

FORBES.COM – 6 NOVEMBRE 2019

Italy's Indigenous Varieties - Part Five



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Sangiovese Vines at Felsina, Chianti Classico

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This is the fifth part of my series about indigenous varieties in Italy.

Sagrantino (red) - An indigenous variety of Umbria, this is a deeply colored, highly tannic variety planted in a zone near the town of Montefalco, not far from Spoleto and Assisi; the wine made here is called Montefalco Sagrantino or less commonly Sagrantino di Montefalco, and is 100% Sagrantino. Given the exuberant tannins - even stronger than Nebbiolo in Piemonte - Sagrantino takes time to round out and display its best qualities; the wines are at their best a decade or more after the vintage. Many producers use large barrels for maturing the wines, so as to not add tannins, while some vintners, most notably Marco Caprai at Arnaldo Caprai, age the wine in barriques. There is also a Montefalco Sagrantino Passito, a lovely dessert wine with black raspberry flavors; it is quite reminiscent of Recioto della Valpolicella from the Veneto region. Among the best producers of Montefalco Sagrantino are **Antonelli**, **Arnaldo Caprai**, **Paolo Bea**, **Sciacciadiavoli**, **Tenute Lunelli** and **Bellafonte**.

A Love Of Soccer Keeps Girls In School In Niger

FAMIGLIACECCHI

Sangiovese (red) - Without question, the Italian wine landscape would look much different without Sangiovese. The most widely planted red variety in the country, Sangiovese is found in regions such as Marche, Umbria, Lazio, Puglia and a few others, but its spiritual home is Tuscany, where it is the principal variety of several famous wines, such as Chianti Classico (and all the other Chianti districts), Brunello di Montalcino, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (where the grape is known as Prugnolo Gentile) and Morellino di Scansano.

Wines made from Sangiovese tend to offer flavors of morel cherry in the perfumes and on the palate, with good to very good acidity - this will depend on the growing season, of course - and medium-weight tannins. Some examples of Sangiovese, such as a Chianti *normale* are quite charming in their youth and should be enjoyed within their first 2-3 years, while more full bodied examples of Chianti Classico or Vino Nobile di Montepulciano age well for anywhere from 5-12 years. Then you have examples of Chianti Classico Gran Selezione or Brunello di Montalcino that demand at least a decade of aging, and can often be enjoyed when they are 20-25 years of age.

There are countless examples of Sangiovese-based wines to try - here are a few. **Cecchi** Morellino di Scansano; **Fattoria Le Pupille** Morellino di Scansano “Poggio Valente;” **Tenuta Perano** Chianti Classico Riserva; **Bibbiano** Chianti Classico Riserva; **Badia a Coltibuono** Chianti Classico Riserva; **Castello di Volpaia** Chianti Classico Riserva; **Fontodi** Chianti Classico and “Flaccianello delle Pieve”; **Rocca della Macie** Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Sergio Zingarelli” and **Monsanto** Chianti Classico Riserva “Il Poggio.”

Also, **Poliziano** Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (*annata* and “Asinone”), **Tenuta Valdipiatta** Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, and the following examples of Brunello di Montalcino (again, only a small sampling): **Poggio di Sotto**, **Il Maronetto** “**Madonna delle Grazie**,” **Casanova di Neri** “**Tenuta di Nuova**,” **Il Poggione**; **Canalicchio di Sopra** and **Talenti**.

Schiava (red) - This indigenous variety of Alto Adige is also known as Vernatsch. The wines made from this grape don't get much publicity, because of their delicate color, high acidity and light tannins, meaning these are not powerful wines made for cellaring. Rather these are charming wines that are medium-bodied and refreshing - they are wonderful when slightly chilled - and pair beautifully with salumi and lighter game birds, or for a simple salad at a picnic. I love the sour cherry, raspberry flavors and delicate spicy notes of a well made Schiava - this is a neat wine! Enjoy Schiava upon release and for another 2-5 years with most examples. Best producers include **Cantina Tramin** “Freisinger” (this producer labels their wine as Vernatsch), **Elena Walch**, **Alois Lageder** “Romigberg,” **Josef Brigl**, **Franz Haas** and **Cembra**.

Schioppettino (red) - This is an indigenous variety of Friuli, with most plantings in the Colli Orientali area. Schioppettino wines have rich black fruit flavors (black cherry, blackberry), high acidity and medium-weight tannins; there are also peppery sensation in the wines. I can't say that I've tasted many examples of older Schioppettino, so I can't speak as to how the wines age, but given the natural acidity, it wouldn't surprise me if some of the best are in great condition ten years on. Best producers include: **La Viarte**, **Petrussa**, **Vigna Traverso**, **Marco Sara** and **Gigante**.

Susumaniello (red) - How can you not love a grape with this name? An indigenous variety of Puglia, Susumaniello is often used as a blending grape, but there are a few producers that bottle it as a stand alone variety. The wines have flavors of strawberry and fresh red cherry, while tannins are not overly aggressive. Best producers include **Masseria Li Veli**, **Cantine due Palme** and **Tenute Rubino**.