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Central Italy This part of Italy is most widely associated with the grape variety Sangiovese and the most famous wine made from it, Chianti. However, there is more to central Italy than this. Refreshing whites and premium full-bodied reds from both local and international grape varieties are made with great success throughout the region. This chapter will cover the regions of Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio, Marche and Abruzzo.

CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

South of the Po Valley, the wine regions of central Italy are dominated by the Apennine Mountains, which run the length of the Italian Peninsula. Grapes are planted in the hills and valleys of this mountain range with altitude providing a moderating influence on the hot climate. Coastal regions on both sides of the country benefit from cooling sea breezes.

TUSCANY

Tuscany stretches down the western coast of central Italy. The region can be divided roughly into three parts: the mountainous Chianti region in the north, the hills and valleys to the south and the flat coastal plain.

Sangiovese is the dominant and most prestigious grape throughout these three areas making wines with high levels of acidity and tannin. It is late to ripen, so needs a warm climate, hence its home in this part of Italy. The wines have aromas of red cherries, plums and dried herbs and are usually aged for a period of time in oak to soften the tannins and sometimes add spicy flavours.

Both small barrels and larger casks can be used. With bottle age the wines develop meaty and gamey aromas. Red wines predominate in this part of Italy although some white wines are also made throughout the region.

Chianti

Chianti is based in the foothills of the Apennines between the cities of Pisa, Florence and Siena. It covers a wide area, which is divided into seven sub-zones. Sangiovese is the dominant grape, but the wines are often blends with small amounts of other black grapes (of both French and Italian origin). Producers of large volumes of Chianti will source their grapes from the greater region and use **Chianti DOCG** on the label. Higher-quality Chianti DOCG wines may be made from the grapes from a particular sub-zone, the name of which can appear on the wine label (note this does not include Chianti Classico DOCG). The sub-zones of Chianti Rufina DOCG and Chianti Colli Senesi DOCG are particularly well known for the quality of their wines.

Chianti Classico DOCG has its own DOCG and is not a sub-zone of Chianti DOCG. Its vineyards are at higher

A view across the vineyards in Chianti Classico, showing the hilly landscape and the importance of altitude and aspect.



altitudes than those of Chianti DOCG, slowing the ripening of Sangiovese, and resulting in wines with greater acidity and more herbal aromas. Chianti Classico wines must be aged for 12 months before they are released onto the market. **Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG** must be aged for 24 months of which at least three months must be spent bottle ageing. *Gran Selezione* is the highest designation for Chianti Classico wines; the grapes must be sourced from a single estate and the wines aged for six months longer than *Riserva*. There are no stipulations concerning oak ageing, and it is therefore the producer's decision as to whether the wine is matured in oak and for how long. In practice, however, the vast majority of wines are matured in oak for at least part of their time before release.

Southern Tuscany

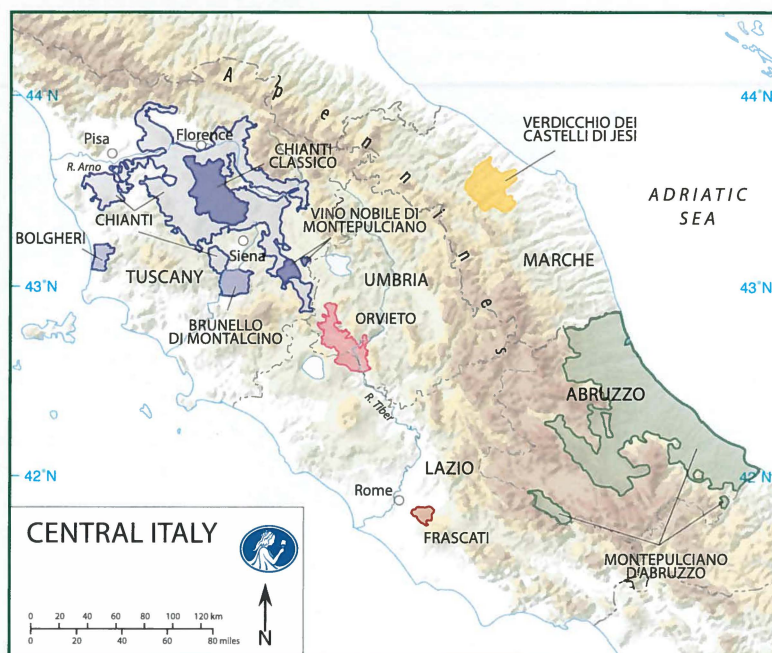
The vineyards of southern Tuscany are at lower altitudes than those in the north and have a warmer climate; however, cool maritime breezes from the south-west can moderate the temperatures. **Brunello di Montalcino DOCG** and **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG** are the best known appellations in the region. Due to the climate, wines from this part of Tuscany are often more intense and fuller-bodied than the wines from Chianti. The regulations for Brunello di Montalcino stipulate that the wines must be made entirely from Sangiovese and undergo a minimum ageing of five years before they are sold, two of which must be spent in oak. **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** can be a blend of Sangiovese with other permitted varieties and must be aged for a minimum of two years before it is sold. Producers from both Brunello di Montalcino and **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** can declassify their wines to DOC as necessary (for example, if there is a poor vintage or the vines are very young). These wines are called either Rosso di Montalcino DOC or Rosso di Montepulciano DOC respectively.

The Coast

The relatively flat coastal region of Tuscany is cooled by sea breezes rather than altitude. Black Bordeaux varieties and a number of other international grapes are widely planted here.

The Tuscan coast witnessed the birth of the first 'Super-Tuscan'. The original wine was made from Cabernet Sauvignon and sold for a premium price despite not being eligible for PDO status. Super-Tuscans were a turning point for the international image of Italian wines as they re-established Italy's reputation for excellence.

Many Tuscan producers have followed this example and make high-quality wines from international varieties, sometimes with Italian varieties as part of the blend. Many are bottled as **Toscana IGT** but the relatively recently formed appellations of **Bolgheri DOC** and **Maremma Toscana DOC** both permit wines to be made entirely from non-Italian varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.



UMBRIA

Umbria has a climate similar to Tuscany's but it is more continental without any influence from the Mediterranean. The region is known for its white wine **Orvieto DOC**, which is a blend of **Grechetto**, **Trebbiano** and, often, a few other local grapes. The wines are light in body with medium to high acidity and flavours of ripe grapefruit and peaches. The best examples tend to be those with the most Grechetto in the blend. Wines are made protectively and undergo cool fermentation in stainless steel.

Umbria's most prestigious red wine is Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG, made from the thick-skinned Sagrantino grape.

LAZIO

To the south of Tuscany is the region of Lazio. The best known wine is **Frascati DOC**. Situated in the hills to the south of Rome the vineyards are cooled by both altitude and a number of small nearby lakes offering perfect conditions for white grapes. The wines are blends of **Malvasia** and **Trebbiano**, usually made in a fresh, unoaked style. They are medium in body with medium to high acidity and flavours of citrus fruit, sometimes with the Malvasia providing floral, orange blossom aromas.

MARCHE

Marche is located on the eastern side of the Apennines and is best known for its white wines made from the **Verdicchio** grape. The most famous of these is **Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi DOC**. Verdicchio is naturally high in acidity with flavours of green apples, lemons and sometimes displays notes of fennel and

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almonds. Many of the wines are simple and fruity, but the best have greater concentration and can develop notes of honey and almonds with bottle age. The red wines of the region are blends of Montepulciano and Sangiovese, of which the best known is Conero DOCG.

ABRUZZO

Below Marche is the region of Abruzzo. The region is famous for its black variety **Montepulciano**, which gives

its name to the main wine **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC** (no relation to the town of Montepulciano in Tuscany). The Montepulciano grape has high levels of colour and tannins, medium acidity and flavours of black plums and cherries. Many wines are simple and fruity, made without any oak ageing, but the most concentrated examples are often matured for a short time in oak.