

Viva Veneto!

THE DIVERSE WINE REGION IN NORTHEASTERN ITALY IS WORTH DISCOVERING

story and photos by Allison Levine



Antonio Bonotto and his wife on the family property that dates back at least 600 years in the small village of Tezze, situated on the left bank of the river Piave, south of Conegliano.

Famous for the canals of Venice, renowned for the architecture of Palladio and fabled for star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet, the Veneto region, in north-eastern Italy, is equally celebrated for the fruit of the vine. Five of the region's seven provinces produce wine: Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Treviso and Venice. With 25 DOCs and 11 DOCGs, the Veneto is responsible for producing 20% of all Italian DOC wines.

A recent trip to the region was spent exploring and learning about the provinces and their wines, ranging from familiar names such as Prosecco, Soave, Valpolicella and Amarone, to lesser-known wines such as Bardolino, Raboso, Tai Rosso, Lison and many others. There are also many international varietals grown in the region, but below we honor some of the indigenous wines in each province.

Verona

Some of the region's most recognized wines come from the province of Verona. The Soave area, which includes Soave DOC and two DOCGs (Soave Recioto and Soave Superiore), holds the largest vineyard expanse in Europe, with 6,500 hectares planted. Made with at least 65% Garganega and up to 30% Trebbiano di Soave, Soave is a fragrant, fresh, medium-bodied wine.



Amarone: The Mistake that Succeeded

The term *recioto* comes from *recia* (Venetian dialect for "ear"). To make *recioto*, grapes selected are from the "ears" of the bunch, which have had more exposure to the sun. The grapes are hung or placed on mats to dry until April. Traditionally this style was used to make a *passimento* style wine in which fermentation is stopped so that the wine remains sweet. But in 1933, the fermentation failed to stop and the result was a bitter (*amaro*) wine that was called *recioto scappato* ("the *recioto* that got away"). This mistake turned out to be extremely popular as it resulted in an intense, full-bodied, elegant red with notes of cherry and spices; the wine was renamed *Amarone* in 1939. Today *Amarone* is one of the most sought-after wines in the world.



Piave Malanotte: One to Watch For

Raboso is a native red variety that used to be the most widely planted grape in the area. Today, it is quickly making a comeback. As of last year, the newest DOCG to be designated is Piave Malanotte, made with at least 70% Raboso del Piave and no more than 30% Raboso Veronese. Between 15% and 30% of the grapes are dried before pressing, resulting in a ruby red wine with notes of cherries and great acidity. This is definitely a wine to watch for in the U.S.!

The Raboso grape is the base of Piave Malanotte DOCG wines.

Valpolicella is the name of the area made up of three valleys crossed by the Negrar, Marano and Fumane rivers. With Valpolicella DOC and two DOCGs (Amarone della Valpolicella and Recioto della Valpolicella), the varieties used are Corvina, Molinara and Rondinella, which produce a fruity and acidic medium-bodied red.

Bardolino, made from Corvina and Rondinella grapes, is a red from the hills of Lake Garda—a light, fresh wine with bright cherry notes. In 2001, Bardolino Superiore was the first red wine in the Veneto to receive the DOCG.

Vicenza

At the border of Verona and Vicenza is the Gambellara DOC, its wines made from the Garganega grape. In addition to dry white Gambellara, Garganega is used in the sweet wine production of Gambellara Vin Santo DOCG and Recioto di Gambellara DOCG. In the hills of Vicenza is Monti Lessini DOC, which is made with the highly acidic Durella grape and makes a crisp sparkling wine. In the south of Vicenza is the Colli Berici DOC, which comes from the Berici Hills. The most typical variety is Tocai Rosso (now called Tai Rosso), a local clone of Grenache, with characteristics of strawberry, cherry, raspberry and spice.

Padua

Padua is the oldest wine-producing area in the Veneto, dating back to the Romans. The primary wines from this area are Friularo (known as Raboso in other areas) from the Bagnoli DOC, Fior d'Arancia DOCG (made from Moscato Giallo) from Colli Euganei and Raboso from Corti Benedettine del Padovano DOC.

Treviso

Piave DOC is located between the provinces of Treviso and Veneto and is 30 kilometers wide by 40 kilometers long. Seventy years ago, the region consisted of 80% red wine production. Today, red wine makes up only 3% of overall production. The area is mostly known for Prosecco DOC wines, with the finest selections emerging from vineyards between the towns of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene. The Prosecco Superiore Conegliano Valdobbiadene became a DOCG in 2009.

To learn more about Veneto wines, visit www.winesofveneto.com.



Grapes drying for recioto.



Giorgio Cecchetto of Cecchetto has been focusing on making Raboso Piave since the early '90s and is a founding member of the Confraternity of Raboso Piave, which aims to promote Raboso Piave wine and preserve the history of this noble wine.

Tasting Notes

Here are just a few of my favorite recent releases from the Veneto.

—Anthony Dias Blue

Bellenda 2010 San Fermo Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Superiore (\$21) Golden color; fresh and juicy with tangy acidity and bright, clean peach fruit; racy and elegant with a long, lively finish. **90**

VISION WINES & SPIRITS

Pieropan 2009 Soave Classico Calvarino (\$30) Lush and fresh with bracing acidity and lovely peach and apple fruit; dense but balanced and juicy with loads of charm; long and refined. **90**

EMPSON USA

Rocolo Grassi 2007 Valpolicella Superiore (\$40) Silky and dense with rich floral, mineral, chocolate and spice; deep plum and juicy acidity; intense and gorgeous. **92**

CHAMBERS & CHAMBERS

Le Ragose 2004 Amarone della Valpolicella Classico (\$60) Spicy and jammed with rich blackberry fruit and chocolate-vanilla tones; ripe but not too sweet; intense and creamy with a seamless finish. **95**



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