

TOPIC [WINE AND SPIRITS \(/MAGAZINES/STYLE/TOPICS/WINE-AND-SPIRITS\)](#)

Making great vintages from montepulciano, grape known for early drinking wines

In the Italian regions of Marche and Abruzzo, vineyards are delivering montepulcianos with high fruit concentration and ageing potential – a far cry from the easy-drinking variety with its soft tannins

BY **SARAH WONG**
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With two meanings, the name “montepulciano” causes confusion in the wine world. On the one hand, Montepulciano is the name of a town in southern Tuscany whose wine, vino nobile di Montepulciano, is made from sangiovese grapes.

On the other, montepulciano is a grape variety that is grown in the central and eastern regions of Italy. In Marche, it produces wines labelled as Rosso Conero and Rosso Piceno. Further down the coast in Abruzzo, the grapes are used to produce wines known as montepulciano d’Abruzzo. The wines are made for early drinking, with red fruit and soft tannins.

Using careful vineyard management, yield control and modern techniques, Michele Bernetti, chief executive of winemaker Umani Ronchi, has shown montepulciano’s potential to make great wines with high fruit concentration and ageing potential.



Umani Ronchi, Cúmaro Conero Riserva DOCG 2013, HK\$290

This wine is named after Mount Conero and the strawberry tree that grows on its slopes. The vineyard is located 150 to 200 metres above sea level and delivers only low yields due to strict pruning and leaf thinning, which increases the grapes' exposure to sunlight, helping with ripening.

Made from 100 per cent montepulciano. Bernetti describes the 2013 as a classic vintage, "not too hot or cold", with grapes reaching optimum ripeness. Fermented in stainless-steel tanks using indigenous yeast. Wines are further aged in oak barriques for 12 to 14 months, with bottle ageing for six to eight months before release.

Black morello cherry; savoury and meaty. Full-bodied with ripe fruit intensity, crisp acidity and firm tannins; elegant and long. A very pure, fruit-forward wine that is ready for drinking.

Umani Ronchi, Campo San Giorgio, Conero Riserva DOCG 2010, HK\$695

Campo San Giorgio is a new project for Umani Ronchi, with 2010 being the wine's second release. Bernetti says the aim is to showcase montepulciano and "to enhance elegance, finesse". This has been achieved through high-density plantings with 8,000 vines per hectare. The vines have been bush-trained, a system that dates to Roman times. Coupled with close planting, this forces vines to develop deep root systems in their search for water and nutrients, improving fruit concentration and increasing complexity.

Made from 100 per cent montepulciano. Wines are fermented in stainless steel, aged in oak barriques for 12 months, and bottle aged for eight to 10 months before release.

Black fruit, spice, licorice. Medium-bodied with firm tannins and finishing long. A food wine. Drinking well and will benefit from further cellaring.

Umani Ronchi, Pelago Marche Rosso IGT 2013, HK\$415

Pelagos means "sea" in ancient Greek. Bernetti says the name reflects "the influence of the sea on the wine, giving it balsamic flavours, with notes of mint and licorice".

Pelago is Umani Ronchi's version of Sassicaia, the first Super Tuscan, and made from 50 per cent montepulciano, 40 per cent cabernet sauvignon and 10 per cent merlot. "It is a wine that retains the style and personality of the indigenous grapes while broadening its aromatic profile and complexity by adding qualities of the Bordeaux style of wine," Bernetti says, adding that "the montepulciano component adds freshness and acid to the wine, balancing the relative heaviness of the cabernet sauvignon".

The 1994 vintage won the best red wine trophy at the London International Wine Challenge in 1997.

Alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel tanks, matured in 225-litre oak barriques for 14 months and bottle aged for 12 months.

Black plums and blackberry fruit, savoury, chocolate with some mint. Full-bodied and round, with well-integrated velvety tannins, ripe fruit intensity and finishing very long.

The wines are available from *Sino Vantage Asia* (<http://sinovantagewines.com/import/>).