

7 Wines from Friuli, Italy's Avant-Garde Frontier

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Put this region on your radar.

Think of the factors that make a winegrowing region dynamic and exciting. Coastal vineyards. Mountain influence. A biodiverse landscape that's relatively untouched by industry. A community of quality-driven winemakers who are challenging convention. [Friuli](#)—the eastern corner of Italy that hugs the Adriatic and snakes upwards along the Slovenian border toward the Alps—has all of that.

If Friuli's not on your radar yet, it may be because it stood quietly by while tourism launched more famous regions like [Tuscany](#) into the limelight. But what was once a hindrance on bottle sales has actually preserved its fierce sense of authenticity and independence from the whims of the market. You won't find a concentration of aristocratic estates with "important" *crus*. What you will find are countless small farmstead producers scattered throughout its bucolic rolling hills and rugged coastline.

Like any frontier land, there's a strong sense of cross-cultural pollination in Friuli. The further east you go, the less you'll find Italian-sounding wine names and the more you'll find Slovene-sounding ones, since that border hasn't always been where it stands today. And many of the

same grape varieties grow on both sides. Those local vines produce some of Italy's most expressive whites; they get the benefit of both alpine snap and sea-breeze salinity. The region is also a hotbed for the revival of ancient techniques like skin maceration and anfora ageing, with iconoclasts like Gravner and Radikon leading the charge.

Here, a snapshot of the diverse and avant-garde wines of Friuli, in 7 bottles:

2009 Radikon Venezia-Giulia Ribolla Gialla ([\\$60/500ml](#))

The late Stanko Radikon was one of Italy's foremost winemaking rebels. Believing that the true character of Ribolla Gialla grapes resides in their skins, he performed long macerations, bottling with zero sulfur in unconventional (500ml) formats. His son Saša continues the tradition, turning out golden hued, spice- and floral-scented whites like this one.

2007 Gravner Venezia-Giulia 'Breg' Bianco ([\\$85](#))

Josko Gravner began experimenting with anfora-ageing in the late '90s and has been one of the world's most devout proponents of the ancient clay vessels ever since. This blend of Riesling Italico, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay is as savory as an aged red—rich with dried apricot, date, and earth-driven flavors.

2012 Kante Venezia-Giulia Malvasia ([\\$36](#))

A cult organic producer nestled in the cool limestone hills of the Carso subzone, Edi Kante experimented with maceration in the early days of the orange wine movement but eventually settled on his own unique style. His Malvasia is an excellent example: almost luminescent in the glass, it's pure, luscious fruit with a saline kick it gets from the vines' proximity to the Adriatic.

2011 Vodopivec Venezia-Giulia 'Origine' Vitovska ([\\$49](#))

Paolo Vodopivec has dedicated his entire production to Vitovska—an obscure grape native to the Carso area on the Friuli-Slovenia border known for its concentrated pear-peach fruit and minerality. He farms organically, macerates for two weeks, ferments with native yeasts and bottles without filtering, resulting in one of the region's most vibrant, approachable skin-contact whites.

2015 Venica & Venica Collio Friulano ([\\$24](#))

If the skin-macerated whites of Oslavia and the Carso aren't your thing, try Giampaolo Venica's crisp, clean styles from the Collio appellation. This Friulano's alpine fragrance and zippy freshness make it a great pairing for everything from spring vegetables to cheese and charcuterie.

2011 Ronchi di Cialla Colli Orientali Schioppettino di Cialla ([\\$49](#))

While white wine may be Friuli's calling card, the region is also home to some delicious and characterful local reds. One of the most notable is this Schioppettino from Ronchi di Cialla—the producer who saved the grape from near extinction. It's brambly and wild, with peppery spice and moderate tannin, tasting a bit like a cross between [Syrah](#) and Beaujolais.

2013 Le Due Terre Colli Orientali 'Sacrisassi' Rosso ([\\$49](#))

Le Due Terre, named for the estate's two types of soil (clay and *ponca*, a local marl) is the brainchild of Silvana Forte and Flavio Basilicata. They farm organically and vinify with native yeasts, aging this lively, elegant blend of Schioppettino and Refosco in a combination of cement tanks and old barriques.

Other producers to seek out: Borgo del Tiglio, Ronco del Gnemiz, Skerk, Dario Prinčič, Damijan.