

REGION OF THE MONTH



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VENETO



Venezia, 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 Eugenean 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. 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 west-

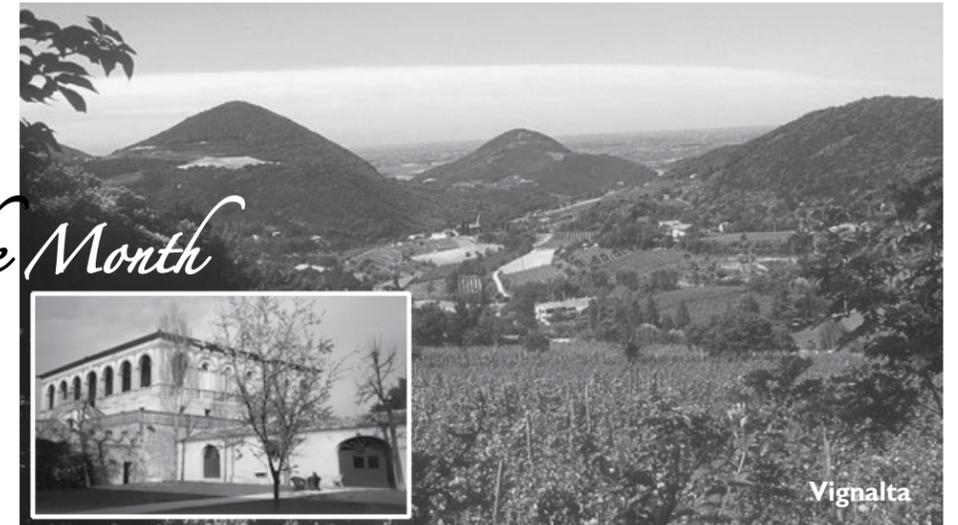
ern province of Verona in the hills between Lake Garda and the town of Soave, the central hills in the provinces of Vicenza, Padova, and Treviso, and the eastern plains of the Piave and Tagliamento river basins along the Adriatic coast northeast of Venezia.

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.

Italian  
*Winery of the Month*



Welcome to the Venetian Hills

The Colli Euganei, more recently known as the Venetian Hills, were formed 30 million years ago by volcanic eruptions which pushed up the sea floor. Both grapes and olives have grown here from very early times. Located near Padova between Vicenza and Venezia, the Colli Euganei furnished these large cities with fresh wines, so farmers had neither the opportunity nor necessity to age their wines or to distribute them beyond the immediate area. The result has been that the wines of the Colli Euganei have been virtually unknown outside of the area. Vignalta, founded in 1980 by Lucio Gomiero and Graziano Cardin, is now the largest winery in the zone with 55 hectares of diverse vineyards on every hill in the zone, producing 20,000 cases of wine a year. The winery is known mainly for its consistent *Tre Bicchierri* winner, Gemola, named after the vineyard on the Gemola hill, mostly planted with Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Its newer wine Rosso Arqua, mostly Merlot and named after the vineyard location near the winery, has risen to the same standard of excellence. Lucio Gomiero points out that wines from three other wineries in the zone have won Gambero Rosso's cov-

eted *Tre Bicchierri* award, bringing attention to this small appellation.

Besides his achievements at Vignalta, Lucio Gomiero, an architect by education, is the largest grower of radicchio in the world, with farms in California, Florida, and now Mexico. He started the enterprise 21 years ago because his father, who operated an import-export business, was receiving a steady stream of requests from the U.S. for the red lettuce, which is popular throughout Italy. Lucio says that he came to California to research the situation, found that no one was growing the crop, and decided to fill the demand. He and his wife Caterina divide their time between their homes in the Colli Euganei and Monterey, which is the site of one of their California radicchio farms.

**Tenuta Sant'Antonio**  
Brothers Armando, Tiziano, Massimo, and Paolo Castagnedi grew up in their father's vineyards in the Valpolicella region. Their father, Antonio Castagnedi, founded the cooperative Colognola ai Colli Cantina and sent his grapes to the communal winery, as did neighboring growers. In 1989, the brothers bought 30 hect-

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## WINES OF THE MONTH



### ARTISAN SERIES

#### Vignalta

##### 2006 Venda

Vignalta's Mount Venda vineyard is located at an elevation of 1000 feet, the highest vineyard in the Colli Euganei appellation. The 2006 Venda is a blend of 80% Merlot and other Bordeaux varieties, especially Cabernet Sauvignon from vines that are 15 years-old. A bright ruby color, the wine is elegant and fruity with fine mineral notes and very smooth tannins. Unlike heavier Bordeaux blends, the Venda is versatile and pairs with a wide variety of foods, from lentils and sausage to roasted chicken and pasta, pizza, or risotto. Serve at cool room temperature.

#### Vignalta

##### 2007 Pinot Bianco

This ancient Burgundian grape variety, Pinot Bianco, has been successfully grown in the Veneto region for about 300 years. The Vignalta Pinot Bianco grapes are grown in a high elevation vineyard, and after fermenting at cool temperatures, the wine is kept for several months on its lees, the sediment that results from fermentation and aging and enriches the flavors of the wine. The Vignalta Pinot Bianco ages very well in bottle, developing an intriguing mineral complexity. This classic wine pairs with appetizers and first courses seafood and vegetables. Serve chilled.

#### WINERIES from cover

ares around Mezzane, and when added to the 20 original ones belonging to their father, increased Tenuta Sant'Antonio vineyards to a total of fifty hectares, which begin at an elevation of 120 meters and climb the hills to an elevation of 320 meters. In 1995, they built their own winery on a hill near San Briccio, among their vineyards, and began making their own wine rather than selling grapes to other wineries. Today, Tenuta Sant'Antonio produces Soave, Valpolicella, Amarone, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Their Valpolicella Superiore, La Bandina, and their Amarone Campo dei Gigli have both been honored with Gambero Rosso's coveted *Tre Bicchieri* (Three See **WINERIES** next page

### WINEMAKER SERIES

#### Tenuta Sant'Antonio

##### 2006 Valpolicella Superiore Monti Garbi

Made from 70% Corvina, 20% Rondinella, and 10% Croatina and Oseleta from the estate's Monti Garbi vineyard, the 2006 Valpolicella Superiore was aged for one year in French oak barrels. The wine is ruby red in color, and the bouquet shows whiffs of red fruit and cherry. On the palate, the wine is soft with a spicy aftertaste. Serve with pasta dishes, both white and red meats, and sautéed dark leafy green vegetables. Serve at cool room temperature.

#### Vignalta

##### 2005 Agno Tinto

The newest of the red wines at Vignalta, the Agno Tinto is 100% Petite Sirah from the only vineyard in Italy that grows the grape variety. Petite Sirah is identified almost entirely with California, where it was commonly planted together with Zinfandel, Carignone, and Syrah in a single vineyard during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and earlier. Known as a field blend, the grapes were not only planted together but also harvested and vinified at the same time, each grape variety making a particular contribution to the blend. Today, the components of blended wines are grown, harvested, and vinified separately and then blended together so that the winemaker has much more control over the resulting wine. Vignalta owner Lucio Gomiero first tasted Petite Sirah here in California and became enamored with its spicy flavors and dense color. He purchased cuttings from Ridge Geyserville, transported them to Colli Euganei, and grafted them over an old Tocai vineyard. The Ango Tinto or "dark lamb" shows spicy raspberry and blackberry fruit with solid tannins, "an iron hand in a velvet glove," Lucio Gomiero says. Serve at room temperature with red meats, game birds, and sausages.

## WINES OF THE MONTH

### COLLECTOR SERIES

#### Roccolo Grassi

##### 2005 Valpolicella Superiore "Roccolo Grassi"

The blend for the Valpolicella Superiore is the same as the Amarone, 60% Corvina Veronese, 15% Corvinone, 20% Rondinella, and 5% Croatina. What differs is the technique for making the two wines. Amarone is made from grapes that are partially dried throughout the winter and spring, whereas the Valpolicella Superiore is made with just 40% of the fruit dried only for 20 days. The wine is aged in French oak puncheons, of which one-third is new and the rest two to three years old. "We wish to produce a wine with a distinct identity, different from Amarone... It should be a powerful, elegant, and fine wine with an outstanding aromatic complexity, a wine that can express the terroir, grape varieties, the vineyard, and a specific, identifiable style, the Roccolo Grassi style. The 2004 Valpolicella Superiore Roccolo Grassi won Gambero Rosso's highest *Tre Bicchieri* award.

#### WINERIES from previous page

Glasses) award.

#### Roccolo Grassi

Named after its most important vineyard in the Veneto's Valpolicella appellation, which is farmed organically, Roccolo Grassi is led by Marco Satori

#### Tenuta Sant'Antonio

##### 2003 Selezione Antonio Castagnedi

Made from traditional Amarone varieties, this Sant'Antonio Amarone is 70% Corvina, 20% Rondinella, 5% Croatina, and 5% Oseleta. After two years ageing in 500-liter French oak barrels, the Amarone Antonio Castagnedi is ruby red in color with aromas of ripe red fruit and spicy notes of liquorish, black pepper, and hints of chocolate. On the palate, the wine is soft, elegant, and well structured with round, sweet tannins. At 14.5% alcohol, the wine can be described as a modern Amarone that will complement foods rather than the heavier classical style, which is Port-like in its richness and more suitable as a "contemplation wine" to be sipped with nuts and dried fruit. Serve at cool room temperature.

and his sister Francesca, who took over the business from their father Bruno and transformed the production to wines of the highest quality. Wine guide Gambero Rosso describes the nine-hectare estate as one of the most successful in the Valpolicella zone. The family owns an additional three hectares in the Soave appellation just to the east and produces whites from that vineyard. Roccolo Grassi is known especially for its Valpolicella Superiore and Amarone, both of which have received Gambero Rosso's highest *Tre Bicchieri* award.

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