

How the Wines of Puglia Stack Up

At the
Tormaresca
Winery.

By Dick Rosano

ask anyone who loves Italian wine and they'll point to Tuscany, Piemonte and maybe Umbria as the source of the best in the country. And while that summary recommendation might not be wrong, it leaves out much of the wine that surprises as much as it impresses. ➤

Tormaresca Winery's
Bocca di Lupo Estate
Cellar in the Pygliese
countryside of
Minervino Murge.

Consider the white wines of Venezia-Giulia, the ripe and robust wines of Sicily, or the bubbly of Franciacorta. How about the ancient vines in Campania, so old that wines like Falerno, Aglianico and Fiano slaked the thirst of the Roman legions. Or Sangiovese Chianti-like wines of Emilia-Romagna, or the Rosso Piceno of the Marches region, the ancestral home of the Mondavi family, both Robert and his brother Peter who know something about wine.

Does that about complete the list? Hardly. In fact, each of the 20 regions of Italy can lay claim to their own flagship wine. But the region that is blossoming into one to watch in the future is Puglia.

First, full disclosure: My mother grew up there, in a little hilltop town called Toritto, west of Bari. But my bias still doesn't detract from the progress in making stellar wines in the heel of the boot.

Historically, the vineyards planted there, and so also the wines made there, had a Greek accent. The seafaring Hellenists brought their culture, art and government to the southern tip of the Italian peninsula, but they also brought their viticulture and their thirst for fine wine. It was these same Greeks who bestowed on southern Italy its first sobriquet, "Oenotria," their phrase meaning the "land of grapes."



Empson USA Inc./Matané winery

Empson USA Inc./Matané winery

Li Veli winery

The Cantele Winery

counterclockwise from top left: Tormaresca winery's Bocca di Lupo Estate vineyards; Li Veli vineyards in the Salento region; Cantele winemaker Gianni Cantele and Brand Manager Paolo Cantele; The Matané vineyards in Salento; and Valentino Sciotti of the Matané winery

Terroir, or roughly the combination of climate, weather and landscape, always plays an important part in vineyard development and flavor. So much of the terrain of Italy rests in the foothills of the Apennines, a mountainous spine that runs nearly the entire course of the country giving local vineyards the proper exposure for fine wine. But Puglia is mostly flat land, the plains that stretch east from the Apennines to the Adriatic Sea. This is the primary reason why so much of the south's economy is farming, and why a visitor can drive for great distances in sight only of olive trees, grain fields, almond orchards and fig trees.

Despite the lack of steep slopes, the wine industry in Apulia is growing quickly and gaining credibility as a source of high quality, affordable wines. Although the expressive flavors and price points are of first interest, the flavors of these unique grapes will also add to the pleasure. Grapes such as Negroamaro, Malvasia Nera, Uva di Troia and Primitivo among the reds, and Verdeca, Bombino Bianco and Trebbiano among the whites, are not common to most wine lovers, but they deserve more attention. Here's a good place to start:

Tasting Notes

WHITE WINES

Bortomagno 2017 Gravina (\$19, Winebow)

Bright, zesty and smooth, white pear and hints of ripe apple. Score: 85

Cantele 2017 Chardonnay (\$17, Vias Imports)

True to the fruit, medium bodied and soft, forward fruit, no hint of oak, supple on finish. Score: 86

Giancarlo Ceci 2016 Panascio Bianco (\$18, Vias Imports)

Light fruit aromas featuring peach with a hint of lemon, tart entry and long, luxurious finish. Score: 86

Leone de Castris 2016 Messapia (\$16, Winebow)

Subtle aromas of white peach and pear, light acidity, medium body. Score: 85

Masseria Li Veli 2017 Verdeca (\$20, Jarvis Communications)

Brilliant fruit aromas and flavors, core of lemon-lime with a suggestion of herbaceousness on finish. Score: 88

ROSATO (ROSÉ) WINES

Giancarlo Ceci 2016 Parchitello (\$17, Vias Imports)

Made from bombino nero, this is fresh and fruity, with a tart cherry and strawberry nose and flavor profile. Deliciously forward and appealing. Great for backyard barbecues and shellfish. Score: 86

Tormaresca 2017 Calafuria Rosato (\$15, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates)

Salmon pink, brisk fruity notes, smooth delivery, soft finish. Score: 87

Primitivo is certainly Puglia's

most famous export, but it didn't leave the country with that name.

DNA research and anecdotal records suggest that this is the parent grape of America's famous Zinfandel. The story goes that the Primitivo left Italy by way of Hungary where it was known as the Crijenak Kaštelanski and through Austria where it was tagged the Zierfandler. Agoston Haraszthy, a Hungarian adventurer, brought this vine to California where it flourished and was rechristened Zinfandel.

Botromagno Winery in Gravina

The Winebow Group

RED WINES

Botromagno 2015 Nero di Troia (\$20, Winebow)

Deep, dark red with aromas of toasted oak and forest floor, smooth tannins, black cherries and ripe plums on palate. Score: 87

Botromagno 2016 Primitivo (\$19, Winebow)

Gutsy and dark, even on the nose; raspberries and black cherries, soft finish. Score: 86

Cantele 2016 Primitivo (\$17, Vias Imports)

Soft, forward fruit, soft acidity, very approachable. Score: 86

Cantele 2014 Salice Salentino (\$17, Vias Imports)

Red fruit and cranberry on nose, tart dried cherries and plums, soft tannins, moderate finish. Score: 86

Giancarlo Ceci 2015 Almagia (\$26, Vias Imports)

Scent of tar and toasted oak, toasty oak on palate, crush berries with pepper accents. Score: 85

Giancarlo Ceci 2015 Almagia (\$26, Vias Imports)

Scent of tar and toasted oak, toasty oak on palate, crush berries with pepper accents. Score: 85

Giancarlo Ceci 2014 Parco Marano (\$29, Vias Imports)

Gutsy and robust on nose and palate, dense, great mouthfeel, a superbly balanced and concentrated wine. Score: 89

Gianfranco Fino 2016 Jo Salento Negramaro (\$100, Winebow)

Dark, rich, compelling, a fabulously aromatic wine, firm tannins, deeply sensuous flavors of dark fruit and slight spice. Score: 92

**Gianfranco Fino 2016
Es Salento Primitivo
(\$100, Winebow)**

Deep, dark red with a purple rim, exciting and aromatic on the nose, rich textures, complex flavors of dark fruit, chocolate, anise, and tobacco leaf. Score: 92

**Leone de Castris 2016
Maiana Salice Salentino
Negroamaro Rosso
(\$17, Winebow)**

Deep and aromatic, with dark fruit and soft wood scents, nicely balanced, showing black cherry and raspberry fruit and a hint of toast. Score: 86

**Masseria Li Veli 2015 Primitivo
(\$20, Jarvis Communications)**

Deep, dark, brooding aromas of toasty oak and black fruit, soft yet evident tannins, nice structure. Score: 89

**Masseria Li Veli 2016
Passamante Salice Salentino
(\$13, Jarvis Communications)**

Coffee, leather, and toast on nose, crisp red fruit punctuated with hint of tobacco leaf and tar. Score: 85

**Matane 2016 Primitivo
(\$14, Empson)**

Raspberries and black cherries on nose and palate, playful and straightforward, a subtle earthiness on the back palate. Score: 85

**Matane 2015 Primitivo di Manduria
(\$26, Empson)**

Rich, smooth, velvety, rich ripe dark fruit. Score: 86

**Tormaresca 2013 Bocca di Lupo
(\$70, Aglianico, Ste. Michelle
Wine Estates)**

Smoke, leather, and dark fruit aromas, black cherry and raspberry on palate, notes of herb and toast on finish. Score: 90

**Tormaresca 2015 Neprica
(\$12, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates)**

Bright red hues, toast and cranberry on approach, with a hint of tobacco, smooth and long. Score: 86

**Tormaresca 2015
Torcicoda Primitivo
(\$20, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates)**

Smoky, toasty oak, supple textures, rich aromas and flavors. Score: 89

DESSERT

**Botromagno 2008
Gravisano Passito di Malvasia
(\$40, Winebow)**

Copper colored and scented with figs and caramel, honey, dried figs on palate, fine acidity that helps enliven the fruit. Score: 88

**Giancarlo Ceci 2015
Dolce Rosalia
(\$40, Vias Imports)**

Luscious textures, peach and honey on nose and palate, a long lingering finish. Score: 87

Dick Rosano's columns have appeared for many years in The Washington Post and other national publications. His novels set in Italy capture the beauty of the country, the flavors of the cuisine, and the history and traditions of the people. Rosano has traveled the world but Italy is his ancestral home and the insights he lends to his books bring the characters to life, the cities and countryside into focus, and the culture into high relief—whether it's "A Death in Tuscany," "A Love Lost in Positano," "Hunting Truffles," or "The Secret of Altamura."

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