

# Umbria

Land of saints and heroes since ever, the green heart of Italy is also the indisputable land of historical and renowned wines, a strong connection which always had accompanied the genuine and tasty cooking of the region in the course of its history

Umbria, among the most suggestive and charming regions of Italy, is by many appreciated for its historical, cultural and artistic richness as well as for its enchanting views, rich of green in which dominate olive trees and vines. Olive oil and wine are in fact two fundamental elements of the enogastronomical culture of the region which set its root in ancient rural traditions. Umbrian cooking is based on simple and humble ingredients however genuine, tasty and dainty: a good attraction for the countless tourists that every year come in this region looking for nice food and nice wines. Umbria has always been considered a land of saints, heroes and refined artists who gave fame and prestige not only to the history of the region but also to the one of Italy. Umbria is also famous in the world for its wines: it is not by chance this region is by many considered as the "Italian Bourgogne", and here enology set its root in the era of the ancient Etruscans, the glorious and mysterious people who established in the western part of the region more than 3,000 years ago.

The prestige of Umbrian wines was very high during Etruscan and Roman times and many are the praises written by many great and important authors of the past, such as Pliny the Elder and Martial, who praised their quality in their writings. In subsequent periods the notoriety of Umbrian wine experienced different moments of luck and fame. Around the end of 1400's Umbrian wine was very appreciated and looked for, in particular the ones produced at Orvieto that were also requested by the renowned painter from Perugia Bernardino di Betto, known as Pinturicchio, as a part of the remuneration for his works at the cathedral of Orvieto. Even other Umbrian painters, including the great Pietro Vannucci, known as Perugino, requested that part of the remuneration for their paintings would be in the form of *good wine*, a custom, it seems, pretty common among the artists of the past. In later periods, in Umbria as in other Italian regions, wine was produced in huge quantities and low quality, as wine was a fundamental resource for the nutrition of the ones who was making it, therefore the more, the better.

The real change for Umbrian enology and viticulture takes place in the beginning of the 1960's which will lead, in 1968, to the first and important prestigious success of the first Umbria's DOC designated to Torgiano. This important and fundamental success was the consequence of the tenacity and capacity of one of the greatest people of the Umbrian and Italian enology, Giorgio Lungarotti, whose wines are now renowned all over the world. The success of Torgiano will be affirmed in 1990 with the designation of the first Umbrian DOCG to Torgiano Rosso Riserva wine. Few kilometers from Torgiano another great man of Umbrian enology is ready to revive the great heritage of his land. Arnaldo Caprai begins his triumphant way to the world of wine by acquiring, in the beginning of 1970's, some vineyards in Montefalco. From the beginning he pays his attention to the dream of reviving the fame of the local red berried grape Sagrantino, forgotten and scarcely appreciated by many and in Montefalco, at those times, many are about to replace it in the vineyards with other varieties. Caprai is convinced about the potentialities of Sagrantino grape and calls in the winery his son Marco, whose passion and tenacity will be fundamental for the development and the affirmation of worldwide success for Sagrantino.

Even at Orvieto, already famous in ancient times for its white wines, will take place some important events that will greatly contribute to the success and prestige of Umbrian enology. It will be the Antinori family to create at Castello della Sala at Ficulle, near Orvieto, two of the most celebrated Italian wines in recent years and that will contribute to

the creation of a new style. Thanks to the intuitions and passion of wine maker Renzo Cotarella - brother of another celebrated wine maker, Riccardo Cotarella, who were both born in Umbria - it will be made a great white, Cervaro della Sala, mainly produced with Chardonnay to which is added a small part of the *par excellence* Umbrian white berried grape: Grechetto. A wine which impresses from the very beginning for its elegance and, as a matter of fact, represents a new style in Italian white wines. The success is repeated few years later with the renowned Muffato della Sala, produced with grapes affected by *Botrytis Cinerea* - the noble rot - a phenomenon that Italy has in Orvieto its main representative.

The current enological condition in Umbria is facing great changes in which quality is continuously increasing



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and most of the producers in the region have abandoned since many years bulk productions in favor of a better quality. Umbria is the only region of peninsular Italy having no coastlines and the land mainly is hilly, a condition that allows a good cultivation of vine and olive trees. The hilly view is in fact a virtually constant characteristic present everywhere in the region. From north to south, from east to west, Umbria is an uninterrupted up and down of hills and slopes in which dominate the gray-green colors of olive trees and the neat rows of vineyards occasionally broke by the many and placid cities rich in art, history and traditions. Wines produced in Umbria are both red and whites - virtually in equal quantity - as well as sweet wines produced with grapes dried on mats, of which the best representatives are Vin Santo, which in Umbria has a long and strong tradition, just like in many other regions in Italy, and Sagrantino di Montefalco Passito.

In Umbria are being cultivated both white and red berried grapes, and both represent an important factor of region's enology. As opposed to other regions in which dominates a specific style of wine, in Umbria, also because of its traditions, the production is divided, almost equally, between white wines and red wines. Among white berried grapes, Grechetto is the one playing the primary role, an autochthonous Umbrian grape spread all over the region and with which are produced interesting white wines, both vinified with this grape alone and blended with other varieties and in particular with Chardonnay. The most important red berried grape is Sagrantino, and no matter it is almost exclusively cultivated in Montefalco - its homeland - the wines produced with this grape are now the most representative ones of Umbria. Among other white berried grapes of the region there are Malvasia Bianca, Trebbiano Toscano, Verdello, Canaiolo Bianco and Procanico, whereas for red berried grapes there are Sangiovese, Ciliegiole, Canaiolo Nero, Montepulciano, Barbera and, in particular, Gamay introduced in the area of Trasimeno lake more than one century ago and with which are produced interesting wines. In Umbria are also found the so called "international grapes", such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc and Riesling, as for white berried varieties, as well as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc, as for red berried grapes.

## The Classification of Umbrian Wines

The wines of Umbria are classified according the quality system in force in Italy and precisely, from the lowest level to the highest one: **Vini da tavola** (*table wines*), **IGT** (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica, Typical Geographic Indication*), **DOC** (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata, Denomination of Controlled Origin*) and **DOCG** (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin*). In Umbria there are currently two DOCG areas: Torgiano Rosso Riserva and Sagrantino di Montefalco (or Montefalco Sagrantino), both being red wines and to certainly be considered among the most important wines of the region. The wine production areas currently designated as DOC by the quality system are 11 and precisely: Assisi, Colli Altotiberini, Colli Amerini, Colli del Trasimeno, Colli Martani, Colli Perugini, Lago di Corbara, Montefalco, Orvieto, Rosso Orvietano and Torgiano. It should be however observed that a pretty high percentage of wines is produced as IGT (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica, Typical Geographic Indication*) and here, just like in all the other regions of Italy, the quality of these products is often higher than many other wines belonging to higher categories.

## Torgiano and Torgiano Riserva

Few kilometers south from Perugia, the capital city of Umbria, there is the town of Torgiano, renowned all over the world for the production of wine. Its success is mainly the result of the work of Giorgio Lungarotti, who thanks to his intuitions, tenacity and capacity was capable of transforming the image of a place by means of wine. The area of Torgiano is now recognized both as DOC and DOCG, in both cases it was the first area in Umbria to achieve this goal (DOC recognition was designated in 1968 and DOCG in 1990). The notoriety of Torgiano certainly is represented by Torgiano Rosso Riserva, the only DOCG wine of this area and mainly produced with Sangiovese and Canaiolo Nero grapes. The production of Torgiano's DOC wines is pretty vast and includes white, red, rose and sparkling wines. Bianco di Torgiano is produced with Trebbiano Toscano and Grechetto and among the white wines are also interesting the monovarietals produced with Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Riesling Italico. Rosso di Torgiano - the first red to be famous outside this area - is produced with Sangiovese, Canaiolo Nero and a small part of Trebbiano Toscano. The production of red wines also includes monovarietals made of Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, whereas rose wines are produced with the same grapes of Torgiano Rosso.

## Montefalco and Sagrantino di Montefalco

Montefalco certainly is the wine area which is having lots of attention since many years and which is more and more becoming the reference wine area in Umbria. Montefalco area is located about 40 kilometers east from Perugia (about 25 miles) and the success of its Sagrantino called in the area famous producers coming from other regions. Just like the neighboring Torgiano, Montefalco shares its area with DOC and DOCG designations. Only wines exclusively produced with Sagrantino are recognized as DOCG, which can be produced as dry and sweet (*passito*). In past times Sagrantino was exclusively produced as *passito*, a sweet wine, rich and full bodied, which well matched the rich Easter meals of Montefalco's people. Despite Sagrantino Passito is still very appreciated - and not only in Montefalco - it is however the dry style to catch most of the attention. Sagrantino vinified as dry is the result of pretty recent researches, about 30 years ago, anyway its improvement is mainly because of the remarkable and precious work in researching and revaluation done by Arnaldo Caprai and his son Marco. Sagrantino is a robust and powerful

grape - with a very high quantity of tannins and a remarkable organoleptic richness - which concretely faced the risk of extinguishment from the vineyards in Montefalco in favor of other varieties, whereas today, thanks to the efforts of producers, it is a grape capable of making wines appreciated everywhere in the world. In the Montefalco area are also produced DOC white and red wines. Montefalco Bianco is produced with Grechetto and Trebbiano Toscano, whereas Montefalco Rosso - a truly interesting red wine - is mainly produced with Sangiovese and Sagrantino grapes and it is also available as *reserve*.

## Orvieto

In past times whenever Italian wine was mentioned, Orvieto was one of the few names to be more frequently remembered. To tell the truth it should also be admitted that whether in ancient times - in the era dating as back as Etruscan times - Orvieto wines were celebrated and appreciated everywhere, the same cannot be said for the subsequent periods. Speculation done in Orvieto, not only by local producers but also and mainly by the ones coming from other areas, was just aiming to bulk productions while depriving the wine of the glorious quality which made this area famous in the past. Luckily, since many years things are changing and producers are now aiming to a strict quality in the hope of reaching that quality so praised in past times again. Orvieto is mainly renowned for its white wines produced with Procanico - the local name for Trebbiano Toscano - Verdello, Grechetto, Drupeggio - elsewhere known as Canaiolo Bianco - and Malvasia Toscana. White wines are also produced as Classico, Superiore and Classico Superiore. Remarkable and interesting is the production of some sweet wines produced with grapes affected by *Botrytis Cinerea* - the renowned noble rot - a phenomenon which frequently happens in Orvieto and known since many years. In Orvieto are recently being produced DOC red wines known as Rosso Orvietano (or Orvietano Rosso), both as a blend and as monovarietals, made of Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cilieggiolo, Canaiolo Nero and Aleatico.

## Colli del Trasimeno

One of the areas which is getting more and more interest and success is Colli del Trasimeno. This area is located west from Perugia and includes all the cities and areas near the Trasimeno Lake. The area is designated as DOC and the production of wine makes use of a pretty high quantity of grape varieties, both white and red. Among the white berried grapes there is Grechetto - the Umbrian autochthonous spread all over the region - Trebbiano Toscano, Malvasia del Chianti, Verdello and Verdicchio. It should be observed that Grechetto is the only grape from which is allowed the production of monovarietal white wines. Among red berried grapes are cultivated Sangiovese, Gamay, Cilieggiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Interesting is the presence of Gamay, to be considered as a particular case in the spreading of this renowned grape. Gamay was introduced in the Trasimeno area more than one century ago and now is so common to be almost considered a typical grape of the area. Red wines produced with Gamay in the Colli del Trasimeno are pretty interesting and are to be considered as the best DOC red wines of this area.

## Other Production Areas

Among the most interesting wine areas of Umbria should certainly be mentioned Colli Amerini, among the most interesting areas of the region for the production of red wines that here are made of Sangiovese, Montepulciano, Cilieggiolo, Canaiolo Nero, Barbera and Merlot. Among the most recent DOC areas there is Assisi, in particular for Grechetto vinified as monovarietal. Even the production of Colli Martani is interesting both for white wines and red wines, although the celebrity of this area is Grechetto di Todi, a white wine produced in pretty limited quantities. An area which is completely involved in the production of red wines is Lago di Corbara, near Orvieto, in which are found Merlot, Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, also vinified as monovarietals. In the area which goes from Perugia to the northern border of Umbria there is Colli Altotiberini DOC area, in which are produced both white wines and red wines. South from Perugia is found the DOC area of Colli Perugini, which also reaches part of the province of Terni, and in which are mainly produced white and red wines.

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