

Lugana

A success story from Italy's Lake Garda region

So there you sit, with a lovely glass of typically straw yellow Lugana. Look at it and let your imagination fly to its homeland just south of Lake Garda, the largest lake in Italy, with its benign Mediterranean climate (can you see it? Lemon trees, olive groves, vineyards...) and its own special winds (the "Pelèr", a cold north morning wind, and the "Ora", a warm afternoon breeze).

Lugana is a village on the banks of Lake Garda from which Lugana DOC wine takes its name. The denomination also includes

the localities of Sirmione, Desenzano, Peschiera and Lonato, all places renowned for their beauty.

Lugana wine brings holidays to mind, sunbathing by the lake, strolling among the spectacular winding village streets, enjoying good food and excellent wine in typical local trattorias. Historically, the Lugana area's strategic importance was guaranteed by castles that can still be seen in Sirmione, Desenzano and Pozzolengo, and by more modern forts in Peschiera and Lonato. Climbing the majestic

watchtower at San Martino della Battaglia is a worthwhile effort just to enjoy the breathtaking view over the vineyards. The bloody battle that gives the town its name took place during Italy's Risorgimento in 1859, and was the inspiration behind the foundation of the Red Cross by one of its spectators: Swiss businessman and social activist, Henry Dunant.

Lugana extends into two northern Italian provinces; of the over 1,800 hectares of vineyards, eighty per cent lie in the province of Brescia (Sirmione - with

Lugana -, Desenzano, Lonato and Pozzolengo), and the remaining twenty are in the province of Verona (Peschiera, with a sub-zone and San Benedetto di Lugana, the denomination's "cru" area). About 15 million bottles are produced subdivided between Verona and Brescia at 48% and 52% respectively.

Terroir and grapes

Let's take a closer look at the terroir. The soil derives from the retreat of an ancient glacier which left behind the morainic hills and morainic debris, which then mixed with the clay. It is in these prevalently calcareous clays, rich in mineral salts and gradually becoming sandier in the hillier areas, that the roots of Lugana's organoleptic heritage lie. The wine's perfumes have a varied aromatic spectrum ranging from citrus fruits to meadow flowers, almonds, herbs and spices.



The predominant grape variety used for Lugana wine is Turbiana, the local name for Trebbiano di Lugana, which is perfectly at home in these soils. Studies carried out in collaboration with Milan University have concluded that the Turbiana vine is exclusive to this region.

Whatever its origin, almost all producers now only use these grapes in their wine, although the regulations foresee a minimum of 90%.

Actually, the origin of the name Lugana comes from "lucus", which means "wood" in Latin, since the area was once a large forest, so it is not so easy to find a date for the origins of the vine, although, thanks to finding *Vitis silvestris* in Peschiera, it is certain that vines were already growing here in the Bronze Age.

Lugana has been praised by many people over the centuries, including the famous Latin poet Catullus, who spent lengthy periods in Sirmione. Even then the area was renowned for being a "climatic cradle" of rare mildness, where Turbiana found its most appropriate expression.

The earliest official mention dates back to 1595 in Andrea Bacci's "De naturali vinorum historia" where he mentioned ➤





the trebulani grapes grown on the southern hills of Lake Garda that we can consider as the ancestors of Trebbiano di Lugana.

Wine producers

There is one more fundamental element in our short report on the terroir: mankind. Lugana has a particular story in this sense. Here there are winemaking companies that own just three hectares and others that own 150. No marketing analysis has ever been done to launch Lugana, but the numbers speak for themselves: in 2000, there were 600 hectares of vineyards, nowadays there are more than 1,800, which means that they have tripled in 17 years. 70% of the wine is exported. At Christmas, the almost 155 companies that bottle the wine have already sold out. But what is the reason for this success? It is probably due to the producers themselves who have personally got down to the business of promoting their own wine.

“At Prowein in 1997”, explained Carlo Veronese, Director of the Consortium founded in 1990, “there were just 25 companies offering a virtually unknown wine. Verbal communication was difficult but they so believed in their wine and what they were doing that, in the end, the authenticity of these enthusiasts won over Germany, America and the UK. Lugana was the first DOC wine in Lombardy and this year we are celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.”

No cooperatives have ever sprung up in the area. Why is that, do you think? Wine was part of everyday life, everyone was bottling it for themselves and for passing

tourists. There is no middleman here, firstly because small producers were already doing their own bottling and secondly because, with the regulation modifications in 2011, it was established that wine-making, bottling and applying the government controlled band on the bottle neck had to be done in the zone. In short, if the land is now worth 300,000 Euros a hectare, it means that the people

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of Lugana have succeeded in working side by side for the good of the denomination.

“Together we have worked towards enhancing the identity of Lugana”, explains Luca Formentini from the Selva Capuzza company and Consortium President since 2009, “one that no longer needs the sugary residues that it used to have (the acidity of Turbiana grapes needed to be tamed), and one that also knows how to show its versatility at the table (try it, with Indian or Asian food, not just Mediterranean cuisine). We now have a technical commission with environmental duties that include involving producers in training evenings to learn more about the technical aspects of specific topics. It is

interesting to see three generations attending the same event indicating that there is no generational turnover problem. This is where our future strength lies.”

But let’s go back to that glass that is, perhaps, on a table in a London restaurant. Lugana has five categories: the entry level (about 96% of production, with its characteristic tension and freshness), Superiore, Riserva (late, end October harvest, a more complex wine-making process in steel or wood with lengthy resting on the yeasts and long aging), Spumante and, lastly, Vendemmia tardiva (with over-ripening on the plant and no grape-drying). A wide choice, right?

Lugana gains in nobility as it ages, which it does well, especially the Riserva. But now, as our poet Horace said: nunc est bibendum (“now it’s time to drink”). That glass is waiting for us. The taste profile displays a multi-faceted and distinct personality featuring stony minerality, salty determination, vigour, acidity, elegance, softness and depth of flavour. It is a modern, enjoyable and unpretentious wine with no airs and graces. It is not snobbish, nor trying to be an important wine at all costs. It simply wants to be friendly, inviting but with the right structure. Cheers! **D**

Alessandra Piubello is a writer and journalist with a focus on wine and food. She grew up in a winemaking family in the Valpolicella region