

REGIONS OF THE MONTH



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PUGLIA

Puglia, the heel and spur of the Italian boot, is rich in art and architecture, which reflect the many cultures that have dominated the region over the centuries. The Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Normans, Swabia's, and Spaniards among others have all left their imprints there. The octagonal fortress in Castel del Monte was built by Emperor Frederick II in 1240. The towns of Otranto and Gallipoli evoke the Greeks. And much of Lecce is Baroque in style, having flourished in the 17th Century. Alberobello is the capital of the "trulli," which are whitewashed, circular buildings with conical roof tiles, and whose origins no one is certain of.

Known as Europe's wine cellar, Puglia produces more grapes than any other region and normally surpasses Germany and all but six other nations. But in the past, it has sacrificed quality for quantity. Many of its wines were without distinction and were consumed locally or used for blending in the wines of other regions. But during the last ten years, producers have been making good to excellent reds, whites, and rose` from a range of grape varieties.

In the north, the terrain is hilly and the climate temperate. White varieties which dominate are Verdeca, Bianco d'Alessano, Malvasia, Tribbiano, and Bombino Bianco and in the Itria valley, Locorotondo and Martina Franca. Red wines are the native Uva di Troia and Bombino Nero, as well as Montepulciano and Sangiovese. The lading DOC zone of northern Puglia is Castel del Monte, which makes a fine rose and a full-bodied red. In much of the north, the emphasis is on red wines.

The traditional wines of Salento in the south are the powerful reds Negroamaro, Malvasia Nera, and Primitivo, related to California's Zinfandel. Salice Salentino is the most prominent DOC zone in Salento and is noted for its rich red and for its rose, some of which ranks with Italy's finest.

CAMPANIA

The capital of Campania, Naples was founded by the Greeks, enlarged by the Romans, and subsequently invaded by the Normans, Hohenstaufen, French, and Spanish among others. Established by the Greeks in the 11th Century BC, Naples was the earliest of a cluster of far flung settlements throughout southern Italy. Many important figures of the age, including Pythagoras, Archimedes, and Aeschylus lived in these settlements, and today some of the best ruins of the ancient Greek world can be found there. Along with mathematics, architecture, and drama, the ancient art of winemaking also flourished in the hills and valleys of the region as the cult of Dionysus spread. Aglianico and Greco, vines that the Greeks introduced, are still highly prized. The Greek historian Herodotus called this part of Italy *Oenotria*, meaning the land of wine.

In the 16th Century, Sante Lancerio, the bottler of Pope Paul III, raved about the wines of the Kingdom of Naples, and their reputation continued into the 19th Century. But subsequently, viticulture went into decline for decades as growers left the land, and the majority of remaining producers ignored DOC regulations and instead chose to plant prolific vines rather than those that would produce premium grapes. In the last twenty years, producers have once again recognized the potential of southern Italy in general and have modernized their viticulture and winemaking techniques. Fiano di Avellino and Greco di Tufo are among Italy's most distinguished white wines, while Taurasi from Aglianico has been called the "Barolo of the South" because of its aging ability. This is Campania's only DOCG wine to date. Mastroberardino is a distinguished winery in the region as is Feudi di San Gregorio, Villa Matilde, Mustilli, and Casa d'Ambra.



Italian Winery of the Month



Villa Matilda

The Favored Wines of Roman Poets Virgil and Horace

Villa Matilda

Located in Campania in the town of Celolone, Villa Matilda is owned by brother and sister Maria Ida and Salvatore Avallone, whose estate is one of the most notable in the region. In the early 1950s, their father Francesco Paolo Avallone, together with a research team at the University of Naples, set out to find the best surviving vines of the reds Aglianico and Piediroso, and the white Falanghina, which the Greeks had brought to the area and which were celebrated by the Roman poets Virgil and Horace. The property consists of 272 acres, divided into Tenuta di San Castrese, where Aglianico is planted, and Tenuta di Parco Nuovo, closer to the coast and suitable to white Falanghina. The estate is flanked by properties in the Benevento and Avellino provinces, respectively Rocca dei Leoni, planted to both Aglianico and Falanghina, and Tenute di Altavilla where Greco di Tufo and Fiano

are grown. Some of the vineyards are located on hillsides at almost 800 feet above sea level with volcanic soils rich in organic matter. Highly esteemed Riccardo Cotarella is the consulting winemaker, who works with some of the most prominent wineries in Italy and France. Villa Matilda has received wine rating board Gambero Rosso's highest *Tre Bicchieri* (Three Glasses) award multiple times for both the red and white Falerno.

Matané

Originally from New Zealand, Neil Empson and wife Maria Empson, born in the United States, have been Italian residents for over 36 years, exporting a distinguished portfolio of some of Italy's best wines to the United States. In February 2007, they were joined by their daughter Tara Smeralda and visited a family friend Valentino Sciotti, who is a winemaker in southern

See WINERIES next page



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WINES OF THE MONTH



ARTISAN SERIES

Matané 2007 Primitivo

Made from 100% Primitivo grapes, planted at San Marzano in Puglia's Salentino peninsula, the wine is almost purple and has rich and spicy aromas and flavors, reminiscent of California Zinfandel. In this season, the Matane' Primitivo cries out for anything grilled or barbecued, from red meat and game to summer vegetables and also hard cheeses. Serve at cool room temperature.

Cantele 2007 Chardonnay

This wine is 100% Chardonnay from estate vineyards at Guagnano near San Pietro Vernotico in Brindisi. Chardonnay is the principal white grape of French Burgundy, including the wines of Chablis and Cote de Beaune. The grape became the darling of winemakers internationally in the late 1980s, when consumers began to feel comfortable requesting wine by specific grape type. Chardonnay caught on in a big way and was planted in many wine-producing countries. What makes the grape so attractive to growers and winemakers is that it responds well to many different growing conditions and winemaking techniques. Chardonnay arrived in Puglia 30 years ago to improve its sparkling wine production. Local growers foresaw its potential and began to experiment with

continued next page

WINERIES from cover

Italy's Puglia region, an ancient wine area, wind-swept by the currents of the Adriatic and Ionian seas. Together with Valentino Sciotti's winemaker Filippo Baccalaro, the group created a joint venture, which produces the indigenous wines of the region, especially Negro Amaro and Primitivo, related to California's Zinfandel. Their first vintage in 2007 received enthusiastic reviews, and they increased production in 2008.

Cantele

Towards the end of the 1970s, Giovanni Batista Cantele and his wife Teresa Manara decided to transfer 30 years of experience in the wine world

WINEMAKER SERIES

Villa Matilda 2006 Aglianico

From vineyards plated at 400 meters above sea level at Villa Matilda's Rocca dei Leoni estate, this wine is 100% Aglianico, which is a corruption of the word *Ellenico*, the Italian name for Greece, where the varietal was first cultivated. Dense purple in color, the distinctive bouquet brings to mind spices, blackberries, and ripe red fruit, typical of the grape variety. On the palate the wine is full, rich, and velvety with fine tannin texture. Serve at cool room temperature

Matané 2007 Primitivo di Manduria

Made from 100% Primitivo grapes, planted at San Marzano in Puglia's Salentino peninsula, the wine has a dense purple pigment that paints the glass with its color. Its opulent bouquet suggests ripe cherries and plums integrated by nuances of chocolate and vanilla. Aged in French oak barrels for four months, the Matané Primitivo di Manduria had round, silky-smooth tannin texture that coats the tongue with pleasure. Serve at cool room temperature, and given the season, serve with fine meats, grilled or barbecued, including lamb or game.

of northern Italy to the region of Puglia, and the Salento zone in particular, where they saw tremendous potential. Thus the winery Cantele was born. During the 1980s, sons Augusto and Domenico took over from their parents. From the beginning, the objective was to develop the potential of the local, historic varieties of Primitivo and Negroamaro and to add the international varieties of Chardonnay, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The construction of a new winery in Guagnano and the entry of Gianni, Paolo, Umberto, and Luisa to the business, the third generation of the Cantele family, have given a new energy to the company.

WINES OF THE MONTH

COLLECTOR SERIES

Villa Matilde 2004 Cecubo

The Cecubo is a blend of 45% Abbuoto, 35% Piediroso, and 20% Primitivo. Aged for 12 months in French oak barrels, only a third of which were new, the wine is an ancient blend based on the rare Abbouto grape saved from extinction. Villa Matilda is one of the few estates to use this grape, which has deep, lush, aromas and flavors of black fruit and cinnamon with sweet tannins and a spicy, peppery finish. Serve at cool room temperature.

Cantele 2007 Chardonnay (con't)

making still wines. Twenty years ago, the Cantele family planted its first Chardonnay vines, and now the variety makes one of their most important white wines. Aged for three months in French oak barrels, the wine has a pale yellow color, an intense bouquet, and a balanced palate, showing ripe fruit and subtle oak flavors. Serve chilled with appetizers, dinner salads, vegetable dishes, and soft cheeses.

Villa Matilde 2004 Taurasi

Known as the "Barolo of the South," noble Aglianico thrives on the rocky volcanic ridges of Campania and Basilicata. In the Campania region, the varietal is known as Taurasi and in Basilicata as Aglianico del Vulture. Brought to these areas by ancient Greek settlers in the eighth and seventh Centuries B.C.E., Aglianico continued to be cultivated by local populations after the Romans colonized the region in 181-180 B.C.E. Aged in French oak barrels for 18 months and for another 12 month in bottle before release from the winery, the Villa Matilde Taurasi has intense ruby red color with pronounced purple reflections in its youth but acquires a garnet red color with orange hues as it ages. The bouquet is rich and complex with notes of licorice, brushwood, berry fruit, and violets. The wine is at once austere and elegant with a lush structure and sweet, round tannins. Decant and serve at cool room temperature.

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