

Tuesday, 23 June 2020 05:18

5 Trending Italian Red Grape Varieties

Written by [Kevin Day](#)

Rate this item

(0 votes)



Italy's wealth of grape varieties presents wine connoisseurs with many tantalizing prospects, particularly on the red wine spectrum. While Sangiovese and Nebbiolo still reign supreme, numerous grape varieties have re-emerged from hiding in recent years to spellbind wine lovers around the world. In Italy, the story of how some of these grapes transitioned from obscurity to fashionably cool can be just as compelling as the wines themselves. In many cases, the wines from these grapes are shining in a way they never have before, thanks to more informed decisions in the vineyard and winery.

Here are five up-and-coming Italian red grapes to pay attention to. While all of these grapes have been around for centuries, their resurgence has meant a quality revolution and increased interest from the international marketplace.

PELAVERGA PICCOLO OR PELAVERGA DI VERDUNO (PIEDMONT)

Of the 11 villages of the Barolo area, only one can lay claim to an indigenous red grape all its own. Tiny Verduno, on the northern edge of the iconic zone, has not only delighted connoisseurs with its elegant style of Barolo, but also its unique monovarietal wines of Pelaverga Piccolo.

Not to be confused with another Piedmont cultivar — Pelaverga Grosso — Pelaverga Piccolo yields a bright red wine of medium body, razor-sharp acidity and delicate tones reminiscent of raspberries, spice and even a sour note suggestive of tangy yogurt to some. Because of its delicacy, it has never really been blended with Nebbiolo, Barbera or Dolcetto, preferring to remain a compelling soloist from Verduno.

Because of its lower tannin levels, Pelaverga Piccolo is best consumed young. While nothing like Barolo, its reputation has gained because three of its best known examples are its excellent Barolo as well, making this taste

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

Producers to look for: Fratelli Alessandria, G.B. Burlotto, Castello di Verduno



SCHIOPPETTINO (FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA)

With a name that rolls off the tongue (that's SKEOH-peh-TEE-no), Schioppettino yields some of Italy's most graceful and uniquely evocative wines, recalling notes of black fruit, violets, peppercorns and baking spice. Schioppettino translates as "crackling," which many believe is a reference to the grapes' crunchy berries. Another theory: the name derives from the explosive secondary fermentations that occurred with these wines centuries ago. Either way, Schioppettino's renaissance has been more of a slow burn resurrection than sudden stardom — but without a doubt, its moment has arrived.

In the last few decades, growers from the Friuli Colli Orientali DOC — particularly in and around the village of Prepotto — have found a passionate audience for Schioppettino wines. Its age-worthiness and linear acidity often have it likened to robust styles of Pinot Noir. For fans of Friulian wine, Schioppettino offers a nice counterpoint to Tazzelenghe and Terrano, two other indigenous grapes known for the razor's edge tannins and piercing acidity.

Schioppettino nearly vanished after phylloxera decimated Friuli's vineyards, as growers replanted with more reliable varieties, particularly Merlot. Its resurrection began in the 1970s when Paolo Rapuzzi on Ronchi di Cialla led an effort to find, cultivate and sanction the growing of Schioppettino (it was so forgotten that it was not included in local regulations, therefore making its cultivation illegal!). While the estate remains a stalwart of Schioppettino, a crop of newer estates are diversifying the offerings and making Friuli an even-more dynamic place for red wine.

Producers to look for: Ronchi di Cialla, Petrusa, Venica & Venica, Vigna Lenuzza



ROSSESE (LIGURIA)

Another grape that has been "hiding in plain sight" is Liguria's Rossese, whose pale-colored wines offer bright acidity and mineral tones that mesh nicely with current trends in wine. Add to this an increased interest in the ancient winemaking traditions of Liguria, and you have one of Italy's trendiest red grapes.

True, Rossese has been the most widely planted red grape in Liguria for some time, but that's not saying much considering a vast majority of Ligurian wine is white. Furthermore, there are only 150 hectares of Rossese planted across the region, representing a mere 10% of all plantings.

The notoriously fickle grape has a long list of demands to produce excellent wine, most notably a requirement for well-draining soil, which confines Rossese to the steeper hillsides of Western Liguria. The grape also has a delicate skin and can easily develop botrytis, meaning either proximity away from the coastline — which is in short supply in Liguria — or significant exposure to breezes. These limiting factors mean that no amount of popularity will result in a "Rossese boom" of vineyard expansion across Liguria, but the existing vineyards — particularly those from the Rossese di Dolceacqua DOC — offer incredibly high quality, often because of their incredible age (For instance, Tenuta Anfosso has Rossese vines that were planted in 1888).

Interestingly enough, neighboring France, where the grape has been cultivated for centuries, has seen a resurgence in interest in the grape. In particular, the village of Tibouren has brought the grape to the forefront in many sommelier circles in recent years, triggering broader interest in Italy's red wine grape. However, there

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

GetComplied

are significant differences in style and terroir between Tibouren and Rossese wines. In Liguria, the best Rossese-based wines are varietal red wines and come from steeply pitched, terraced vineyards, especially those found in the highlands of Dolceacqua. In Provence, Tibouren is often blended with other red grapes or used in rosé. But both wines share one key trait that has wine professionals eager to explore more: terroir sensitivity.

It is this last attribute which has caught the attention of noted American winemaker Randall Grahm, who has embraced Rossese as part of his ambitious Popelouchum project in the Central Coast of California. Grahm — who became famous for popularizing American-style Rhône varieties in the 1980s — has even called Rossese “one of the coolest grapes on the planet.”

 Producers to look for: Maccario-Dringenberg, Tenuta Anfosso, Terre Bianche



CESANESE D'AFFILE (LAZIO)

Lazio has often been seen as lagging behind its neighbors for vinous prestige. Much of this has to do with the region's lack of a big, powerful red grape to compete with the likes of Tuscany's Sangiovese, Abruzzo's Montepulciano and Campania's Aglianico.

But tastes have changed, and as the diversity of red wines from Italy has been more and more embraced, it has created an opening for Lazio's most prized red grape to shine. Cesanese d'Affile produces a medium-bodied yet substantially structured wine predicated on berry-like and floral aromas. The best examples exhibit a delicate spice.

Lazio's landscape of Cesanese wines can be a little confusing, as Cesanese Comune — a different and distinct grape variety — has more sizable plantings and, like Cesanese d'Affile, is a Lazio original. Cesanese Comune ripens easier and its less fickle, so its acreage has exceeded that of Cesanese d'Affile. Yet those tables are turning. As so often happens, the more difficult grape to work with (Cesanese d'Affile) yields a much more compelling wine. Because of this, there is a movement afoot in Lazio to expand the offerings of Cesanese d'Affile.

That said, finding a varietal Cesanese d'Affile is rare, as it is often blended with small portions of Cesanese Comune. Cesanese del Piglio is Lazio's only DOCG devoted to red wine, and its blending formula calls for 90% Cesanese d'Affile or Comune. Within the regulations of the Cesanese di Olevano Romano DOC, the percentage is reduced to 85%. A purer expression of Cesanese d'Affile can be found from the DOC of the same name, which includes a small produce zone around the town of Affile and which mandates a 90% minimum of Cesanese d'Affile.

Producers to look for: Casale Della Loria, Formiconi, Raimondo



CORVINONE (VENETO)

Our last entry has less to do with fashion and more to do with practical considerations in the vineyard. Like all wine regions in the world, Valpolicella is facing unprecedented challenges from rapid climate change, and the region's famed blended wines recently experienced a massive shakeup that could forever alter which grape we view as supreme in the region.

Last year, the Consorzio Tutela Vini Valpolicella — which regulates the wines of the region — gave Corvinone an equal-footing role with Corvina in the region's wines. Formerly, producers could only use Corvinone in up to 50% of their blend, while Corvina was required to comprise a minimum of 45%.

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements. [REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

So why the change? It comes down to giving winemakers more versatility to meet the demands of each vintage. Corvinone has long provided Recioto della Valpolicella, Amarone della Valpolicella, Valpolicella Superiore and Valpolicella Ripasso with tannins and weight, while Corvina has provided elegance and enhanced aromatics. However, in the vineyard, Corvinone is more resistant to water stress and less prone to the fungal disease esca. A drawback to Corvinone is the fact that both the berries and bunches are asynchronous, meaning they ripen at different times and require more manual work at harvest. However, for the growers of Valpolicella, having more blending options in a changing world outweighs these concerns. Whether growers utilize this option and begin skewing their wines toward a more Corvinone-centric future, only time will tell. But one thing is for certain: Valpolicella wines will not be trending toward lighter and fresher styles anytime soon with this change.

Producers to look for: *Bussola, Tenuta Sant'Antonio, Secondo Marco*



LEARN MORE ABOUT ITALIAN WINE:

- [Italian Wine Scholar](#) study & certification program
- [BLOG: 5 Trending Italian White Grape Varieties](#)
- [BLOG: What's new with Italian wine DOCs and DOCGs](#)
- [PODCAST: Italian Sparkling Wine - Ciro Pirone](#)

Want to receive a free sample chapter?
Complete the form below for more information and receive a FREE sample chapter

Name

Email

Phone number

Are you :

Comment

Tweet Like 0

Published in

[Blog](#)

Tagged under

[Italian Wine](#) [Italian Grape](#) [Grape Varieties](#) [Italian red grape](#) [Italian red wine](#) [red wine](#)

KEVIN

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

GetComplied



Kevin Day is an Italian Wine Scholar™ with Highest Honors, and the editor-in-chief of the popular online wine magazine [Opening a Bottle](#). In 2019, he was shortlisted for the Louis Roederer International Wine Writer's Award in the category of Emerging Wine Writer. He lives in Denver, Colorado.

[Log in to post comments](#)

[back to top](#)



BLOG UPDATES

Be notified of our next blog posts!

 I'm not a robot

reCAPTCHA
[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

LATEST BLOG ENTRIES

5 Trending Italian Red Grape Varieties



Ten Fascinating Wines to Look Out for from South West France



Wine Trends in 2020: Burgundy by the Numbers



PODCAST: Jane Anson on Bordeaux



5 Trending Italian White Grape Varieties



Discovering Alto Piemonte



We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements. [REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

GetComplied



12 Wine Study Tips for Mastering Distance Learning



French Lessons for a Warming World



Top 10 reasons to study Spanish wine



POPULAR TOPICS:

- Andrew Jefford
- Bordeaux
- bordeaux wine
- bourgogne
- bourgogne wine
- bourgogne wines
- burgundy wines
- Champagne
- food and wine pairing
- french wine
- French Wine Maps
- French Wine Regions
- french wines
- Italian Wine
- italian wine course
- Italian wine education
- Italian Wine Regions
- italian wines
- Piedmont
- Piemonte
- Podcast
- Quentin Sadler
- Rhône Wines
- Spain wine regions
- Spanish wine maps
- Spanish wines
- Tuscany
- wine education
- Wine Maps
- Wine Podcast

SEARCH SITE

BLOG ARCHIVE

- June 2020 (2)
- May 2020 (3)
- April 2020 (3)
- March 2020 (2)
- February 2020 (5)
- January 2020 (2)
- December 2019 (4)
- November 2019 (2)
- October 2019 (2)

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)

September 2019 (1)

August 2019 (2)

July 2019 (1)

WSG THANKS THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR SUPPORT:



Vini del Trentino
CONSORZIO DI TUTELA



Decanter



FOLLOW US



EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- French Wine Scholar
- Italian Wine Scholar
- Spanish Wine Scholar
- Alsace Master-Level
- Bordeaux Master-Level
- Bourgogne Master-Level
- Champagne Master-Level
- Loire Master-Level
- Rhône Master-Level
- Provence Master-Level

MEMBERSHIP

- Join/Renew
- Member Webinars
- Member Quizzes
- Online Learning Games
- Pronunciation Exercises
- Blank Wine Maps
- Member Discounts
- Vintage Charts & Reports

CONNECT

- Log in
- Contact Us
- Linkedin
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Instagram

STUDY TRIPS

- Upcoming Study Trips
- Trips FAQs
- Reservation Form

ABOUT

- About Us
- Meet Our Team
- Industry Endorsements
- Latest News
- Where To Study

We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)



We use cookies to improve your browser experience, analyze site traffic, personalize content, and serve targeted advertisements.

[REVIEW PREFERENCES](#)