

THE APPELLATIONS, WINES AND WINEMAKERS OF FRIULI, ITALY

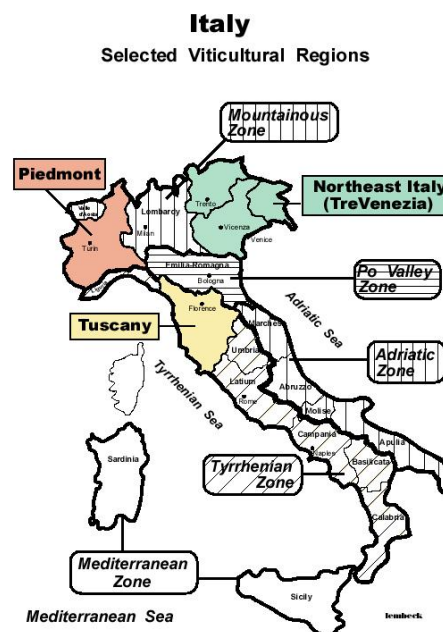
At the end of June my wife Ellen and I were off for a week to [tour the wineries of Friuli](#), Italy. We stayed in the city of Gorizia, which is right on the border with Slovenia. Then we spent a week in the Slovenian capital city of Ljubljana. We have been to this part of the world before but did not have an opportunity then to tour wineries. That was quite a trip, as we were packed and ready to leave the morning of September 11, 2001. We of course did not fly that day, but we did fly a week later.

Friuli (the full proper name is Friuli-Venezia Giulia) is one of three contiguous provinces in northeastern Italy which sometimes used to be called by the name TreVenezia. The other two are Veneto and Trentino-Alto-Adige. Northeastern Italy is itself the third of the three greatest wine regions of Italy, the other two being Tuscany and Piedmont. Fourth place is a pretty fair distance behind these top three. In the map at right, the furthest east of the provinces colored in green is Friuli, with Veneto in the middle.

There are thirteen DOCGs or DOCs in Friuli. (A DOC is a geographic area of historic style, the production methods for which are controlled by the government's "Code for Denomination of Wines of Origin" since 1992.) The DOCGs are Ramandolo and Picolit, both for dessert wines. The most important DOCs are, in this order: Collio, Isonzo, Colli Orientali, Carso, Grave, and Aquileia.

In **COLLIO** (the word means "hillsides") the approved red grapes are three varieties of Bordeaux: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and Burgundy's Pinot Noir (Pinot Nero in Italian). There are twelve approved white grapes, including the international varieties of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, and the local varieties Pinot Grigio, Malvasia, Ribolla Gialla, Pinot Bianco and Friulano (pre-2008 vintage, it was known as Tocai or Tocai Friulano). Pure varietal wines and combinations are allowed. Merlot has been grown over the entire TreVenezia for 200 years, but achieves the best wines in Colli Orientali and in Collio. About 85% of wine production is white. The objective of most Collio winemakers is to maximize the fresh fruit and pure varietal characteristic of the grape. Therefore, oak is not widely used in this region. The great producers of Collio include **Jermannn** [year-män] (the Chardonnay wine "Dreams...", Pinot Noir, and the white blend "Vintage Tunina"), **Josko Gravner** [yosko](the white grape Ribolla Gialla), **Radikon**, **Damijan**, **La Castellada**, **Villa Russiz** (Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot "de la Tour"), **Borgo del Tiglio**, **Schiopetto**, and **Toros**. Collio extends into Slovenia under the name **GORISKA BRDA**. Here the producer of first renown is **Movia**, followed by **Edi Simčič**.

ISONZO is home to four approved red grapes including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Refosco, and ten white grapes, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Malvasia, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco, Friulano and Verduzzo. High quality producers here include **Lis Neris** (white dessert wine "Tal Luc," and both white and red blends) and **Vie di Romans**.



Whereas the Collio and Isonzo tend to excel most with whites, the **COLLI ORIENTALI** is proving capable of yielding both important whites and reds. The number of top producers with established track records of excellence continues to grow and includes *Miani* (Merlot and Ribolla Gialla), *Moschioni*, *Scubla* (many varieties) and *Girolamo Dorigo*. Younger properties like *Meroi* and *Bastianich* are well on the path of building top-notch track records of their own. In a more popular price point, but still with scores clustering around 90 points are *Zamo* and *Livio Felluga*. There are seven approved red grapes, those of Collio, plus Refosco and Schiopettino. There are twelve white varieties, essentially the same as Collio.

The **CARSO** wine region is the strip of Italy that stretches down from Isonzo to the port city of Trieste. Here the producer of note is *Edi Kante*, but he is now being joined by *Beniamino Zidarich* and the *Vodopivec* brothers in producing 92+ point wines. The red wine grape of distinction is the Refosco (also known as Terrano and Mondeuse), while the great whites are Sauvignon Blanc, Vitovska, Malvasia.

I include an extended quotation from a recent article by Antonio Galloni, the Italian and Champagne wine writer for *The Wine Advocate*: “Much has been written in recent years about Friuli’s whites made with contact on the skins. In some circles the wines are being described as ‘orange’ to differentiate them from more conventional whites and reds. These wines are vinified with anywhere from a few days to a few months of contact on the skins followed by extended aging in large, neutral oak, much in the way structured red wines are made. The contact with the skins gives the wines intense color that can range from deep yellow to bronze-hued shades of orange, and everything in between. A few producers including Gravner and Vodopivec ferment their wines in terra cotta amphora buried in the ground, reviving an ancient winemaking technique imported from the republic of Georgia. Both Gravner and Vodopivec age their wines in oak, but several months in amphora renders the wines incredibly delicate and complex. Most of the producers who work in this style also follow a non-interventionalist approach in the vineyards and cellar, which is to say minimal treatments in the vineyards, fermentation with indigenous, ambient yeasts without temperature control and no fining or filtration prior to bottling. To be sure, this is high-stakes winemaking as there are no safety nets that technology affords other producers. That said, when the wines are well-made, they can be breathtaking.” These “orange” wines should be enjoyed at a temperature around 60 degrees, perhaps just slightly cooler than the suggested red wine temperature of just above 65 degrees.

The following are Friuli wines available in Houston that I recommend.

Houston Wine Merchant (on Shepherd just south of Westheimer)

2006 Bastianich Vespa White Wine \$45.99

2007 Miani Ribolla Gialla White Wine \$99.99

Catalan (on Washington a few blocks west of Shepherd)

2005 Movia Ribolla Gialla White Wine \$38.00 (avoid the 2007 by the glass)

2000 Josko Gravner Ribolla Gialla White Wine \$132 (To my taste, one of the greatest white [“orange”] wines I have ever had. I still have 6 bottles. Yum!).

2005 Damijan “Kaplja” White Wine \$79.00

2005 Vodopivec Vitovsha White Wine \$86.00

2003 Radikon “Oslavje” White Wine 500ml \$51.00

Spec’s (on Smith in Midtown)

2007 Zamo Pinot Bianco White Wine \$10.52

2004 Zamo “Il-Refosco” Red Wine \$36.52

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