DOCG is a large area that covers much of central Tuscany. It surrounds the smaller Chianti Classico. It is an area of hills, although many vineyards are at lower elevations (less than 300 m above sea level) than Chianti Classico. Producers have a choice of bottling the wines either as Chianti or, if they are within one of the seven subzones, as Chianti with the name of the subzone, with slightly tighter regulations (see [Chianti subzones](#) below).

The blend for Chianti DOCG is 70–100 per cent Sangiovese. The blending varieties may be local varieties or international ones, although Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Cabernet Franc may not exceed 15 per cent. Ten per cent of white grapes continues to be allowed (e.g. Trebbiano Toscano), but they are rarely used. Minimum alcohol level is 11.5% abv, with the subzones mostly requiring a minimum of 12% abv.

Maximum yield is 63 hL/ha in Chianti. This moderately high yield level with less intensive work in the vineyard and short ageing (Chianti DOCG can be released for sale in March following the vintage) in large format stainless steel or old oak contributes to the light to

medium flavour intensity and the lower cost (and therefore price) of Chianti, as compared to denominations such as Chianti Classico. They are typically medium bodied and medium alcohol. Wines are inexpensive to mid-price and quality ranges from acceptable to very good.

Any Chianti to be released as Riserva must be aged for two years before release, raising the cost of producing the wine. Apart from the wines of certain subzones, no wood ageing is required.

Chianti subzones

Within Chianti DOCG, there are seven named subzones; for example, Chianti Colli Fiorentini (Chianti from the Florentine hills). The subzones have yields set at a lower maximum of 56 hL/ha, enhancing the possibility of higher-quality wine but reducing production volumes. For Riserva wines, in the subzones Chianti Colli Fiorentini, Chianti Colli Senesi and Chianti Rufina at least six months of this period must be in wood barrels.

The named subzones have some differences between them. For example:

Chianti Rufina DOCG – This is a small zone and the coolest one due to a combination of altitude (around 350 m) and cooling winds descending from a pass in the Apennines to the north. This results in wines of high acidity and more restrained fruit character when young, but with a capacity to age and develop complexity in bottle (e.g. Selvapiana). Because of its proximity to Florence, it has a number of aristocratic estates (e.g. Frescobaldi at Nipozzano); however, it has not attracted the same level of investment and new owners as Chianti Classico or Montalcino and therefore has not seen the same raising of quality standards in general. Wines are typically mid-priced with a few premium examples, with quality ranging from good to outstanding.



Cordon-trained Sangiovese, Chianti Rufina

Chianti Colli Senesi DOCG – This is the largest of the subzones and generally warmer than the others, producing fuller bodied and richer wines. It requires a higher proportion of Sangiovese in the blend (minimum 75 per cent) and less of the Cabernets (maximum 10 per cent, singly or together). Wines are inexpensive to mid-price and quality ranges from acceptable to very good.

Chianti Classico DOCG

Chianti Classico is the hilly area between Florence and Siena, with the best wines typically coming from 200–500 m above sea level. The elevation contributes to cool nights, lengthening the growing season and promoting full ripeness and high acidity. Soils here are schistous, crumbly rock with clay and marl (known as *galestro*), calcareous soils with clay (known as *alberese*), and sandstone and sandy soils. The soils combine good drainage with sufficient water-holding capacity. *Galestro* is said to give aromatic wines with the potential to age. Soils with more clay are said to give wines with more structure and body. Some work on the hillsides has to be done by hand, raising costs.

The wines must have a minimum 80 per cent Sangiovese, although in practice most wines are around 90 per cent Sangiovese with a wide choice of supplementary varieties, both local (e.g. Canaiolo) or international (especially Merlot). No white varieties are permitted in the blend. Maximum yield is restricted to 52.5 hL/ha. Chianti Classico can be released no sooner than October in the year after the harvest, adding to the cost of production. Riserva must be aged for two years from 1 January after the harvest. The label may mention the name of a single vineyard. Wine made from grapes grown in this area may not be bottled as Chianti DOCG.



Preparing new vineyard in rocky soils, Chianti Classico

There is a range of styles of Chianti Classico. The importance of export markets and the prominence of Super Tuscan wines in the 1980s and 1990s led to wine being made in what is referred to as an international style (deeper colour, plummy fruit from the presence of Merlot, evident vanilla from new oak). The recent trend has been towards a more traditional style: paler colour, sour cherry fruit from dominant Sangiovese grapes, restrained new oak. The wines are typically medium flavour intensity, with some pronounced examples. Prices range from mid-price to premium, with quality ranging from very good to outstanding. There are numerous significant producers including Fontodi and Castello di Ama.

To promote the top tier of Chianti Classico, the Consorzio introduced a new designation in 2013: Chianti Classico Gran Selezione. The grapes must come from a single vineyard or an estate owned by the producer and be aged for a minimum of 30 months (no requirement to age in wood). From 2021, the wines must be a minimum of 90 per cent Sangiovese and the use of international grape varieties is excluded. In addition, producers may name one of 11 UGAs, defined subzones, on labels if the grapes were grown within the UGA. *Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive*, additional geographical units, are either a municipality (e.g. Radda) or a specified subzone (e.g. Panzano). These revisions will apply to Gran Selezione wines only in the first instance.

Brunello di Montalcino DOCG

Montalcino is in southern Tuscany and the denomination is named after the town of the same name. The wine was first bottled and sold in 1865 by the Biondi-Santi family, who remained the only commercial producer until the Second World War. Since the 1970s, there has been massive expansion of planting, led by Banfi, a wine company that originated as an importing company in the USA. Having had great success exporting Lambrusco to the USA and other countries, Banfi purchased land and planted Muscat in the southern part of Montalcino, but this proved unsuccessful. The vines were grafted over to Sangiovese and this subsequently led to a large commercial



Hillside vineyards in Montalcino

success for Banfi's Brunello di Montalcino in the USA and other markets. Eleven producers and 65 ha in the 1960s have grown to more than 250 producers and 2,100 ha today.

In general, the area is warmer than Chianti Classico and drier, as it is protected from rain by Monte Amiata to the south, but in most years there is still adequate rainfall for vines to flourish. These conditions allow the production of wines with ripe fruit, full body and high alcohol. The area also benefits from cooling breezes at night from the Mediterranean Sea, 40 kilometres (25 miles) away, helping to preserve acidity.

Elevation varies. The vineyards in the longest established area just south of the town are more than 500 m above sea level, while other parts of the DOCG are much lower (minimum

120 m). The majority of the denomination is hilly. Similarly, soils are very variable. The northern part has more *galestro*-based soils with higher elevations leading to wines that are more aromatic. There is more clay in the lower, warmer, southern part, which in turn produces fuller bodied wines. Many producers blend grapes from several parts of the area. There is a debate about whether or not to introduce subzones.

Brunello di Montalcino DOCG must be 100 per cent Sangiovese. Maximum yield is restricted to 54 hL/ha. Brunello requires extended ageing: it may not be released until 1 January four years after the year of harvest, and ageing must include two years in oak containers. (For Riserva, five years including two in oak.) The ageing requirements add considerably to the cost of production, due to the need to invest in oak containers and to have space to house them. As in Chianti Classico, there was experimentation with new French oak barriques, but the trend in this century has been to return to large format oak. The label may mention the name of a single vineyard. Prices are mainly premium and super-premium. The wines are typically of outstanding quality with intense sour cherry fruit, high levels of acidity and tannin (giving a capacity to age) and showing complexity, even on release, due to the tertiary notes developed in the long, initial ageing. There are many significant producers, including Casanova di Neri and Soldera.

Rosso di Montalcino DOC is also required to be 100 per cent Sangiovese. It is often made from young vines or from less promising sites. It is aged briefly in stainless steel or oak to preserve primary fruit and can be sold after a year. The wines are typically mid-price and are good to very good in quality. This category also allows producers to declassify to Rosso DOC wine that would normally be Brunello di Montalcino DOCG in very difficult vintages (e.g. 2014).

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG

This region is in south-eastern Tuscany, between Montalcino and the border with Umbria. It is a historic denomination reflected in the name of the top wine, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. Vineyards are planted on east and south-east facing slopes at elevations of 250–600 m, with the higher vineyards producing more aromatic wines due to a longer ripening season. Soils include heavy, cool clay (producing fuller bodied wines) and sand (more aromatic wines).

Wine styles vary. Traditionally, the wines were full bodied and austere, requiring ageing in the bottle. However, some major companies have been working to produce wines that can be drunk in their youth; methods include shorter extraction periods and the use of small format French oak for maturation.

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano must be made from 70–100 per cent Sangiovese. Maximum yield is 56 hL/ha. The wine must be aged for a minimum of two years from 1 January after the vintage, with a mandatory period of 12–24 months in wood (dependent on the subsequent amount of bottle age, if any, before release).



Sangiovese ripening in Montepulciano

Moderate yields and ageing requirements add cost to the wine. Riserva wines must be aged for three years (but have no additional requirement for ageing in wood). Names of vineyards may be included on the label. As with Montalcino, Rosso di Montepulciano DOC is a category available for less-expensive wines for early drinking, which can be released on 1 March of the year after the grapes were harvested. Vino Nobile is typically mid- to premium price and very good to outstanding quality. Significant producers include Avignonesi and Contucci.

A proposal to introduce a new, higher quality, category from defined zones within Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is in the final stages of approval. This will:

- require the wines to be a minimum of 85 per cent Sangiovese and the complementary grapes will exclude international varieties;
- allow producers to name one of 12 *pievi* (UGAs, defined zones) on labels if the grapes were grown within that *pieve*.

Due to the success of the major Tuscan denominations, the supply of Sangiovese-based and other wines from other areas of Tuscany has increased.

Morellino de Scansano DOCG

Close to the coast of southern Tuscany, this warm area is moderated by altitude (average 250 m) and cooling winds from the sea at night. As a result, the wines have ripe fruit, some black fruit notes alongside sour cherry, medium to medium (+) acidity and ripe medium (+) tannins. Morellino di Scansano requires 85 per cent Sangiovese with a maximum yield of 63 hL/ha. The wines are good to very good quality and inexpensive to mid-price. A few producers have a track record of outstanding wines at premium prices. Examples include Le Pupille and Morisfarms.

Bolgheri DOC

Bolgheri is a compact, now densely planted denomination on the Tuscan coast specialising in red Bordeaux blends. Some single variety wines, white wines and rosé wines are also made. The red Bordeaux blends represent 80 per cent of the area planted. A warm climate, with cool nights due to the area's proximity to the sea, leads to fully ripe grapes. Winds from the sea throughout the year help to reduce the risk of fungal diseases. Initially, vines were planted at 400 m above sea level, but when it was found that lesser altitudes also experienced cooling winds, planting on lower sites took place. Soils are varied. Rain is sufficient and well distributed throughout the year. As in other Tuscan denominations, irrigation is allowed. As the area has been planted recently, irrigation has been widely installed. There is relatively little rain during the harvest period. Vineyards are typically planted as cordon-trained, spur-pruned with VSP, being easy to maintain and to produce high-quality fruit. Densities are around 6,000 vines per ha (rather higher than in traditional areas of Tuscany), enabling competition between vines to reduce yields and raise the concentration of the final wine.

The wines were initially bottled as *vino da tavola* as there was no DOC until 1983. Bolgheri was not an area known for wine and the wines were made predominantly with Bordeaux varieties that were not typical in Tuscany. Bolgheri DOC regulations allow up to 100 per cent of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, up to 50 per cent of Syrah and Sangiovese and up to 30 per cent of other varieties, for example, Petit Verdot. As noted, in practice, Cabernet Sauvignon dominates the blends.



Vineyard at Ornellaia, Bolgheri

Bolgheri Rosso Superiore has the same options for varieties but more restricted yields, 56 hL/ha rather than the 63 hL/ha for Bolgheri Rosso. The latter can be released from September of the year after harvest. Bolgheri Rosso Superiore must be aged for two years following 1 January of the year after the harvest, one of which must be in oak. Typically, Rosso Superiore wines are aged in French barriques, with a significant proportion of new oak. Moderate yields and the use of new French oak barrels raises the cost of production. Small amounts of white wines are made, especially from Vermentino, which can also be bottled as a DOC Bolgheri wine.

Bolgheri Rosso Superiore is typically deep ruby in colour, with medium (+) to pronounced intensity blackberry and red plum fruit, sometimes with green bell pepper notes in cooler years, and vanilla and sweet spice from oak, with medium (+) acidity and high tannins. The wines are very good to outstanding in quality and premium to super-premium in price.

Bolgheri Sassicaia DOC – This is a separate DOC for the single estate, Tenuta San Guido, which produces Sassicaia. The DOC regulations require a minimum of 80 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon and minimum ageing of two years, 18 months of which must be in 225-litre oak barrels.

The highest quality wines, especially Sassicaia and Ornellaia (owned by the Frescobaldi family), are regarded as world-class examples of Bordeaux style wines, collected and traded around the world. These and other companies also make less-expensive second wines on the Bordeaux model.

The Bolgheri Consortium represents more than 90 per cent of the vineyards planted, with the 10 largest producers holding 70 per cent of the vineyards. The amount of wine being made has grown rapidly (the area under vine expanded from 190 ha in 1994 to nearly 1,400 ha in 2022) reflecting the success of the DOC.²

Maremma Toscana DOC

Based on the former IGT of the same name, this denomination covers an extensive area, encompassing the entire province of Grosseto, adjacent to the coast of southern Tuscany. The volume of production has risen rapidly since the DOC was created in 2011. The DOC

allows a wide range of varieties, both local and international. Nearly half of the grapes grown are Sangiovese, with Cabernet Sauvignon and Vermentino (white) the next most important varieties. Permitted yields are moderately high (e.g. 77 hL/ha for single variety red wines) and prices mostly inexpensive to mid-price. A handful of high-quality estates sell their Bordeaux blends within the DOC at premium and super-premium prices, for example Le Pupille and Rocca di Frassinello.

Vernaccia di San Gimignano DOCG

This is an historic white wine region, mentioned several times in the Middle Ages, within the western side of Chianti DOCG and recipient of Italy's first ever DOC in 1966 (now DOCG). The region has dry summers and is windy, reducing the presence of fungal diseases. Vines are planted on hillsides between 200–400 m, giving good sunlight interception and drainage. The wine is made from the grape variety of the same name, minimum 85 per cent, with up to 10 per cent of Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling being allowed. The wine is typically of medium intensity on the nose with lemon and floral notes and has medium (+) acidity.



Sandstone soils at San Gimignano

The variety, grown on the local sandstone soils, ripens mid to late in the season and can produce very high yields. This may have contributed to a lessening of its reputation as too many wines were produced that lacked concentration. The DOCG now limits production to 63 hL/ha.

Sales of Vernaccia di San Gimignano have reduced by 10 per cent in the ten years to 2022. Half of the wine produced is exported, with the US, Germany and Switzerland being the biggest markets. There is a very large local market to the tourists visiting the famous town with its remaining 14 medieval towers; half of the the wine sold in Italy is sold locally. Prices are mainly inexpensive to mid-priced with a few producers getting premium prices for their highest quality wines (e.g. Panizzi and Montenidoli). Since 2014, the Consorzio has been promoting an initiative to reduce the carbon footprint of its wines (by reducing the amounts of chemicals used, reducing energy and water consumption, and using lighter bottles).³

Red wines from Sangiovese and international varieties are also made in the area and can be bottled under the separate DOC San Gimignano.

Toscana IGT

In addition to the DOC(G)s, producers also have the option of Toscana IGT with higher permitted yields. Any registered grape variety or varieties may be used, and the grapes can be grown anywhere in Tuscany. While most of the wines are inexpensive to mid-priced, some of Tuscany's most expensive and prestigious wines are bottled as Toscana IGT, including Masseto (Merlot from Frescobaldi's Tenuta dell'Ornellaia) and Solaia (Cabernet Sauvignon/Sangiovese/Cabernet Franc blend from Antinori).

Vin Santo

Vin Santo is an amber coloured, sweet wine made by the *appassimento* method (see the section on Drying Grapes Off The Vine, in Specific Options for Wines with Residual Sugar in D1: Wine Production), most often using a blend of Trebbiano Toscano and Malvasia. It is a style of wine prevalent throughout Tuscany and permitted within many denominations.

The DOCG Vernaccia di San Gimignano permits this style, as do three separate DOCs for Vin Santo that correspond to the zones of Chianti, Chianti Classico and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. For example, Trebbiano Toscano and Malvasia, singly or combined, must be a minimum of 60 per cent in Vin Santo Chianti Classico DOC. Traditionally the grapes were dried in the loft of the house, their juice fermented and then the wine aged in small barrels sealed and stored unopened in the loft for many years (5–10 years). Many wineries produce small batches in this way, while a few producers (e.g. Avignonesi, Montepulciano) produce significant volumes.

Minimum ageing in barrels is two years in Chianti Classico and three in Montepulciano, but this is often exceeded. The combination of rising and falling temperature and oxidative ageing without topping up leads to the amber colour and a complex palate of dried fruit (apricot, lemon) flavours, nutty notes, as well as a variable level of volatile acidity. The wines are sweet but with balancing high acidity and medium (+) to high alcohol. Modern production either continues in this way or controls the fermentation temperature to retain some primary fruit. The wines are premium or super-premium in price due to the small batch production and years of ageing before sale.

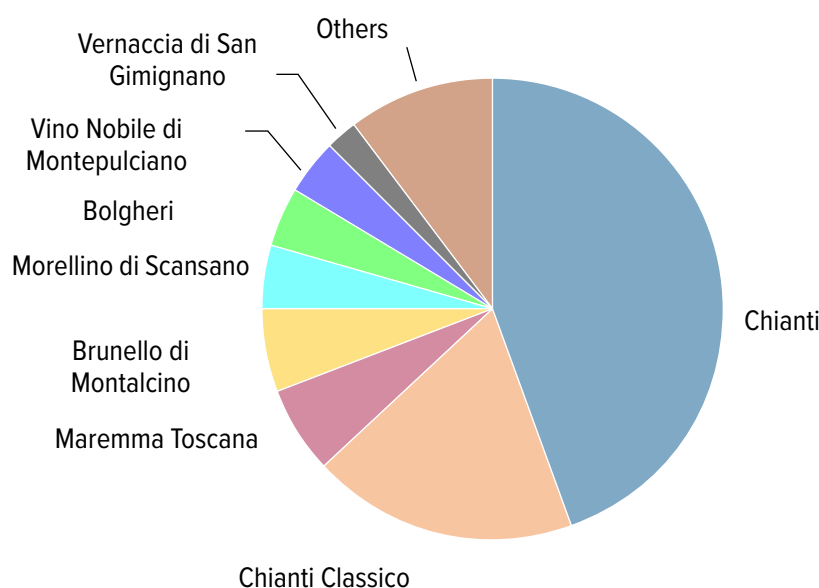
There is also a much rarer red version, based on Sangiovese, called Occhio di Pernice ('eye of the partridge').



Seal on Vin Santo barrel

WINE BUSINESS

Tuscan DOCs and DOCGs by volume, 2021



Note: Rosso di Montalcino and Rosso di Montepulciano are included in the 'others' category.

Source: Federdoc⁴

In terms of price, most of the Tuscan regions sell both a wine of the previous vintage and wines which must be aged for longer periods. Depending on the denomination, the former wines can be inexpensive (e.g. Chianti DOCG) or premium (Rosso di Montalcino). The longer aged wines are premium to super premium. The requirement to age Brunello for a minimum of five years adds additional cost to production. These include space in the winery and containers to age wine for many years before release, as well as the delay in the return on investment.

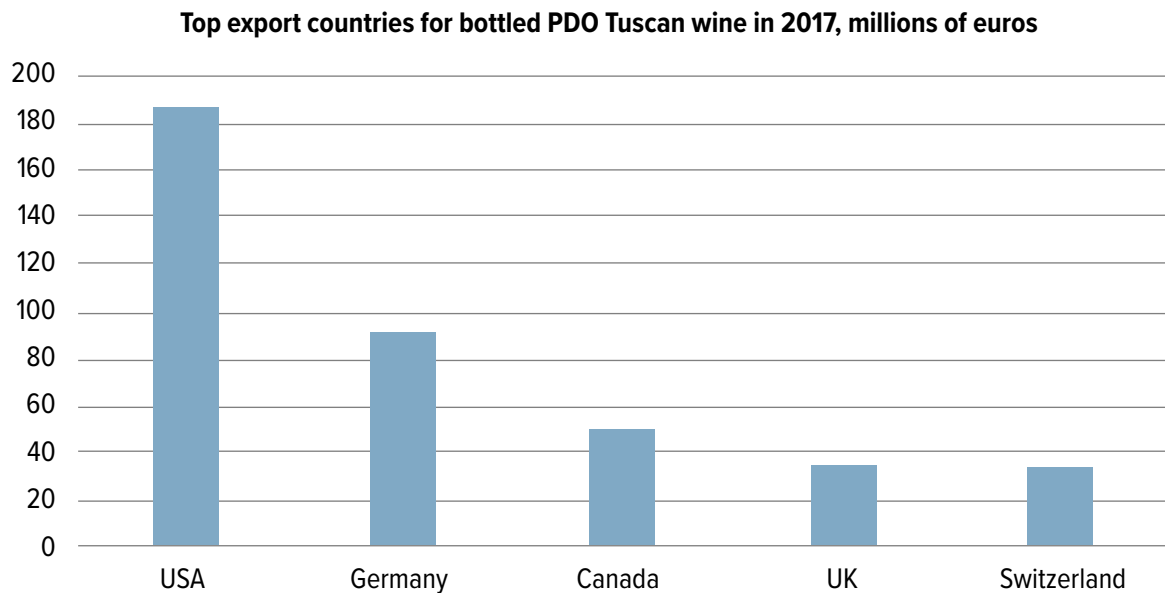
Within Tuscany, DOC(G) wines account for around 65 per cent of all wine production. As can be seen in the chart above, Chianti accounts for nearly half of all DOC(G) wines and Chianti Classico is the next biggest segment. By contrast, in terms of value, Chianti Classico (€112 million) leads, followed by Chianti (€87 million) and then Brunello di Montalcino (€61 million).⁵

The structure of the industry is very different across the denominations. Fourteen per cent of Chianti is made by co-operatives, but only six per cent of Chianti Classico and one per cent of the wine from Montalcino.⁶ There is no co-operative-made wine from Bolgheri.

For Chianti DOCG, within Italy in supermarkets and deep discounters half of all the wine is sold in bottles up to 0.75 litre and the next most important format is the 'brick' (see section on Packaging and Closures in D1: Wine Production), typically 500 mL to 1 L (nearly 30 per cent), reflecting a low average price. In 2022, it was the highest selling red wine in Italy by volume and value.⁷

Export markets are very important to some of the Tuscan regions. Chianti Classico exports nearly 81 per cent of its production, with the main markets being the USA (46 per cent of exports by volume), much bigger than Canada and UK, the next largest (2022 figures).⁸ Montalcino exports 63 per cent by value, with the USA, Canada and Germany as the main markets. Similarly, nearly 70 per cent of Montepulciano is exported, with Germany, the USA and Switzerland being its largest markets.⁹

60 per cent of Chianti DOCG wine is exported, mostly at low prices. The most important export markets are Germany followed by USA and UK.¹⁰ As has been seen, Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino are successfully exported, with the most important markets being the USA, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.



Source: Regione Toscana.¹¹

As elsewhere, within Italy there is a marked difference between the route to market for inexpensive wines that will be sold through supermarkets and inexpensive bars and restaurants, and mid-price to super-premium wines that will be sold through specialist wine shops and higher priced restaurants.

The marketing of Tuscan wines varies according to the denominations. Broadly, Chianti, Chianti Classico and Montepulciano are promoted with reference to their place in Tuscan wine history, while wines from Montalcino and Bolgheri are promoted as wines of world-class quality. Wine tourism and the construction of architecturally ambitious wineries



Petra winery, Tuscany

have been a marked feature since the 1990s, building on Tuscany's reputation as a highly desirable holiday destination.

The wines are promoted to the trade through events at the *antepime*, a once-a-year opportunity for buyers and wine journalists from around the world to taste the new wines of last year's vintage, aged and Riserva wines.

Tuscany has increased opportunities for wine tourism, including the building of modern architect-designed wineries. For an overview, see [Toscana Wine Architecture](#)

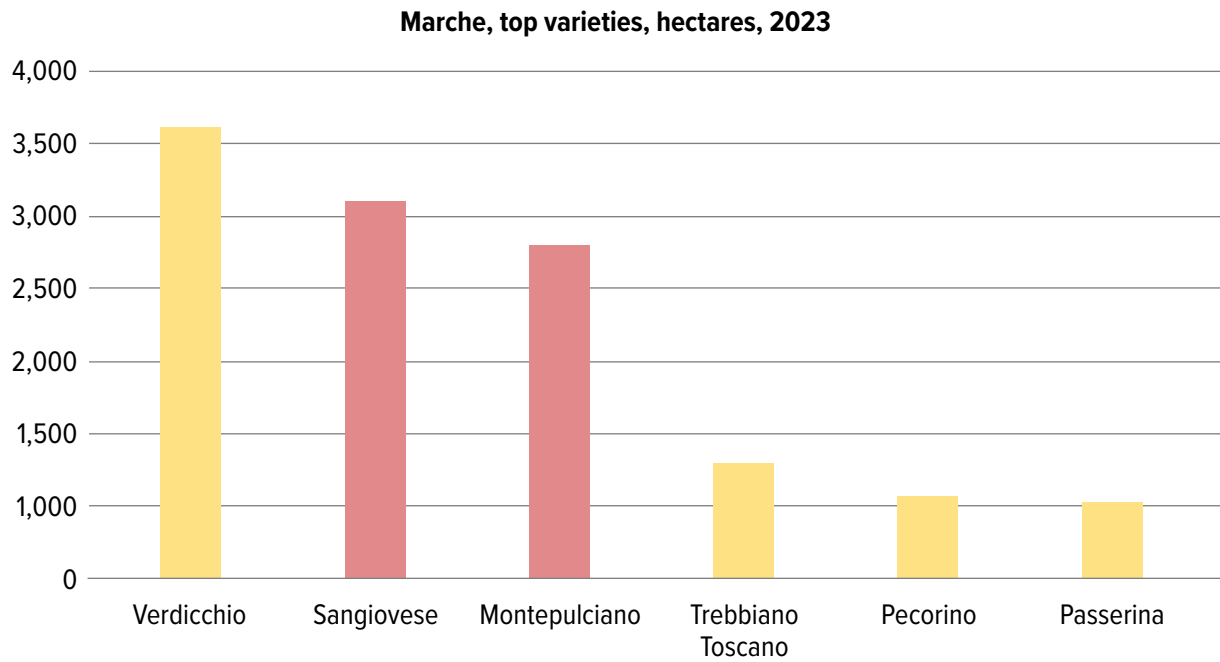
18.2. Marche

The Marche region (sometimes translated as the Marches) is in central Italy and extends from the Adriatic Sea to the Apennines. It is bordered by Emilia Romagna to the north, Tuscany to the west and Abruzzo to the south. It mainly produces red wines from blends of Montepulciano and Sangiovese (for basic information on this variety, see Tuscany: [Sangiovese](#)) and white wines from Verdicchio. The two black grapes now produce three times as much wine as is made from Verdicchio, which used to be the region's main variety. Most of the wines, both white and red, are in the inexpensive to mid-priced range with Riserva wines attracting premium prices.

Land suitable for grape growing is on the low hills rising from the coast, and in some higher zones, with a broadly Mediterranean climate featuring hot summers and little rainfall in summer. Inland, west of Ancona, the climate is more continental in character with helpful dry autumns. As in Tuscany, the soils are principally limestone and clay, with a good balance between being free-draining and retaining sufficient water for vines through the summer. The main grape varieties grown in the Marche region are detailed in the chart.



Vineyard in Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi DOC



Source: Agenzia per le Erogazioni in Agricoltura¹²

WHITE WINES: GRAPE VARIETIES, WINEMAKING AND DENOMINATIONS

Verdicchio

In the vineyard, this variety needs to be given space, as the first four buds are sterile, and it therefore is planted at low densities. A late ripening variety, it retains high acidity levels. It needs to be given a long time in the vineyard to ripen fully to make high-quality wines, but this exposes the crop to the risk of late season rain. It is susceptible to both forms of mildew and to botrytis bunch rot.



Young and 20-year old Verdicchio

The wines have a pale lemon colour, medium (–) aromatic intensity with blossom, apple, lemon, fennel and almond notes with a slightly bitter finish, high acidity and a medium body. Wines are made across the whole quality range from acceptable to outstanding.

Most entry level Verdicchio does not go through malolactic conversion (to preserve the crisp high acidity). The wines are aged for 4–6 months in stainless steel and bottled for early release and consumption. Some producers choose to put their Riserva wines through malolactic conversion for creamier acidity. A long ripening season can produce wines with high fruit concentration and high acidity. Riserva wines will often be aged on the lees in old oak barrels for additional texture, but not oak flavours. These wines can be aged for a decade or more, developing dried fruit and mushroom tertiary notes.

The two main denominations are:

- **Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi DOC** is in the low hills west of Ancona in the valley with clay and limestone soils producing floral and fruity wines. This is much the larger of the two denominations with nearly 10 times as many hectares as Matelica.¹³ Permitted yields are high at 98 hL/ha. Classico is reserved for grapes from the historic heart of the appellation and Classico Superiore for wine from lower yields (77 hL/ha, giving wines of greater concentration). Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva was promoted to DOCG. It requires minimum 18 months of ageing, which may be, but does not have to be, in wood. This additional ageing requirement adds to the cost of production.
- **Verdicchio di Matelica DOC** is in a higher zone in the foothills of the Apennines, protected from the influence of the sea by mountains and hence with a continental climate of hot days and cold nights, resulting in a longer ripening season and higher retained acidity than vines grown closer to the sea. The soils are a mixture of sandstone with fossils and contain less clay than in Castelli di Jesi; they are therefore faster draining. The permitted yield is marginally lower than for the basic Castelli di Jesi (91 hL/ha). The wines here are fuller bodied but with higher acidity and are less overtly fruity. Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva DOCG requires minimum 12.5% abv and 18 months of ageing, which may be, but does not have to be, in wood.

Pecorino

Pecorino is planted mostly in the south of the Marche and farther south in Abruzzo. It has high disease resistance. Like Verdicchio it is best trained long (Guyot or pergola) as it has sterile buds near the trunk. Clonal selection has focused on rectifying its low productivity. It ripens early, thus avoiding late season rain. It can be vinified before other local varieties creating space in the winery. The wines tend to be high in alcohol (e.g. 14.5% abv) due to the low productivity but this can be balanced by the grape's natural high acidity. The wines have herbal notes (sage, thyme, mint), with crisp apple and pear fruit and are medium bodied. The wines can be sold as Marche IGT or, if grown within the Offida area and in line with its regulations, as **Offida Pecorino DOCG**. Some of the DOCG wines are released early to retain primary fruit while a minority are aged for 12–18 months in old oak barrels for additional texture. The wines from this white variety have grown rapidly in popularity since the turn of the millennium.

Passerina

This variety is also grown in the Marche and in Abruzzo. It has good disease resistance and high production. It ripens later than Pecorino, thus making it more vulnerable to late season rain. Passerina has naturally high acidity, but can lose acidity quickly once fully mature, and therefore harvest needs to be scheduled with this in mind. It produces ripe lemon and yellow apple fruited wines. The wines can be sold as Marche IGT or, if grown within the Offida area and in line with its regulations, as Offida Passerina DOCG.

Biancame

This is a local variety making fresh and crisp white wines for local consumption.

Trebbiano Toscano

As in other regions of central Italy, Trebbiano Toscano (see [Tuscany](#)) is grown for wine that is consumed locally.

REDS WINES: GRAPE VARIETIES, WINEMAKING AND DENOMINATIONS**Montepulciano**

This is a key black grape variety in Marche for both its quantity and its quality. In the Marche, it is often blended with Sangiovese. The high-quality wines tend to be at least 70–85 per cent Montepulciano. The variety is resistant to botrytis bunch rot and downy mildew but is susceptible to powdery mildew. It needs a long season to ripen fully (to avoid bitterness) but



Large format oak for red wines

tends to ripen unevenly within individual bunches. This leads to either lower quality or to the need to select carefully, which adds cost.

The wine made predominantly from Montepulciano is deep ruby in colour. It is susceptible to developing reductive sulfur compounds during winemaking and requires frequent aeration to avoid the development of off odours. Maceration times depend on the style being made: short 4–5 days for simpler, lighter wines and a longer period of around 20 days for higher-quality wines. However, care must be taken not to extract too much tannin.

The wines are made in two contrasting styles:

- ripe, medium intensity red cherry fruited wines with no oak flavours with a medium body and medium tannins (short maceration);
- medium (+) to pronounced intensity red cherry and black plum fruited wines with oak aromas and medium (+) tannins (long maceration of top quality fruit followed by ageing in oak, typically large oak vessels).

Montepulciano, often blended with Sangiovese (which contributes acidity), is a major part of **Rosso Piceno DOC** (35–85 per cent Montepulciano) which covers a large area of the middle of the Marche. **Rosso Piceno Superiore DOC** is a higher-quality designation that can only be made from fruit grown in 13 townships in the Ascoli Piceno province in the south of the region. This denomination requires a slightly higher alcohol level and a minimum of one year of ageing. Within this geographical area, a further distinction was made with the creation of the Offida DOCG, 100 kilometres (60 miles) south of Ancona. **Offida Rosso DOCG** must be 85–100 per cent Montepulciano and the wine must be aged for 24 months of which 12 must be in wood before release.

South of Ancona the **Rosso Conero DOC** and **Conero Riserva DOCG** are dedicated to Montepulciano wines (minimum 85 per cent in both cases). In the case of Conero Riserva DOCG, the blending variety, if used can only be Sangiovese. Conero Riserva DOCG must have a minimum two years of ageing (of which one in wood) before release.

Sangiovese

In the Marche, as noted, it is used typically as the second variety in blends with Montepulciano. It contributes red cherry fruit, high acidity and high tannins.

WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

These have been dealt with under the varieties.

WINE BUSINESS

The IMT (*Istituto Marchigiano di Tutela Vini*) is a consortium dedicated to the promotion of the wines of the region. It represents three-quarters of the individual denominations and 80 per cent of the exports of the region.

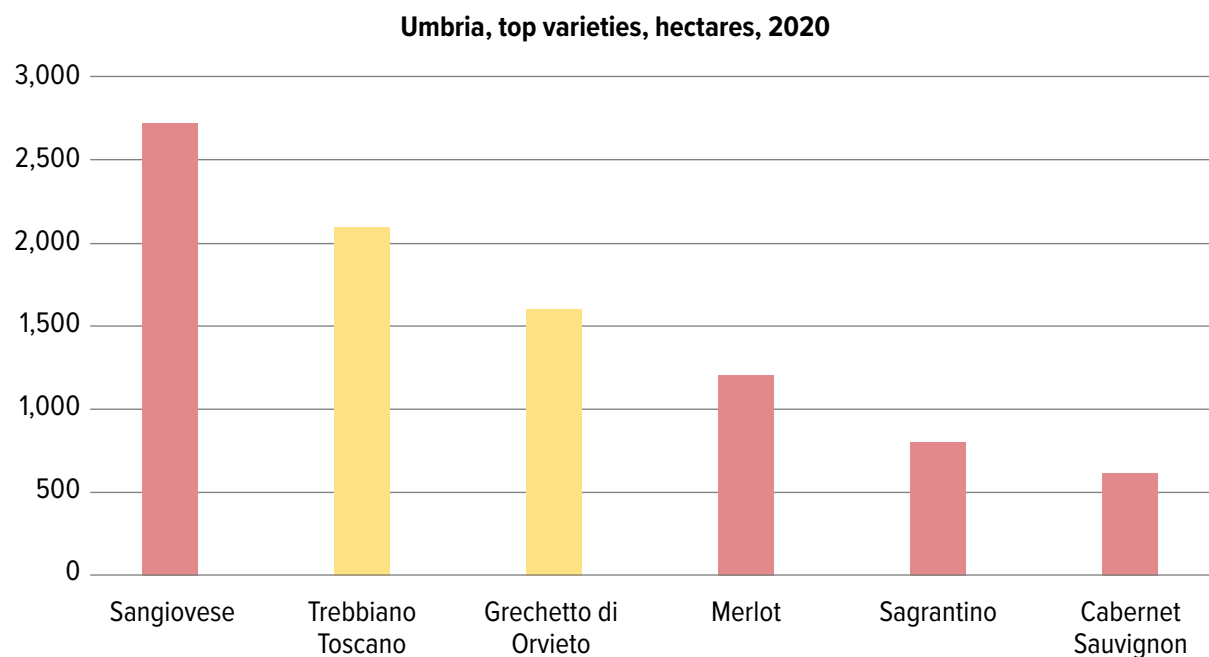
Significant private companies include Umani Ronchi (70 per cent exported) and Fazi Battaglia. Co-operatives include Moncaro, which exports 55 per cent.

Most of the wine of the Marche is sold in Italy but about one-third by value of wine produced is exported. The USA, Canada, China and Japan are the leading markets.¹⁴ In the past inexpensive Verdicchio sold very well both in Italy and in export markets but now has been overtaken by Pinot Grigio from other regions, leading to a marked drop in the area

planted.¹⁵ The current challenge is for producers to build an international reputation for quality, rather than quantity.

18.3. Umbria

Umbria is a landlocked region south of Tuscany with a predominantly hilly landscape and sharing a similar climate to inland hilly Tuscany. In addition to growing varieties common to central Italy, its two most important wines are the white wine, Orvieto DOC, and the red, Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG, both made from grape varieties not previously discussed.



Source: Italian Wine Central¹⁶

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

Climate

Umbria has a warm, mildly continental climate. Hot summers can lead to periods of heat stress for the vines. An average of 800 mm of rain falls mainly in autumn and winter. This gives enough water to be stored in winter to keep vines supplied through the growing season, and lessens the risk of fungal diseases. The risk of rain in September and October, can affect the harvest period. However, there are sufficient dry autumns that allow picking for late harvested and botrytised styles.

Grape varieties

Grechetto – Grechetto di Orvieto is a white, thick-skinned variety, with resistance to fungal disease that makes it suitable for late harvesting. It has good resistance to downy mildew. Wines made with Grechetto have low to medium intensity lemon and white flower aromas and flavour, with high acidity and a medium body.

Sangiovese – See under [Tuscany](#).



Sagrantino

Sagrantino – This is the speciality black variety of Umbria. It needs full sunshine and heat to ripen and is moderately productive. The vineyards are principally on hillside sites, 220–470 m, for the best sunlight interception and good drainage. It is trained with either Guyot or cordon with spurs and VSP trellised. The main pests are tiny spiders that can live on the hairy underside of its leaves and reduce vegetative growth, vine moths and downy and powdery mildew, depending on the conditions in any year.

Sagrantino is a very tannic variety. The varietal wines are deep ruby in colour, with medium (+) to pronounced blackberry and red plum fruit, high acidity and high tannins, which require long ageing in the production phase and often in bottle before the wines are ready to drink.

DENOMINATIONS, WINEMAKING, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

Most Umbrian whites are blends that include Trebbiano Toscano (see under [Tuscany](#)) and/or Grechetto.

Orvieto DOC

Orvieto is situated mainly on the western edge of Umbria with a small extension into neighbouring Lazio. There is a Classico zone around the town of the same name. The wine must be a minimum 60 per cent of Trebbiano Toscano and/or Grechetto and be grown at 100–550 m above sea level. Better quality wines are likely to include more Grechetto for greater flavour intensity. The wines typically have medium (–) intensity lemon and apple fruit, top end of medium alcohol and medium (+) acidity and a light body. Maximum yields are 77 hL/ha. The wines are typically acceptable to good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced. The



White grapes entering destemmer

Superiore category has a much reduced maximum of 56 hL/ha, resulting in wines with higher concentration. The DOC includes provision for dry, off-dry and sweet wines. Labelling options for sweet wines include the categories of late harvest wines (*vendemmia tardiva*) and wines made from grapes affected by noble rot (*muffa nobile*).

The dry wines are fermented in stainless steel at cool temperatures to retain primary fruit. They are aged briefly in stainless steel tanks (to retain fresh fruit) before being released for drinking within 1–2 years. Significant producers include Barberani.

Montefalco DOC Rosso and Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG

The wine called **Montefalco DOC Rosso** is a blend in which Sangiovese is the main variety (60–70 per cent), with Sagrantino (10–15 per cent) and other permitted varieties. Maximum yield is 77 hL/ha. Minimum ageing is 18 months before release. By contrast, **Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG** must be made from 100 per cent of the Sagrantino variety. For the latter, yields are restricted to 52 hL/ha. The wine must be aged for 37 months before release, of which one year must be in wood. These lower yields and the long maturation time add to the cost of production. Single vineyard wines may carry the name of the vineyard. The wines are typically very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium priced.

In the past, as elsewhere in Italy, very long maceration periods (e.g. two months) were normal for Montefalco Sagrantino. These have been reduced to 2–3 weeks in most cases to avoid the extraction of harsh tannins. Some companies have softened the wines by ageing in new French oak barriques (e.g. Arnaldo Caprai, two years in barriques), while others prefer ageing in traditional large casks, followed by extended bottle ageing.

The Montefalco consortium has initiated a series of projects to raise the standard of grape growing across the denomination as a whole. It has created a network of weather stations, collected and processed the data and made it available so that growers can be informed of impending threats of disease. This has enabled growers to reduce the number of treatments in the vineyard and the amount of chemicals used.

Read more about a sustainability initiative in Montefalco as implemented by the winery Arnaldo Caprai: [The Sustainability Project](#)

The production of Montefalco Sagrantino DOCG has grown rapidly, with hectares under vine rising to 390 hectares by 2022. 60 per cent is exported, especially to the USA, Germany and Canada.¹⁷

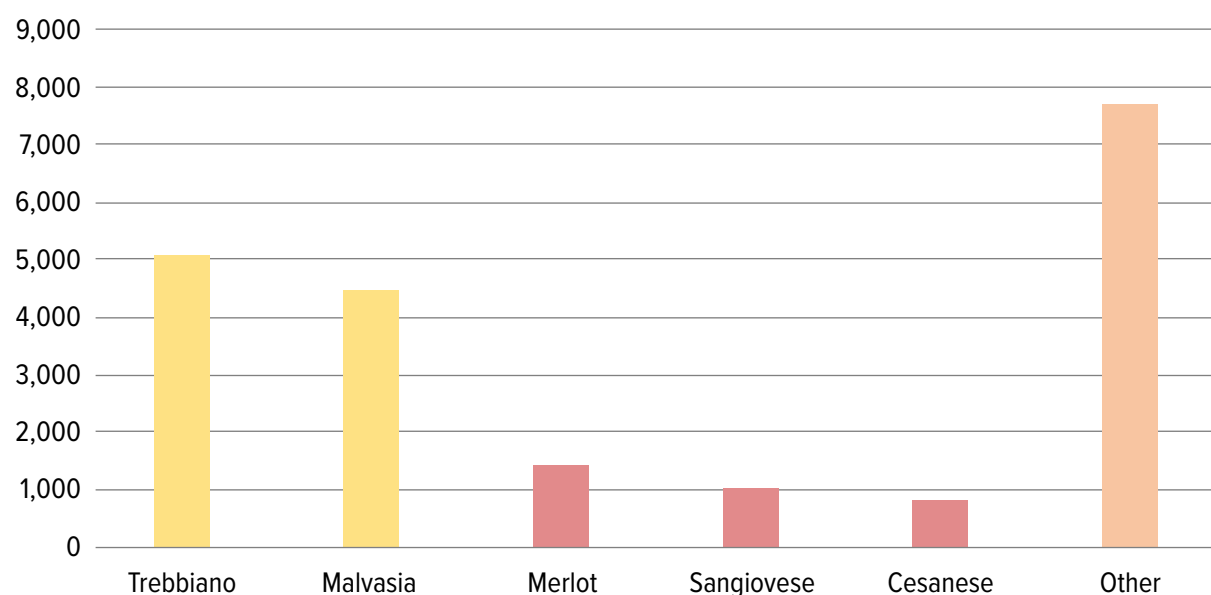
WINE BUSINESS

Umbria has several large companies that have been innovators in the fields of organic viticulture (e.g. Barberani in Orvieto DOC), recovery of energy from biomass (Lungarotti) and sustainability (Arnaldo Caprai). Montefalco Grape Assistance is an example of a regional sustainability initiative.

18.4. Lazio

Lazio, the central Italian region that includes the city of Rome, was historically important for wine production in Etruscan and Roman times and has continued to provide locally made wines to the city. Today it is known principally for its white wines that constitute roughly 70 per cent of its production. They are made mainly from Malvasia and Trebbiano Toscano. Some red wines are produced, mainly from Merlot, Sangiovese and the local variety Cesanese. Vineyard area has declined in recent decades, although some DOCs, especially Frascati, continue to be well known. A small number of high-quality wineries are also well known, for example Falesco, a home estate of Riccardo Cottarella, one of Italy's leading oenologists and consultants.

Lazio, top varieties, hectares, 2020



Source: Italian Wine Central¹⁸ Note: The Malvasia in this chart is Malvasia Bianca di Candia.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

Climate

Lazio has a warm, Mediterranean climate that is moderated by altitude on low hills (up to 300 m) and by cooling winds from the sea, enabling grapes to ripen regularly. The hazards from the climate are occasional spring frost, hail, excessive heat in summer and rain during the harvest period. Rainfall is normally adequate with little falling in the summer months, so reducing the threat from fungal diseases.

Grape varieties

Trebbiano di Toscana – see [Tuscany](#).

Malvasia Bianca di Candia – This white variety has good resistance to disease and produces high yields. Its juice is prone to oxidation in the winery and therefore has to be handled carefully to avoid it losing freshness and becoming too deep in colour. In blends it contributes medium (–) intensity lemon and apple fruit, medium alcohol and medium (+) acidity and a light body. The amount planted has decreased since the early 1990s.

Malvasia del Lazio – Malvasia del Lazio is a cross between Muscat of Alexandria and a local variety. It produces wines with grapey and peach flavours. It must be harvested at exactly the correct time as its acidity drops quickly once it is ripe. It was commonly planted in Lazio until the 1960–70s, but was widely replaced due to its lower yields and lower disease resistance in comparison with Malvasia Bianco di Candida and Trebbiano Toscana.

Cesanese – This black variety is semi-aromatic, very late ripening and high yielding but with high quality potential. It is prone to powdery mildew. It is vulnerable to autumn rains and to a failure to ripen fully, resulting in low quality wines. Some Cesanese is grown inland and on higher slopes (up to 600 m), giving greater diurnal range and hence fresher fruit with higher acidity.

Cesanese can be used in a number of denominations including DOCG Cesanese di Piglio, which requires a minimum 90 per cent of the variety. The wines have pronounced aromas with red cherry and rose-petal scented fruit, with medium tannins and acidity and high alcohol.

WHITE WINES: WINEMAKING, DENOMINATIONS, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

Frascati DOC

Historically Frascati was made predominantly from Malvasia del Lazio. However, today **Frascati DOC** can be made from Malvasia Bianca di Candia and/or Malvasia del Lazio, provided these two varieties singly or together make up at least 70 per cent of the wine. Wines with more flavour are made from the latter variety, but the former is often preferred by growers because of its higher disease resistance and higher yields. Further, the wine can include up to 30 per cent of Trebbiano Toscana, a neutral but high yielding variety. This results in wines that are cheaper to produce but with lower flavour intensity. High yields are permitted (maximum 105 hL/ha), contributing to wines of light flavour intensity.

Most Frascati DOC is made at cool fermentation temperatures to retain primary fruit. The wines are stored briefly in stainless steel tanks (to retain fresh fruit) before being released for drinking within 1–2 years. Most wines are acceptable to good quality, with some very good examples. The wines are inexpensive to mid-price.



Frascati vineyard

Frascati Superiore DOCG

This DOCG has the same rules about grape varieties as Frascati DOC. It was introduced in 2011 with lower yields (maximum 77 hL/ha) with a view to improving quality (greater flavour intensity and fuller body than standard Frascati). The wines have to be aged for one year before release, with no requirement to age in wood. Frascati Superiore DOCG is now about 20 per cent of the total of vineyards devoted to Frascati production.¹⁹ Quality is good to very good and the wines are mid-priced.

Most Frascati Superiore is aged in stainless steel to preserve primary fruit. Some producers make one more ambitious wine (mid-priced to premium) which may be barrel fermented.

Castelli Romani DOC

This DOC covers a broad area south of Rome and has many other DOCs within it, including Frascati. More white wine is made than red and these whites must be made from Malvasia del Lazio, Malvasia Bianca di Candia or Trebbiano Toscano at up to 120 hL/ha, resulting in light flavour intensity.

RED WINES: WINEMAKING, DENOMINATIONS, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

As noted, Merlot and Sangiovese are the leading black varieties by volume of production. The wines are mostly inexpensive to mid- priced and drunk locally.

The regulations for the DOCs that are made predominantly from Cesanese (for example Cesanese di Affile DOC) allow up to 65–70 hL/ha, which can result in wines of light flavour intensity. The wines are typically aged in stainless steel tanks or large format oak, as additional

oak flavours would mask the aromatic qualities of the grape variety. The wines are mainly mid-priced with a few premium examples, for example from Damiano Ciolli.

WINE BUSINESS

While the wines of Lazio were famous in Roman and medieval times, the emphasis in the middle to late 20th century was on high volume, inexpensive production by large companies. As a result, the reputation for quality fell and production decreased.

The area of hectares under vine for Frascati dropped by 15 per cent in the 10 years to 2017.²⁰ For Frascati, co-operatives continue to play an important role, being responsible for around 20 per cent of production. 60 per cent of Frascati is exported.²¹ The main export markets are the USA, Canada and Germany.

In addition to servicing the considerable local demand from Rome and its tourists for inexpensive, acceptable to good quality wines, Lazio also has a number of high-quality small producers creating high-quality wines, for example, Casal Pillozzo.

18.5. Abruzzo

Abruzzo is on Italy's eastern coast, south of the Marche and north of Puglia. It is Italy's fifth largest region by production volume,²² ahead of Piedmont and Tuscany, with production volumes being led by co-operatives. The black Montepulciano variety dominates planting, though not quite to the same extent as Sangiovese in Tuscany.

The region produces three main wines, a white, a rosé and a red:

- **Trebbiano d'Abruzzo**, a crisp white with high acidity, typically unoaked
- a medium to medium (+) bodied rosé, **Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo**, made from the Montepulciano variety
- the red **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo**, also made from the Montepulciano variety.

In addition, Abruzzo makes single varietal wines from Pecorino and Passerina.

THE GROWING ENVIRONMENT AND GRAPE GROWING

The region can be divided between hillside vineyards under the high Apennines and the flatter, coastal zone. The hillsides have a warm continental climate with cold snowy winters and warm, short summers with cooling influences from the mountains. These cooling influences result in a longer season for ripening grapes and therefore sugar accumulation is slowed allowing greater time for the development of aromas and flavours. The risks here are late spring frosts and autumn rains at harvest time.

The coastal zone has a warm Mediterranean climate. There is lower risk here of spring frost and of rain at harvest



Pruning pergola-trained vines



Coastal vineyard

time. Temperatures are higher than on the hillside and soils are more fertile. As a result, the vineyards in general are better suited to the production of high volume wines.

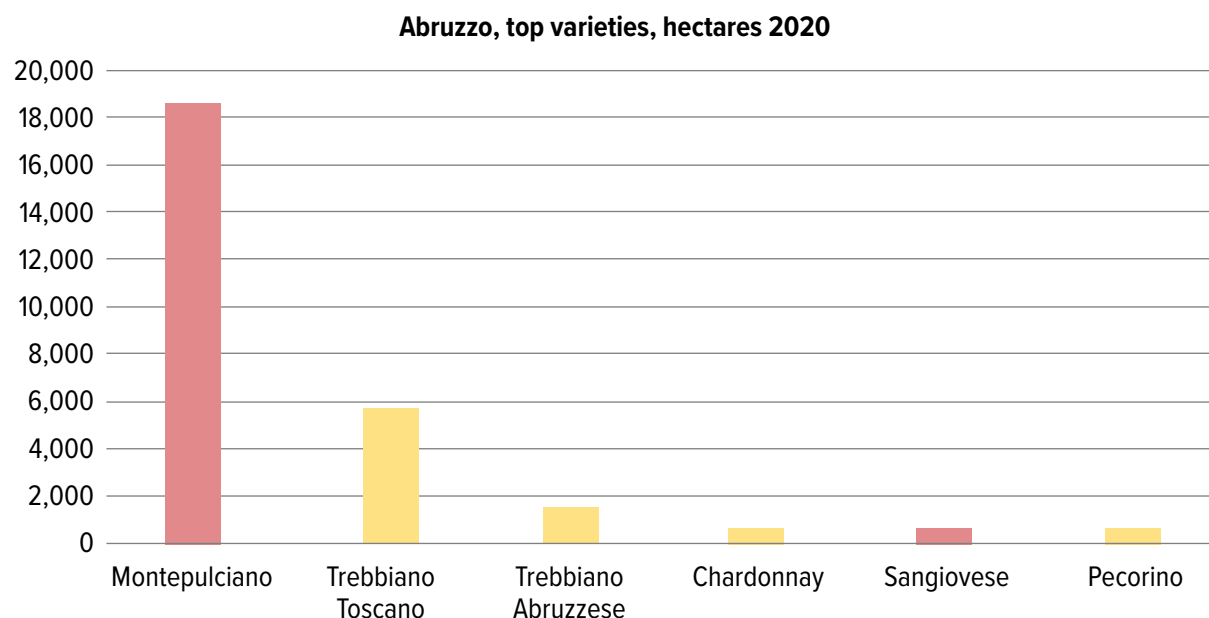
In general in Abruzzo, planting density used to be low (2,500 vines per hectare) and pergola the typical form of training. High yield allowances led to a significant amount of wine with medium to low concentration. However, quality has begun to rise with denser planting, newer forms of training and lower yields for the better quality wines.



Winter in Abruzzo vineyard

In the coastal zone, cordon-trained spur-pruned or Guyot is more common, allowing working with machines and mechanical harvesting, bringing down the price of wine. Work in the hillside vineyards is mostly by hand, though some will be able to use tractors to work the land. Harvesting is by hand.

Grape varieties



Source: Italian Wine Central²³

Montepulciano – For the grape variety, see under the [Marche](#).

Trebbiano Toscano – See under [Tuscany](#).

Trebbiano Abruzzese – Considerable confusion exists around this variety. Its relationship, if any, to the other varieties called Trebbiano has not yet been clarified.²⁴ The variety is often called Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, but this is the name of the DOC, not the variety. Trebbiano Abruzzese is mid to late ripening, vigorous and highly productive. It is well suited to growing on pergola systems as high training is appropriate to the size the vines and provides the fruit with shade. It is prone to powdery mildew.

DENOMINATIONS, WINEMAKING, WINE LAW AND REGULATIONS

The regulations for the wine called **Trebbiano d'Abruzzo DOC** allow the use of either or both Trebbiano Abruzzese and Trebbiano Toscano. The latter is usually thought to be of lower quality (low flavour intensity). Further, yields of up to 98 hL/ha are allowed, leading to many wines of light to medium flavour intensity at best. Nowadays the wine is typically made protectively with cool fermentation temperatures, using either ambient or cultured yeast. Malolactic conversion is typically blocked to preserve acidity. The wines are typically aged in stainless steel.

While most Trebbiano d'Abruzzo is acceptable to good quality, a few estates produce very good to outstanding wines. Examples include Valentini (whose Trebbiano d'Abruzzo is often

regarded as one of Italy's greatest white wines and commands a super-premium price) and Masciarelli.

The rosé wine **Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo DOC** must be made from a minimum of 85 per cent of the Montepulciano variety. Historically, it was medium intensity pink, a much deeper colour than many modern rosés, but now wines are often made to be of lighter intensity. They can be made using short maceration (generally up to 12 hours) or direct pressing. Some producers make rosé as a by-product of their red wine production (*saignée*). They are medium to medium (+) bodied. The Montepulciano variety is rich in anthocyanins so maceration times are short to avoid the extraction of too much colour.

As with Montepulciano in the Marche, **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC** is made in two styles, described above in the section on the Marche. The naturally high tannins of Montepulciano may be softened by very light extraction, which is achieved by short time on the skins. As the grape is rich in anthocyanins, brief maceration will still produce a medium colour intensity. Some producers also use up to 15 per cent of Merlot or Primitivo to complement 85 per cent of the named variety. High-quality wines will be given extended time in barrel to allow the tannins to soften and may benefit from bottle age too. Large oak vessels are most common, with some producers using small French oak barriques for their best wines.

There are three levels for red wines made from Montepulciano:

- Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC must be grown on hilly sites, Yields of up to 98 hL/ha are allowed. If grown at this maximum level, the grapes produce wines of light to medium concentration.
- By contrast, the five official subzones of this DOC restrict yields to 66 hL/ha and require 18 months of ageing, half of which must be in wood. At this yield, the wines will have more concentration than the basic DOC wines.
- The newer Colline Teramane Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOCG, a former subzone of the DOC, but now a DOCG in its own right, has the same restricted yields as the subzones but must be aged for two years before release, of which one must be in wood.

Unusually, the DOC wines do not have to be bottled in the region of origin. This has led to the criticisms that this freedom has contributed to lower quality standards and to the use of wine from Abruzzo to add colour and alcohol to red wines in other regions and countries.

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wines are typically deep ruby in colour, medium intensity red cherry and plum fruited, medium (+) body and high tannins as well as inexpensive to mid-priced. At the mid-price level, wines will typically be aged in oak. Some of the DOCG wines are very good quality and premium priced.

WINE BUSINESS

Three-quarters of wine production comes from the region's 40 co-operative wineries. The wines are sold in Italy and are exported, especially to northern Europe, the USA and Canada, often because of the good value for money. The majority of wines are inexpensive. A very small number of premium and super-premium priced wines are sold in specialist wines shops in Italy and abroad. Significant producers include Valentini (super-premium priced), Masciarelli, and among the co-operatives, Cantina Tollo, which exports 35 per cent of its production.²⁵

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