



FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

**F**riuli and Giulia both refer to Julius Caesar, who conquered the area after a long struggle with the native inhabitants. Friuli, a contraction of the Latin for “Forum Julii,” includes the large provinces of Udine and Pordenone between the Adriatic and Austria, while the smaller Venezia Giulia in the southeast was part of the Venetian empire. Before joining Italy in 1866, the region belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire. Today, the region borders Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia and has a sizable Slovenian minority.



The Carnic and Julian Alps cover 43% of the region and open onto the Adriatic basin. Friuli’s most exceptional DOC zones are in the higher areas of Collio and Collio Orientale on terraced slopes called “ronchi” and in the hills above the seaport and regional capital of Trieste. The other four DOC zones cover the low hills or plains.

Friuli has built a reputation for white wines like Tocai Friulano, Malvasia, Ribolla, and Verduzzo, which are native to the area, but it has a long tradition with Chardonnay, Sauvignon, the Pinots, Traminer, and Riesling too. The Friulians have also rediscovered certain neglected varieties, such as Picolit, one of Europe’s finest sweet whites around 1800. Verduzzo also makes an exquisite light dessert wine. And Ribolla Gialla has benefited from new wine making methods and is now produced as a dry white.

But the Friulians are also making attractive reds as well. Refosco can be either light and fruity or a more substantial wine, which can age. Franconia and Tazzeighe make distinctive reds, but the Schioppettino grape may have the greatest quality potential.

VENETO

**V**enezia, a city built into the sea, is like no other, haunted by the princes and poets of its noble past and by centuries of tourists. The cities of Padova, Vicenza, and Verona, originally frontier posts on the Roman trade route between Venezia and Genova, grew into Renaissance splendor and are marvels in their own right. In the 16th century, the region’s great architect Andrea Palladio worked throughout the area and his buildings are everywhere, in the cities and in the countryside. Nature exhibits its own marvels in the region, the spectacular Dolomite mountains in the north, the rolling Euganean hills in the south, vast Lake Garda, Italy’s largest lake, on the eastern border, and to the west, the Adriatic with its beaches and ports.

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Today, Veneto is a thriving agricultural center, a lush land of vines, ranking third after Apulia and Sicily in wine volume but the first with classified DOC wines. There are three general areas of premium production: the western province of Verona in the hills between Lake Garda and the town of Soave, the central hills in the provinces of Vicenza, Padova, and Treviso, and the eastern plains of the Piave and Tagliamento river basins along the Adriatic coast northeast of Venezia.

Verona is the leader in classified DOC wines and the site of Vinitaly, the largest wine trade fair in the world. A major part of the DOC wines in the region are Soave, Bardolino, and Valpolicella, a blend of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. When young, Valpolicella is a full, fruity red, but when the grapes are partly dried, they are made into Amarone, one of Italy’s most noble wines. Bardolino is made from the same grapes as Valpolicella but is a lighter version. Similar to Soave, Bianco di Custoza is another DOC white as is Lessini Durello, a steely dry wine, usually sparkling.

The central hills produce whites similar to Soave as well as Tocai, the Pinots, Merlot, and Cabernet. Prosecco, a dry to lightly sweet white, is produced in the area as is the renowned Venegazzu, both usually sparkling.

The eastern plains have been dominated by Merlot and Cabernet Franc for decades, but the local red Raboso and white Verduzzo still have admirers. Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon, and Chardonnay are also gaining ground. ■



YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY

*Italian Wineries of the Month*



**Vila Marinja & Movia**

**T**he Family of Mirko and Ales Kristančic has owned its wine estate since 1820 with vineyards on both sides of the border between Friuli in northeastern Italy and Brda in western Slovenia. The general area with its uniform geological and climatic environment along the Slovenian-Italian border is subdivided into three sub areas: Colli Orientali in Italy and Goriska Brda and Osrednja Brda in Slovenia. All vineyards framed by the family are organic. Vila Marija is the Kristančic brand name for their lighter, fresher wines, made from normally harvested grapes and fermented in stainless steel tanks. Movia is their brand name for richer, somewhat heavier wines, including dessert wines, made from extremely ripe grapes grown on older vines, and aged in oak barrels. The best known white wines of the area are Tocai Friulano, Pinot Grigio and Bianco, Sauvignon Blanc, and Malvasia, while the red wines of the area are Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Pinot Nero.

shares a facility for the entire production process, from winemaking to storage to marketing. In 1933, seven small producers originally formed the cooperative, banding together to share winemaking facilities which none could have afforded individually. Growers specialize in Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara grapes that are blended together for the classic wines of the region, Valpolicella, Bardolino, Amaron Classico, and the dessert wine Recioto, all made from basically the same blend of grapes. .

**Masi Agricola Serego Alighieri**

**M**asi Agricola Serego Alighieri is located in Veneto. The winery’s name is derived from Vaio dei Masi or little valley of the Masi, located in the larger Negrar valley in the Valpolicella classico zone. The Boscaini family, owners of Masi, bought their first vineyard there at the end of the 18th century. Over time, the winery has grown through successive and very careful acquisitions in the classico zones of Valpolicella, Bardolino, and Soave. Today, Sandro Boscaini is president; his brother Sergio is chief enologist; cousin Roberto is responsible for operations and logistics; and cousin Dario for vineyard management. Recently, Masi has formed a partnership with Serego Alighieri, descendant of the poet Dante, whose family has owned its prestigious and his-

See **Masi Agricola** next page



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May 2004

**Domini Veneti**

**D**omini Veneti is a group of 200 small grape growers with vineyards covering a total of 450 hectares, located in the classic Valpolicella hillside zone of Veneto. The group shares a management team, presently led by Giuseppe Gaburro, president of the board of directors, and Ettore Righetti, the direct manager, and

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WINES OF THE MONTH



ARTISAN SERIES

Vila Marinja  
2001 Merlot

This wine is 100% Merlot from organically farmed estate vineyards on the Slovenian side of the border. This wine is ruby-red in color but distinctly lighter than that of Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc. In the estate vineyards, the acids are low to moderate and the alcohol never very high. With an elegant taste and a characteristic raspberry aroma, the wine is wonderful when young, but as it ages, it develops a particularly noble bouquet. This wine will complement most lighter summer meals with or without meat. Either this wine or its companion Pinot Grigio would be perfect with this month's menu.

Vila Marinja  
2003 Pinot Grigio

This wine is 100% Pinot Grigio from organically farmed estate vineyards on the Italian side of the border. Pinot Grigio is a mutation of the famous red grape Pinot Noir, a blanched mutation of its famous predecessor from the Burgundy region of France. This is a fairly complex wine with intense aromas and will complement a range of foods from grilled salmon to eggplant dishes. Serve chilled. ■

**Masi Agricola** from cover  
toric vineyards and cellars in Valpolicella since 1353. At this estate, Poet Dante Alighieri put the finishing touches to the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" contained in his "Divina Commedia." Since then, the estate has become the permanent home for the descendants of Dante Alighieri. The house and grounds, after twenty generations, are today the property of Pieralvise Serego Alighieri. Surrounded by the vineyards of Valpolicella, 20 km. from the artistic and cultural attractions of Verona, the villa of Serego Alighieri is part of a flourishing agricultural business. For more than six centuries, the Serego Alighieri estate has been the historic focal point for wine making and agriculture in the Verona area. Together with Masi, the two companies are producing the true historic crus of the area. ■

WINEMAKER SERIES

Domini Veneti  
2000 Amarone della Valpolicella Classico

This is a blend of 70% Corvina Veronese, 15% Corvinone, and 15% Rondinella from vineyards located in the heart of the classico Valpolicella zone on drywall terraces in the Negrar hills between 150 and 350 meters above sea level. The fruit was pressed and fermented in February after having been dried on straw mats through the winter. The wine has aged for 18 months in 225 and 50 hl Allier and Never oak barrels and for another 12 months in bottle before release from the winery. Its color is a dense, compact red with a persistent, ethereal, and fruity bouquet that suggests black cherries under spirits, dry prunes, flowers, and a whole series of sweet spice aromas. The wine will age for 15 to 18 years if stored properly. Traditionally, Amarone is served with game, grilled and braised meats, and richly flavored aged cheeses. Serve at cool room temperature.

Domini Veneti  
2000 Valpolicella Classico Superiore  
Ripasso, Azienda Agricola La  
Casetta di Ettore Righetti

This wine is a blend of 65% Corniva Veronese, 15% Corvinone, 10% Rondinella, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon from vineyards located in the heart of the classico Valpolicella zone at Tramanal in the Negrar hills. The altitude of the vineyards is between 230 and 270 meters above sea level. The fruit was fermented in October after picking and then stored in stainless steel tanks until February when the wine was re-passed (repasso) over the Amarone lees with contact for 15 days. It was then aged for two years in French oak barrels and for another six months in bottle before release from the winery. Its color is an intense ruby red with hints of violet, and its bouquet emanates hints of cherries and spices. Warm and full-bodied, the wine is velvety smooth with hints of dry fruit. This wine will complement all types of meat, both grilled and braised, and seasoned cheeses. Serve at cool room temperature and uncork the bottle one hour prior to serving. ■

COLLECTOR SERIES

Masi Winery  
1985 Amarone Classico

This wine is a blend of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara from estate vineyards. Amarone has been produced in Valpolicella since Roman times. Virgil, Suetonius, Martial, and Pliny the elder testify to its existence. Historic references continue during successive centuries: during the Longobard period, the Middle Ages, the dominion of the Scaligers as well as during the Most Serene Republic of Venice when the wine was referred to with great pride as the "wine of the Doges." Amarone is the product of the ancient winemaking method called "appassimento" or "drying of the grapes." In early October, the best clusters of grapes from the hillside vineyards are picked, dried for 48 hours, and then placed in wooden boxes or on bamboo tracks and stored in the large ventilated rooms of old farmhouses in the hills until the middle of January, at which time they weigh 40% less and have an enhanced flavor and higher concentrations of sugar. After a delicate pressing and partial destalking of the grapes, they ferment for about 50 days in large oak barrels at naturally cold temperatures. The wine is then racked off its lees and transferred into 40 hl barrels where fermentation continues for another three to four months, encouraged by selected yeasts. A secondary malolactic fermentation also takes place at that time. Once the wine is completely fermented to dryness, it is again racked off its lees into different barrels and continues to age for another 20 to

WINES OF THE MONTH

30 months, partly in large oak barrels and partly in small Allier and Slavonian oak barrels. The wine is then filtered and bottled and then aged in bottle for another six months before release. At almost 20 years old, this 1985 Masi Amarone will exhibit much more refined and elegant flavors than the younger 1997 below, but it will still be an amazingly intense wine. Traditionally served with meats, game, and piquant cheeses like Parmegiano, it is also considered a "meditation" wine and is served after dinner, probably the best choice for this 1985.

Serego Alighieri  
1997 Vaio Armaron

This wine is a blend of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara from the estate's Vaio Armaron vineyard at Gargagnago in Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella at 180 to 265 meters above sea level. Please read the paragraph above for the Masi 1985 Armarone for a description of the technique that winemakers use for making Amarone. Vaio Amarone is unanimously recognized as the original vineyard for the production of Amarone. One accredited theory suggests that through linguistic corruption, today's word "Amarone," commonly used in Veronese enology, owes its derivation to the name of this vineyard. Made in the traditional style, this is a big wine. Exuberantly massive both on the nose and palate, it has great structure and power. The characteristics of the grapes themselves and the particular microclimatic conditions in the drying areas favor more botrytis, which gives this Amarone fullness, roundness, and an illusion of sweetness in the perfume. ■

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JUST CALIFORNIAN?  
JUST ITALIAN?  
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\$48/month  
Winemaker red-Collector red:  
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