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## DISCOVERING THE WINES OF ALTO ADIGE, A UNIQUE AND ORIGINAL WORLD

***By Alessandra Piubello***

Two days of total immersion in the highlands of Alto Adige, under the auspices of the Alto Adige Wine Summit, now in its fifth edition, thanks to the organization of the Consorzio Vini Alto Adige. This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the Alto Adige DOC, established in 1975.

South Tyrol, in northern Italy, in a mountainous environment, is a complex mosaic of unique and original situations, including from a cultural point of view. The region is indeed a crossroads of exchange and a meeting place of three cultures (German, Italian, and Ladin).

With its 5,850 hectares of vineyards, Alto Adige represents approximately 1% of the total wine-growing area of the Italian peninsula. Despite its small size, it is one of Italy's most renowned wine regions. The roughly 326 wineries of Alto Adige produce around 40 million bottles, 95% of which are classified as DOC. The most widespread grape varieties are white, covering 65% of the cultivated area (a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous varieties), while among the reds, in addition to the two indigenous varieties Schiava and Lagrein, almost all the best-known varieties have been cultivated systematically for over a century, and Pinot Noir has certainly found a privileged home here. Today, Alto Adige is a region with a strong focus on white wines, with production almost double that of red wine (35%). It is therefore surprising that 50 years ago, the situation was reversed.

The wide variety of soils, altitudes, and exposures allows for the cultivation of grape varieties in the most suitable areas, enabling them to express themselves at the highest level of quality. The soils of Alto Adige are a veritable puzzle, composed of porphyry of ancient volcanic origin, schist and metamorphic rocks of quartz and mica, dolomitic limestone, and sands and gravels of morainic or alluvial origin. It is precisely the complexity of the territory that led the Consortium to implement a more precise zoning system, identifying 86 additional geographical units, officially recognized with the 2024 vintage. "It was a long and complex process," says Andreas Kofler, President of the Alto Adige Wine Consortium, "but now every bottle can tell its story with maximum transparency, right back to the vineyard of origin. This is a decisive step for traceability and for expressing, in all its authenticity, the extraordinary diversity of our region."

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The wine region of South Tyrol, as we know it, is the product of a recent qualitative revolution that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At a time when the wine world was undergoing rapid change globally, South Tyrol winemakers struggled to keep pace, their production focused on quantity and indigenous grape varieties (Schiava accounted for 80% of the vineyards). This was a difficult turning point, marked by a quest for quality and international grape varieties, which would later revitalize local production. Today, young winemakers are at the helm of family businesses, and even the cooperative wineries (which represent 70% of production and are a flagship of the region) have begun a significant generational shift.

### **The tasting**

South Tyrol is a shining example of a region that, in just a few decades, has successfully reinvented itself and committed itself wholeheartedly to excellence, as the tastings clearly demonstrated. 365 wines from 98 estates were presented at the Wine Summit.

Our readers are now familiar with our philosophy of focusing exclusively on estates that operate according to the principles of organic and biodynamic agriculture. In South Tyrol, 10% of the vineyard area is dedicated to organic viticulture. We have concentrated on white wines, now internationally recognized: mountain wines characterized by their freshness and vibrancy, as well as their depth, elegance, and flavor. These qualities make them ideal companions for meals and social gatherings, and also perfect as an aperitif.

We selected five representative wines from organic or biodynamic farming. A very, very difficult task, given the high quality of the wines offered for tasting.

**Cave Terlano Terlaner I Primo Grande Cuvée Alto Adige Terlano Doc  
2022**

The 2022 vintage is composed of 62% Pinot Blanc, 35% Chardonnay, and 3% Sauvignon Blanc. It represents the quintessence of the best vineyards in the Terlano region.

Sometimes, when faced with a great wine, all it takes is listening to it, for we immediately empathize with it and our very being recognizes it instantly, beyond anything that can be described. Its style is characterized by its finesse and elegance, brought to their zenith.

The winery's history dates back to 1893. It was established in an ideal location: old vines with roots in soils rich in quartz and silica, low-yield vineyards situated at varying altitudes between 250 and 900 meters. It is to Sebastian Stocker, a legendary figure (he began collaborating with Terlano in the 1950s and continued until the 1990s) and great visionary, that we owe the idea that the white wines of this region could age beautifully.

Rudi Kofler, the current winemaker, joined the company in 1999 and, in 2011, produced the first vintage of this exemplary wine, made only in the best years. Part of the vineyards is cultivated according to the principles of organic farming, others according to the principles of integrated pest management (IPM).

### **Brunnenhof Alto Adige Doc Chardonnay Mühlanger 2023**

From one hectare of the Mühlanger vineyard, this Chardonnay expresses itself with fruity, herbaceous, and slightly spicy notes. The palate is juicy and fluid, lively and energetic, so much so that it will have much more to offer over the years. It invites sharing.

Kurt Rottensteiner, now assisted by his son Johann, founded the company in 1999 and subsequently obtained organic certification. The estate comprises seven hectares of vineyards on predominantly sandy and clay soils.

### **Castel Juval Unterortl Alto Adige Unterortl Val Venosta Doc 2024**

A mountain Riesling, as we are in the Val Venosta, with vineyards reaching

850 meters in altitude and steep slopes. The aromatic bouquet evokes notes of citrus and hawthorn, while the palate, flavorful and taut, invites further tasting. We will appreciate it even more in the coming years, when its profile becomes more complex, yet no less fresh and vibrant.

The estate, owned by Reinhold Messner, was founded in 1992 with the collaboration of Martin Aurich, who remained there until his retirement in 2024. Today, the young couple Christine and Raphael Burki continue to manage this magical place, comprising nearly 5 hectares of certified organic vineyards.

### **Manincor Alto Adige Doc Sauvignon Lieben Aich 2023**

This is a Sauvignon Blanc with delicate aromas, not at all bold as we are often used to, but nonetheless multifaceted. The taste emphasizes elegance and finesse, without neglecting a fresh and flavorful vivacity that invites another sip.

In 1991, Count Micheal Goëss-Enzenberg decided to settle with his family in the historic Manincor estate, nestled among the vineyards. Since 2006, the Count and his trusted oenologist, Helmut Zozin, have been converting the estate to biodynamic principles. Of the 50 hectares of vineyards, some are located around the winery in Caldaro, and the rest in Terlano.

### **Cantina Tramin Alto Adige Doc Gewürztraminer Nussbaumer 2023**

Over time, winemaker Willi Stürz has managed to lighten this great classic of Alto Adige winemaking. While the aromas remain those typical of Gewürztraminer, with notes of rose, saffron, and sweet spices, it is on the palate that it reveals an unexpected vibrancy. The balance between savoriness and a lively acidity that lightens the mouth is intriguing.

It was in 1898 that the parish priest of Termeno, Christian Schrott, decided to create a cooperative capable of bringing together the many winegrowers of the region. Today, it has 170 member farmers who manage 270 hectares of vineyards.

The vineyards are partly certified organic, partly certified biodynamic and partly certified integrated pest management (SQNPI).