

Italy, Marche: A Spotlight on Verdicchio



By MONICA LARNER (/AUTHOR/J5RTSGU2A5HCSXBTY) © Oct 31, 2023



In the vast landscape of Italian white wines, Verdicchio from the Marche region in the center of the country stands out as one of the most promising. Few white grapes show as much versatility or, more importantly, the exceptional capacity for bottle aging.

Verdicchio's versatility means that the grape is suitable for making high-acidity sparkling wine, youthful table wines with electric primary fruit, as well as more elaborate and textured Riserva expressions that may or may not include late-harvest fruit, reductive winemaking, longer skin maceration, lees aging, some degree of malolactic fermentation and oak aging. The possibilities are endless.



Verdicchio

The true magic of the grape, however, is in the fact that even a stainless steel-only Verdicchio made according to simple, hands-off winemaking should continue to evolve beautifully over the next 10 years or more.

“Verdicchio expresses itself from the inside, not so much from the skins or the seeds, but from the actual fruit pulp,” says Bisci winemaker Aroldo Bellelli.



Where to?

With more than 2,000 hectares of vines, the biggest appellation is Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi. The term “castelli” refers to the many villages of the winemaking zone found between the Apennines Mountains and the Adriatic Sea. Some of these are Montecarotto, Castelplanio, Maiolati Spontini, Cupramontana, San Paolo di Jesi and Staffolo.

Wines from Castelli di Jesi in the province of Ancona tend to reflect some of the more generous characteristics that are in line with a territory with a Mediterranean climate that is open to the sea. The flavor profiles show orchard fruit and Golden Delicious apple with hints of spicy ginger, licorice and saffron. These wines are fleshed out and elegantly textured.

That saffron turns into the proverbial white pepper as soon as you move into the neighboring Matelica region (in the province of Macerata), a much smaller denomination that also focuses on Verdicchio. The so-called Matelica “magic” comes thanks to the area’s mountainous elevations, steep diurnal shifts and continental climate. These wines are very vertical in nature, with tight aromas and pronounced minerality.

This report of 165 wines shines a spotlight on Verdicchio. I tasted these wines over three visits to the region, including a two-day tour of wineries that I have detailed below.

Within these notes you will find quite a few vertical tastings that attest to the aging qualities of Verdicchio. You will also find a great number of excellent value wines (priced from \$18 to \$25) that I highly recommend.



Chef Errico Recanati (lower left) of Michelin-starred Ristorante Andreina

(<https://guide.michelin.com/en/marche/loreto/restaurant/andreina>) works magic on the grill and uses smoke as an ingredient. Two of his signature dishes are cacio e pepi (upper left) cooked over open embers in the fireplace (upper right) and his piglet on a spit (lower right).

Borrowing from a tradition of *mare e monti*, or surf and turf, the Marche region offers an exciting array of local culinary specialties that pair with young or aged Verdicchio alike.

Day Three

I made a second trip to the Marche region to visit one of the leading wineries, Umani Ronchi.

Umani Ronchi

Umani Ronchi is one of the leading wineries in central Italy, with 210 hectare of vines spread across three main areas: Verdicchio, Conero and Abruzzo. Looking specifically at the white grape, this estate has 100 hectares of Verdicchio located in seven parcels. Since the 1970s, Umani Ronchi's land holdings have doubled, and 85% of the old vines have been renewed.



Old Verdicchio vines in Montecarotto

The winery was founded by Gino Umani Ronchi in 1957 in the village of Cupramontana. Partners Roberto Bianchi and Massimo Bernetti joined in 1968. Today, the estate is managed by Michele Bernetti, who joined the company full-time in 1990.



Michele Bernetti

The legendary Tuscan winemaker Giacomo Tachis helped set Umani Ronchi on its path and helped to create some of its most famous wines, such as Pelago, the Montepulciano, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot blend, which was first made in 1994. Tachis left in 2001 just as the estate came into its own with a new state-of-the-art winery in Osimo, a commitment to organics and new projects in the neighboring Abruzzo wine region.



The Umani Ronchi cellar room

The bread-and-butter wines are Verdicchio and Rosso Conero, but Umani Ronchi also focuses on Pecorino and Lacrima di Morro d'Alba.



New Verdicchio vines in Montecarotto

This estate is celebrated for its commitment to issues surrounding biodiversity and sustainability. As owners of the elegant Grand Hotel Palace in the port city of Ancona, it is also uniquely positioned to forge synergies between wine tourism and hospitality in the Marche region.



Verdicchio safari

Umani Ronchi's Verdicchio program has three main wines, starting with the Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore CaSal di Serra, which is a blend of fruit from various areas. The Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Riserva Plenio, with fruit from Cupramontana, sees some oak aging. My favorite is the cement-only (and no malolactic fermentation) Ver Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore Vecchie Vigne, with fruit from four hectares of vines planted in 1971 in Montecarotto.



A perfect pairing for young Verdicchio? Why not try the local Marche specialty, moscioli gratinati, or wild mussels from the seaside town of Portonovo served with breadcrumbs.

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Delivered to Italy at age 11 by The Winds of War, Monica Lerner has lived most of her life in her adopted home. A Los Angeles native, her family moved to Rome for filming of the 1983 World War II TV mini-series thanks to her father, Director of Photography Stevan Lerner (Badlands, Roots, North and South and Caddyshack...).

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