

**Leave the flashcards.  
Take the Bardolino.**

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Few countries of the wine world intimidate us more than Italy. Her complexities of regions, provinces, regulations, and caveats rarely leave the consumer with sure footing and firm grasp of what's in the bottle. At some point, we make the effort to delve deeper into the mystery; we make lists; we make up mnemonic devices; we make flashcards. The triumphant feeling of rifling through a stack of 'three by fives' with minimal mistakes leaves us with the false sense of mastery; we know the answers, right? Then it happens. Someone has a question; time to show them what we've learned. A simple query on the geography of Veneto, but for whatever reason, we're flummoxed. So this is how Deep Blue felt when the Russian won. Perhaps we need to look at what truly lead to our defeat. Did someone just ask the wrong question?

Imagine each piece of information we learn about Italian wine is a thread of fabric. The fewer the threads, the looser the fabric, and the greater chance that things may fall through the gaps of our understanding. It's like trying to catch a bucket of marbles with a deep-sea fishing net. We need to go beyond the relevancy of what's just inside the bottle, we need to take the time to learn the culture, geography, and historical context of each region, individually, in order to create a fabric of knowledge that can support the weight of our goal.

Let's start with the basics. Italy is divided into 20 regions, which are further divided into provinces, which are then made of communes, or towns/cities. Think of your state, then your county, then your hometown. Easy enough.



But before we get too far, we should consider the history of the land. Remember, Italy did not become a unified kingdom until 1871, and it was not until the end of World War One that the boundaries were set as we know them today. So, what did pre-1871 Italy look like, and how did it work? After the fall of the Roman Empire, much of the land was declared property of foreign rulers like France, Spain, and Austria. There were also what we called “City-States” which were autonomously ran mini-kingdoms that revolved around major cities of the time. Florence, Venice, and Naples were examples of these. The city-states would become powerful players in the world of politics and trade. Names like the Medici family ruled and waged turmoil against neighboring kingdoms. Also, there were the Papal States, or properties still under the control of the Church. As you can see, the country looked much differently, just a couple hundred years ago, and while the borders have since changed, the cultural state of these areas are still steeped with old traditions & customs.



## Le Marche



The Marche lies on the east side of the country, between the Apennine Mountains and the Adriatic Sea. The region is bordered by Emilia-Romagna to the north and Abruzzo to the south. The Capitol city of the region is Ancona located in the province of the same name. The city is an ancient one even by Italian standards, and loosely translated, means: elbow, referring to the spur of land that just into the sea. This spur is actually the Monte Conero, a massive rock that is visible up and down the coastline for miles. This mountain served as a reference point for Greek sailing vessels that were navigating the sea. The famous emperor, Trajan, was responsible for much of the expansion of the city, and left behind such notable architecture as the Arch of Trajan. South of the city is the small commune of Loreto, which is home to the famous Basilica della Santa Casa. An estimated four million people a year will make the pilgrimage to this site where the original house of the Virgin Mary is kept as a sacred relic.

The wine regions of the Marche are home to many of the indigenous varieties that aren't found anywhere else in the world. From the powerful reds of Conero and Piceno to the contrasting Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Matelica, to the curious oddities of Pergola, Lacrima di Morro d'Alba, and the deliciously refreshing Pecorino of Offida.

The Verdicchio di Matelica is a substantially smaller region in comparison to the wines of Jesi, however the wines show a much higher capacity to develop and age in bottle. The vines of Matelica are sandwiched between the Apennine chain and the pre-Apennine range at roughly 1,100 feet above sea level. Most of the vines have a southerly exposition allowing the berries to benefit from long sunny days. Because of the elevation and the lowered impact of the Adriatic Sea, the vines experience a wider diurnal of temperatures between day and night. This helps to maintain healthy acidity while still ripening the sugars and phenolics. The wines are generally characterized by a slightly austere beginning but evolve into layers of nuance over the course of several years. The Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi vineyards are within view of the coast and benefit from a more stable climate due to the constant air mass that moves in from the sea. The wines reflect this with a typically lighter and fresher profile that lends them time of earlier enjoyment.

## MARCHE



### D.O.C.G.

1. Conero
2. Vernaccia di Serrapetrona
18. Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva
19. Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva
20. Offida

### D.O.C.

3. Bianchetto del Metauro
4. Colli Maceratesi
5. Colli Pesaresi
6. Esino
7. Falerio dei Colli Ascolani o Falerio
8. Lacrima di Morro d'Alba
9. Terre di Offida
10. Rosso Conero
11. Rosso Piceno o Piceno
12. Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi
13. Verdicchio di Matelica
14. Serrapetrona
15. I Terreni di Sanseverino
16. Pergola
17. San Ginesio



## **Wine One:**

### **Verdicchio di Matelica DOC, Fontezoppa, 2013**

Region // Marche

Province // Macereta

Commune // Matelica

Elevation // 1,100 feet

Soil // Calcareous-Clay

Vinification // Temperature control tank

Tasting Notes:

# Campania



Campania is the second largest region in Italy behind Lombardy. The South is decidedly the soul-food center of the country, boasting fertile volcanic soils that are perfect for hauling in a wide variety of crops. Hazelnuts are big business in Campania, and represent a substantial portion of the country's production. However, it is tourism that really drives the economy. Naples, the second most populated city behind Milan, is a year-round holiday for Italians and foreigners alike. Just south of Naples, the sun-drenched Amalfi Coast is the perfect place to enjoy cured meats, seafood, and cheeses, all while washing them down with some sparkling red Gragnano. Towns like Sorrento and Positano seem to cling impossibly to the cliffs in a picturesque coastal scape. In the distance, Mt. Vesuvius looms as an ever-reminding cautionary tale.

Further inland, roughly 30 miles east of Naples, we arrive in the ancient town of Avellino, the small capital of the province with the same name. The region often goes by an earlier name of Irpinia, which is where many of the local wines derive their name. Fans of The Sopranos will be delighted to know that Tony Soprano traces his roots back to Avellino. More importantly, it is home to Campania's four DOCG wines.

# CAMPANIA



## D.O.C.G.

1. Taurasi
2. Aglianico del Taburno
10. Fiano di Avellino
12. Greco di Tufo

## D.O.C.

3. Aversa
4. Campi Flegrei
5. Capri
6. Castel San Lorenzo
7. Cilento
8. Costa d'Amalfi
9. Falerno del Massico
11. Galluccio
13. Ischia
14. Penisola Sorrentina
15. Sannio
16. Vesuvio
17. Irpinia
18. Falanghina del Sannio
19. Casavecchia di Pontelatone



While the red wines of Taurasi (the first DOCG of the south) may be what savvy collectors are stashing away, it is the famous and ancient white wines of Fiano and Greco that fly superbly under the radar in terms of value and surprising aging potential. Fiano is said to be an indigenous grape of the region, and many think the origins are the hillsides of the commune of Latio. The Fiano vine seldom reaches old age, as many are replanted at around ten years. This is due to a very vigorous vegetative cycle that eventually exhausts the vine to the point of unrewarding yields. Greco, believed to be brought by the ancient seafaring culture of Greece and left to propagate in the southern half of Italy. Both of these varieties grow particularly well on the “Tuff” soil, which is compressed volcanic ash that has formed into a yellow Sulphur based rock. For years, both Sulphur and gypsum were mined in the hills of Avellino, in fact, many of the vineyards sit atop ancient mines.



**Wine 2:**

**Fiano di Avellino DOCG, NATIV, 2012**

Region // Campania

Province // Avellino

Altitude // 1,300 feet

Soil // Tuffo, with calcareous and clay-based silt

Fermentation // temperature controlled stainless steel

Tasting Notes:

**Wine 3:**

**Greco di Tufo DOCG, Benito Ferrara 'Vigna Cicogna', 2013**

Region // Campania

Province // Avellino

Commune // Tufo

Altitude // 1,600 feet

Soil // Calcareous-clay, rich in Sulphur

Fermentation // temperature controlled stainless steel

Tasting Notes:

# Veneto



When it comes to sheer volume of wine production, few regions can hold a candle to that of the Veneto, with its waves of Pinot Grigio and inexpensive sparkling wine lapping at the shores of virtually every wine drinking country in the world. However, do not be too quick to write off such an important and historical region. In some regards, the Veneto reminds me of Alsace, in that it has been passed back and forth over the centuries, acquiring customs and idiosyncrasies along the way. At the height of its heyday, the Most Serene Venetian Republic was the grand merchant of the sea, and ferry to the Levant. Fleets of ships were at the ready to shuttle eager crusaders off to the holy land –all for a modest price, of course. The vast holdings of Venetian land stretched from Verona over along the Dalmatian coast of what is modern day Croatia. Lake Garda, Italy’s largest lake, serves as the western border for the province of Verona, and as the site of the hillside village of Bardolino. Like so much of the region surrounding Bardolino, the wines are based on the native grapes of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. However, unlike the rich and powerful wines of Amarone, Bardolino is the perfect weight for a summertime red. It also handles a chill remarkably well.



**Wine 4:**

**Bardolino DOC, Cavalchina, 2013**

Region // Veneto

Province // Verona

Commune // Custoza

Soil // Morainic: glacial deposit

Blend // 60% Corvina, 30% Rondinella, 10% Molinara

Fermentation // Temperature controlled stainless steel

Tasting Notes:

**Wine 5:**

**Lacrima di Morro d'Alba DOC, Velenosi, 2013**

Region // Marche

Province // Ancona

Commune // San Marcello

Soil // Clay

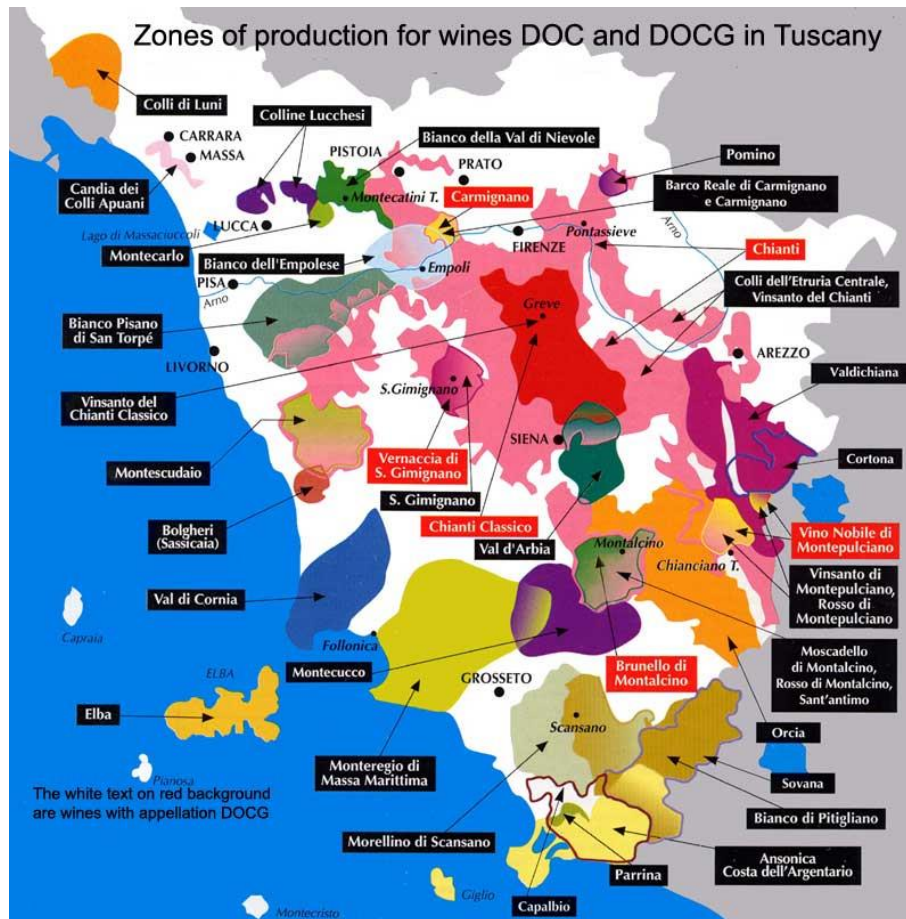
Fermentation // Temperature Controlled stainless steel

Notes:

# Tuscany



If ever there were a region that would benefit from a few extra hours of explanation, Tuscany would certainly be high on the list. I think it's important to understand the centuries-old alliances within central Italy in order to make sense of what's really going on. Two major groups: Guelfs and the Ghibellines; very unfriendly to each other. In a very general sense, one side supported the Papacy, the other supported Imperialism of the Holy Roman Empire. Lots of jockeying for geographical advantage between both groups. The ancient town of Montepulciano, albeit closer to Siena in proximity, sided with Florence. This alliance kept Montepulciano at the forefront of the Italian Renaissance, and kept Florence with a strategically positioned ally that flanked Siena. It's partly because of this alliance that the wines of Montepulciano gained such prominence so early in history. Long before there were talks of the wines of Montalcino, politicians, popes, and the wealthy were consuming the "Vino Rosso Scelto di Montepulciano", what we now refer to as Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. The name didn't change until the well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a man named Adamo Fanetti that re-introduced this term of Vino Nobile to the masses after he renamed his top wine to Vino Nobile.



## Wine 6:

**Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG, Cantine Dei, 'Bossona Riserva', 2008**

Region // Tuscany

Province // Siena

Commune // Montepulciano

Soil // Tuff volcanic rock with calcareous

Blend // 100% Prugnolo Gentile

Fermentation // fermentation and maceration for one month followed by 36 month in large tonneaux, followed by one year in bottle

Tasting Notes:

# Umbria

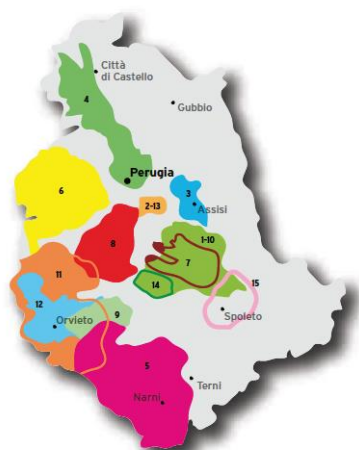
## UMBRIA

### D.O.C.G.

1. Montefalco Sagrantino
2. Torgiano Rosso Riserva

### D.O.C.

3. Assisi
4. Colli Alto Tiberini
5. Amelia
6. Colli del Trasimeno o Trasimeno
7. Colli Martani
8. Colli Perugini
9. Lago di Corbara
10. Montefalco
11. Orvieto
12. Rosso Orvietano o Orvietano Rosso
13. Torgiano
14. Todi
15. Spoleto



Named for the Umbri civilization that predates Rome, Umbrians are considered to be some of the original inhabitants of Italy. Today, the region can be likened to a slower-pace Tuscany, with all the grand hillsides and small town dotting the map, but without the mobs of tourism. The capital, Perugia, was also ally to Montepulciano and lies just across the Lake Trasimeno. Ancient villages of Orvieto and Assisi draw in crowds but nothing like the major regions. Here fields of sunflowers destined for oil production canvas the hills like corn in the Midwestern US. Also, the region is known for its famous red-skinned potatoes and truffles. The hilltop town of Montefalco rises from the wide valley floor and is able to maintain a watchful eye. The famous wines of Montefalco were long a delicacy of the dessert fashion, it wasn't until the 1970s that dry table wine experimentation began to take place in earnest. The historic estate of Caprai is often credited with establishing the wines in the local Italian markets.

### Wine 7:

#### Montefalco Sagrantio D.O.C.G., Antonelli San Marco, 2007

Region // Umbria

Province // Perugia

Commune // Montefalco

Elevation // 1,300 feet

Fermentation // after a 25-40 fermentation in temperature controlled tank, the wines are moved to various size barrel for 24 month, then 12 month is glass-lined cement, then 12 month in bottle

Tasting Note: