

# WINE OVERVIEW



## ITALY

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Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

Italy is one of the most daunting countries to master when it comes to wine. There are 20 regions (including 2 islands), 73 DOCGs, over 300 DOCs, 500 or so IGTs, over 3,500 indigenous grapes and international varietals, traditionalists and modernist winemakers, big business and small family farms. In this complicated landscape you will discover some of the most interesting and memorable wines in the world.

Italy is 760 miles long, and 116,303 square miles. To put this in perspective, Italy is the size of a combined Florida and Georgia. The entire country is a vineyard, and Italy battles back and forth with France annually for producing the most wine in the world.

The vine is cultivated in all 20 of Italy's regions - from the Alps in the North, along both coasts of the peninsula, and the islands to the south. Viticulture roots in Italy extend back to 2,000 B.C. The South and the Islands were influenced by the Greek winemaking traditions and in the North, learned from the Gauls. (Gaul was a European region during the Iron and Roman Ages, comprising what is present day France, Luxembourg and Belgium, most of Switzerland and the western part of Northern Italy, Netherlands and Germany.) With the accommodating climate, soil, and wine culture, the peninsula of Italy soon became known as 'Oenotria' or 'Land of Wine.'

## CLASSIFICATION

The Italian appellation system was introduced in 1963, and is modeled after the French Appellation of Origin classification. All wine classifications in Europe (for members of the EU) are divided into two categories: Table Wine and Quality Wine Produced in a Specific Region (QWPSR).

## TABLE WINES

Vino da Tavola (VDT) - A basic wine that cannot be labeled with a vintage year and is usually consumed locally.

Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT) - A wine from a specific area that does not conform to the DOC(G) laws of the area. This designation was created in 1992 as a response to the 'Super Tuscan' style- good wine (better than Vino da Tavola) that does not conform to the regulations of the area. This regulation is known as "Goria's Law", and opened the door for some of the country's best and most famous wines.

## QUALITY WINE PRODUCED IN A SPECIFIC REGION (QWPSR)

Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC) - A more traditional classification, the more than 300 DOCs each have their own law regarding grape varieties, blends, harvest yields, winemaking methods, type and length of aging, levels of alcohol, acidity, and extract.

Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) - There are currently 73 DOCGs (about 36 as of 10 years ago). The wines must comply with all DOC standards and pass a chemical analysis and blind tasting panel.

## MAJOR VARIETALS OF ITALY

### REDS

**Sangiovese** - Considered Italy's most noble red grape, it is the base for many prize-winning wines including Chianti Classico, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Brunello di Montalcino, and Morellino di Scansano. It has a characteristic black cherry aroma with scents of wood smoke, tar and wild herbs.

**Nebbiolo** - Considered native to Piedmont, this ancient grape has been documented since the 1300s. Along with Sangiovese, it represents the most noble Italian grape. It produces uniquely perfumed and powerful reds. It is also known as Chiavennasca in Valtellina, Picotendro in Aosta Valley, and Spanna in Northern Piedmont.

**Barbera** - High tannin grape native of the Monferrato hills, Barbera is the most-grown red grape in Piedmont and the second most planted in Italy after Sangiovese. Durable and very productive, this grape variety is planted in about every suitable place, thereby generating a wide variety of styles and bouquet. Called Dolcetto in local parlance, the name means "little sweet thing" and refers to the sweetness of the ripe grape. It ripens early and it is used in soft, dark reds with strong black-fruit flavors and surprisingly soft tannins.

**Corvina** - As suggested by the name, this is a deep dark and spicy red grape. It is widely used in Valpolicella, Recioto della Valpolicella, and Amarone della Valpolicella.

**Montepulciano** - Sweet tannins and a jammy, soft flavor characterize this red grape widely grown in Italy. Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and Rosso Conero are among the best varieties.

**Aglianico** - Believed to have been brought over to Italy from Greece, its name derives from the Latin ellenico or Hellenic. Another theory states that it was originally a wild native vine that was domesticated by the Greeks.

**Nero d'Avola** - Also called Calabrese, is the most important red grape in Sicily. It is vinified into dark, thick, flavorful reds reminiscent of the best Australian Shiraz.

**Negroamaro** - The name means "Bitter Black" and produces deeply-colored and brawny wines with strong hints of tropical spices. It is among the most planted red grapes in Italy, and notably, it is the base for the Salice Salentino and other flavorful reds produced in the Salentine peninsula.

**Primitivo** - Dr. Carole Meredith, a California researcher, proved that the Puglian native Primitivo grape has the same DNA as the American Zinfandel and the Croatian Plavac Mali. Extremely popular among winemakers of soft, spicy, sun-baked reds produced in the Salentine peninsula.

**Cannou** - Italian name for the French Garnacha or Grenache, produces earthy, red-berry flavored reds. Teroldego Maybe related to Marzemino, this grape is actually gaining popularity over it especially in the area around Campo Rotaliano.

**Sagrantino** - Grown exclusively in five municipalities in the Montefalco area, this dark and spicy grape is making a comeback after having almost completely disappeared. Very rare, it makes one of Italy's most distinctive red wines.

**Refosco** - Used in dark, tannic, strong, spicy wines with black fruit accents.

**Schioppettino** - A rare red grape native to Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it is comparable to Syrah. Though the wines it produces are strongly tannic, it evolves into warm, rich red wine when aged.

**International varietals:** Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, Pinot Noir (called Pinot Nero in Italy).

### WHITES

**Trebbiano** Known in France as Ugni Blanc, Trebbiano represents the largest family of Italian white grapes and counts a large number of variations throughout Italy. It is an extremely productive grape used to produce generally light, pale white wines. Its origins are widely debated.

**Pinot Grigio** Known in France as Pinot Gris, this is an extremely productive grape with highly variable characteristics.

**Pinot Bianco** - The Italian version of the French Pinot Blanc, this grape has been planted in Italy since the early 1800's. Arguably, the best variety is the Friuli-Venezia Giulia, also known as Weissburgunder.

**Verdicchio** - Possibly related to Greco or Trebbiano, especially the sub-variety found in Soave, Verdicchio is one of the most appreciated Italian native whites. It is mostly grown in the Jesi and Matelica areas.

**Vernaccia** - The most prominent white varietal in Tuscany, where it is best produced as Vernaccia di San Gimignano. This was the first DOCG white wine in Italy, awarded in 1966.

**(Tokai) Friuliano** - Not to be confused with Alsace's Tokai or the Hungarian Tokaji, this is the top Friuli native grape. The EC ruled for a name change to avoid confusion with other varieties. It makes wines that combine mineral qualities with delicate scents of peaches and pears.

**Traminer** - Probably native of the Termeno (Tremin in German) from where it is believed to get its name, the Traminer is considered the originator of the more famous and widespread Gewürztraminer. The Italian Traminer is generally less aromatic than Gewürztraminer.

**Arneis** - Native of the Roero hills of Piedmont, this somewhat floral and citrusy grape cultivation dates as far back as the 15th century.

**Cortese** - A native Piedmont grape, it is the base of the Gavi wines.

**Garganega** - The base for the Soave wines.

**Moscato** Italian name for the French Muscat Blanc à Petit Grain, The oldest known variety of Muscat. It is the most planted and most appreciated among the widely cultivated Moscato varieties grown in Italy. It is also known as Moscato Canelli.

**Malvasia** - Thought to be of Greek origin, Malvasia is among the most cultivated grapes in Italy. It comes in many varieties.

**Vermentino** - A crisp, acidic grape with herbal hints lent by the Mediterranean scrub, Vermentino is among the most appreciated Italian native whites. Extremely durable and resistant to both heat and drought, it grows particularly well in coastal areas such as the Tuscan Maremma or the rocky Gallura in Sardinia.

**Fiano** - Spicy, smoky and crisp grape grown in Campania for centuries it produces some of the most full-bodied, aromatic whites in the region.

**Greco** - Suspected to be originator of the similarly named Grechetto, Grecanico, and Garganica, this ancient, original Greek grape may well be the progenitor of the widely grown Trebbiano. It is the base for the Greco di Tufo wines.

**Falanghina** - Probably of Greek origin, the grape very likely got its name from the Latin phalanga, or pole, in reference to the ancient Greek method of growing vines tied to a pole.

**International varietals** - Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc.



## REGIONS OF ITALY

Italy can be divided into four regions: Northwest, Northeast, Central, and South (including the Islands)

Northwest: Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Liguria, Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna

Northeast: Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto

Central: Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Abruzzo, Molise, Latium

Southern: Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia  
Arguably, the best variety is the Friuli-Venezia Giulia one, also known as Weissburgunder

## NORTH WESTERN ITALY

### PIEDMONT

Piedmont is one of the most important and majestic regions in Italy. Two of Italy's most famous wines, Barolo and Barbaresco, are made here. This is a land of steep hills, its name literally meaning "foothills of the mountain". The climate here is continental- cold winters and hot dry summers. Turin is the major city of this region, and it was here that Italy really joined the Industrial Revolution. In Northern Italy surrounded by mountains, Piedmont was somewhat isolated. At times they were influenced more by the French than their fellow Italians. It is hard to think of Italy merely in terms of regions, but it wasn't until 1861 that Italy became a unified country. The isolated, but enlightened Piedmont was therefore the first region in Italy to really master winemaking, know its vineyard sites, and classify its wines.

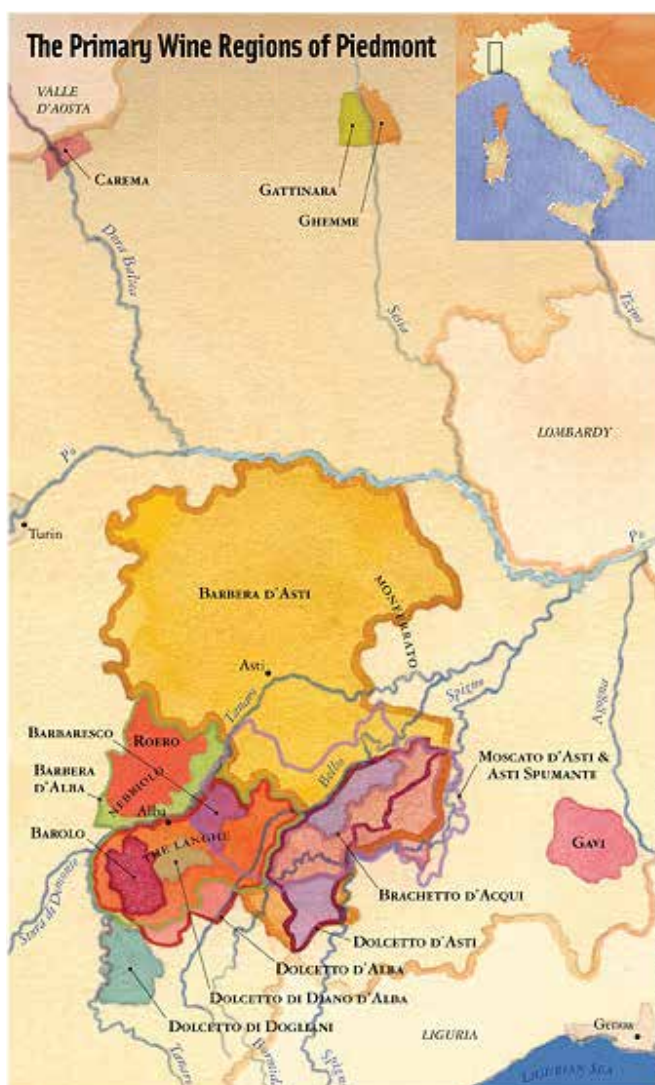
Barolo is known as the "King", and Barbaresco as the "Queen", of Italian wine, but both wines are made entirely from the very noble Nebbiolo. This varietal gets its name from the fog (or "nebbia") that forms in

the vineyards at the bottom of the hills where it grows. Barolo must age a minimum of three years (five years for Riservas) while Barbaresco must age a minimum of two years (four years for Riservas). Barolos tend to be bigger, more powerful, and take longer to reach maturity while Barbarescos are more elegant and require less time to mature.

Other wines of the region are Barbera d'Alba, Dolcetto d'Alba, Barbera d'Asti, Brachetto d'Acqui, Gattinara, and Ghemme.

Moscato d'Asti is a sparkling wine from the town of Asti made from Moscato grapes. (Note: When you see a d', de, or di in an Italian wine it means a wine made from this grape from that place. Moscato d'Asti= a wine made from Moscato from the town of Asti. This will be useful throughout Italy- Brunello di Montalcino, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, Cannanou di Sardengna). It is a sparkling wine but Moscato d'Asti is NOT made in the traditional champagne method. Rather a bulk carbonation technique called Charmat method.

White wines of the region are Roero Arneis and Gavi di Gavi. Roero Arneis being made in the town of Roero from the Arneis varietal. Arneis was planted in vineyards to distract birds from eating the more valuable Nebbiolo. It wasn't cultivated into a wine till 1967. Gavi di Gavi is made from Cortese grapes. This varietal is known for high acidity, and used to be vinified into a sparkling wine. Now Gavi's are a still fine white wine.



## LOMBARDY

Most people think of this region as the home of fashion epicenter Milan. In terms of wine, Lombardy is the home of Franciacorta- a wine that rivals Champagne in taste, style, and price. How fashionable! Here you will find Lake Como, the Alps, and the wealthiest people in Italy. The climate is diverse, but cool.

Franciacorta is made from Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Pinot Nero in the traditional champagne method (Method Champenoise). Non vintage wines must age nine months in bottle and vintage dated sparklers must age 30 months. The red wine of the region is Valtellina, made from Nebiollo. It is a softer version of Nebiollo than typically found in the wines of Piedmont. Lugana, a full bodied fruity white wine, is made from Trebbiano di Lugana.

## EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Emilia-Romagna is the home of Lambrusco, a red sparkling wine made from the eponymous varietal. While it tends to be sweet, these wines can be made in a drier, more serious, style as well. This region is home to Albana di Romagna- Italy's first DOCG white wine. This region also makes several wines from Sangiovese and Trebbiano varietals.

## VALLE D'AOSTA

Nestled deep in the extreme Northwestern-most pocket of the Italian Alps, Valle d'Aosta, the smallest of all wine producing regions in Italy spans the 33 miles of one central valley. The influence of Switzerland and France is strong in this isolated mountainous region.

## LIGURIA

Home of Genoa, the largest port of Italy and one of the busiest in the Mediterranean, this region once belonged to France under Napoleon's reign. Ligurian viticulture is characterized by terraces carved from the cliffs that descended vertiginous toward the sea. At Cinque Terre vineyards are harvested by workers in boats.

## NORTH EASTERN ITALY

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Note: The following three regions (Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) are known geographically as Tre Venezie meaning 'three Venices.' These areas were all part of the Venice trading epicenter in the Middle Ages. This is important because a wine from these three regions can be classified as IGT Delle Venezie and be made from grapes sourced from all three regions of Italy. This is the only multi-region classification in Italy.

## TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE

This is really two regions- Alto Adige in the North and Trentino in the South. The entire region is encompassed by the Dolomites of the Alps. In Alto Adige people are more likely to speak German than Italian. This area was part of Austria until 1919. While Alto Adige is mountainous, Trentino is far more hilly. The climate here is continental.

Alto Adige makes varietally labeled white wines from Pinot Grigio, Pinot Bianco, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Moscato, and Muller-Thurgau. Red wine is made from the light bodied Schiava. Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Lagrein, Pinot Nero are also planted. In Trentino local red variety Teroldego is planted, along with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Lagrein, Merlot, and Pinot Nero. Chardonnay is the main white of the region followed by Pinot Grigio, Muller-Thurgau, and Pinot Blanc.

## VENETO

Along with Piedmont and Tuscany, Veneto is one of Italy's most well known fine wine regions. Recognized for Soave, Valpolicella, and Amarone wines, this region has wine styles as diverse as their climate. Near the coast the weather is mild, hot in the center, and cool in the West. Veneto is home to both the romantic city of Verona, of Romeo and Juliet fame, and the timeless water lined canals streets of Venice.

The main reds of the region are all made with the same indigenous varietals- Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. In Valpolicella, they are made into a dry red wine. In Ripasso della Valpolicella the Valpolicella wine is fermented over dried grapes. Ripasso means "to re-pass" and the resulting wine has more raisiny, stewed fruit flavors, more alcohol, body, and tannins. Amarone della Valpolicella is made entirely from dried grapes. This takes all the flavors of Ripasso and elevates them even further to more alcohol, body, tannins, stewed fruit, and rasinated flavors. Ripasso can be called a "baby Amarone" or a "Valpolicella on steroids".

Soave is made near Verona in the west and made of primarily Garganega. Small amounts of Trebbiano di Soave, Chardonnay, and Pinot Bianco are also permitted. To the west, closer to Venice, the sparkling wine of Prosecco is made. Prosecco was both the name of the wine and the grape it is made from, but Glera is now the accepted name of the Prosecco grape. The best Prosecco is Prosecco di Conegliano - Valdobbiadene, produced close to those two villages. The charmat method, rather than the champagne method, gives this wine frizzante bubbles or fully spumante bubbles.

## FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

Much like Trentino-Alto Adige this region has many cultural influences. The eastern part belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War I. Serbo-Croatian and Italian are both spoken in the East. This is mountainous country and white wine reigns here. Yields in Friuli are some of the lowest in Italy- a testament to their fine wine intentions. The whites made here are Pinot Grigio, Friuliano, Pinot Bianco, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Traminer, Muller-Thurgau, and Ribolla Gialla. Merlot, Cabernet Franc, followed by Cabernet Franc, Refosco, Schiopettino, and Pinot Nero are the dominant reds. While whites dominate the scene, red wine production is substantial.

## CENTRAL ITALY

### TUSCANY

A land of glowing warmth, rolling hills, ancient castles, olive groves and cypress trees, Tuscany has spawned many a daydream, painting, novel, and film. Florence is the ancient center of Tuscany, and the burial place of Galileo, Dante, Michelangelo, Vespucci, and Machiavelli.

All of the major reds of Tuscany are predominately produced from the Sangiovese grape, or a local clone of Sangiovese. Chianti, probably the most famous Italian wine, is made from a minimum of 75% Sangiovese, with up to 10% Canaiolo and a total of 20% non-traditional grapes like Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah. Chianti Classico is the traditional home of Chianti (the term Classico always denotes the ancestral home of a wine/winemaking tradition) and was delineated in 1716- one of the first instances of legally classifying a wine area. A Chianti Classico Riserva can be made from Chianti Classico's best grapes and it must be aged from 27 months. South of Chianti Classico and South of Siena is the area of Brunello di Montalcino. These wines are made from the Brunello grape, a clone of Sangiovese known for its



brown skin - hence the 'brun' in Brunello. Brunello di Montalcino was the first red wine to be given DOCG status and is one of the finest most prestigious red wines of Italy. The climate is drier and warmer than Chianti in the North. Brunellos must age for four years and Riservas require five years. Just east of Montalcino is Montepulciano where the legendary Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is made. The wine here is made from Prugnolo Gentile, a local clone of Sangiovese, along with Canaiolo, Mammolo and/or Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

Vernaccia di San Gimignano is the first white DOC in Italy, and has since been promoted to DOCG. It is made mostly from Vernaccia. The "Super Tuscan" category is newer and applies to both red and white wines. In the late 70's and early 80's, winemakers in Tuscany wanted to make wines with more international varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Syrah). Legally, these wines could only be classified as Vino da Tavola, the lowest category, but would sell for very high prices. Thus the IGT classification was created in 1994 for fine wines that fall outside of the traditional classifications of the area. This trend originated in the Chianti zone and has spread throughout Tuscany. Maremma and Bolgheri are popular areas for Super Tuscans.

## UMBRIA

Umbria is the only region in Italy that doesn't touch the sea or another country. It is entirely surrounded by Italy! The city of Assisi is found here and is the home of St. Francis of Assisi. Orvieto and Sagrantino di Montefalco are two of the noteworthy wines made in Umbria. Orvieto is a blend of Grechetto and Trebbiano. Sagrantino di Montefalco is made from Sagrantino grapes.

## MARCHE

This is mountainous and hilly countryside. Marche is known for white Verdicchio wines: Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Verdicchio di Matelica. Rosso Conero and Rosso Piceno are the region's reds.

## ABRUZZO

The 9,000 feet Alpennines Mountains that dissect this region have kept it somewhat isolated. This is the most mountainous region in Italy. They actually measured that it is 65% mountains and 35% hills! The main red wine here is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and the white is Trebbiano d'Abruzzo.

## MOLISE

A small, isolated, mountainous region connected to Abruzzo administratively till 1960's. Like Abruzzo the main grapes grown here are Montepulciano and Trebbiano. Wine here is almost entirely produced by co-operatives and sold in bulk.

## LATIUM

The capital city of Rome is located here and the population is quite dense. It is Italy's third most populous region after Lombardy (Milan), and Campania (Naples). Latium is known for inexpensive white wines made from Malvasia and Trebbiano grapes. Frascati is one of the more well-known wines. The other notorious white of the region is Est! Est!! Est!!! di Montefiascone. This translates into "It is, It is, It is". Local legend says a Bishop was on his way to Rome, sent a page ahead of him to find good inns for wine along the way. Once in Montefiascone he loved the wines so much he wrote "Est! Est!! Est!!!" on the door to the wine inn there. While the wine doesn't quite deserve such adulation, it is an interesting tale nonetheless.

## SOUTHERN ITALY

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### CAMPANIA

Campania is home to the thriving metropolis of Naples, the Island of Capri, the beautiful Amalfi Coast, Mount Vesuvius, and the birthplace of pizza. The region is hilly with warm and dry weather near the coast and rainier, cooler climates inland. The most renowned red wine of the region is Taurasi. This wine is

composed primarily of Aglianico and must be aged for three years with one year in oak. For Riservas, the wine must be four years with 18 months in oak. White wines of note are Fiano di Avellino, Greco di Tufo, Falanghina, and Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio.

## APULIA

After talk of mountains and hills, we have arrived at Italy's flattest wine region. The weather is warm here and grape production is huge, rivaling Sicily for the quantitative first place in production. The climate is Mediterranean in the heel of the boot of Italy. The best wines are usually made in the South- the stiletto heel of Apulia's heel. Salice Salentino is made from Negroamaro and Primitivo di Manduria is made from Primitivo.

## BASILICATA

This mountainous region is sparsely populated and home to Italy's coldest city, Potenza at 2,624 feet elevation. Aglianico del Vulture is the finest wine of the region and produced near the extinct volcano Monte Vulture. This is the biggest, baddest, and finest red wine of Southern Italy and is known as the Barolo of the South.

## CALABRIA

This is the sole and toe of Italy's boot. It is a poor, hilly and mountainous area with a Mediterranean climate. The most import wine of this region is Ciro Rosso made from the Gaglioppo varietal.

## SICILY

This is Italy's largest region, and the largest island in the Mediterranean. The Greeks came to the island in 8000BC and introduced winemaking. The island is hilly, mountainous, dry, and hot, which is ideal for wine production. Sicilians have their own language, unique culture, and wine varietals. Co-operatives were dominant here but more and more family wineries have been founded and are promoting the potential of fine wine in Sicily. Mount Etna, the highest elevation (10,705 feet) active volcano in Europe is responsible for the layered complexity in the soil here.

White wines are made from Insolia, Cataratto, Grillo, and Chardonnay. Reds include Nero d'Avola, Perricone, Nerello Mascalese, as well as Syrah, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Marsala, a fortified wine, is made here. See the Fortified Wine section for information about Marsala.

## SARDINIA

This island in the Mediterranean is 125 miles from the peninsula of Italy. Throughout history, this island has been a part of many kingdoms including the French and Spanish. Several of its grape varietals, Cannanou, Vermentino, Carignano, Monica, and Bobal, are of Spanish origin showing the lingering Spanish influence. While having the most miles of coastline of any other Italian region, most of the island's inhabitants live inland in the hilly center. Cannonau di Sardegna is the island's most well-known red and Vermentino di Sardegna is the most popular white. Vermentino di Gallura DOCG is a finer version of the generic di Sardegna designation.