

Italy, Marche: A Spotlight on Verdicchio

By MONICA LARNER - 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. 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.

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.

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.

The villages of Staffolo, Cupramontana and Montecarotto draw a golden triangle that delineates the best areas for Verdicchio, according to Baldi.

Borgo Paglianello

My second visit in Matelica was to the dynamic Borgo Paglianello estate. It was founded by five partners and today produces 11 wines, including one Metodo Classico sparkling, for a total of 130,000 bottles released annually. The estate was purchased in 1993, but winemaking started in 2003. The team is young, tightly knit and full of enthusiasm. Borgo Paglianello is located within the cozy confines of the Alta Valle dell'Esino in the Matelica hills. This is the only valley in the area with a true north-to-south layout, and the cool climate is dictated by this fact. The estate has **29 hectare of vines** across **three parcels**. In addition to Verdicchio, it farms the red grapes Sangiovese, Merlot, Montepulciano and Lacrima. It has been certified for organics since 2013.

Verdicchio from Matelica needs more time in bottle compared to Verdicchio from Jesi," says sales manager Marco Vecchiolo. Borgo Paglianello makes elegant wines that are bright, lifted and show very precise aromas. I especially liked the slightly softer and more fleshed-out 2018 Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva Jera. That wine spends more time aging on the lees. We also tasted a few back vintages, and these wines showed beautifully.

