



SLOVENIA
A WINEMAKING
COUNTRY

Robert Gorkjak

S L O V E N I A

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Dedicated to my wife Sandra.

You were always by my side on the crossroads of life,
helping me discover roads that would have otherwise stayed hidden.

Slovenia – a Winemaking Country
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“Slovenia is one of the world's most exciting wine countries, a true jewel in the crown of Central and Eastern Europe. Of course, there's so much more to wine than just liquid in a glass, and part of understanding what makes Slovenia so intriguing is the rich and varied history shaping its wines, as well as the stunning landscapes and talented, passionate winemakers it boasts. In the book at hand, Robert Gorjak presents some thoroughly fascinating insight into the landscape, history and politics that made these vineyards into what they are. Pen-portraits of leading winemakers bring their stories to life – coalescing into the charming narrative of Slovenia's world-class wine. Precisely the volume Slovenian wine has been missing, it will help explain the enchanting tale of this beautiful country and its amazing wines to a wider world.”

Caroline Gilby, MW





SLOVENIA
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SLOVENIA - A WINEMAKING COUNTRY

Registered vineyard area: 15,921 ha

Total vineyard area: 21,000 ha

Grape growers: 30,000

Winemakers: 2,550

Annual production: 0.7 M hl

White vs Red: 70 : 30

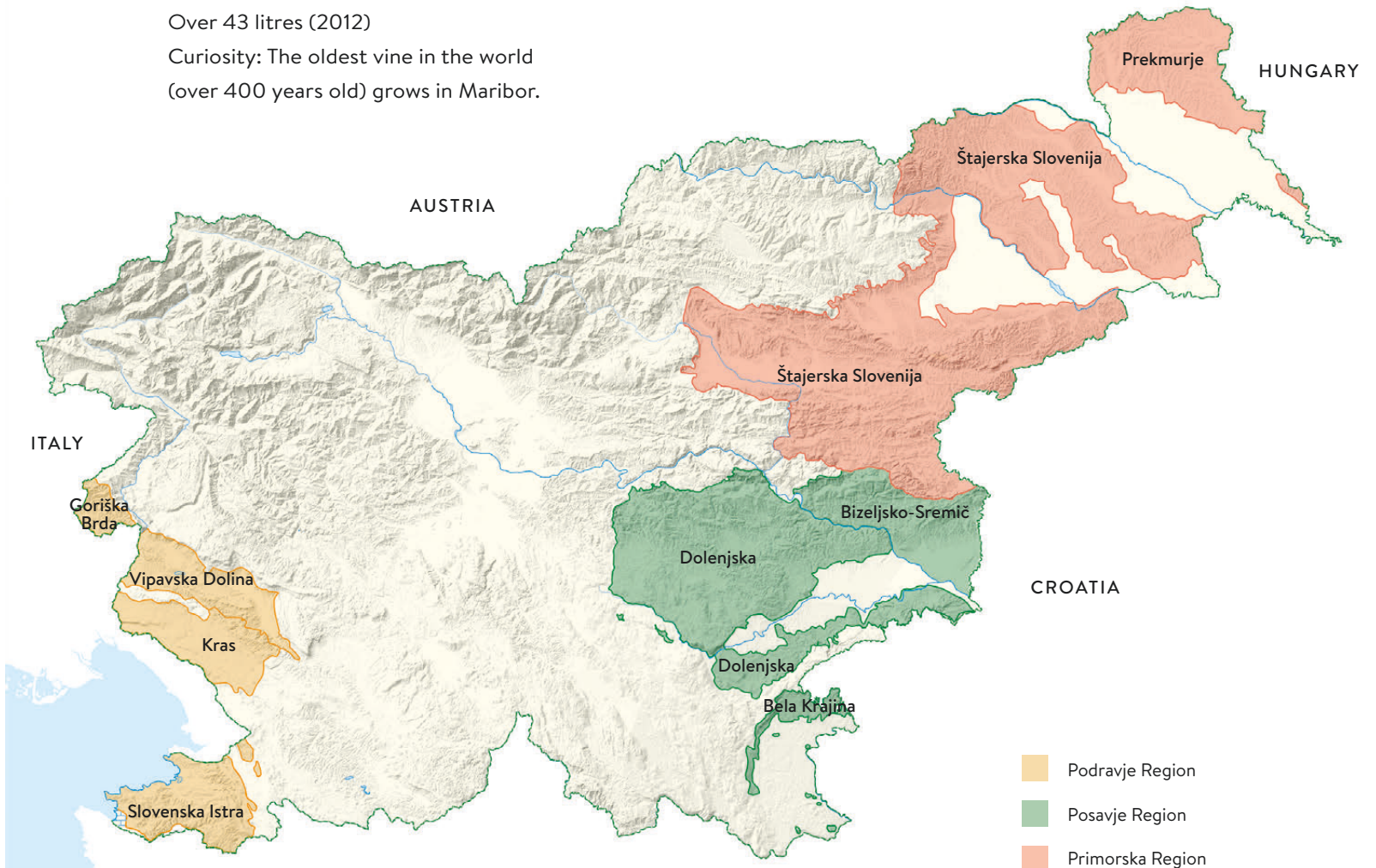
Most planted varieties: Welschriesling, Refosco,

Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Žametovka

Annual consumption of wine per capita:

Over 43 litres (2012)

Curiosity: The oldest vine in the world
(over 400 years old) grows in Maribor.



Introduction

In the eyes of the geographer, Slovenia is a fascinating and versatile country. It lies in Central Europe, at the crossroads of four major geographical units: the Adriatic Sea (Mediterranean), the Alps, the Pannonian Plain and the Dinaric Alps. Slovenia is thus quite hilly and mountainous. Most of the vineyards are on the slopes, with only some 10% appearing in flatlands. Hand-picking is a norm, even for the production of the most basic wines, and so is dry farming. The climate of Slovenia can be described as a mixture of continental and Alpine. The Alpine humid summers and relatively cold winters mix with the hot and dry summers and severe winters of the Pannonian Plain. One influences the other, and the resulting weather isn't too harsh. In the southwest close to the coast, the Mediterranean adds its own characteristic flavour. Slovenia is officially divided into three wine-growing regions and nine wine-growing districts according to climate, soils, wine styles, tradition etc.

Podravje wine region, named after the Drava River, lies in the northeast and includes the Štajerska Slovenija and Prekmurje districts. **Posavje** wine region, named after the Sava River, lies in the southeast and includes the Bizeljsko-Sremič, Bela Krajina and Dolenjska districts. To the southwest lies the **Primorska** wine region (which literally means "littoral") and encompasses the following districts: Goriška Brda or Brda, Vipavska dolina (Vipava Valley), Kras (Karst) and Slovenska Istra (Slovenian Istria).

Districts are further divided into sub-districts, all the way down to villages and vineyard sites. The names of these vineyard sites appear on the wine labels more and more often.

As of March 2017 there were 15,920.91 ha of officially registered vineyards, and around 5,000 ha of unregistered vineyards planted across the country, bringing the total to some 21,000 ha. This discrepancy is because "vineyards" smaller than 0.05 ha (500 sqm) need not be registered. Little calculation is required to realise that out of the 30,000 registered winegrowers or so, the majority are hobbyists who grow wine for themselves and their friends. This little detail sheds light on how tightly wine is connected with everyday life in Slovenia. No wonder Slovenians globally rank among the most enthusiastic drinkers of wine. With an annual consumption of over 40 litres per capita, Slovenia constantly places among the top five wine-drinking countries alongside France, Croatia and yes, you guessed it – Vatican, the usual company of biggest wine consumers.

It is difficult to estimate how many professional winemakers, i.e. those who live exclusively or mostly off wine, exist in Slovenia, but there are certainly a few hundred of them. Some 0.7 million hl of wine is produced annually. Around 70% of the wines are whites, which suit the climate and tradition better. Hence, it is the whites, either young fresh and fruity, stainless steel or oak-aged, that are considered superior and of better value than the reds. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the quality of reds has improved immensely in the past decade.

General Geographical Features

Generally speaking, Slovenia lies on the fringe of what is a great winegrowing area. In the north, vine growth is limited by the Alps and their cooling effect, while in the south the barrier is the hilly and mountainous Karst, preventing the vines from ripening properly. The climate becomes increasingly favourable as one approaches the Mediterranean Sea in the west, or the Pannonian periphery in the east. This is why there are two distinct winegrowing areas in Slovenia. The **continental** area includes the regions Podravje in the northeast and Posavje in the southeast of the country. The **coastal** area, with its sole region Primorska, lies in the southwest. Viticulture historically spread from the west to the east, from the Mediterranean towards the continent.



SOME HISTORY

Slovenia is a traditional wine-producing country with a long history of the craft, where wine was made already by the Celts around the 3rd and 4th centuries BC. The following is an extract of some of the major historical milestones. More details appear in the chapters on each of the districts.

400 BC – Celts

Archaeological proof shows that Celtic tribes were already making wine in Styria.

100 BC to 313 AD – Roman Times

Numerous sources attest that winemaking flourished in Roman times on the territory of today's Slovenia. These include rich archaeological finds (tools, vessels, etc.) and the works of Roman writers. Romans were known for developing viticulture and winemaking wherever they settled. It is likely that during their age, viticulture was already present in most of the places where vines are still grown today – in Styria especially in Ptuj, in Istria, around the coast, in the Karst, in the Vipava Valley, in Brda, but also in some other places like Celeia (Celje) where this is no longer the case.

313–800 – Post-Roman Times

With the fall of the Roman Empire and the barbarian incursions, viticulture suffered drastically. The Slavs who arrived to the depopulated areas (the Romans mostly fled) gradually learned viticulture from the local people. Several wine-conveying Slavic names of villages such as Vinica, Vinomer, Vinski vrh etc. are preserved from those times. Winegrowing was again on the rise with the spread of the Christian religion, which used wine for its worshiping services.

794 – The Franks

When the Franks took over, arriving in today's Slovenia in 8th Century, viticulture was specifically encouraged. Shortly after 794, Charles the Great aka Charlemagne issued his *Capitulare de Villis* decree, which provided detailed information on agriculture including viticulture, vines, wine law and excess production.

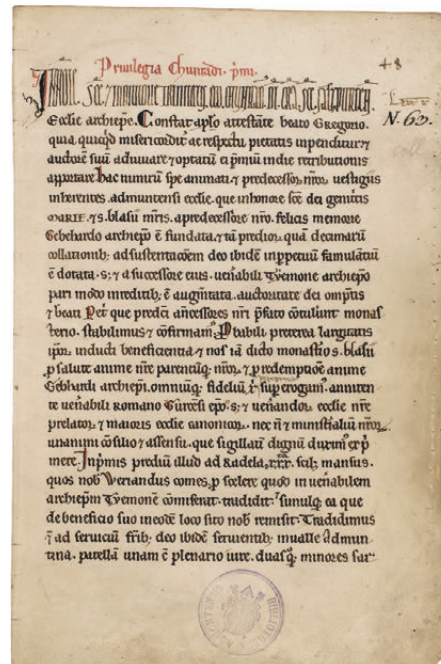
890

The first written document referring to viticulture in Styria deals with the Salzburg Archbishopric's purchase of large properties around Ptuj, complete with vineyards.

1000–1500 – the Times of the Church and the Monasteries

- From the 11th century onward, most of the vineyards were in the hands of the Church. Monasteries in particular can be credited with the further development of viticulture in the region.
- 1091 The Benedictine St. Paul monastery was founded in Lavanttal, acquiring vineyards in Kozjak at the end of the 11th century.

- 1091 The Rosazzo Benedictine monastery was elevated to an abbey. It was famous for producing wine and trading with Germans and Venetians.
- 1132 Cistercians founded the monastery in Stična.
- 1139 Benedictines from the Admont monastery received properties and vineyards in Jarenina, and later in the 13th century also in Maribor and Ljutomer.
- 1164 The The Žiče Charterhouse was founded close to Slovenske Konjice. It didn't possess a particularly large area of vineyards, but the vineyards in Žiče were mentioned in 1173 already. In 1243 two vineyards in Maribor were donated to the monastery.
- 1230 Dominican monastery was founded in Ptuj. In time, they came to own roughly half of the Haloze vineyards.
- 1234 Cistercian monastery was founded in Kostanjevica on Krka.
- 1239 Minorites, the Franciscan order, formed a monastery with a wine cellar in Ptuj. This is considered the beginning of wine cellaring in Ptuj.
- 1407 A Carthusian monastery was built in Pleterje in the foothills of Gorjanci. Wine is still made there today.



Deed of gift to Benedictines of Admont from the year 1139

In the Middle Ages, vines were also grown in some improper, cooler places, where the practice was later discontinued such as Gorenjska (Bled, Kamnik, Kranj, Škofja Loka), on the Rožnik Hill in Ljubljana, around Grosuplje, Izlake, and many other places in Carinthia. Some say these less suitable places were abandoned due to climate change, but the main cause for the shift were transport routes. As these improved there was no longer any reason to grow grapes on sites with suboptimal conditions.

1235

Ribolla is first mentioned in a contract referring to a property in Strunjan.

1280–1290

Ottokar's Chronicle mentions the seizure of wines from the Venetians in the early 1280s, speaking of Ribolla (Rainval), Malvasia, Teran (Terran), Pinela (Pino), wine from Brda (Ecke), Vipava wine (*Wein von Wippach*), wine from Muggia (Muglaere), and many others – Greek, Muscat, Vindeplan, Cyprian, Claret, Schafernac from Genoa, wine from Arras, wine from Ancona, Tribian, and Platznaer.

1336

Ribolla is first mentioned in Brda, in a purchase contract from the village of Višnjevnik. It is important to note that the name at the time didn't refer to the variety but to a particular style of wine.

1376

Seven articles of the Statute of Ptuj are dedicated to wine, prescribing wine trade, mensuration, opening times etc.

1500–1600

The “Old Vine” — officially the oldest vine on the planet was planted in Maribor. It survived Ottoman raids, phylloxera and both World Wars, still bearing fruit today.

When the Ottomans invaded Hungary and cut short its exports to Austria, the price of wine increased.

1543

Because winegrowing was an especially important business at the time, the relationships between landowners, leaseholders and workers were regulated by the legal code concerning the vineyard management called the *Gorske Bukve*, issued in this year.

1582

Gorske bukve were translated into Slovenian language by the priest Andrej Recelj, becoming the first legal document ever published in Slovenian, further emphasizing the importance of winegrowing.

In the first documents describing the vibrant wine trade in Ljubljana, wines from the Vipava Valley and the Karst were mentioned as the most important.

1600–1700

An interesting form of cooperative wine production emerged in communes called *soleske zidanice* (literally ‘neighbourhood wine cottages-cellar’) in Bela Krajina.

1689

The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola was written by Johann Weikhard von Valvasor (Janez Vajkard Valvasor). He describes the wines of Carniola, including wines from Upper Carniola aka Gorenjska (which had vineyards at the time), Dolenjska, Bela Krajina, Karst, the Vipava Valley and Istria.

1789

The first written record of Cviček wine in Ožbalt Gutsman’s dictionary.

1789–1790

Although the Theresian Cadastre existed before it, the Josephine Cadastre was the first document to thoroughly record vineyard areas and yields:

Region	Surface (ha)	Production (hl)	Yield (hl/ha)
Styria (incl. Austria)	29,186	335,169	11.5
Carniola	8,654	93,166	10.7
Carinthia	130	794	6.1

Data for the Goriška region is unfortunately not available. It is interesting to observe the low yields compared to present day standards, which can be over ten times bigger or more.

1820

Vineyards from across Slovenia were documented in the 1820 cadastre:

Region	Surface (ha)
Slovenian Styria	21,957
Slovenian Istria, the Littoral, Goriška	18,514
Carniola	9,645
Carinthia	66
Total	50,182

Prekmurje is not included, as it belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary.

1822

Archduke Johann established an exemplary vineyard in Meranovo near Maribor, introducing the first plantings of Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Sylvaner, Riesling, and Traminer in the country. As a matter of fact, these varieties got a proper boost only after the phylloxera epidemic in the early 20th century.



Drawing of Furmint, work of Kreuzer Brothers

1841–1855

A thorough list of 282 varieties planted in Styria was compiled by Franz Trummer in his book *Systematic Classification and Description of Vine Varieties from the Duchy of Styria*. The book was supported with 175 beautiful and amazingly authentic pictures of vines with grapes made in the gouache technique, a masterpiece work by the Kreuzer brothers. 126 originals are preserved at the Institute of Agriculture and Forestry in Maribor.

1844

Priest Matija Vertovec wrote the book *Vinoreja sa Slovenze* ('Winegrowing and Winemaking for Slovenians'). In the work he offers advice to winegrowers and winemakers, including also descriptions of varieties grown in his time, especially in the Vipava Valley. *Vinoreja* is considered the first expert book in Slovenian language on the subject.

1852

The first sparkling wine, produced according to the traditional method, was made in Radgona by Alojz Klajnošek. Though Radgona lies across the Mura River in present-time Austria, and Gornja Radgona (Slovenian Radgona) did not exist at the time, 1852 is considered the beginning of sparkling wine production in Slovenia.

1869

A regional agricultural school opened its doors in Gorizia.

SOME HISTORY

1871

Maribor followed with a Fruit and Winegrowing School in 1871, and Slap by Vipava in 1873. The latter was the first school where teaching was practised in the Slovenian language. In 1886 it was moved to Grm by Novo Mesto. Both schools are still in existence today. The Maribor school, now the Biotechnical School Maribor, is historically considered the most important agricultural school in the country.

1880

Phylloxera broke out in Slovenia. The epidemic was widespread by the end of the century and devastated practically all the vineyards before the start of WWI. There used to be 51,832 ha of vineyards in Slovenia before phylloxera, 25,690 ha in Lower Styria alone, a number that was never reached again.

1890

A wine cooperative was established in Maribor. Vipava followed in 1894, Ormož in 1898, Črnomelj and Metlika in 1908 and 1909.

1905

First districts were formally created in what was then Lower Styria. Together with the districts, the first list of permitted varieties for the Drava Banate was drawn up, including Welschriesling, Furmint, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Riesling, Chardonnay, Sylvaner, Red Traminer, White and Red Gutedel. Bohuslav Skalicky wrote *Kletarstvo* (oenology), the first modern oenology textbook in Slovenian in the 20th century.

Štv.	A. Navadna namizna vina.	Letnik	Liter po	
			K	v
1	Dolenjski čviček, lahek, prijetno režen	19 00	-	04
2	Dolenjski čviček, lahek, prijetno režen	19 09	-	08
3	Dolenjsko namizno vino, belo, lahko, prijetno rezo	19 00	-	04
4	Vipavsko namizno vino, svetlo, prijetno, netrpko	19 10	-	04
5	Vipavsko namizno vino, svetlo, prijetno, netrpko	19		
6		19		
7		19		
8		19		
B. Fina namizna vina.				
9	Dolenjski salonski čviček, fin	19 08	-	00
10	Belokranjsko (metliško) namizno vino, belo, močno, netrpko	19 09	-	00
11	Vipavsko namizno vino, belo, močno, polno	19		
12	Vipavski rizling, režen, s cvetlico	19 10	-	00
13	Vipavski burgundec, beli, močan, poln, buketen	19 10	-	00
14	Vipavski rulandec, prijeten, močan, zlatorumen	19 10	-	00
15		19		
16		19		
17		19		
18		19		
Cviki učinkujejo osvežujoče ter o o znatno pospešujejo prebavo. o o				

Štv.	C. Buteljska vina.	Buteljka	
		K	v
19	Vipavski zelen, rumenozelen, z močno cvetlico, zlahtnega, milega okusa	2	50
20	Vipavski burgundec, beli, močan, ognjevit, s polno cvetlico	2	00
21	Vipavski burgundec, črni, ognjevit, rubinaste barve	2	00
22	Vipavski karminet, karminastordeč, poln, močan, karakterističen travni buket	2	00
23	Vipavski silvanec, mil, prijetnega okusa	2	00
24	Dolenjski burgundec, beli, star, poln, zlahten	2	00
25	Dolenjski rulandec, star, zlatorumen, zlahten	2	00
26	<i>Zipavski: Jakklice</i>	2	00
27			
28			
29			
30			

Navedene cene veljajo do preembe in iz zadrzne založne kleti v Ljubljani. Pri enkratnem odjemu nad 20 hl znižane cene. V sodih se oddaja od 50l naprej. Buteljska vina se razpošiljajo v zabojih po 10, 25 in 50 steklenic. Prevozne sode posodi na zahtevo zadruga, iste pa je tekom 6 tednov franco in v dobrem stanju vrniti ali pa plačati. Zaboji in zavoji se zaračunijo po lastni ceni. Pri naročilih naj se natančno navede številka in vrsta vina. Nakup vseh drugih vrst domačih vin, kletarskih potrebščin itd. posreduje zadruga brezplačno ter daje p. n. interesantom drage volje vsa potrebna pojasnila.

1911 11

Wine price list of the Provincial Winemaking Cooperative of Carniola from the year 1911

1935

Wine districts and corresponding lists of approved grape varieties for the Drava Banate were created. The Drava Banate covered most of today's Slovenia, except Primorska which was still under Italy at the time. The districts and grapes were:



District	Recommended varieties
Pohorje	Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Welschriesling, Pinot Noir, Vranek, Blaufränkisch, Red Traminer, Ruländer (Pinot Gris)
Kozjak and Gornje Slovenske Gorice	Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Welschriesling, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (especially in Kozjak), Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc (called Muškatni Silvanec at the time), Portugieser, Pinot Noir, Blaufränkisch
Srednje Slovenske Gorice	Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Welschriesling, Red Traminer, Ruländer, Pinot Noir
Ormož-Ljutomer district	Furmint, Pinot Blanc, Welschriesling, Grüner Sylvaner, Sauvignon Blanc, Bouvier, Pinot Noir
Gornje-radgonske Gorice	Welschriesling, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Furmint, Riesling, Chardonnay (Bela Klevna), Bouvier
Prekmurske Gorice	Welschriesling, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Pinot Noir (instead of Kadarka), Chardonnay experimentally
Halozze and Obrobno Pogorje	Riesling, Welschriesling, Furmint, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Red Traminer
Šmarsko-rogaško-kozjanski and Celje district	Welschriesling, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Red Traminer, Bouvier experimentally
Dramlje-Savinja district	Sylvaner, Welschriesling, Pinot Blanc, Blaufränkisch
Bizeljsko and Posavje	Welschriesling, Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, Red Traminer, Žametovka, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser
Krško-Kostanjevica district	2/3 should be red: Žametovka, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser, Red Kraljevina, Welschriesling, Gutedel, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Red Traminer
Novo mesto-Mokronog district	Red Kraljevina, Welschriesling, Gutedel, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Red Traminer, Žametovka, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser
Črnomelj-Metlika district	Red Kraljevina, Welschriesling, Gutedel, Pinot Blanc, Sylvaner, Red Traminer, Žametovka, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser

The following table varieties were recommended for all districts: Pearl from Čaba, White, Red Gutedel, Muscat Gutedel, Portugieser, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Ottonel, Muscat Hamburg. Registered yields in the early 1930s were between 20–25 hl.

1945–1991

Wine production began concentrating around cooperatives. Vineyards were then owned either by the state or were in the hands of farmers selling grapes to cooperatives. A minor part of the wine was kept for own use or to be sold in bulk locally. Some of the cooperatives managed to produce stunningly good wines, even by today's standards. Many of these remain preserved in archive cellars.

1967

Business Association Styria ('Poslovno združenje Styria') was founded in Ljutomer with the aim of protecting the interest of winegrowers and winemakers, defining business opportunities for the wine industry and organizing its own expertise services. In 1975 it was reorganised into the **Commercial Union**

for Viticulture and Wine of Slovenia ('Poslovna skupnost za vinogradništvo in vinarstvo'), consolidating the interests of wine producers, merchants, vine nurseries, education and advisory services. In 2006 it was then renamed to *Wine Association of Slovenia* ('Vinska družba Slovenije') which still exists today.

1969

A seal of approval for Slovenian wines was established. Three colours were chosen for different quality designations: golden seal for "Premium wine", silver seal for "Quality wine" and red seal for "Table wine". Sauvignon Blanc Rimljan Anno '69 vintage 1968 from Haloze was the first to carry the seal. Other wineries and wines soon followed suit.

1970

The first rise of private winegrowers. After WWII, private production was limited to grape growing and the making of bulk wine for communal use only. It was in the 1970s when the first proper private producers bottling wines under their own labels began to appear — Stanko Čurin and Otmar Šturm in 1972, Boris Lisjak in 1974, Jože Kupljen in 1976, Radivoj Lisjak in 1978. We should also mention Janez Istenič who bottled his first 100 bottles of sparkling wine in 1968.

1974

New wine laws were adopted, a modern European-style legislation defining wine production, yields, and delineating 3 regions and 13 districts. It prescribed the permitted grape varieties and defined quality criteria.

1991

Riding the wave of the newborn national independence, heaps of new private producers began to emerge. Most had already been privately producing bulk wines for decades or selling grapes to the closest cooperative as a family thing. They were now inspired to commence bottling and labelling wines carrying their own names and brands. Wine culture grew among wine lovers, propagating the proper use of glasses, wine and food matching etc. Wine education, likewise, began spreading to the general public via sommelier courses, wine schools, seminars and numerous wine tastings and dinners hosting winemakers.

1993

Slovenia became an OIV member.

1997

New Slovenian wine legislation was adopted, compatible with the EU. The PTP category was introduced.

2004

Slovenia became an EU member on the 1st of May.

2006

Standardised wine legislation was introduced to ensure EU compliance after Slovenia's membership. A new district, Štajerska Slovenija, was created with the union of the following six former districts: Radgona-Kapela, Ljutomer-Ormož, Maribor, Haloze, Srednje Slovenske Gorice, Šmarje-Virštanj.



WINE LEGISLATION IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia, each wine intended for sale must be submitted to authorities for sensory (i.e. tasting), chemical and physical analysis. If successful, the wine receives a certificate number which must be printed on the label alongside other data such as origin, alcohol content etc. Slovenia has three wine regions: Podravje, Posavje, and Primorska. For PGI designations, 85% of the grapes must be sourced within the region stated on the label.

Furthermore, there are nine districts. For each district, the permitted and recommended varieties are stipulated. These are determined by climate and tradition. New varieties can be proposed to the authorities, but this, of course, is a lengthy process. For PDO wines the grapes must be sourced 100% from the district stated on the label.

In 2008, new quality designations, namely PDO and PGI, (ZOP and ZGO in Slovenian respectively, as seen in the table below), were introduced in the EU. The use of the new framework remains largely overlooked on Slovenian labels for now, with the traditional terms still very much in use.

Geographical indications in Slovenia

Language	Framework	PDO Wines	PGI Wines
Slovenian	New Framework	zaščitená označba porekla ZOP	zaščitená geografska označba – ZGO
	Traditional Terms	vrhunsko vino zaščitenó geografsko poreklo OR vrhunsko vino ZGP kakovostno vino zaščitenó geografsko poreklo OR kakovostno vino ZGP priznánó tradicionalno poimenovanje (PTP)	deželno vino PGO
English	New Framework	PDO – Protected Designation of Origin	PGI – Protected Geographical Indication
	Traditional Term	Quality Wines Produced in Specific Regions (QWPSR)	Table Wine with Geographic Indication
French	New Framework	Appellation d’Origine Protégée (AOP)	Indication Géographique Protégée (IGP)
	Traditional Term	Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (AOC)	Vin de Pays (VDP)
Italian	New Framework	Denimazione di Origine Protetta	Indicazione Geografica Protetta (IGP)
	Traditional Terms	Denimazione di Origine Controllata (DOC) Denimazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG)	Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT)

Similar to Germany or Austria and unlike Romanic countries such as France, Italy and Spain, PGI indications are rarely used in practice. A vast majority of wine is sold as PDO wine – *kakovostno vino ZGP* to be exact (see the above table for meanings). It is also important to explain that although *vrhunsko vino ZGP* (see the above table) in theory stands for wines of superior quality, it is practically entirely ignored by top Slovenian family producers. So in reality, it is good to know that the brand represents a more reliable indication of quality than the terms *vrhunsko* or *kakovostno*.

Legally defined quality designations

Predicate Wines

Slovenia is no doubt one of the top regions in the world when it comes to sweet wines. Two International Trophies – ‘best in show’ for sweet wines since 2011 at the Decanter World Wine Awards in London are not a coincidence. Usually these come from Podravje and Posavje, where botrytis style sweets prevail, but some Primorska sweet wines made from dried grapes are stunning as well. To indicate extra ripeness, potentially superior quality and (often) sweeter style of wine the following categories below are designated. They are much less popular than they used to be 20 years ago.

Pozna trgatav (Spätlese)

is made from grapes that are slightly overripe, usually picked a week or two after regular harvest. It can be dry or have some residual sugar.

Izbor (Auslese)

is produced from fully ripe and overripe grapes, minimal sugar level in grapes are prescribed. Can be dry, but usually it is sweet.

Jagodni izbor (Beerenauslese)

produced only from select, fully ripe berries, it is very sweet.

Suhi jagodni izbor (Trockenbeerenauslese)

wines are perhaps some of the sweetest, “oiliest”, concentrated and long-lived wines produced in Slovenia. These are made in small quantities and sold in small format bottles such as 0,25l.

Ledeno vino (Ice wine)

This are very special sweet wines made from frozen grapes. Lately, due to the global warming, there is less and less vintages where making Ice Wine is a possible. Until 2008 practically every year in this century made an ice wines. A warm 2009 and the years after made very few ice wines until 2016, which brought some hope again.

For any categories above, Vrhunsko vino ZGP (Traditional) or Zaščitená označba porekla ZOP (since 2008) is a mandatory term.



The Meaning of PTP

PTP stands for “Recognised Traditional Denomination” and can be seen as a French approach in a “Germanic” world. What do we mean by that? In Slovenia, wines are named by grape varieties, which is the norm in the “Germanic” world, i.e. lands that were part of Germany or Austro-Hungary and still have a Germanic influence. Besides Germany and Austria this would include Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. The rest of Eastern Europe and New World countries use the same system, in contrast to “Romanic” naming, which is used in France, Spain, Italy and Portugal, where wines are named after the place of origin (Chianti, Rioja, Medoc) rather than after the variety. Behind every such name, there is a “recipe” defining the zone of production, the permitted grape varieties and their percentages in the wine.

In very much the same fashion, for each PTP a “recipe” is given, prescribing the grape varieties for the blend, its percentages, the style of the wine and the zone, usually a district, where it can be produced. As of today, there are seven PTPs declared in Slovenia establishing collective brand names. In a way the system is not dissimilar to the Austrian DAC.

For the whites these are:

PTP	District	Year of registration
Bizeljčan	Bizeljsko-Sremič	2007
Belokranjec	Bela Krajina	2003
Ritoznojčan	Štajerska Slovenija	2016

Red PTPs are:

PTP	District	Year of registration
Bizeljčan	Bizeljsko-Sremič	2007
Metliška črnina	Bela Krajina	2003
Cviček	Dolenjska	2000
Teran	Kras	2000

As a rule, PTPs are almost always entry-level quality wines that are very important in terms of quantity and local economy. Cviček and Teran are also very popular nation-wide, with Teran having some limited success in export terms as well. None of the PTP make hugely interesting wines but we respect them as they protect tradition and cultural heritage of the wine district. For details, look into each of the districts below.

Here is a list of expressions commonly found on a label of Slovenian wine:

Slovenian term	English term	Slovenian term	English term
vino	wine	kakovostno vino	quality wine
vrhunsko vino	premium wine	suho	dry
polsuho	medium-dry	polsladko	medium-sweet
sladko	sweet	pozna trgatav	Spätlese
izbor	Auslese	jagodni izbor	Beerenauslese
suhi jagodni izbor	Trockenbeerenauslese	ledeno vino	ice wine
sušeno grozdje	dried grapes	peneče vino	sparkling wine
rdeče vino	red wine	belo vino	white wine
rose	rosé	mlado vino	“nouveau” style (young wine)
vsebuje sulfite	contains sulphites	pridelal in polnil	produced and bottled by
pridelovalec	producer	letnik	vintage
ročno trgano, ročna trgatav	hand-picked	penina	PDO sparkling wine produced in Slovenia

How to Read the Label

Brand name. Renski Rizling Cerovec

Indicates the origin of the wine. VINO KUPLJEN JERUZALEM-SVETINJE

“Dry” – it indicates very low residual sugar levels. 2015

Alcohol content. Alk. 13,0% vol.

Bottle content. 750 ml

Contains Sulphites. Vsebuje sulfite. Št. odl. PT 323 S-16. Ser. L02/1000. Pridelal in polnil: Vino Kupljen Jeruzalem Svetinje, Svetinje 21, 2259 Ivanjkovci

Grape variety – very often also the name of the wine, very much in Germanic and New World style. Renski Rizling

Vineyard name. Cerovec

Vintage – it indicates the year the grape was harvested. 2015

Geographical Indication – (see chapter Wine Legislation in Slovenia) indicates the PDO origin of the wine. Štajerska, Slovenija

Suho kakovostno vino ZGP

3 830007 217043

Brand name (in this case after the family name). KRISTANČIČ®

Pavó rdeče – name of the wine; rdeče stands for red. pavó RDEČE

Village – the winery is situated in the village of Medana. iz Medane

Certificate Number – each wine produced in Slovenia has to be submitted to tasting and chemical analysis at the authorized body before sale. 2015

Geographical Indication – indicates the PDO origin of the wine. Suho kakovostno rdeče vino, kontrolirano poreklo ZGP GORIŠKA BRDA, vsebuje sulfit

Lot number. reg.št. GO 1345/17, L: 1-07/17

“Produced and bottled” – followed by the name of the winery with its full address. ALK: 14% VOL | 0.75 l

3 830036 350063

pridelal in polnil
KRISTANČIČ DUŠAN & MARKO
Medana 29, Goriška brda, www.kristancic.com
PRODUCT OF SLOVENIA



VINTAGES

Below is a detailed description of recent vintages. Data and impressions were provided by Božidar Grabovac of the Verus winery. Although information was taken from the *Ormož-Ljutomer* sub-district, it can be more or less generalized for the whole country to obtain a rather good idea about the vintage characteristics.



2016

The winter was mild, with little precipitation in the beginning but plenty in March and April. Budding was rather late compared to preceding vintages. On 26 April frost hit a big part of the Štajerska region. In some parts close to Austria (Svečina) the damage was close to 100%, but generally it was around 20%. Local hails occurring in some areas further decimated the yields. A cooler weather pattern emerged throughout the spring, with rather late flowering in mid-June. Summer

was warm but not too hot, with several showers and rains causing pressure of disease, notably downy mildew. The second part of August was warm and dry. September was very warm and accelerated the grape drying, so harvest began a bit earlier than first anticipated, in early September in Primorska and in mid-September in Styria. 2016 produced very good, vibrant wines with good acidity levels and distinct aromatic profiles. A classic vintage, especially for the whites.

2015

Gentle winter with early bursting in April and early flowering on 31 May. Hot summer with enough rainfall to hold drought at bay. Harvest began in early September and was blessed with great weather, which then changed late in September. October was very cold and rainy. Conditions were appropriate especially for early-ripening varieties, bringing healthy grapes with lots of aromatics and higher sugar levels. A warmer vintage, very good to excellent, producing ripe powerful wines, often with complex aromatic profiles. Especially good for reds, which have a good ageing potential. Due to lower acidity, whites will have shorter life.

2014

Mild winter. Sleet shackled Slovenia at the end of January causing huge damage in woods, but fortunately not in the vineyards. Budding was early and so was flowering, starting on 27 May, but summer was unusually rainy and cold. Unfortunately, the weather pattern continued in September with a record-breaking 212 mm of rain. There was practically no window of good weather to perform the harvest which started on 17 September, after winegrowers were faced with the dilemma – picking unripe grapes or face with grey rot. Achieving ripeness and keeping the grapes healthy was a daunting task. 30 years ago, such difficult vintage would prove disastrous. With much hard work, knowledge and tough selection in the vineyards, the vintage was ultimately saved, producing lighter wines with simpler aromatic profiles, very pleasant to drink and destined for short-term consumption. For many it was the hardest vintage since 1984, definitely more difficult than 2010.

2013

Winter was long, lasting till the end of March with plenty of rain and snow in cooler parts. When it got warmer, the bursting was immediate and rapid due to high water reserves. Flowering was a bit late due to the cold end of May, beginning on 7 June. In summer there were periods of very hot weather with temperatures reaching record-breaking 38°C on 8 August. Ripening was fast but September luckily brought some rain and colder temperatures, prolonging the ripening and delaying what would otherwise have been an extremely early harvest season. Harvest began on 8 September with Sauvignon Blanc. Grey rot was an issue, draining the yields, but there were enough periods of good weather to bring home good grapes with well-expressed varietal character. Harvest finished on 3 October with Furmint. Good to very good vintage, especially for whites. Wines have solid freshness and possess higher acidity levels and very good aromatic profiles.

2012

A warm January was followed by a most cold February, with extreme temperatures reaching -15°C on 8 February causing smaller damage to the vine buds. There was not much rain in the winter and early spring. On 9 April lighter frost occurred in Štajerska, just a few tenths of a centigrade removed from catastrophe. Flowering started very early on 25 May. Summer was unusually hot with plenty of days over 30°C and temperatures reaching 36°C in Štajerska and 38°C in the Vipava Valley. There was just enough precipitation in the continental part to prevent drought, which did occur in the region of Primorska. The harvest began on 3 September and finished on 21 September, earliest in recorded history. Grapes were healthy with abundant sugar levels, while aromatics were unexpectedly retained. It was a very good to excellent vintage, especially for reds, keeping splendid aromatic profiles and showing excellent ageing potential.

**2011**

Winter was mild but long, followed by rapid and sudden warming. Flowering started early on 25 May and drought was an issue already in June. Summer was unusually hot and dry, with the ripening in danger of stopping but some precipitations in July saved the vintage. August and September were hot and dry as well. Harvest started on 7 September and finished on 4 October. Summer temperatures over 30°C lasted until the second week of October(!), when the harvest had already been

practically over. The grapes were healthy and picking days could be chosen at one's leisure. Fruit was of very good quality with high sugar levels. The resulting wines, whites and reds alike, are of excellent quality. A vintage of the century for Blaufränkisch.

2010

Winter was mild, February was warm though not March. Flowering started on 4 June. May and July were very wet, causing pressure of disease, especially downy mildew which decreased the yields significantly. Sultry weather brought a major powdery mildew attack. August was humid and didn't change much. September was also rainy and cold. Grapes were not yet ripe, and grey rot was on the move. What to do, wait for ripe grapes or lose the crop? It seemed like an impossible situation. Harvest began on 23 September. Those who patiently waited for the grapes to reach at least minimal ripeness saved the vintage. A lot of work was required to separate the healthy grapes and berries from the unhealthy

VINTAGES

ones. Between 30% to 60% of the crop was lost. It was the first truly difficult vintage after a string of successful, easy-going ones since the early 1990s. We felt quite relaxed, thinking the age of difficult vintages was over, but nature demonstrated its power again. The vintage brought lighter wines that, with few exceptions, weren't too long-lived.

2009

Spring was a bit delayed, with cold weather persisting until end of April. May, though, was warm and flowering began very early, around 20 May. The start of the summer was cold and rainy, causing wine-makers to worry, but the rest of the summer was warm and dry with just enough rain to prevent drought. The harvest started on 19 September and finished on 7 October. It was an easy vintage all around the country, giving perfectly healthy grapes with high sugar levels. The whites didn't have the structure to last long, but reds were mostly perfectly ripe and are ageing beautifully.

**2008**

The first three months were unusually warm, predicting an early start, but spring brought cold weather and made things very "normal". The bursting of buds began at what is considered the average time. Summer wasn't particularly kind. July was very wet, while August and September didn't bring any extended periods of sunny weather. Storms were unusually frequent and intense, causing damage especially in Štajerska. Harvest began on 13 September with Sauvignon Blanc and was prolonged to 26

October, as the second part of October was dry, though colder, which proved to be excellent for late ripening Furmint and Riesling. Disease was an issue, and this was not an easy vintage producing many average wines, though it turned out great for many whites from top producers all around the country, especially the late-ripening varieties that showed intensity, great balance and longevity. Reds were good, but not nearly as successful as whites.

2007

The outset was marked by a very mild winter with practically no snowfall, except in the final days that brought half a meter of wet, heavy snow causing damage yet also helping raise the water table. The following months were very warm and so the bud bursting and flowering, which began on 18 May, were almost three weeks ahead of the average. Summer was warm and dry but the second part of August brought colder weather, and so harvest started "only" 10 days earlier of what is average. The second part of September and first part of October were warm and dry, making it ideal especially for late-ripening varieties. A great vintage.

2006

Winter was long and very cold. Bud bursting started normally, but flowering was delayed, perhaps due to the extended winter. July was hot but August rainy, September was dry and so was October. It was a very good vintage, especially for reds in the Primorska region where summer was constantly sunny but never too hot.

2005

There was frost in Podravje in February, decimating the vintage for sensitive varieties such as Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Sauvignon Blanc and Furmint. Bud bursting started normally, flowering was a bit late and began on 30 May. July, August and September were rather cold and rainy so growth slowed down. A dry, sunny, rather warm October saved the vintage. Due to low yields, the vintage produced concentrated wines of very high quality.

2004

Winter and the beginning of bursting were completely normal. Spring was cold and flowering delayed to 10 June. Cold weather continued through the summer. Early-ripening varieties that were picked late proved to be successful, but late-ripening varieties didn't ripen fully and produced lighter wines.

2003

One of the warmest vintages to date. After a regular winter, March and April were already quite warm. Bud bursting and flowering, starting on 22 May, occurred very early. Summer was hot and dry with much below average precipitation. Harvest in Podravje started on 28 August, 3 weeks before the average. Grapes were healthy with high sugar levels, yields were abundant. It was a comfortable vintage. Wines were full-bodied and of good quality but lacked intensity and concentration, especially whites. It was a very good vintage for reds.

2002

The vintage was average in all aspects. Flowering was rather early on 24 May, summer was pretty normal. Harvest began on 16 September and lasted for 28 days. Rain at the end of September caused grapes to develop noble rot. Wines were of good quality with firm acidity levels.

**2001**

Winter was mild and bud bursting early. In mid-April some vineyards barely escaped frost, while some orchards were hit heavily. Flowering started normally on 27 May. Summer brought no surprises and the heavy rain in mid-September didn't cause trouble as it was followed by a very nice autumn which enabled harvest to finish normally and produced a good to very good vintage.

2000

The warm initial months forecasted an above-average warm vintage. Flowering started very early on 19 May. Warm weather continued throughout the summer though drought was not an issue and maturity was three weeks ahead of the average. Harvest began on 30 August and finished on 18 October. The year 2000 brought full and powerful wines, with slightly less defined aromatic profiles, but generally very good to excellent.



Golden
Grapevine,
vintage 1917

Archive Wines

Wine gets better with time... ancient wisdom, yet one that often conjures up misleading ideas about wine ageing. Truth is, most wine ought to be drunk as soon as possible to enjoy it at its best. Verily the saying should be changed to: "Only the best wines get better with time". No wonder many people have had bad experiences with old bottles. They didn't open the right ones.

In Slovenian archive cellars on the other hand, there are many bottles that would astonish even the most demanding wine lovers, be it from London, Hong Kong or

New York. Unsurprisingly given the situation, these are mostly whites, very often with some residual sugar and light in alcohol. They are usually of deep golden or amber colour, with dense, oily texture, possessing lovely elegance and concentration, releasing heavenly flavours even the most experienced wine tasters have trouble describing. These wines speak for themselves and wine lovers usually enjoy them in silence.

What keeps them alive? Remarkable acidity for one and, according to Mitja Herga, chief oenologist of Puklavec Family Wines, their very low pH, often close to 3.0.

There are also some family wineries who compiled a good archive, notably Kupljen and Movia. However, the archive cellars in what used to be state-owned wineries offer greater selection and go further back in time.

Most impressive are the Jeruzalem Ormož and Ptujška Klet archives. The latter shelters the oldest Slovenian bottles preserved – *Zlata trta* ('Golden Grapevine') from 1917. The bottles survived WWII owing to the fact that crafty wine merchant Ornik, who owned the place, hid a significant portion of his old bottles in a secret chamber to conceal them from the Germans. Other very old bottles preserved in the Ptuj cellar are Sylvaner 1919, Sauvignon Blanc 1921, Riesling 1926, Furmint 1927 and quite a number of others. Since 1945, all the subsequent vintages are represented in what is today a 170,000 bottle archive. Sauvignon Blanc is the most represented variety. Who says it cannot age well? Riesling and Muscat are strongly present, too.

The Jeruzalem Ormož archive stocks 250,000 well selected bottles that were kept following rigorous tastings when Vladimir Puklavec bought the winery in 2009. The oldest wines are from 1956, while some even older vintages were relocated to Ljubljana and are lost. Only a few are dry, and Pinot Blanc is most highly represented, followed by Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and Traminer. Furmint is only archived as very sweet Trockenbeerenauslese and ice wine. Herga thinks Sauvignon Blanc 1963 is the best, but the star of the archive is the 1971 Beli Burgundec, Svetinje, made from Pinot Blanc. 1971 is by many considered the vintage of the century. 20,000 bottles of this precious treasure were archived (120,000 were produced in total) and a few thousands are still available for those seeking something rare and absolutely special. How many wine regions can proudly show their whites from the 1970s, which not only survived but are still thrilling? Štajerska sure can!

The best vintages of the 20th century are:

- Podravje region: 2000, 1993, 1983, 1971, 1958, 1952, 1947, 1942, 1917.
- Posavje region: 1999, 1979, 1967, 1959.
- Primorska region: 1999, 1979, 1967, 1959.



WINE AS PART OF THE SLOVENIAN CULTURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Wine is very much part of the everyday life of Slovenian folks. Although the modern lifestyle dictates reduced wine consumption compared to the past, ours is still among the highest in the world with 40 litres per capita. People in Slovenia know that Chardonnay is a white grape and that Merlot makes red wine, no education needed. Furthermore, many folk songs cherish wine and wine drinking while the Slovenian national anthem is, in fact, a toast:

A Toast (by France Prešeren)

*The vintage, friends, is over,
And here sweet wine makes, once again,
Sad eyes and hearts recover,
Puts fire in every vein,
Drowns dull care
Everywhere
And summons hope out of despair.*

Here's the seventh stanza, sung as the Slovenian anthem:

*God's blessing on all nations,
Who long and work for that bright day,
When o'er earth's habitations
No war, no strife shall hold its sway;
Who long to see
That all men free
No more shall foes, but neighbours be!*

(Translated by Janko Lavrin)

In Slovenia, wine is the standard beverage consumed during all the major milestones such as birth, baptism, wedding and funeral.



Wine is a highly praised beverage in Slovenia.

The Wine Patron Saints

St. Urban (Pope Saint Urban I)

St. Urban was a pope and a martyr. He is the patron saint of winegrowers, vineyard workers and barrel makers. He is popular in the winegrowing areas, being often portrayed in their churches and chapels, some of which carry his name. The life of St. Urban was not overly connected with wine, but since a vine is growing in his graveyard, people in wine regions entrusted him with the protection of vineyards. According to folk tradition, winegrowers pray for good weather on his name day (25 May), which is believed to bring a good harvest.

St. Martin of Tours

St. Martin is by all means the most important wine saint in Slovenia. St. Martin's day designates the end of the harvest and the season in general. On his name day (11 November), must turns into wine which includes ceremonies and feasts in wine regions and urban centres alike, extending to at least a week before and after the holiday. Very popular are ceremonies where must is "baptised" to become wine and wine lovers head across wine regions to experience the new wine and new vintage in its authentic environment. Slovenia is a small place, so it is very easy to tour a nearby winery no matter where one resides. Nouveau style wines are offered in restaurants and shops, and mainstream journalists compete for interviews with important wine-related personalities, prone to writing about wine in general. There is something in the air!

St. Martin's feast is a thanksgiving ritual where goose is the traditionally served dish.

Ljubljana – International City of Vine and Wine

Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, lies very much in the centre of the country, an hour's drive from any important Slovenian vineyard areas. And yet, the title it carries is very much deserved.

Ljubljana hosts one of the world's oldest OIV wine competitions, established in 1955 and celebrating its 50th edition in 2004. In recent years it has lost much of its significance and charm, but in the past many wineries, especially from New World countries, proudly displayed medals from VINO Ljubljana International Wine Competition to boost their fame. Hence the title, which was bestowed upon the city in 1987 in Rome by the OIV (International Organisation of Vine and Wine).

To cherish the title 1,050 vines of Chardonnay and Zweigelt were planted on the southern slope of the Ljubljana Castle Hill in 2016. The wine thus produced will be used for protocol purposes.

At the end of the day, Ljubljana is by far the most important fine wine and HORECA market in Slovenia.

The Story of the Old Vine

If Ljubljana resides off the map of wine regions, the second biggest Slovenian city Maribor is a true wine city with a long history of production. In its heart, very close to the city centre only a few meters from the Drava River's left bank, grows the oldest living vine on the planet. This fact is not as widely known as it deserves to be, though it has finally been communicated more in recent years.

The ancient Old Vine is over 450 years old, but its age does not prevent it from flowering and giving plenty of grapes. The harvest is always a ceremony, with much program and protocol around it. The Old Vine's grapes are used to make protocol wine for the Municipality of Maribor. The grape variety is Žametovka (Modra Kavčina), one of the few indigenous Slovenian varieties. It is highly resistant to pests and disease, which partly explains why it survived to see such an epic age.

The venerable plant is tended in the espalier training system, in front of a house built in the 16th century that was at the time part of the Maribor city walls. How exactly the Old Vine managed to survive through the centuries is a bit of a mystery and quite amazing. Obviously, it must have given consistent high yields and it was in the interest of the inhabitants of the house to prune and tend it properly. The house was burned partially several times throughout history, but the Old Vine endured.

Just how did it survive the phylloxera pandemic at the end of the 19th century? Well, the Old Vine is a solitary plant which spared it from infection, and its roots descend to the banks of the Drava River featuring plenty of moist gravel, something the phylloxera is not a fan of.



The oldest grapevine on Earth

Thus, it endured Ottoman raids, fires, epidemics and the WW2 bombing, weathering even worse storms to come. Lent, the city quarter where the Old Vine resides, was becoming an increasingly abandoned and quiet place throughout the 20th century. In 1913 a new main bridge was built, causing Lent to be bypassed. After the Second World War the rafting trade on the Drava River collapsed, impacting Lent even more. In 1960, a new power plant in Zlatoličje was built, raising the water level by 2 meters. The first row of houses closest to the Drava were torn down, and the roots of the Old Vine flooded. Bad news for any old vine, let alone the venerable lady. In late 1970 it actually seemed like the Old Vine was on its deathbed. The vegetation was minute and the vine's multiple "dead arms" didn't look promising at all.

When in 1972, the age of the Old Vine was determined to be at least 375 years, pressure arrived from various sides, including the general public and journalists, for it to be preserved at any cost, and an expert team was thus formed to save it.

On March 31st 1980 the rescue squad ventured to visit the Old Vine. Much to their surprise, they were blocked from approaching by over 30 inhabitants of the house, mostly gypsies, who made a living wall around it. Years ago, they were namely told by the Maribor police chief to protect the Old Vine if they wanted to continue squatting in the building. If the Old Vine goes, they go. Quite literally, they obeyed. When the situation was cleared up, the botanists' work could begin. MSc Tone Zafošnik, a member of the expert team, reported they almost felt like coroners at first, with the funeral seeming inevitable. Vast amounts of knowledge and wisdom were invested, and Zafošnik conducted his professional work with excellence. The Old Vine survived! It took several years to rejuvenate and nurture it to health. To everyone's delight, in 1986 the Old Vine yielded its first grapes in a long while. Pruning and harvest, initially the solitary work of Mr Zafošnik, soon became a major event, turning into a regular feast since



Klopotec

the 1990s. Cuttings are made and officially sold, and they were donated to more than 70 cities around the world including Paris. One offspring has been decorating the arcades at the Ljubljana Castle ever since 1991. The Old Vine is today in excellent shape, yielding 40–50 kg of grapes. The harvest is an officially recognized event. Grapes are pressed, vinified and put in small 0.25 litre bottles specially designed by Oskar Kogoj. The wine is used for protocol purposes by the Mayor of Maribor.

Due to his own advanced age, Mr Zafošnik handed his honorary duties as municipal vinedresser over to Stane Kocutar, who took his place in 2011. Mr Zafošnik passed away in 2012, but his work will surely be remembered for at least as long as the Old Vine thrives.

Since 2004 it has been recognised by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the oldest vine on the planet. In the house whose front it scales, a tourist information centre called the Old Vine House was established, dedicated to the Old Vine and to the wines of the region. A tasting room and a wine and souvenir shop are some of the permanent fixtures, while the House also organises several special events throughout the year.

Klopotec

When touring the vineyards of north-eastern Slovenia, just before or during harvest time, one might notice many feature peculiar “windmills”. These are called *klopotec* (klo-po-tets), standing on the hill-tops and emitting curious wooden clatter in windy weather.

Some are small, measuring less than one meter in diameter. These rotate quickly, creating a high pitched sound. Then, there are serious specimens with blades measuring several meters, producing deep, loud sounds. By now you might have guessed the purpose of the klopotec – causing ruckus in order to scare away birds, especially starlings. That was the general idea, at least, when the klopotec

was invented a few hundred years ago, apparently in the 16th century, but that is not confirmed. What is certain is that the protection of the fruits and crop was at the time essential. We can assume that the predecessor of the klopotec was a live scout watching over the vineyards from the lookout tower, directing men towards any flocks of birds. The men would shout and rattle to repel the birds, and in time a device was devised to accomplish the same. Supposedly, the klopotec was first used to scare birds in fields and orchards (especially in the crowns of cherries) and was later moved to vineyards. In Slovenian literature the klopotec is first mentioned in a Volkmer song from 1797. First known portrayal appears courtesy of Franz Kiroshofr in 1829, in a panorama of the Bizeljsko Castle.

Today the klopotec is a tradition more than anything else. Winegrowers set it up between the San Giacomo (25 July) and St. Bartholomew's day (24 August) when the grapes start changing their colour, and then disassemble it after the harvest. Setting a klopotec is quite a task, especially with big ones as parts might weigh over 20–30 kg and need to be installed onto a pole several meters above the ground. Today, tractors and lifts are used, but in the past it was all manual work. Setting a klopotec is also a feast. The master would invite the family, neighbours and vineyard workers over on the occasion, offering food and wine alongside music and singing.

Traditionally, klopotec is made using wooden parts exclusively, employing around six different woods. There are different forms, but in the Slovenske Gorice Hills four blades are the norm, and six blades in Haloze. The klopotec is also popular in Bizeljsko, in the Austrian Südsteiermark, and the Zagorje and Medimurje regions of Croatia.

In 1997, the Post of Slovenia issued a stamp featuring the klopotec, thus paying tribute to this old-time feature of the vineyards of the Štajerska region. The biggest standing klopotec recorded in the *Guinness Book of Records* measures 20.58 m in diameter and stands in the village Hermanci close to Ormož.





WINE GRAPES IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia, 53 different grape varieties are officially authorized for growing, 36 white and 17 red. You can find a few vines of certain other grapes as well, such as Sämling, Viognier or Pika to name a couple, but these appear in very small quantities. Grapes in this chapter are sorted according to their colour, and then according to the total surface area planted with the variety in Slovenia. We took our information from the national Register of Grape and Wine Growers, and it was current as of March 2017.



WHITE GRAPES

MOST IMPORTANT WHITE GRAPE VARIETIES

Welschriesling (Laški Rizling)

Welschriesling is with its 1,924 ha (12.09%) the most widely planted grape in Slovenia. Its origins are still uncertain, but it likely comes from the Danube Basin or from Croatia where they call it *Graševina*. It is a very important grape in countries around the Pannonian Plain, which includes Hungary (*Olaszrizling*), Austria, and Serbia, but also in Italy where it is known as Riesling Italico. Interestingly, it bears no relation with Riesling. Welschriesling was quite likely brought to Slovenia in 1822.

Welschriesling prefers cooler to medium climates and produces wines with gentle fruity aromas, medium to high acidity and a rather light body. It crops well and is one of few grapes to produce noble rot wines. This makes it a very popular grape for the production of very simple wines, or for outstanding sweet wines – and not much in between.

Welschriesling is hugely important in the Podravje region where it is a major blending component for the entry-level white blends usually sold in bulk, but it also gives some delightfully fresh and rather attractive light varietals. Here, it is made into stunning sweet wines either as botrytis style or as ice wine. This variety brought Slovenia its most important medals and trophies at many international competitions, which were all awarded to sweet wines. It is important also in the Posavje region, where it is a key component to Cviček, and wines in which styles are similar to those found in Podravje. It is also found in the Vipava Valley district of the Primorska region where it ends up in simple blends.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Falot, Frešer, Gaube, Jamšek, Marof, Šturm.

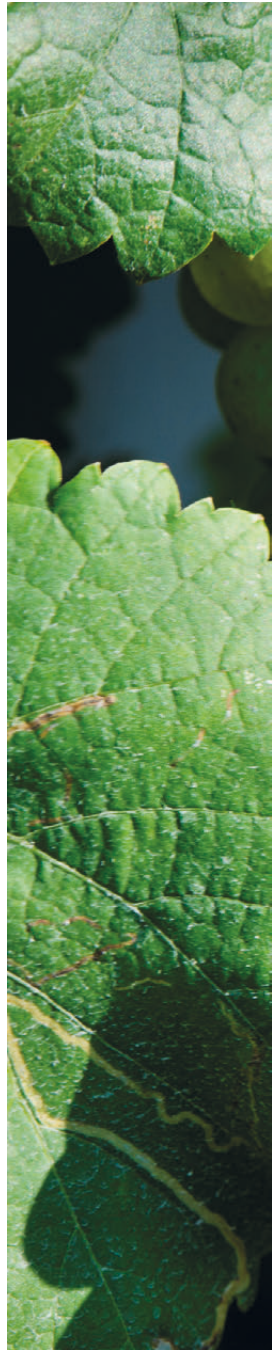
Chardonnay

The most popular white grape on the planet originates from France and requires no introduction. No wonder, then, that it is also the second most planted grape in Slovenia and very popular as well, as Slovenia with its 1,185 ha (7.45%) ranks in the top 10 Chardonnay producers in Europe. It was brought to Slovenia in 1822.

Chardonnay is not a very aromatic variety, producing, depending on the climate, aromas of lemons, melons, peaches and even tropical fruits. It prefers oak and ageing on lees (*sur lie*) and lends itself well to being blended. Overall, it varies considerably in style.

In Slovenia, Chardonnay grows in all nine districts and often gives excellent results. Generally, in Štajerska Slovenija and the Vipava Valley its acidity goes from medium to high with a medium body. In Brda and Prekmurje it has medium acidity with a full body. All around the country, wineries use it as a blending component for sparkling wines or for entry-level whites. They also make it into a single varietal easygoing style produced in stainless steel. Some very serious oak-aged chardonnays, not unlike good Burgundies, are made in Prekmurje, Štajerska Slovenija, the Vipava Valley and in Brda. In Brda and the Vipava Valley, it also produces premium white blends when mixed with local varieties.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Klet Brda (Bageri), Kristančič, VINO Kupljen Jeruzalem, Edi Simčič (Kozana), Marjan Simčič, Marof, Mlečnik, Piro, Sutor.





Sauvignon Blanc



Sauvignon Blanc

Called simply Sauvignon in Slovenia, it accounts for around 1,139 ha (7.16%) of vineyards which makes it very even with Chardonnay. Sauvignon Blanc originates from France and came to Slovenia in mid-19th century.

Sauvignon Blanc prefers cooler climates and makes for very aromatic wines with a zesty acidity. Its aroma is reminiscent of elderflower, tomato leaves, hay, gooseberry, blackcurrant, but you can often also sense some tropical fruits such as mango, papaya...

In Slovenia, it is a highly important grape especially in Štajerska Slovenija and the Vipava Valley where it accounts for more than 10% of the area, but also in Brda. Most Sauvignon Blanc on the market is produced in stainless steel, giving pungent, highly aromatic wines. In some regions, especially in Brda and Štajerska Slovenija, wineries mature it in oak, producing premium wines with a full body and creamy texture. Sauvignon Blanc is also a very popular blending component.

Notable producers: Puklavec Family Wines, Verus, Ptujška klet, Marjan Simčič, Kobal Wines, Dveri-Pax, Marof, Tilia, Gross, Piana.

Malvazija Istarska (Malvazija, Istrska Malvazija)

There are more than 50 different Malvasia (*Malvazija*) varieties around the globe, so it is essential to distinguish Malvazija Istarska from the rest of them. With 914 ha (5.74%), this is one of the major white grapes in Slovenia and its share continues to grow. Malvazija Istarska very likely originates from Istria so we can count it among the indigenous varieties. Although Malvazija Istarska is an essential white grape in Istria on both the Slovenian and the Croatian side, it only has regional importance. It also grows in northeastern Italy and in all four districts of the Primorska region.

Malvazija Istarska is an aromatic variety with rather low acidity levels and high alcohol levels when not planted on appropriate, i.e. cooler sites. It goes perfectly with local seafood, especially cold dishes.

The styles produced in Slovenia vary, from gently aromatic made in stainless steel best consumed when young, to oak-aged, blended with other whites, or made using prolonged skin maceration and aged in amphorae. The latter styles reward mid-term ageing. Malvazija Istarska is by far the most important white grape in the Slovenska Istra district (30% of the total area) coming second only to the red Refosco. Locals often call it the queen of Istria, with Refosco being the king. In the Vipava Valley it used to be part of the traditional Vipavec blend and is gaining popularity. Brda, too, makes some fine Malvasia though it is of lesser importance there. Malvasia is frequently used for wines with prolonged skin maceration.

Notable producers: Cigoj, Guerila, Klabjan, Montemoro, Pasji Rep, Pucer z vrha, Rojac, Santomas, Edi Simčič, Sutor, Štemberger, Vinakoper, Vinakras, Zaro.

Riesling (Renski Rizling)

Riesling is the king of white grapes, and it's called "*The Best White Wine on Earth*" in the eponymous book by Riesling authority Stuart Piggot. Riesling is an ancient German variety that accounts for 614 ha in Slovenia (3.86%). It prefers cooler climates, and so you will only find it in Podravje and perhaps a droplet in the Posavje region. It came to Slovenia in 1822.

Riesling is an aromatic grape offering a range of scents such as lemons, peaches, pineapples, linden flowers, burnt matches, quartz, and with age has a tendency to become increasingly mineral with hints of petroleum. For many, petroleum is considered as Riesling particularity and typical of the variety,

until not too aggressive. It becomes assertive in very warm vintages and in Germany they fear pure Riesling aroma is under threat. Riesling wines have perhaps the best aging potential among white varieties. The styles produced in Slovenia can be practically anything: blending material, dry and steely, medium sweet to lusciously sweet made as Trockenbeerenauslese or ice wine. Traditionally, local drinkers prefer it slightly sweeter, but quite a few seriously dry ones have been available for more than two decades now as well.

Notable producers: Ducal, Dveri-Pax, Joannes Protner, Kogl, Vino Kupljen Jeruzalem, Marof, Puklavec Family Wines, Valdhuber, Verus, Zlati Grič.

Ribolla Gialla (Rebula)

Ribolla Gialla is an old variety that originates from Friuli-Venezia Giulia in north-eastern Italy. Numerous references mention Ribolla already in the 14th century in Friuli, Slovenia and Istria, but it is important to note that the Ribolla thus mentioned at the time referenced a style of wine not a grape variety. Its first ampelographic description was given by Matija Vrtovec in 1844, while its very first mention appears in a document from 1235. In Slovenia, 601 ha (3.78%) are planted with this variety, which makes it the biggest area of any world country. A bit less than 300 ha of Ribolla Gialla are grown in Italy, and that is pretty much it. Three decades ago it was on verge of being forgotten, being treated as the material for only the simplest of wines, but since then it has risen like a phoenix and is now hugely popular. Ribolla is a late ripening variety which is quite discrete on the nose, usually providing some lemons, gentle spices, anise or even a touch of cloves and liquorice. It has high acidity levels and is usually of light to medium body. If not tended well, it can easily overcrop.

The main source of Ribolla is Brda, where it is the most planted grape, but it is now gaining popularity in the Vipava Valley as well, where winemakers once used it for making both the varietal wine and the Vipavec blend. Styles of Ribolla Gialla vary. A lot of Ribolla ends up in simple blends at the bottom end of the pyramid. On the other hand, winemakers in Brda blend it with either Chardonnay (most often) or Pinot Gris, Sauvignonasse or Sauvignon Blanc to produce their signature blends which can be terrific and sold at premium prices. Single varietal Ribolla Gialla produced in stainless steel is very popular locally and in the capital of Ljubljana, though Malvasia seems to be catching up to it lately. Success with oaked Ribolla, notably from Marjan Simčič, showed how much wine drinkers have to lose if Ribolla Gialla were to be forgotten. Finally, there is a trend among non-interventionists to produce Ribolla Gialla with prolonged skin maceration and then age it in either oak, concrete tanks or even in amphorae. Ribolla Gialla is a key ingredient in the production of sparkling wines, adding freshness and a regional touch. Some amazing sweet Ribolla from dried grapes is produced in Brda.

Notable producers: Batič, Blažič, Burja (in blend), Erzetič, Ferdinand, Guerila, Jakončič, Kabaj, Klet Brda, Klinec, Movia, Edi Simčič, Marjan Simčič, Svetlik, Ščurek.

Furmint (Šipon)

Furmint is an ancient grape variety that came to Central Europe (and consequently in Slovenia as well) centuries ago. From the shape of its leaves we can conclude it arrived from the Black Sea. Officially, it is considered a Hungarian grape. Before phylloxera, Furmint was the second most planted grape in Štajerska Slovenija after Ranfol (*Belina*), and it was then considered a premium grape variety. Today there are 546 ha (3.43%) of Furmint planted in Slovenia, which makes it the second biggest Furmint country worldwide after Hungary. Croatia produces some Furmint under the name *Moslavec* while Austria makes minute quantities (*Mosler*).





Ribolla Gialla



Pinot Gris

Furmint is a late-ripening variety with a discrete but fine aromatic profile when ripe. Its aroma is reminiscent of apples and, when fully ripe, even of ripe pears. Furmint wines are high in acidity with low to medium alcohol. Furmint is one of the great grapes to produce botrytis wines and some claim its skin is most suitable for miracles caused by *Botrytis cinerea*.

Furmint is a very important grape in the Podravje region and is found in scarce quantities also in Posavje. Best Furmint comes from Ljutomer-Ormož, around the village of Jeruzalem, but Haloze recently demonstrated some top quality Furmint, too. Just before the Slovenian independence, Furmint was considered mostly as a great blending ingredient for simple entry-level blends. It still perfectly plays this role today, but started gaining publicity as a varietal wine when *Klub Šipon* (the Furmint Club) was formed in the late 90s. Recently, with the rise of local varieties, it has achieved some international recognition as a crisp varietal wine, especially in the UK. Dveri-Pax successfully makes a version produced in large oak barrels. Due to its acidity, it is a welcome variety for sparkling wines. Furmint-based botrytis wines from Štajerska Slovenia and lately some made from dried grapes can be considered world-class in the category of sweet wines. Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Fürst, Gross, Kobal Wines, Vino Kupljen Jeruzalem, PRA-VinO (sweet), Puklavac Family Wines, Verus.

Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (Rumeni Muškat)

Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains is a very old variety that grows widely around the world under a number of different names, e.g. Rumeni Muškat in Slovenia, Moscato Bianco or Moscato Giallo in Italy or Gelber Muskateller in Germany. In Slovenia, 591 ha (3.72 %) are planted. Wines made from this variety have an intense terpene, grapey, muscaty, floral, lemony, lychee, anise, even spicy scent. Most Muscats are made as medium-sweet or sweet wine including botrytis wines and enjoyed locally, but some end up as dry wine and are very popular among Austrians.

In Slovenia, most of the Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains is planted in the Štajerska region which produces all the styles mentioned above. It is increasingly popular in Istria where it appears in medium-sweet or sweet wines made from dried grapes. Bela Krajina probably produces the best Muscats in the country, although in small quantities (only 17 ha). Some amazingly rich Spätlese or Auslese wines are produced there, and ice wine or Trockenbeerenauslese can be absolutely splendid and world-class. Every district makes at least some Muscat wine.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Kogl, PRA-VinO, Prus, Puklavac Family Wines, Šturm, Valdhuber, Verus, Vinakoper.

Pinot Gris (Sivi Pinot)

Pinot Gris is a French grape that, according to *Wine Grapes* by Jancis Robinson, is the same grape variety as Pinot Noir and is just a mutation. The results are very different, though. In Slovenia 525 ha (3.30%) are planted with Pinot Gris. It arrived to Slovenia in 1822 under the name *Rulandec* (Ruländer), as it is still sometimes called across Štajerska.

Pinot Gris is a pink-skinned grape that makes white wines. Some lightly pink, almost rosé wines from Pinot Gris have been very popular lately. Wines made from Pinot Gris are exclusively dry with medium acidity. The variety easily achieves high sugar levels, producing full-bodied wines with notable alcohol levels.

This is a popular grape in Slovenia and has its own “Slovenian” character no matter the origin. Almost half of the domestic Pinot Gris is produced in Štajerska Slovenija, in a style not unlike those of New Zealand – aromatic with lots of fruit character and freshness. Although greater quantities are planted

WHITE GRAPES

in the Vipava Valley than in Brda, it makes more noise in the latter district. In Brda it is produced in stainless steel or in old oak, usually resulting in wines with a rather serious character and depth. Pinot Gris is a favourite component of the top white cuvées from Brda. Being either from the western or eastern part of the country, Pinot Gris from Slovenia has its own distinction.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Ferdinand, Klet Brda, Marjan Simčič, Movia, Piro, Puklavec Family Wines, Edi Simčič, Ščurek, Verus.

Pinot Blanc (Beli Pinot)

Using the same argument that was applied to Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc is the same variety as Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. Yet again, though, it can be observed that wines made from these three grapes are very different. In Slovenia, there are 445 ha (2.80%) of Pinot Blanc planted. Even in the 1980s there was still some confusion in Slovenia between Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay, so it is hard to say anything concrete about the domestic history of this grape, but it might have been present already in 1822.

Pinot Blanc gives fruity wines with not much distinction in character and with rather high acidity.

More than half of Pinot Blanc is planted in Štajerska Slovenija where most of it ends up as a blending component. Few varietal Pinot Blancs are made throughout the country, though Brda does have some producers of these, too.

Notable producers: Kabaj, Ščurek, Edi Simčič.

Sauvignonasse

Sauvignonasse, called Friulano in neighbouring Italy, is a variety originating from the Bordeaux region. There are 238 ha (1.50%) of Sauvignonasse planted in Slovenia. In the past it was called *Tokaj*, but the name had to be changed after Hungary managed to gain a Protected Designation of Origin status for it from the EU. Slovenian winemakers then took a really long time to agree on an alternative name and in the meanwhile the variety lost some of its popularity.

Sauvignonasse is a mid-ripening and aromatic variety with a distinctly vegetal, dried herb character reminiscent somewhat of Sauvignon Blanc though they are not related. It is medium to full-bodied with medium acidity.

It grows exclusively in the Primorska region, mostly in Brda and to some extent in the Vipava Valley where certain highly distinctive examples are produced. Due to its aromatic profile it is a very welcoming blending component for both entry-level and flagship cuvées.

Notable producers: Blažič, Kabaj, Mlečnik, Marjan Simčič, Zanut.

Traminer / Gewürztraminer (Traminec / Dišeči Traminec)

Traminer is an ancient French or German variety. In Slovenia, there are 216 ha planted (1.36%) along with 30 ha of a more aromatic and distinctive mutation named Gewürztraminer (*Dišeči Traminec*). The factual situation might differ from the numbers above, so for the sake of simplicity we will discuss both mutations of Traminer in one go. It arrived to Slovenia in 1822.

Traminer is a very aromatic variety with terpene aromas often reminiscent of roses, oriental spices, lychee. While Traminer has medium level of acidity and alcohol, Gewürztraminer is rather low in acidity and high in alcohol, and the two are often blended.

Štajerska Slovenia is a primary source of Traminer, producing it mostly in medium-sweet style.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Puklavec Family Wines, PRA-VinO, Radgonske gorice, Steyer.

OTHER IMPORTANT WHITE GRAPE VARIETIES

Kraljevina

Kraljevina is an indigenous variety of Croatia. In Slovenia it is grown as an important blending component for Cviček. It has high acidity and low alcohol content, along with a rather neutral aromatic profile. Therefore, not much varietal wine is made from it. In Bela Krajina, some notable botrytis wines were made from Kraljevina in the last two decades.

Müller-Thurgau (Rizvanec)

Müller-Thurgau is a German crossing popular in Štajerska Slovenija, with a dash of it appearing in Prekmurje. It is an early-ripening low acidity wine, good for blending and for producing “nouveau” wines.

Kerner

Kerner is another German crossing that got some traction just before the end of the previous century in Štajerska Slovenija.

Muscat-Ottonel (Muškat Ottonel)

Muscat Ottonel is a 19th-century French variety. It is an early-ripening, low acidity and very aromatic variety that usually accumulates quite a lot of sugar. Less popular than Yellow Muscat. Muškatna penina sparkling wine from Pukavec Family Wines is a fine example of this grape's potential.

Silvaner (Zeleni Silvanec)

Silvaner is an old German mid-ripening variety. Some few varietals are made in Štajerska Slovenija, Dolenjska, Bizeljsko and Prekmurje.

Notable producer: Frelj, Marof.

Rumeni Plavec

Rumeni Plavec is an indigenous variety of either Slovenia or the neighbouring Croatia. Known for its very high acidity, it is used for blends in Bizeljsko-Sremič and in Dolenjska. Lately, it has been gaining popularity as a premium blending component for sparkling wine (Istenič).

Zelen

Zelen, meaning “green”, is an indigenous Slovenian grape variety originating from the Vipava Valley which remains the only source of this variety. It is a mid-ripening variety that gives distinctive wines reminiscent of apricots and dried Mediterranean herbs while possessing very low acidity and alcohol levels that usually remain at 11%, seldom achieving 12%. A true Slovenian specialty.

Notable producers: Burja, Guerila, Krapež, Pasji rep, Vipava 1894.

Bouvier (Ranina)

Bouvier is an indigenous Slovenian variety, though more of it is now planted in Austria. Clotar Bouvier, an Austrian banker and landowner, discovered it in 1900 in his vineyards close to Gornja Radgona. It is a very early ripening variety (hence the name Ranina – ‘ripens early’) locally almost exclusive to Štajerska Slovenija. The wines are lightly perfumed with hints of Muscat and low acidity.

Notable producers: Kogl, Radgonske gorice, Steyer.

Pinela

Pinela is an old Slovenian variety, likely of Italian origin. In Slovenia it grows exclusively in the Vipava Valley. It is mid-ripening and gives medium-aromatic peachy and flowery wines with a full body and medium to high acidity.

Notable producers: Batič, Ferjančič, Guerila, Štokelj, Vipava 1894.

Vitovska Grganja

Vitovska Grganja is an indigenous Slovenian variety that was first mentioned in 1844 by Matija Vertovec. Contrary to popular belief, it is a different variety than Vitovska, which grows almost exclusively in Italy in the Carso (Karst) district. Its aromatic profile is quite similar to Malvazija Istarska but a bit more masked, with notably higher acidity and medium alcohol levels. Although its area remains small (30 ha), it has almost doubled in the Karst and the Vipava Valley in the past five years. Often used for wines with prolonged skin maceration.

Notable producers: Čotar, Fon, Boris Lisjak, Renčel, Štemberger, Vinakras.

Ranfol

Ranfol is an ancient grape variety very likely originating in the region of Styria. Just before phylloxera at the end of the 19th century, it was the most planted grape in Štajerska occupying more than 50% of vineyards and it was then called *Belina* or *Štajerska Belina* (Styrian white). It gives light, rather simple and neutral wines. It is grown in the Podravje and Posavje regions, notably in Dolenjska and Štajerska Slovenija.

Notable producer: Ptujška klet.

Picolit (Pikolit)

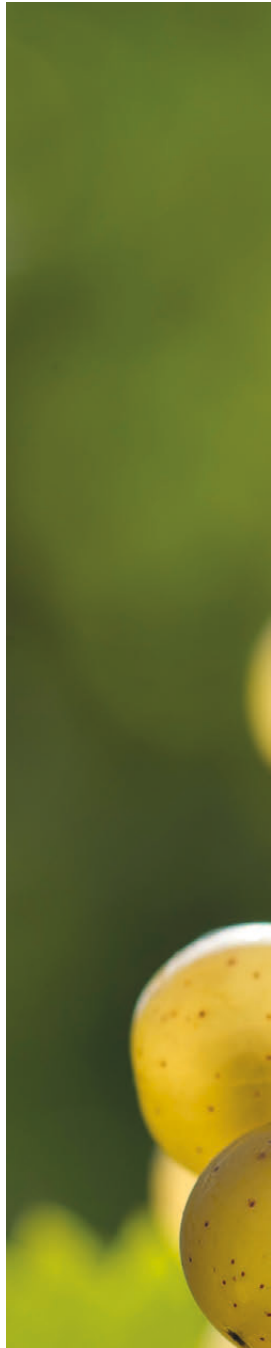
Picolit is an ancient Friulian variety giving some high-quality sweet wines in Brda and the Vipava Valley. First references of Picolit describe sweet wines produced from dried grapes, most likely from Malvazija Istarska and Ribolla Gialla.

Klarnica

Klarnica is a very old variety probably originating from the Vipava Valley and mentioned by Matija Vertovec in 1844. Out of just 3 ha of total plantation, only few winemakers produce it even in retail quantities (Mansus, Stegovec, Cigoj). Styles include dry, medium sweet, sweet and even a sparkling version.

OTHER WHITE VARIETIES PLANTED IN SLOVENIA

Verduzzo (Verduc), Chasselas (Bela Žlahtnina), **Poljšakica**, Glera, **Pika**, Sämling, **Tržarka**. Grape varieties in bold and italics are considered indigenous to Slovenia.





Vitovska Grganja



RED GRAPES

MOST IMPORTANT RED GRAPE VARIETIES

Refosco (Refošk)

Refosco is an ancient variety originating from Slovenia or Northern Italy. Was Pliny the Elder, perhaps, already talking about Refosco when describing the grape variety “*Omnium nigerria*” – the blackest of the black? Otherwise, its first mention goes back to the 1280s when it was called Terrano. With 1,338 ha (8.41%), it is by far the most widely planted red grape in Slovenia and a highly popular wine all around the country.

Most of Refosco is planted in Istria (820 ha) and in Karst (430 ha), with some plantings appearing in Brda and the Vipava Valley as well. In Karst, three out of four vines are Refosco.

It is known for its deep colour that can stay violet (i.e. youthful) for several years. The aroma profile displays red and black fruits, pepper and juniper. It has very high and refreshing acidity, medium tannins and a medium to full body.

In Istria, Refosco makes fruity and spicy reds that range from ordinary ones and worse, all the way up to delicious and original oak-aged sturdy reds that can age well and please even the most demanding of palates. Here and there, it is blended with other reds such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah to acquire some international appeal. In the Karst, it grows on terra rossa producing an opaque red called Teran which possesses a lighter body and even more acidity. While Refosco might be highly popular locally, it has had a hard time appeasing foreign wine lovers. In the Vipava Valley and Brda, it is considered somewhat less important and is mostly used for blends.

Notable producers: Čotar, Boris Lisjak, Renčel, Rojac, Santomas, Steras, Vinakoper, Vinakras.

Žametovka

Žametovka is an ancient Slovenian variety probably originating from the Dolenjska region. *Žamet* means ‘velvet’ and *Žametna Črnina* (literally ‘black velvet’) is a synonym of Žametovka. The oldest living vine on planet Earth, which grows in Maribor, is of the Žametovka variety. There are 858 ha (5.39%) of Žametovka planted in Slovenia, and no other country has planted it thus far.

Žametovka is a late-ripening variety giving high acidity, lightly coloured robust wines.

If one were to ask a Slovenian wine consumer, even an experienced wine lover, what the second most planted red in Slovenia is, few would know. This can be attributed to the fact that practically no varietal Žametovka is bottled. A large majority ends up in blends produced in the Posavje region. In Dolenjska (603 ha) it helps make the ubiquitous *Cviček*, in Bizeljsko-Brežice the blend is called *Bizeljčan*, while in Bela Krajina it is *Metliška črnina* (‘a black from Metlika’). Some Žametovka is planted in Štajerska Slovenija as well. Perhaps sparkling wines are its new future as showcased by Domaine Slapšak.

Merlot

Merlot is a world-famous old French variety with significant plantings (822 ha, 5.16%) in Slovenia, too, which make it the number one international variety in Slovenia. It arrived to Slovenia after WW2.





Refosco



Cabernet Sauvignon

Merlot is a mid-ripening variety that gives deeply coloured and not too tannic reds with an attractive aromatic profile of red and black fruits.

It grows successfully in all the Primorska districts. Most of it is planted in the Vipava Valley, followed by Brda and then Istria. In Podravje and Posavje it would struggle to ripen during most years.

Merlot is by far the most important red grape in the Vipava Valley (producing half of the Slovenian total), where it is the most planted grape, and is highly significant in Brda as well. It is used for different wine styles. Simple red blends and easygoing Merlot varietals are popular all across Primorska, though Merlot gets much more exciting when it ends up in premium blends or as a premium varietal. In this context, it mostly appears as a varietal in the Vipava Valley and in blends in Brda (Bordeaux blends), though the opposite can be true as well. The majority of the flagship Slovenian reds from Brda are Merlot-based blends. Notable producers: Batič, Kabaj, Klet Brda, Krapež, Lisjak, Mlečnik, Piro, Santei, Marjan Simčič, Sutor, Tilia, Vinakoper, Zanut. Producers who use it in their flagship blends: Kabaj, Kristančič, Movia, Edi Simčič, Marjan Simčič, Ščurek, Štokelj.

Blafränkisch (Modra Frankinja)

In 2016, the German research team E. Maul, F. Röckel and R. Töpfer from the Julius Kühn Institute in Geilweilerhof announced their findings stating the variety's origin is in Slovenia. The scientists confirmed 56 variety identifiers (genetic markers). The parent varieties of Blafränkisch are the forgotten red Slovenian variety Vranek or Tičenska Črnina, and Debela Belina (Gouais Blanc). The birthplace of Blafränkisch appears to be the winegrowing region surrounding the city of Slovenske Konjice. Quite some news!

In Slovenia, 698 ha are planted (4.39%) with *Modra Frankinja*, mostly in Posavje and around a quarter of it in Podravje.

Blafränkisch is a later-ripening, deeply coloured grape that needs a rather warm climate. It has an intense colour with notes of red berries, vegetal notes and black pepper. It exhibits fair amounts of acidity with medium to low tannin levels.

For decades, it was used to improve and spice up simple red blends based on Žametovka (see Žametovka), though some solid and refreshing varietals were also made. In the last decade the quality has increased significantly, along with the number of very good producers, and more surface area is being planted with this variety.

Notable producers: Dveri-Pax, Heaps Good Wine, Kerin, Kobal, KZ Metlika, KZ Krško, Marof, Martinčič, Šturm.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet Sauvignon is the most planted grape on Earth and is of French origin. In Slovenia, there are 427 ha planted (2.68%). This makes it only the 15th most popular grape on the domestic level. It arrived to Slovenia after WW2.

It prefers warmer climates, which makes Slovenia less suitable for this very popular grape as it often struggles to ripen properly even in the warmer Primorska region where all the Slovenian Cabernet is in fact planted. Nevertheless, it is highly popular among consumers and many (too many?) varietal wines are produced across all the possible price ranges. It never reaches the tops of Merlot in Slovenia, often being vegetal and hard on tannins, but is a very welcoming blending component for many flagship reds to which it gives firmness and a spicy aromatic bouquet.

Notable producers: Ferdinand, Jakončič, Piro, Santomas, Tilia, Vinakoper, Zanut.



Pinot Noir (Modri Pinot)

Pinot Noir is an ancient French grape that is thought to have existed for over 2000 years. 217 ha (1.37%) are planted in Slovenia. Pinot Noir is a delicate grape variety preferring cool climates and requires a highly skilled winemaker to make it right. Wines have a distinct character of strawberries and gentle smoke, and are lightly coloured with the colour soon turning to garnet. It possesses light to medium tannins, a medium body and shows rather high acidity levels.

In Slovenia, it is allowed and actually grown in all nine districts, though Štajerska Slovenija, Brda and the Vipava Valley make the finest examples. Some of the best Slovenian reds are Pinot Noirs.

Notable producers: Burja, Dveri-Pax, Vino Kupljen Jeruzalem, Movia, Marjan Simčič, Tilia, Verus, Zlati Grič.

OTHER IMPORTANT RED GRAPE VARIETIES**Barbera**

Barbera is a deeply coloured, high acidity speciality of the Vipava Valley. In the past it was blended with Cabernet and Merlot to make some cheap reds, however in recent years some decent attempts have been made and things seem to be getting better. A variety to watch in the future.

Cabernet Franc

Cabernet Franc is one of the oldest grapes currently grown in the world. In Slovenia it found some traction in the Primorska region.

Zweigelt

Zweigelt is a 20th-century cross originating from Austria. It was planted very recently in the Podravje and Posavje regions for its dark colour.

Syrah

Syrah or Shiraz is a recent phenomenon in Slovenia. It requires warm to hot climates and makes some good results in Istria.

Blauer Portugieser (Portugalka)

In 2016, it was established that Blauer Portugieser was most likely an indigenous Slovenian variety. Similar to the origin of Blaufränkisch, the German Federal Research Institute Julius Kühn traced back its roots to the surroundings of Slovenske Konjice, with the parent varieties being Vranek and Sylvaner. Slovenia currently grows just 13 ha of Blauer Portugieser, mostly in Bela Krajina, where it gives wines with a rather neutral character and lower acidity. It is making some noise as a “nouveau” style made using carbonic maceration in November after harvest.

OTHER RED VARIETIES PLANTED IN SLOVENIA

Gamay, Saint Laurent (Šentlovrenka), Cipro, Schioppettino (Pokalca aka Črna Rebula), Picolla Nera (Maločrn), Chasellas Rouge (Rdeča Žlahtnina).



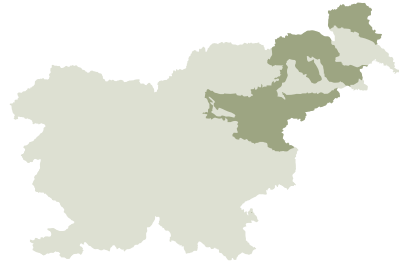


Syrah



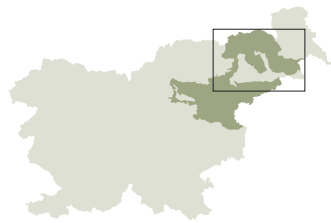


PODRAVJE REGION





ŠTAJERSKA SLOVENIJA DISTRICT



ŠTAJERSKA SLOVENIJA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	6,050 ha
Grape growers	10,736
Winemakers	887
Average annual rainfall	900–1,100 mm
Climate	Continental
Most important grape varieties	Welschriesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Chardonnay, Furmint
Notable producers	Dveri-Pax, Frešer, Fürst, Gaube, Gross, Joannes Protner, Kobal Wines, Kogl, VINO Kupljen Jeruzalem, Puklavc Family Wines, Ptujška klet, PRA-VinO, Radgonske Gorice, Sanctum, Steyer, Valdhuber, Verus, Zlati-Grič
List of permitted white grape varieties	Bouvier, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Furmint, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Kraljevina, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Müller-Thurgau, Muscat Ottonel, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Ranfol, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Silvaner, Traminer, Welschriesling
List of permitted red grape varieties	Blaufränkisch, Chasselas Rouge, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Blauer Portugieser, Zweigelt, Žametovka

Introduction

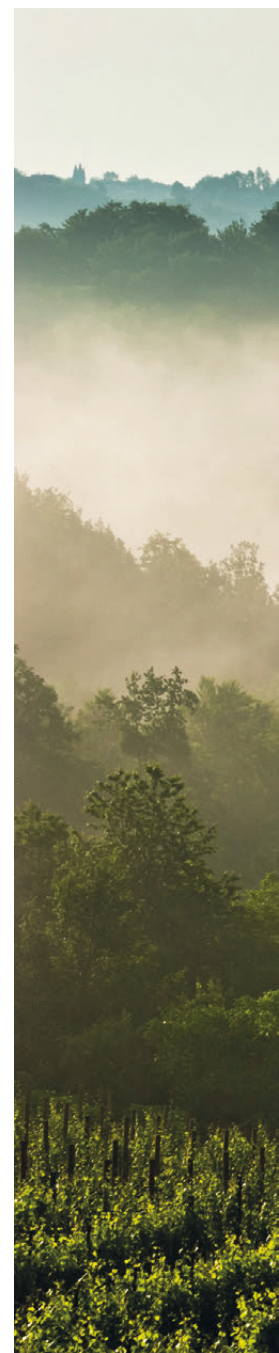
Štajerska Slovenija literally means ‘Slovenian Styria’. The other part of Styria (Steiermark) lies in Austria. Štajerska Slovenija is the nation’s biggest wine district, responsible for nearly 40% of the Slovenian vineyards. In 2006, six rather similar small districts (Radgona-Kapela, Ljutomer-Ormož, Srednje Slovenske Gorice, Haloze, Maribor, Šmarje-Virštanj) united in what was a pragmatic move to accommodate major branded wines. The land has had a long history of wine production, which was traditionally an important economic category here. The region was always among the leading wine producers in the various countries it belonged to (Slovenia, Yugoslavia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire). This is a place where some of the most aromatic and delicate Slovenian whites are found, and where quite a few stunning world-class sweet wines are made. Red wines are a recent phenomenon, with Pinot Noir already showing lots of promise. The biggest wine centres in the area are Maribor and Ptuj, which is considered the oldest Slovenian town, Gornja Radgona, Ormož, and Ljutomer. Slovenska Bistrica and Slovenske Konjice are both important wine towns as well.

A Bit of History

Vines were grown in these parts already in 4th century BC, when Celtic tribes began driving out the Illyrians. When the Romans arrived in the 1st century, the vines were already here. In the lands they conquered, the Romans were known to encourage agriculture, including viticulture. No wonder, then, that winegrowing was at its height during the Roman times between 1st and 4th century AD, as witnessed from the excavated amphorae and various other storage, transport and drinking vessels discovered throughout the area, especially in Ptuj. Vine was also a feature of many Roman monuments. In Poetovio (Ptuj), single-handle clay jugs for storing wine were being manufactured in the 1st century. Vines were frequently planted by the Roman soldiers, who were themselves also the biggest consumers of wine. Each soldier had the right to a daily ration of half a litre of wine, which they mixed with water. Drinking undiluted wine was considered uncultured and reckless. Winegrowing must have been very fruitful since Emperor Domitian (reigned 81–96) ordered the conversion of half the vineyards in Pannonia into fields, in order to maintain the cereal crops and protect the prices of wine in Rome. Luckily, his decree was largely disobeyed, until it was finally cancelled by Emperor Probus (reigned 276–282) born in Sirmia (Srem) in Pannonia, who is credited with most merit for the growth of winegrowing in the region. Following the fall of the Roman Empire and the raids of barbaric tribes between the 4th-6th centuries, a majority of the vineyards were abandoned, destroyed or at least badly damaged. The situation further declined when Slavs began arriving in the 6th century. They were not adept winegrowers, since this was an art mostly practiced by the Mediterranean folks. Nevertheless, viticulture survived as the Slavs, who were generally a skilful agricultural people, learned the craft from the few remaining locals they merged with. The viticultural situation progressed steadily once again under the Franks. In fact, Charlemagne, the king of the Franks who ruled at the end of the 8th and beginning of 9th century, actively encouraged viticulture through the document *Capitulare de villis*.

The first written records dealing with viticulture in Styria are from 890, confirming the Salzburg archdiocese’s ownership of a property near Ptuj, stating it had ten vineyards.

By the 12th century, most of the land once belonging to the German crown was further divided between the nobility and the Church. Churches and monasteries are actually responsible for much of the development in winegrowing in the Middle Ages. Wine was needed for their religious services, but it was also a subject of trade. It is documented that several monasteries, namely the Benedictine Saint Paul’s Abbey





Misty morning in Haloze



FOURNISSEURS DE LA CORDON ROUGE
DE SA MAJESTÉ DU ROI
YOUGOSLAVIE

COTAR BOUVIÈRE

MONT DU DUC
SEC

GORNJA-RADGON

CARTE BLANCHE

Cotâr Bouvière

from Lavanttal (1091), the Carthusian Žiče (1164), and the Cistercian Viktring Abbey (1142) all owned vineyards in the 12th century. Most noticeably, the Salzburg archdiocese in 1139 donated land in Jarenina north of Maribor to the affluent Benedictine order of Admont. They conducted their winegrowing uninterrupted until 1938, owning properties around Maribor, Ptuj, and Jeruzalem. Today, their tradition is continued under the name Dveri-Pax Winery at the historic property in Jarenina. Besides the Church, important 12th-century owners were also German knights known as the Knights of the Cross or the Knights of the Teutonic Order with headquarters in Velika Nedelja (and properties around Ormož). In the 13th century, they built an administrative building with a wine cellar and a press called Temnar near Ormož. Reconstructed several times, last in the 18th century, the Temnar stands proud above the Ljutomer-Ormož vineyards to this day.

The vineyards in Maribor, between Kamnica and Melje on the left bank of the River Drava, were documented first in 991, and it is a place where vineyards have persisted ever since. Starting then, a string of documents leads through the centuries, recording vineyards on the left bank such as the famous Piramida (Pyramid) and Kalvarija (Calvary) hills just north of the city. One can thus observe over 1000 years of uninterrupted viticulture in Maribor. In 1239 the Minorites, a Franciscan monk order, formed a monastery with a wine cellar in Ptuj, which is considered the beginning of wine cellaring in this town. In 13th-century *urbariums* (a sort of Middle Ages land register), a pretty good idea can be had about the size of the vineyard area in Styria. By the end of the Middle Ages, vineyards were very much in the same places as today, though many no longer exist. There were no vineyards in the valleys.

Because winegrowing was an especially important business, the relationship between landowners, leaseholders and workers was regulated by a compilation of rules called the **Gorske Bukve** issued in 1543. The name derives from the fact that new vineyards were always created on the slopes where it is warmer than in the valley, and the plots were called *gorca* ('little hill'), hence "*gorica, gorice*" which is still largely used among the people in everyday communication when referring to vineyards.

Maribor, Ptuj, and Radgona were important trading centres. So-called 'wine routes' where wine was transported were firmly established, including waterways. No other routes could be used for trading. For 300 years, disputes occurred between Ptuj and Maribor with regard to wine-trading rights, culminating in the 17th century in what was called the Wine War, a testament to the significance of local trade with this noble liquid.

If the Middle Ages were relatively peaceful times, disturbed only by the plague, grasshoppers and floods, the 16th and 17th centuries were not kind to winegrowing. The situation worsened at the end of the 15th century with the Ottoman incursion lasting two centuries (1471–1683), and numerous peasant uprisings. When the Ottomans conquered Hungary and stopped the import of "fiery" Hungarian wine, this actually boosted wine trade in Styria though. Lots of wine was then sold locally, and lots exported to Vienna and even to Silesia. When the invaders were banished from Hungary, the situation reversed. Suddenly, there was an excess of wine, and the local people began drinking more than it was good for them. In 1788, under Joseph II, the then-total size of vineyards in Styria was measured to be 29,186 ha, producing merely 330 thousand hl which amounts to just over 1,100 litres per hectare. During 18th and 19th century, numerous glassware manufacturing plants called *glažuta* (*Glashütte*, Ger.) were established in Pohorje, crafting also wine bottles.

As documented by the French who briefly conquered the region between 1797–1809, most of the vineyards at the time were planted with a hundred or so high-yielding late-ripening varieties, and the quality corresponding. Vines were mostly planted chaotically, with no particular system of rows or columns whatsoever. The simple and neutral Belina and the superior Furmint were the two most widely planted varieties.

Archduke Johann

In 1822 Archduke Johann bought a property in Meranovo just south of Maribor, at the foothills of Pohorje, and planted what he considered an exemplary vineyard, introducing varieties from Western Europe. Riesling, Welschriesling (today we believe that Welschriesling, aka *Graševina*, is in fact of Croatian origin), Traminer, Silvaner, Ruländer (Pinot Gris), Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay. He also planted Furmint, White Gutedel and Red Gutedel. The brand new vineyard was monovarietal and not a field blend which was then normally the practice.

In earnest, it took nearly a century longer for the idea of Western varieties introduced by Archduke Johann to take root. This occurred with the first phylloxera replanting, but the “seed” had been introduced, as described, almost 200 years ago. It is important to note Furmint was giving the best wines at the time, especially in the Ljutomer-Ormož district where it was the dominant grape.

In the 19th century, the main markets for Styrian wines were Salzburg, Vienna, Ljubljana, Klagenfurt and Graz.

A magnificent work by Franz Xaver Trummer and the Kreuzer brothers

In 1841 and updated in 1855, a thorough list of 282 varieties planted in Styria including some from Dolenjska and Vipava were documented by the master gardener Franz Xaver Trummer in his work: *Systematische Klassifikation und Beschreibung der im Herzogthume Steiermark vorkommenden Rebensorten* ('Systematic Classification and Description of Vine Varieties from the Duchy of Styria'; available free at Google Books). The varieties were classified using the Babo and Metzger methodology.

The work is highly important overall, documenting the wealth of varieties found in Styria at the time and recording those that went extinct after the phylloxera replanting. It also carried a broader meaning. Ampelography as a serious science namely has its roots in the early 19th century, and Trummer's writings are considered a pioneering research in the field of identification and systematic classification of vine varieties. The book was supported by 175 beautiful and amazingly authentic pictures of vines and grapes painted by the Kreuzer brothers in the gouache technique. 126 of these pictures remain preserved, kept at the Maribor Institute for Agriculture and Forestry.

To appraise the situation further, another valuable source is Victor Rendu's *Ampélographie française* of 1857, where some 150 grape varieties are addressed. The work featured beautiful hand-coloured lithographs by Eugene Grobon.

A list of portrayed varieties that are still important today: Welschriesling, Furmint Chardonnay, Traminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Riesling, Blaufränkisch, Kraljevina, Žametovka, Ranfol, Sylvaner, Malvazija Istarska. Among the significant modern Styrian varieties, only Sauvignon Blanc appears to be missing.

Some rather obscure varieties that are mostly extinct: Bela Volovina (Aramon Blanc), Bela Želodovina ('white acorn-grape'), Beli Ptičnjak ('white bird's grape'), Beli Refošk (White Refosco), Bistriška Črnina ('Bistrica black'), Gosjonog ('goose leg'), Javor ('maple'), Kozji Sesec ('goat teat'), Bela Lipovščina ('white lime tree leaf'), Modra Tičina ('red bird's grape'), Modra Volovina ('red bull's eye'), Modri Tokajec ('blue Tokayer'), Ovčji Rep ('sheep's tail'), Postič (Pinot Meunier), Rivček ('little snout'), Rjava Tičina ('brown bird's grape'), Rumeni Peček ('yellow pip'), Tičina ('bird's grape'), Velika Črnina ('great black'), Vranek ('little crow'), Zeleni Hrustec ('crunchy green'), Zelenika ('box tree grape').



Blaufränkisch - a parent of Blaufränkisch, drawn by the Kreuzer Brothers



160 Years of Sparkling Wine in Slovenia

In Slovenia, sparkling wine is certainly not a recent phenomenon as its story begins already way back in the mid-19th century.

In 1849 the Klajnošek brothers founded a wine distribution company and a “champagne cellar” as it was called at the time, in Radgona. It should be noted that this was on the left bank of the Mura River, on what is today the Austrian side. The quality and style of sparkling wines at the time was picturesquely described in the *Novice kmetijskih, rokodelskih in narodnih stvari* (‘Agricultural, Craft and National News’) from 10 December 1853 by Janez Bleiweis. He reports that “*Champagne or sparkling wine is a favourite among the noblemen of Europe,*” continuing that *many have started producing sparkling wine in the (Austrian) Empire, but no one makes them as good as Klajnošek. In Graz, experts tried blind-tasting them in direct comparison with French ones yet failed to identify Klajnošek’s.* Bleiweis reports that Klajnošek travelled to Champagne to learn the craft and returned in 1850. After numerous trials, he released his first sparkling wine in 1852 and immediately sold 1,200 bottles.

It is less known, but sparkling wine was produced in Ptuj starting with 1891 already.

Of key importance for sparkling wine production in Radgona was the Bouvier family of Swiss origin. Clotar Bouvier, after whom a Slovenian indigenous grape variety is named, founded the *Sekt- und Weinkellerei Bouvier* (‘Sparkling Wine and Wine Cellars Bouvier’) in 1882. The company was very successful at collecting prizes at wine shows from 1883 till 1906, and ran a successful business all the while. They even supplied the king since 1922. After WWII the company was nationalised in 1949 and can be considered the precursor of what is today the Radgonske Gorice winery, the biggest sparkling wine producer in the country.

In 1871, the first Wine Society was founded in Maribor, with six others following shortly in Radgona, Ptuj, Cmurek, Ljutomer, Ormož and Brežice. In the same year, only 11 years after the famous School in Klosterneuburg north of Vienna had opened in 1860, a Fruit and Wine Growing School was founded here. It came to life in 1872, the same year as another famous school in Geisenheim, Germany.

At the 1873 Winegrowers’ Congress in Vienna, Hermann Goethe, the headmaster of the by-then already widely renowned Maribor Fruit and Wine Growing School became head of the International Ampelographic Commission. In 1876 he published an ampelographic glossary, drawn up in Maribor and considered one of the Commission’s premiere achievements.

In 1881, Herman Goethe divided Styria into 12 districts. Three were found in today’s Austria (Central Styria) and nine in Lower Styria. These were:

District	Size	Cadastral income / ha
Slovenske gorice (Slovenian Hills)	4,623 ha	23 fl 94 kr
Maribor	2,047 ha	30 fl 71 kr
Radgona district	1,028 ha	21fl 70 kr
Ptuj	983 ha	19 fl 52 kr
Ormož-Ljutomer	2,889 ha	31 fl 18 kr

Most of these districts, with slight adaptations, lasted all the way up until 2006.

The other four districts suggested by Goethe were Haloze, Pohorje, Celje and Savinja-Obsotelje.

Sparkling wine
in a glass

Manual riddling in
Radgonske gorice
wine cellar

Phylloxera

The simple Belina and the noble Furmint were the dominant grapes hereabout, alongside a number of today practically non-existent varieties, when phylloxera hit the Styrian vineyards hard in 1888, ravishing Haloze already in 1886. It accomplished its vicious job by the end of the century, when practically all the vineyards in Styria were contaminated. The size of vineyards as they had been before the phylloxera epidemic was never recovered.

Vineyard replantings

The first post-phylloxera replantings were conducted in the early 20th century. Since the vines were grafted and deep ploughing (*rigolanje*) was utilised, it was an expensive business forcing many smaller owners to sell their vineyards to the richer townspeople and bigger farmers. Vines were planted at a density of 7,000 vines per hectare and trellised with stakes. Although the phylloxera was disastrous, it helped clean up the list of recommended varieties, which in 1905 appeared as follows: Welschriesling, Furmint, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Riesling, Chardonnay, Sylvaner, Red Traminer, White and Red Gutedel. In 1905, the first districts together with a list of permitted varieties were established. This was further extended and developed in 1935. See “*Some History*” section in the Slovenian history chapter above for the details.

The second major replanting was conducted after WWII. Since manpower was short, terraces were introduced to help with mechanisation. The density on terraces was only 2,000 plants per hectare, so the yields per vine were very high. Today, these terraces, though contributing much charm to the landscape, are largely abandoned, except on the steepest hills.

The Merchants of Ptuj

At the turn of the 20th century, Ptuj was a thriving wine city with numerous wine merchants, namely Fürst, Ornig, Osterberger and Kaiser, trading throughout the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire. When Kaiser went bankrupt in 1906, his cellar was documented as having a capacity of 14 million litres, which is bigger than any winery in Slovenia today.

The most famous and richest merchants were probably the Fürst family arriving from Bavaria in the 18th century and founding a wine company in 1821. By 1920 they owned 11 town houses in Ptuj complete with two cellars, and were known as the largest wine dealer in the region. The family was dispossessed after WWII, but with the denationalization process at the turn of the millennium, it received much of the real estate back, restarting the family tradition and establishing a winery in 2007.

Wine merchant Ornig owned extensive underground cellars on Kremljeva 5 in Ptuj, where today's Ptujška Klet cellar has its premises. During the war, he walled off part of the cellar into a hidden chamber. As a result, many pre-war bottles were preserved, the oldest going back to 1917. A dozen or so bottles of the so-called ‘Golden Vine’ remain, and they are the oldest preserved Slovenian wine.

Brief History of Vintages in Styria up Until WWI

The below excerpt is taken from the excellent book *Zgodovina vinogradništva Slovenskih goric* (‘History of Winegrowing in the Slovenske Gorice Hills’) (p. 129–142), written by Ivo Zupanič in 1969. Data up until 1811 was collected from different sources. Descriptions from 1811 onward are from the author's family chronicle from their farm in Jarenina, north of Maribor. Here are some top picks:

- 1347: *weather is so cold neither fruit nor grapes ripen*

The Fürst family were the first major merchants in Ptuj at the beginning of the 20th century



Berg Jerusalem
(Eigenbau)

C. Fürst & Söhne

PETTAU
Steiermark.





Winter in Haloze



- 1611: many excellent wines that are especially strong
- 1719: dry and hot, wine is of superb quality
- 1740: because of long winter there was no harvest at all
- 1754–1756: bad vintages
- 1767: very acidic wines, almost like vinegar
- 1777: because of the draught little wine of excellent quality
- 1783: lots of good wine
- 1785–1787: most generous vintages of the century, wines of quality good enough
- 1792: an excellent vintage
- 1800: dry vintage with low yields
- 1811: very good vintage, perhaps the best in living memory
- 1812: lots of very cheap wine, with the barrel more expensive than what's in it. Speculators earned a lot.
- 1834: a most dry year; winter with no snow, budding in March, flowering in May. Summer with no rain, a major draught and heat. Fountains and creeks run dry, with shortage of animal feed so severe they had to be sold at low prices or slaughtered; almost no vegetables; nevertheless plenty of wine of excellent quality, even better than in 1811. One of the best vintages until WWI.
- 1869: mild winter, a comfortable spring and dry summer, a nice early autumn. But at harvest time, the weather suddenly went dreadful. Lot of snow though no frost, by 18th October most winegrowers haven't begun picking yet. As soon as the first snow melted new one arrived on 30th and 31st October with much of the grapes still under the white blanket. It was a tedious, lengthy and expensive harvest, pickers requiring the support of hot tea and mulled wine. In the end, yet, it was a richly yielding harvest giving good wine.
- 1890: especially favourable vintage; mild winter with little snow, rather warmer than cooler, lots of rain in the spring but very dry from July to mid-October, bringing drought in summer. A benevolent rain arrived in September, influencing the ripening favourably. The grapes were perfectly healthy and ripe, producing sweet wines of quality unseen since 1834, with prices to match.
- 1900: comparable with 1890. A fifth of the crop is now being produced with "Americanos"; vines on American rootstocks.
- 1914: winter was harsh, with sufficient snow to organise transports carrying wood, bringing limestone from a remote quarry, or fertilizer for the fields and vineyards. Spring was favourable as well. On 28th of July and 15th of August hail did severe damage to the vineyards and fields, resulting in crops modest in quality and quantity.

World War Two–1991

After WWII most of the vineyards came to be owned by the state and cultivated by the coops evenly distributed around all the districts. They were responsible for practically everything that went into the bottle. These were: Vinag in Maribor, KZ Bistrica in Slovenska Bistrica, Konjičan in Slovenske Konjice, KZ Plač in Svečina, Haloze in Ptuj, Jeruzalem-Ormož in Ormož, Ljutomerčan in Ljutomer, KZ Kapela in Kapela, and Radgonske gorice in Gornja Radgona. Slovenska Bistrica and Kapela have disappeared in the last decade, while the rest are still firmly in business and now in private hands.

Still, quite many hectares were owned by small farmers with lots averaging at much below 0.5 ha per winegrower. In fact, this pretty much remains the case. Part of the crop, i.e. grapes, is sold to the cooperative, with the other part going into producing wine in bulk for sale to restaurants, pubs and taverns

and for own consumption. They didn't bottle and label until the 70s, when the era of private producers began, culminating in the 90s following Slovenia's independence.

Position and Geographical Features

Štajerska Slovenija lies in the northeastern part of the country. It is a beautiful agricultural area, boasting rolling hills interspersed by creeks and small rivers, sprinkled with hilltop villages. The Drava River flowing through carved out the wide, flat and fertile Drava Valley, suitable to a greater degree to crops other than vines. Štajerska Slovenija is a rather a big "AOC" measuring over 90 km in the north-south direction and almost 100 km in the direction east-west. Because most of the southern and south-western part is obscure, the heart of the district is a 50 x 40 km large patch of land, which is still considered huge. The Alsace region we often like to compare it with, especially when it comes to grape varieties, reaches 50 km on the north-south axis and 15 km on the east-west one for example.

In the north, Štajerska Slovenija borders the Austrian SüdSteiermark and SüdostSteiermark regions sharing many grapes and wine styles. In the northeast it touches the warm Pannonian Basin that breathes a gust of warm air in the summer. To the east and southeast, it borders the Croatian Zagorje-Medimurje district, and to the south bordering the Bizeljsko-Sremič district of Slovenia and to the west the Pohorje mountain range. Pohorje stands as the easternmost part of the Alps in Slovenia and provides an important cooling effect to the region.

Climate and Soil

Štajerska Slovenija lies at the bottom of what was some 10 million years ago the Pannonian Sea, which is why marine sediments often appear in the subsoil. Soils vary greatly. On the hilltops, they are mostly sandy, with sandstones getting loamier and heavier at the bottom of the vineyards. In Haloze, marl and limestone are a feature while at the foothills of the Pohorje, the base is formed by granite and its tonalities. Slate and gneiss with different proportions of clay appear around Maribor. Topsoil is usually well ventilated and well drained, while erosion is an issue.

The climate is continental with hot summers and cool winters. As one moves east, from the Pohorje mountain range towards the Pannonian Basin, the climate starts becoming warmer, the warmest and driest around the town of Jeruzalem. In fact, there can be up to 14 days of difference (in the last two decades averaging around a week), in the ripening times between the townships of Svečina and Jeruzalem.

Though average rainfall seems to be quite high for a wine region, it is important to note that the majority of the precipitation is likely to happen in wintertime. Nevertheless, the rain pattern is difficult to predict, as it faithfully varies from year to year. There is no fixed pattern! Droughts can rear their nasty head, though they usually cause harm only to wines on the young side. Spring frosts, though happening from time to time, have been considered rare. In April 2016 and May 2017, though, two major frosts occurred in the district, ruining some 30% of the crop on average. Are frosts something the region should take into account in the future? Perhaps. Hails take their share almost every year but typically do not pose a major issue. Starting with September, cool nights are a feature enabling delicate varietal aromas to persevere, maintaining also high levels of acidity. Misty mornings in September and October are kind to the development of noble rot and the creation of botrytis wines, a famous staple of this area. Temperatures can descend far below zero by the end of October already, and in November quite often so, enabling the production of prestigious ice wines. Sadly and hopefully owing to chance, that has not been the fact since 2008. The vineyards lie at an altitude between 250 m to 400 m, exhibiting a variety of

Marly soil in
the vineyard
Sanctum





east-west orientations, conjuring up a great diversity of the microclimates, sometimes even in the same vineyard. To spice up the matter further, soils can morph in a matter of a few dozen meters. It is obvious that winegrowers here are often faced with grapes that display subtle changes in ripeness and aromatic profile, potentially leading to aromatically complex wines. Throughout the times, winegrowers fine-tuned the plots to the varieties, though much remains to be studied, explored and discovered.

Viticulture and Grape Varieties

Vineyards are always planted on the slopes. You won't find any in the flats as the soils are too rich, drainage insufficient and spring frosts an issue. The single or double Guyot is the preferred vine training method by far. Grapes are dry-farmed and harvested manually. A characteristic of this area, especially around the village of Jeruzalem, are terraces. They look beautiful and one can easily imagine they've been part of the landscape forever, though they've been implemented on a larger scale only in the 1960s, by professor Veselič. Beauty is one thing; practicality another. Many vineyards, except for the steepest ones, turned back to verticals in recent times, enabling far more vines per hectare compared to terraces. A sad truth is also that many of the steepest vineyards have been abandoned in the last few decades.

What Grows There

Aromatic whites and botrytis! At the turn of the millennium, 97% of the wines produced were white. Today the share of reds has risen to 7%, since local winemakers realised there wasn't much sense in "importing" the ubiquitous Refosco and Cviček from other parts of Slovenia, when a proper job with reds could be done at home. To have a good impression of what grows here think of Alsace, then add Furmint, Welschriesling and maybe the red Blaufränkisch, and you are more or less set when it comes to the grape varieties grown and the styles produced. As opposed to their fellows from the Primorska region, wineries in Podravje were quick to adopt screwcaps, which is now the most common closure for the majority of the wines.

Welschriesling might be the most planted grape, but growing it does not bring fame or renown since varietal Welschriesling is not particularly popular. It does its job in entry level white blends and delicious sweet wines, though. A crisp, fruity and herbaceous, aromatic yet not overly savoury **Sauvignon Blanc** is definitely a player here. Practically every house grows some "Sauvignon" as we simply call it, and some wineries have built their reputation on it and continue to do so. The Salon Sauvignon event in Ptuj, normally organised in May, brings around 50 wineries from Slovenia and abroad under the same roof to display their Sauvignons.

Delicate, crisp and aromatically restrained **Furmints** are signature wines, wines with distinction carrying their local fingerprint. These have been excellently received on some of the most demanding markets like UK and the United States, which appear to be looking for wines "off the beaten path". Traditionally, the best Furmints come from Ljutomer-Ormož area, but Haloze with its slightly leaner, more mineral style proved its case as well. Generally, Styrian Furmints are fresher, lighter in body, more vibrant and gentler compared to their usually fuller-bodied Hungarian fellows.

The story of how Furmint got its Slovenian name **Šipon** goes back to the beginnings of the 19th century when the French were momentarily colonizing Slovenia. Two grapes were dominant in Styria then. The lesser one was Belina, the superior one Furmint. When the French tasted the local Furmint they liked it very much, mumbling: "*C'est si bon, c'est si bon!*" – ('it's so good!'), hence the name Šipon (*Shee-pon*). Riesling is a very important variety here, the pride of many local winemakers. Compared to the German

Rieslings, these have less acidity and as a consequence less residual sugar, showing a hint of floral notes. They can be dry, medium-sweet or sweet, some aging most gracefully, offering a much better deal compared to those from established regions.

No producers have risen to fame in Štajerska with their **Chardonnay**, but practically everyone makes one. Most are produced in stainless steel, but those aged in wood, large and small, demonstrate that this is where the region should be headed by creating tasty “cool climate” Chardonnay.

Sivi pinot can have the fruitiness of Pinot Gris (i.e. Alsace) and the freshness of Pinot Grigio (Veneto). Aromatic whites, we said! What could be more aromatic than **Traminer** and **Muscat**? These two varieties are very popular, showing wonderful aromatic profiles usually produced in a medium-sweet style to satisfy the less demanding local (and some international as well) wine lovers.

Though **Pinot Noir** has been present in the region since 1822 and VINO Kupljen Jeruzalem is producing it for over 30 years already, the variety received a bit more attention from wineries only in the recent decade. Serious attempts have been made by numerous producers, and this is a space to watch.

The region is famous for its **sweet wines**, having secured two(!) Decanter International trophies in the last seven editions, awarded to Dveri-Pax and Ptujška klet respectively. Welschriesling and Furmint are usually responsible for botrytis or ice-wines, producing lusciously sweet and balanced wines that are pure joy to drink. “Lots of international varieties here”, an observer might comment. Indeed, and the phenomenon is not recent, as it started already 200 years or so ago in 1822, as explained in the history section above.

Who is Who

Starting southwest, **Zlati Grič** is a mid-sized winery with a beautiful cellar based in Slovenske Konjice, in the foothills of Pohorje. For some time they were lacking an edge over their competition, but after a com-

Boštjan Protner (Joannes) deserves full credit for the popularization of Riesling in Slovenia.

When nurtured by the right hands, Welschriesling gives thrilling results.

Pinot Noir feels great in the Štajerska Slovenija winegrowing district. No further proof is needed than the Decanter Gold Medal for the 2012 Pinot Noir from the Zlati Grič Wine Cellar.





Maks Kadivec of the Ptujška Klet wine cellar



plete reconstruction of the cellar in 2009 and employing Sašo Topolšek as oenologist, things exploded in a good way. Pay attention to their Riesling, while a recent delightful discovery is Pinot Noir. The property has a golf course, and the nearby Zreče represents an excellent base camp for skiing on Mount Rogla.

Sanctum winery was formed in 2002 in Loče close to Slovenske Konjice. Jurij Brumec, a young oenologist, and Marko Podkubovšek, a businessman with local roots who made his fortune in the States, joined their forces, aiming high. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are usually best. The two associates separated in 2016 with Brumec establishing the winery **Meum** producing a slightly more restrained and elegant style. Just north in Slovenska Bistrica, the New Zealander Nick Gee started his small winery **Heaps Good Wine** producing good Pinot Noir, Blaufränkisch and Pinot Gris. He is known for his unmistakable and funny black-and-white cartoon-like labels, and for pushing boundaries, especially with his Blaufränkisch. If Gee is a newcomer, Matjaž Frešer of the **Frešer** winery proudly displays the year 1832 on his labels, purporting to represent the seventh generation of the family business, though relatively new on the scene. His wines are made from organic grapes. Watch this space as Chardonnay and Pinot Gris can already get impressive.

All the above wineries are based in the eastern foothills of the Pohorje range, with vineyards on altitudes between 250–500 m.

As a curiosity we should mention “**Ritoznojčan**” PTP, a wine that first appeared in 1947 around Slovenska Bistrica and whose name literally translates to “sweaty buttocks”, alluding to the difficulties encountered by those working the steep vineyards used to create it. Though this story sounds perfect, the name in fact likely derives from count Ritter von Snoj who owned vineyards in these parts. Ritoznojčan is an entry-level blend of whites based on Welschriesling, with mandatory parts of Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc and an optional inclusion of any other white grown here. Though staying local, this humorous name is firmly back on the labels of around a dozen producers.

Going further north, just before coming to Maribor, Radizel in the Pohorje foothills is the home of **M-enostavno-dobra-vina** (M-Simply-Good-Wines). The scintillating and smiling Gregor Mikuž, who likes to give his wines unconventional names such as RockNRoll (Riesling), Pee.not Gris (Pinot Gris) and šeM-pejn (sparkling wine), is successful on social media, staying on good terms with the younger generation.

Maribor is Slovenia’s second biggest city. Although the capital Ljubljana bears the name “city of vines and wine”, Maribor is THE wine city in fact, boasting a thousand years of documented wine history. The city lies on both banks of the Drava River. A string of vineyards starts at the city’s northern boundary with the Pyramid and Calvary, famous south-facing hills, and then continues to the Austrian border a good 10 kilometres north. On the right bank, the vineyards begin a few kilometres from the city centre, in the northern foothills of Pohorje. It is here, exactly in the Meranovo, where Archduke Johann bought a property in 1822 and planted his exemplary 13 ha vineyard, introducing Western varieties to the region. More on this can be found out in the “Bit of History” section. The Maribor Pohorje is a well-known ski resort where the Golden Fox world cup ski races have regularly been taking place since 1964, and where Florence Cathiard of Bordeaux Smith-Haut-Lafitte was competing on the ski slopes. There aren’t many towns or cities in the world that manage to be wine hubs while at the same time offering city bus line access to ski-lifts. Should you visit Maribor, an absolute must is the visit of the “Old Vine” (*Stara trta* in Slovenian), officially the oldest living vine on planet Earth. The venerable plant is over 400 years of age, accompanied by a modern visitor centre that displays some of its history.

In Maribor it was the **Vinag** winery which dominated the scene until the turn of the millennium, when it began declining due to bad management. The story of Vinag began in 1847 when the wine merchant

Alojz Kriehuber built an underground cellar in the city of Maribor. The underground structure is the biggest of its type in this part of Europe and is open for tourists. Just before the printing of this book, Vinag was sold to James Lukežič, an American with Slovenian roots. He intends to rebuild and expand the business of Vinag.

Mitja Lo Duca, determined mountaineer from Trenta, Primorska, bought a property in Svečina in 2007. There he makes organic, unconventional, full-bodied skin macerated whites under the brand **Ducal** which has already acquired a following at home and abroad, and is served at his Kekec homestead in Trenta. In the 80s, Črnko, Valdhuber and Joannes Protner were among the first private producers around Maribor. The **Valdhuber** brothers, based in the well-known village Svečina on the very Austrian border, were pioneers of dry whites in the area starting in 1989. Their line of precise varietals with lovely varietal aromatic profiles seemed quite controversial at the outset of the 90s, as the overwhelming majority of wines in those days contained fair amounts of residual sugar. Nevertheless, the brothers stood their ground, and success followed. A few years ago they decided to part ways, with the younger Bogomir keeping the Valdhuber label whose specialties were always very dry Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Traminer. Janez, the older brother and professor at the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences in Maribor created his own label **Falot**.

In the neighbouring **Gaube** winery under the custody of Alojz Gaube, wine was being made already at the end of the 19th century. Their line of young refreshing whites is always rewarding. Recently, they have been focusing on agritourism, and we can only recommend a visit.

Another winery from Svečina that has to be mentioned is **Kušter**. Very much in the style of Gaube and Valdhuber, Cene Šerbinek makes his own exciting dry white varietals that can age really nicely. Go for the always reliable Welschriesling or the even more solid Pinot Gris or Sauvignon Blanc.

Furmint from the Dveri-Pax Wine Cellar has been their frequent ticket to foreign markets.

In Gornja Radgona they have been making sparkling wine using the traditional method for over 150 years.

The Steyer Cellar specializes in Gewürztraminer, whose medium-sweet incarnation is their bestseller.





Mitja Herga checking old bottles in the wine library, Puklavac Family Wines, Ormož



The state-of-the-art winery of Pukavec Family Wines

Doppler winery in Zgornja Kungota just north of Maribor, under the ownership of Mihaela Krsnik Kopše and her husband, features a state-of-the-art brand new winery and a solid line of whites alongside a rosé, their red called Doppler Efekt, and sparkling wines.

In Jarenina, **Dveri-Pax**, one of the top Slovenian wineries, continues the 800-year-old tradition started by Benedictine monks in 1139, interrupted unfortunately in 1938 by the Nazis. They rebooted the business with the vintage 2002, producing wines from around 70 ha of vineyards. Oenologist and general manager Danilo Flakus creates wines in two distinctive lines. The Benedict line is vinified in stainless steel, offering Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Welschriesling and even an entry level item – the “Janez” – well received both at home and on international markets, along with Riesling and Furmint that usually stand out. The Admund line features wines aged in different kinds of new and used oak, a style quite rare in the region. The Admund line includes excellent, bar-raising top quality Chardonnays made in “Côte Chalonnaise/Beaune” style, a firm Pinot Noir, a spicy and full-bodied Blaufränkisch and the always impressive full-bodied Sauvignon “Vajgen”, and Furmint “Ilovci”. Riesling “Pekel” (i.e. ‘Hell’) comes from a beautiful vineyard with the same name, shaped like an amphitheatre and producing a style close to the Wachau Smaragd. In 2011, Dveri-Pax won the Decanter International trophy for best sweet wine of the show with their sweet Furmint from dried grapes. On the property there is a 15th-century manor house with a brand new shop and an amazing underground cellar room where tastings and dinners are organised.

The story of the **Črnko** family from Jarenina began in 1984 when Srečko Črnko, father of Silvo Črnko who is today in charge of the property, decided to go private and bottle his first wines. This is a small 6 ha estate that seems to have secured a firm grip in the USA.

The focus of Srečko **Šumenjak** from Jakobski Dol are wines with prolonged maceration using as few interventions as possible and produced from organic grapes.

The Horvat winery from Počehova counts among the oldest in the region. They make good varietals, especially Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc can excel. The winery is now run by the younger generation: Andrej and his sister Sabina.

Joannes Protner winery, run by the dynamic and omnipresent Boštjan Protner, was founded in 1990 just east of Maribor. The name Joannes derives from a statue of John of Nepomuk standing in the Protner vineyards. Although he produces quite a range of whites and a bit of Pinot Noir, he is well known for his Rieslings that often get very mineral and intense and are listed, among others, in New York’s *Terroir* – the renowned “Riesling institute”.

Moving further northeast from Maribor towards **Gornja Radgona**, Apače is the home of **Steyer** where the lively sports fan Danilo Steyer began establishing his “House of Traminer” in the early 1990s. Why so named? Gornja Radgona has been known for decades for its Traminer, and the Austrian Klösch renowned for its Traminer on volcanic soils is also less than 10 km away. To justify the name House of Gewürztraminer Steyer makes countless versions of the variety: dry, medium dry, medium-sweet (best-selling), sweet, oak aged (Exclusive) blended with Pinot Gris and Chardonnay (Steyer Mark), sweet ones, sparkling wines... Furthermore, Danilo is one of the few to craft wine from the indigenous grape Bouvier.

Radgonske Gorice is the oldest and by far the biggest producer of sparkling wines in Slovenia. Their story started in 1852 when Janez Klajnošek made the first sparkling wine in Radgona as documented in the Bleiweis News. Their Radgona Gold (classic method) and the ubiquitous medium-sweet Radgona Silver (charmat method) are major brands, well-embraced by Slovenians. Another ace of the house is their medium-sweet Traminer with a black label, extremely popular in the 80s and still one of the country’s bestsellers. In the archive cellar, the vintages of their sparkling wines go back to 1977 with many



of them still resting on the lees! Try vintages 1984 or 1994 to see how well these can age. The nearby Radenci is the home of the highly praised and pristine Radenska mineral water.

Ljutomer-Ormož

Heading southeast from Gornja Radgona, one soon encounters the wine towns of Ljutomer and Ormož which denominate the *Ljutomer-Ormož* sub-district. The gentle rolling hills heading in the north-south direction were for centuries recognised as some of the finest sites, no matter which country they belonged to.

Jeruzalem is a famous hilltop village between Ormož and Ljutomer, proudly nestled in its highest spot. Legend says that it got its name from the Crusaders passing along on their way to Jerusalem in Palestine time and time again. They would stop here, entranced by the beauty of the hills, the wine, the food and the beautiful women, exclaiming, as tales tell: “We shall go no further, this is our Jerusalem!”. Ever since then, oddly enough, this place has been called Jeruzalem. A more plausible story explains that an army of knights from the West were stranded here in a terrible winter, forced to camp and endure. One of their leaders fell ill and made a promise to return, should he recover, and bring with him a gift from Jerusalem. He did, keeping his word by carrying over a statue of Mary, Mother of Christ. A church was later built in the same place, featuring a copy of the Jerusalem painting of Virgin Mary with Jesus. In the Ljutomer-Ormož lands in the 60s, they could not agree on which one of the towns should be keeping the central cooperative cellar, and so they built two. Rational decision or a question of prestige? Who knows. Before these two wineries were built, the vinification, maturation and bottling was carried out in around a dozen smaller cellars dispersed around the region. Some of those are still preserved, namely Temnar and Malek, the latter having become a visitor’s centre with a small museum and preserved old cellars. Anyhow, the construction of the two cellars created some local tension and

Jože Kupljen, the founder of *Vino Kupljen* Jeruzalem, made his fortune running a restaurant in the German Mainz. Opting for Riesling, thus, was a logical continuation of the story.

Pinot Gris from Štajerska boast the fruitiness of those from Alsace and the freshness of Venetian Pinot Grigio. Aging in new barrels is still a rarity in this region.

In the category of predicate sweet wines, Slovenia ranks at the top of the world, especially with its premiums by our greatest winemaking masters.



Some archived bottles from Štajerska can surprise even the world’s top wine connoisseurs





made for some healthy, mostly friendly competition. Today, this no longer matters, since both wineries were purchased by the Puklavec family in 2009 and consolidated under the P&F Wineries umbrella, today **Puklavec Family Wines**, creating the biggest wine producer in Slovenia.

The Jeruzalem-Ormož cellar was perhaps the finest coop in Yugoslavia, producing a range of whites under their famous “yellow label”. Their expertise can be observed in the archive cellar, where some amazingly good bottles are preserved and can be purchased in what is, no doubt, the best organised and best kept archive cellar in the country. The story of the Ljutomer cellar is a bit less shiny overall, yet nevertheless, it was this very winery that once, in its heighday, produced the massively successful Lutomer Laski Riesling, the number one selling wine in the UK of the early eighties. Today, the Puklavec Family Wines is a modern, state-of-the-art winery with young Mitja Herga acting as head oenologist and general manager. Their complete range is extremely reliable and of good value, while they excel in distinctive Sauvignon Blancs and Sauvignon Blanc/Furmint/Pinot Gris based blends with very good success in the Netherlands and the UK especially. The Riesling and Furmint should be considered as well. Their top line is called 7 numbers and boasts some impressive wines, Furmint and Traminer being the most important. For those with a sweet tooth, they produce the *Muškatna Penina* (‘Muscat sparkling wine’), a very nice medium-sweet sparkling wine made from *Muscat Ottonel*.

It was precisely here, back in 1972, when Stanko Čurin bottled his first wines, becoming the first private winemaker in what was then Yugoslavia. His grapes were initially denied by the coop, and there are two versions of the story telling what actually happened. Be as it may, the proud, stubborn and capable Čurin took his rejected grapes and made wine on his own, never looking back. In time he became the undeniable king of sweet wines. His *Auslese*, *Beerenauslese*, *Eiswein* and *TBA* were simply outstanding and world-class. In 1984 he crafted his first *Eiswein*, believing it to be the very first *Eiswein* made in the country. The wine was stunning, but was not recognised by the authorities as *Eiswein* proper, as the temperatures were supposedly not low enough. Čurin was also the first in *Podravje* to produce a sweet wine from dried grapes,

Božidar
Grabovac,
Verus
Vineyards

Svetinje hill
with the
famous village
of Jeruzalem in
the background



Few blends from Štajerska Slovenija fetch premium prices. Pod Stolpom is one of them.

Aromatic whites with marvellous varietal characters are the staple of the Štajerska Slovenija winegrowing district.

The secret is well kept, but Sauvignon Blancs from Štajerska Slovenija can easily contest with those from the Elgin or even Marlborough regions.

a process known as *passito* in Italy. Again, he clashed with the authorities on this, as they insisted wine be made from freshly picked grapes only. Čurin was thus constantly pushing limits to achieve his greatness. While tasting in his cellar, for many an enlightening experience, he was prone to amusing comments on the divine sweetness of these wines. In 2017, the venerable Stanko Čurin passed away, but the story continues under the brand **PRA-VinO** owned by his son-in-law Slavko Prapotnik and his son Borut.

Jože Kupljen from **Vino Kupljen Jeruzalem** originating in Ljutomer left the region at age 20 and made his fortune in the restaurant business in Mainz, Germany. Always connected with his home soil he began buying vineyards around Svetinje and Jeruzalem. He was the pioneer of dry wines and Pinot Noir in the region, bottling his first bottles in 1976. The story goes that when smuggling his first plantings of Pinot Noir at the beginning of the 80s, crossing the Austrian-Yugoslav border with a full load of French Pinot Noir clones, a customs officer asked his son Samo what he was carrying, to which he replied: “Roses for my mum!”. The officer smiled, quipping “my, what a lucky woman she is,” and let him go.

Jože sadly passed away in 2015. His energetic and enterprising son Samo took over, determined to up the game even further. Wines arrive on the market in two ranges. Varietal expression is key in the Premium range, intended for early enjoyment and mid-term cellaring. Riesling and Pinot Noir are usually among the best in this range, but Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris are always dark horses. Chardonnay, Merlot (yes, Merlot!), white and red blends fill out the range.

Wines from the Stars of Styria range, coming to the market in 2017, are hailing from their best plots and best vintages only. Aldebaran (Riesling), Passion (Pinot Noir), Sirius (Chardonnay), Bellatrix (Furmint) and Skywalker (Merlot) are now on their way, committed to impressing even the most demanding palates. Several venerable Riesling and Pinot Noir bottles in his “First National Wine Bank of Slovenia” show quality rarely seen in the region and demonstrate that not only whites but also Pinot Noir has great aging potential here.

Verus is one of the youngest Slovenian wineries yet already one of the most successful. Three friends, Božidar Grabovac (winegrowing expert), Danilo Šnajder (oenologist) and Rajko Žličar (sales expert), all former employees of Jeruzalem-Ormož, formed Verus in 2006, with 2007 producing their first vintage. The wines immediately caught the attention of some of the most prominent UK wine writers such as Jancis Robinson, Oz Clarke and Steven Spurrier. The specialty of the winery are extremely precise, refined and focused white varieties, well deserving the name *Verus* – meaning honest, genuine and pure in Latin. This holds especially true for their Sauvignon Blanc, being constantly among the best in the country, and also their Furmint.

Both have set new standards when released in 2007. Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and especially Riesling are truly fine as well. The instantly successful Pinot Noir joining the family with the vintage 2011 merely confirmed the ability and determination of this small team.

In 1987 Franci Cvetko, at the time in his twenties, inherited property from his father, bottling his first wines under name **Kogl**. Top quality from the get go, his wines made much noise with fellow wine-makers, who wondered how it was possible for someone with almost zero experience to create wines at this level. Cvetko replies: “One just has to carefully read all the books”. He was among the first here to deliberately use a brand name instead of the family name for his wines, adding the year 1542 to his logo relating to the first written mentionings of the property Kogl. In the beginning, he made wines with residual sugar according to the *vogue* of the times. Today, he makes several styles (red, rosé, sparkling wine, sweet) including some less frequent varieties such as Bouvier and Auxerrois. Best in the house are dry varieties full of characters and a few blends under the name *Mea Culpa*, with Riesling





and Sauvignon usually standing out. Cvetko often invites artists over, hosting open events at his home in Velika Nedelja that features a stunning view of the Drava Valley towards Ptuj and Croatia. To him, Kogl is much more than wine.

Not many reliable producers exist in the serene hills between Ormož and Ptuj. Hardworking Simon Druzovič, though, is one to trust. He bottles his wines under the brand name **SiSi**, the nickname of an Austrian Empress known for her beauty.

Arriving to Ptuj, this is one of the most historical wine towns in the entire country, with the first wine cellar built by the Minorite monks back in 1239. This is also the year appearing on the labels of **Ptujska klet** wines, though, to be honest, there is no real connection between the monks and today's winery. Nevertheless, Ptujska klet has without doubt the greatest (hi)story of all the Slovenian wineries. In their archive cellars is kept the oldest Slovenian wine from 1917, and it was their Sauvignon Blanc Rimljan Anno '69, vintage 1968, which carried the 0001 number when the seal of approval for Slovenian wines was introduced back in 1969. In 2002, Ptujska klet was bought by Perutnina d.d. and Bojan Kobal became chief oenologist. Under the tutorship of UK's Angela Muir, MW, the vintage 2003 was a game changer and things only went upward from there, with a shift to a focused, internationally well-accepted style. The Pullus Sauvignon Blanc from the vintage 2003 was a Slovenian reference and remains one till this day, while less aromatic Sauvignon "G" is a step up in the direction of Sancerre. Other varieties are often good as well. In 2015, the winery won a Decanter International award for their sweet Welschriesling 2013 from dried grapes. Bojan Kobal departed in 2015 and is superseded by the young and capable Maks Kadivec. New Zealander Craig Anderson is a consultant.

In the rest of Haloze, home to perhaps the steepest vineyards in Slovenia, the situation is far from rosy. Only some private producers remain, having only a local presence with few notable exceptions.

Leaving Ptujska klet, Bojan Kobal of **Kobal Wines** started his new journey with partner Andrej Sajko. Their first vintage was 2015. Most of the wines are sourced from the old Haloze vineyards which Kobal



Furmints from Haloze differ quite a bit from those coming from Jeruzalem – they are firm, mineral and steely.

With his very first vintage (2015), Bojan Kobal already showed he was aiming for the quality pinnacle of the Slovenian wine offer.

Gentle bouquet, intensive flavour. In style and quality not far from the wines hailing from the steep slopes of Sancerre.

Danilo Flakus of Dveri-Pax Wines

Danilo Steyer of the Steyer winery

knows as well as the back of his hand. Wines bottled in screw-capped Burgundy shape bottles are just superb. Prolonged skin contact Sauvignon Blanc is somewhat bigger in style, while slightly pinkish Pinot Gris was an instant hit. His Furmint from Haloze is excellent, too. Apparently not only Jeruzalem makes great Furmint, which is great news. They also create Muscat and a sparkling wine.

Conrad Fürst, an Austrian and heir to what was once the greatest Ptuj merchant family, was returned vineyards in Haloze, Jeruzalem and some real estates in Ptuj during the denationalization process. He now makes three wines under the name **Conrad Fürst & Söhne**. Pinot Blanc might be one the country's finest, while Furmint can match those from Verus and Dveri-Pax. Pod Stolpom is a blend of the two varieties plus Sauvignon Blanc.

The latest Haloze surprise comes from another Austrian. The famous **Gross** family from Austrian Südsteiermark bought property in Haloze, planting Sauvignon Blanc and Furmint to good effect. Both Gorca (Furmint) and Colles (Sauvignon Blanc) are premium examples of what these varieties are capable of – restrained, savoury, mineral and made to be matured while showing a great expression of Haloze marly soils.

Kobal Wines and both Austrian developments give high hopes that steep and hilly Haloze with its marly and clay soil with an ample share of limestone will somehow manage to get back on track.

In the very southern part of Styria, around Šmarje pri Jelšah, Podčetrtek and Šentjur, not much is planted and quality is rather basic. However, we have to mention Aci **Urbajs**, a Slovenian pioneer and definite devotee of biodynamic principles since 1999, carried out at his farm in Rifnik. Quantities are minute and wines might be anarchic, as is the name of one in fact, but Aci is one of the most pleasurable and nicest persons you will ever meet. The small local cooperative **Emino** from Podčetrtek, a couple of miles away from famous Olimje Spa, is doing a good job there.

A list of other notable producers: **Krainz**, **Krajnc**, **Püklavec** running a well recommended agritourism, and **Bartol** – a minute high-quality winery producing “orange” Furmint among others.





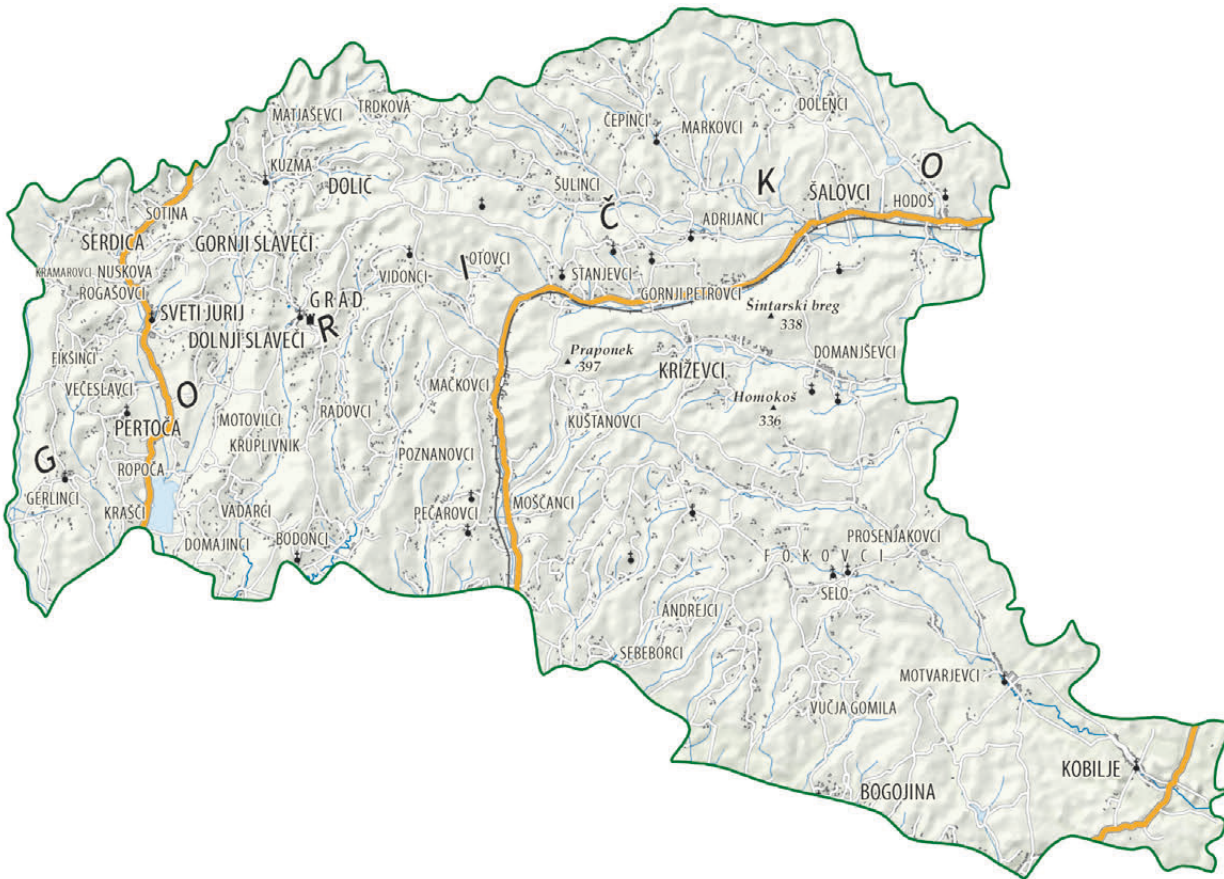
The Old Vine



PREKMURJE
DISTRICT



PREKMURJE DISTRICT



Vineyard area	523 ha
Grape growers	2,590
Winemakers	260
Average annual rainfall	800–1,000 mm
Climate	Continental
Most important grape varieties	Welschriesling, Chardonnay, Riesling, Furmint
Notable producers	Marof, Gjerkeš
List of permitted white grape varieties	Bouvier, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Furmint, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Müller-Thurgau, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Muscat Ottonel, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Silvaner, Traminer, Welschriesling
List of permitted red grape varieties	Blafränkisch, Chasselas Rouge, Pinot Noir, Zweigelt



Introduction

Prekmurje is a geographical region defined by the Mura (Mur) River in the southwest (hence the name), the Austrian Steiermark to the north and west, and Hungary to the east. Due to historical reasons, culturally and ethnically this region differs from the rest of Slovenia, showing considerable Hungarian influence. A literal translation of Prekmurje would be “Transmurania”, or “Across the Mura”. Germans translate it as Übermurgebiet. This is the second smallest Slovenian district. Spas and storks are the signatures of Prekmurje.

In 2015, a 53.5 m high observation tower called **Vinarium** was built in the Lendava vineyards offering a marvellous view of four different countries: Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Austria. The aim of the Vinarium is to showcase the local wine and cuisine and attract tourists.

Until very recently with the creation of the Marof winery, it had no producer of significant importance outside the district boundaries.

Position and Geographical Features

Prekmurje lies in the northeasternmost part of Slovenia, on the left bank of the Mura River bordering Austria to the north and Hungary to the east in what is already part of the warm Pannonian Basin. Prekmurje is the flattest Slovenian region, but one section is also quite hilly and that's where the vineyards are found.

Climate and Soil

The climate is typical continental with hot summers and cold winters. Rainfall is the lowest in the country. It is generally warmer than in the neighbouring Štajerska Slovenija, hence wines are usually slightly bigger with less acidity. The district is divided into two sub-districts. The *Lendava* sub-district in the east features a handful of steep vineyards on marly soils divided between a sizeable number of owners in a strappy fashion with very long rows. In the hills of *Goričko* on the Austrian border, the slopes are gentler, less steep and more diverse when it comes to the soil with sandy, loamy, marly and even volcanic soils (Kramarovci on the very Austrian border) giving some highly mineral wines.

A Bit of History

Prekmurje became part of today's Slovenia in 1919 when it joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, which in 1929 then became Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Before that, Prekmurje was part of Hungary in what was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. If the rest of Slovenia is Catholic, the people of Prekmurje are Protestants. In Prekmurje they speak a distinct dialect that is considered endearing and appreciated by the rest of the country.

There is not much evidence regarding the time when the grapevine arrived to Prekmurje, but it is logical to assume that vines grew here in Roman times if not before. The first written documents mentioning winegrowing in Prekmurje are from 861, from Kocel's duchy near Balaton Lake. In the Middle Ages, vineyards were planted around churches, monasteries and castles. There are signs that in 17th century, vineyards covered most of the sunny slopes of the Goričko zone while vineyards in the flats began disappearing. Prekmurje apparently hit its apex in late 18th and early 19th century. Around 1840, the wines of Prekmurje became famous when the winegrower Malačič won a title in Vienna for “best Mid-European wine”. *Rakovina* is mentioned as the most typical variety of the time, today extinct. Between 1856 and 1864, the area of vineyards was 1,448 ha. Since then, it has been slowly decreasing.





Downy mildew (*peronospora*) and powdery mildew (*oidium*) arrived in 1875–1890 while a thorough destruction of Prekmurje vineyards began with phylloxera's arrival in 1892, ending with the final wave in 1909. In Lendava, which was closer to the transporting connection, new plantings were done on American rootstocks, while in the more remote Goričko they planted mostly hybrids. Just before WWII the most important grapes were Welschriesling, Burgundy White (very likely Chardonnay) and Silvaner.

What Grows There

It is hard to say what Prekmurje is capable of, since apart for some great sweet wines, not many decent wines were produced here until rather recently. Wines are mostly easy-going white blends intended for mixing with mineral water and local consumption. The picture changed in 2007, when Marof winery owned by the Polanič family released their first vintage, with Erich Krutzler being chief oenologist at the time. Their Welschriesling might now be the country's best, while Riesling from the volcanic soils of Kra-marovci is always very special, distinctively mineral. Marof is the only winery still making an effort with Silvaner. They are also renowned for their corpulent, big-bodied oak-aged yet perfectly measured Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs from the Breg and Cru lines. One could easily mistake them for a premium product of the warmer Primorska region. As Prekmurje is close to Burgenland in Austria, the logical answer is to grow Blaufränkisch at which Marof really excels. In 2011 Uroš Valcl assumed the role of chief winemaker, leading the winery towards new heights.

Gjerkeš is raising the quality of its wines and making quite a bit of noise with its Chardonnays. The recent change of the wine labels from a gaudy, “Knoll-like” style to a more modern one appears to be a good sign.



Uroš Valcl, Marof

Contemporary reception hall at the Marof winery

Blaufränkisch benefits from a renaissance in Prekmurje. Judging by the one presented by Marof, the variety has a bright future in these parts.





POSAVJE
REGION





BIZELJSKO-SREMIČ
DISTRICT



BIZELJSKO-SREMIČ DISTRICT



Vineyard area	861 ha
Grape growers	2,209
Winemakers	155
Average annual rainfall	900–1,200 mm
Climate	Continental
Most important grape varieties	Blafränkisch, Žametovka, Welschriesling
Notable producers	Istenič, KZ Krško
List of permitted white grape varieties	Bouvier, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Furmint, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Kraljevina, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Müller-Thurgau, Neuburger, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Ranfol, Riesling, Rumeni Plavec, Sauvignon Blanc, Silvaner, Traminer, Welschriesling
List of permitted red grape varieties	Blafränkisch, Chasselas Rouge, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Blauer Portugieser, Šentlovenka, Zweigelt, Žametovka

Introduction

The Bizeljsko-Sremič district is named after its two most important wine villages. This rather small district remains of local visibility – with one major exception: the Istenič winery. Since the Croatian capital Zagreb is considerably closer than Ljubljana, it was traditionally a vital market for the region. Thus, the border arising from Slovenia's independence in 1991 wasn't best for the local economy. When Croatia joined the EU in 2013 things got slightly better once again, though our neighbours have significantly developed their own wine industry in the meantime.

Position and Geographical Features

The district lies on the left bank of the River Sava, reaching from the village Breg to the Sotla confluence, bordering the Dolenjska district on the right bank. The Sotla River, once determining the border between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Empire and today drawing the line between Slovenia and Croatia, marks the boundary in the west. To the north it borders Štajerska Slovenija. The most important cities are Brežice, Krško, and Sevnica, the hometown of Melania Trump. Vineyards are grown on undulating hills at altitudes between 200–400 m, with slopes facing all kinds of directions.

Climate and Soil

The climate is sub-Pannonian, i.e. continental with cool winters and warm to hot summers. As in other Slovenian districts, the annual rainfalls can vary significantly, going from 1,150 mm in 2010 to 660 mm in 2011 and back to 1,550 mm in 2014 (measured in Bizeljsko), though averaging in general at 900–1,200 mm. Bedrock here varies considerably, and there are at least three different types of soil over each type of bedrock. Soils are heterogonous, changing frequently, but are predominantly sandy with clay, mostly on marl and sometimes on limestone bedrock. Quartz sand can be found as well.

A Bit of History

It was the Romans who brought the vine to the Bizeljsko region, a land of importance in their age with a major road along the Sotla River connecting the Nevioudunum (Drnovo) port and the city of Poetovio (Ptuj). The first written documents about vineyards in Bizeljsko are found in a land register from 1502. A special tribute to wine and the vineyard was made by Anton Martin Slomšek, a priest from Bizeljsko (1825–1827), who wrote the folklore-inspiring song “*En hriček bom kupil*” (Gonna Buy me Some Vineyard). It was in August 1880 that phylloxera was spotted in Bizeljsko, just a few months after it was found in Istria. There's a sad story connected with the phylloxera struggle. The task group charged with exterminating the louse was called “the lousy people” (*ušivci*). When they arrived to Sromlje on 13 July 1883, in the company of the gendarmerie, they stumbled upon an assembled group of 200 local men, women and children who, unaware of the emperor's decree, wanted to save their grapes and insisted the vines be pulled out only after the harvest. Jostling ensued, and two men who tried defusing the situation were shot by the gendarmerie since they did not understand Slovenian.

Many efforts in the post-phylloxera replantings ought to be credited to the young Ivan Baloh (1862–1897) from Stara Vas, who was declared by baron Wilhelm von Babo, the famous Austrian viticulturist, to have been the best student he's ever had.

In September 1897 a “Grand Exposition of Grape and Wines” was organised in Bizeljsko in order to demonstrate how well the region recovered from the phylloxera epidemic. The grapes on display were Mosler (Furmint), Moravna (Blauer Portugieser), Rdeča Rožica (Zierfandler), Rilček (Riesling), Žlahtnina





Botrytis affected grapes await harvest



Miha and Janez Istenič

(Guetedel), Muškatelec, Rulandec (Pinot Gris), Kavčina (Žametovka, Blauer Kölner) etc. The list of visitors included people from Celje, Maribor, Ptuj, Zagreb, Ljubljana, even Graz. The expo was then repeated in Ljubljana, in the Figovec Inn. In 1936 the Viticulture and Fruit-Growing Cooperative (*Vinarsko-sadjarska zadruga*) was established with 40 founding members. During WWII the Germans expatriated many Slovenians from the region and repopulated it with Germans from Kočevje who had no clue about winemaking, resulting in decaying vineyards.

What Grows There

In style, the whites are not unlike those from the neighbouring Štajerska Slovenia, using pretty much the same grapes and going from dry, medium-sweet to sweet, though appearing in considerably more basic quality. The list of the most common white varieties includes Welschriesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains and Pinot Blanc. 40% of grapes planted are red, again showing few distinctive results, though Blaufränkisch has lately been showing increasing promise. Characteristic of the region are the white and red Bizeljčan PTP.

White **Bizeljčan PTP** is an entry level white blend based on Welschriesling (30-60%) with up to 50% addition of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay; up to 20% of Rumeni Plavec and up to 10% of any other white.

Red **Bizeljčan PTP** is likewise an uncomplicated light red blend not unlike the next-door Cviček, based on Žametovka (40-60%) and Blaufränkisch (10-30%), with 5-15% of other reds and up to 25% of white permitted in the blend, but typically showing a bit more body and less acidity.

A speciality here is **Rumeni Plavec**, a high-yielding indigenous white grape with low sugar and high acidity. It is used in simple blends with very few varieties produced. However, as Istenič is now proving, it can be a great component of sparkling wines, adding local character and distinction.

As mentioned, a bright exception in the region is the **Istenič** winery in Stara vas close to Bizeljsko. It was formed by Janez Istenič, well-travelled and educated oenologist of Slovenijavino and an ex-goal-keeper. He made his first 100 bottles of Barbara (sparkling wine named after his daughter) in 1968, and the rest is history. The Istenič family were pioneers in many areas of sparkling wine production in Slovenia, including technical and marketing aspects. They were the first to introduce special cuvées, a line of premium sparkling wines ageing 36-60 months on the lees. If Janez is a technical expert, his cosmopolitan son Miha is a marketing wizard. Istenič is today the biggest family producer of sparkling wines in Slovenia, and also one of the country's very best. The sparkling wines, all made using the traditional method, are based on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir with a significant part of Rumeni Plavec in some cuvées, playing its role with immense acidity levels.

The **KZ Krško Agricultural Cooperative** is the largest national Cviček producer. Accordingly, most of the grapes for their wine are grown in the Dolenjska district. Nevertheless, the top 15% of their premium wines are made with produce from the left bank of the River Sava, from Sremič – or Štajerska as they like to put it. Their sweet wines are outstanding, and the Blaufränkisch has been shedding its “wooden” reputation, making leaps in quality from one year to another.

On the Krakovo property Zdravko **Mastnak**, ex-winemaker of KZ Krško, is doing good business producing significant volumes of sparkling wine and Cviček, as well as some Blaufränkisch. **Janko Kobal**, a brother of Bojan Kobal (of Kobal Wines), is on the other hand making a very good job with his Blaufränkisch.



BIZELJSKO - SREMIČ DISTRICT

The list of other winemakers in the Bizeljsko-Sremič district would include: **Blažova gorca**, **Graben** (Šekoranja), **Keltis** (Kelhar), **Kunej**, **Klakočar**, **Molipači** (Berkovič) and the up-and-coming generation: Varlec Simon, Andrej Berkovič, Simon Pinterič, Blaž Zgmajster, Rajko Kovačič, Miha Balon, Alojz Babič. A unique feature of the district are the *repnice*. These are underground pits manually dug into the million-years-old quartz sand. Thus, they practically keep their initial shape forever. Repnice were used as storage chambers for crops, mostly turnip (turnip = *repa*, thus *repnica*). The *repnica* maintains a constant temperature around 8°C and moisture around 95%. The high humidity is obviously not suitable for wooden barrels, and so *repnice* were used as wine cellars only after the very recent introduction of stainless steel vessels, though they'd sometimes be storing bottled wines in the past, unlabelled, of course. The oldest *repnice* are 200 years old, and most are today abandoned. A few of them are being used as tasting rooms, while some serve as tourist attractions.

Janez Istenič, oenologist and pioneering private sparkling wine producer, was in his youth a goalkeeper for the Olimpija Ljubljana football club.



Janko Kobal

Maturation of sparkling wine





DOLENJSKA
DISTRICT



DOLENJSKA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	1,549 ha
Grape growers	7,380
Winemakers	405
Average annual rainfall	1,100–1,200 mm
Climate	Sub-Continental with Alpine influences
Most important grape varieties	Žametovka, Blaufränkisch, Welschriesling, Kraljevina
Notable producers	Frelj, Kerin, KZ Krško, Martinčič, Pletzerje Charterhouse, Domaine Slapšak, Zajc
List of permitted white grape varieties	Bouvier, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Kraljevina, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Ranfol, Riesling, Rumeni Plavec, Sauvignon Blanc, Scheurebe, Silvaner, Traminer, Welschriesling
List of permitted red grape varieties	Blaufränkisch, Chasselas Rouge, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Blauer Portugieser, St. Laurent, Zweigelt, Žametovka

Introduction

The Dolenjska wine district bears the same name as the geographical region in the southeast of Slovenia it belongs to, but is obviously much smaller since only the hills capable of giving good grapes are included. This relatively big region features countless micro producers, whose only ambition is to proudly produce wines for themselves and their friends. In fact, this rather common face of the Slovenian wine scene, together with its particular traits and flaws, is most prominent in Dolenjska. A gaze across Trška Gora Mountain just north of Novo Mesto with its dozens of wine cottages, each with only a few (very short) rows of vines, is uniquely quaint and speaks of the role held by wine in our nation and how producing it is an important leisure activity in Slovenia. One might say that in Slovenia, everyone either makes wine or at least knows somebody who makes it.

Position and Geographical Features

To the north and northeast, the Dolenjska region borders the Sava River, lying on its right bank. To the west, the border is almost a straight line between the towns of Litija in the north and the hamlet Krka in the south. From Krka, it continues south-westward grazing the Krka River and eventually meeting the Gorjanci range, continuing east along the Gorjanci foothills until again meeting the Sava River close to Obrežje on the Croatian border. Quite a piece of land, thus, with highly dispersed vineyards. This is the domain of many yet low 'gentle hills', as they were described by poet Tone Pavček, with only the Gorjanci range to the southeast creating a bit of a natural barrier. The Mirna River, Temenica River and the Radulja River flow across the region's central part. Novo Mesto is the capital, with wine centres across the villages and towns of Šentjernej, Trebnje, Mokronog, Šentrupert, Žužemberk, Pleterje, Kostanjevica na Krki, Trška Gora, Raka, Gadova Peč, Veliki Trn, and Mirna Peč.

Climate and Soils

Being more inland and closer to the Alps than the Bizeljsko-Sremič and Bela Krajina districts, this also means the area is cooler than the two, featuring a mixture of Alpine and sub-Pannonian climates with very cool winters and warm summers, which nicely matches the description of continental climate. As the climate is marginal, the best vineyards here are steep and south-oriented. Soils are diverse, though Karst clay on limestone bedrock and sandy-loamy soils dominate somewhat. Erosion is usually not an issue.

A Bit of History

Winemaking was present in Dolenjska since Roman times. The Church played an important role in the Middle Ages. In 1132 the Cistercians, the monk responsible for creating the foundations of the famous classification of Burgundian vineyards, established a monastery in Stična, while in 1252 the town Kostanjevica na Krki was founded. In 1407 a Carthusian monastery was built in Pleterje on the foothills of the Gorjanci. Though the Carthusian tradition was paused for over 300 years, it is believed that winemaking continued uninterrupted until present times. In 1582, Andrej Recelj, a priest in Raka close to Krško translated *Gorske Bukve* from German language to Slovenian. This happened to be the first extensive legal text written in the Slovenian language, which only adds to the historical importance of wine in Slovenia. Wine from Dolenjska was never considered of high quality, usually being the cheapest – as observed from a 1651 pricelist from Ljubljana describing it as tart and unripe. Unfortunately, this often still remains the case. A much better review was given by Johann Weikhard von Valvasor in his *The Glory*

A Blaufränkisch
berry

The rolling hills
of Dolenjska





of the *Duchy of Carniola*, where he comments thus: “The wines produced in this other part, namely Dolenjska, are called “Markwein”, and all of them are sound.

Cviček was first mentioned in 1789 as a tart wine indeed, and neither Valentin Vodnik (1758–1819) nor Matija Vrtovec (1784–1851) gave it much love. Phylloxera arrived in 1884 and in addition to devastation brought some positive changes in the varieties planted. In 1886, the agricultural and winegrowing school was moved from Slap by Vipava to Grm by Novo Mesto. With 13 heavy carts, they relocated the whole inventory (chairs, tables, cabinets...), library, teachers and the first headmaster Rihard Dolenc from Podnanos. The institution exists to this day. Here, a teacher and future headmaster Bohuslav Skalicky founded an experimental winery ten years later, in 1896, the first of its kind in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It played a key role in the development of the wine industry of what is today the Posavje region.

The name “Cviček” and the rules for this locally popular wine’s production were finally regulated officially in the year 2000.

What Grows There

Out of 7,000 plus wine producers, only a few dozen take their craft as a serious business, though quite some of them are making considerable quantities in Slovenian terms.

Cviček PTP is by far the most popular wine. It will never be a high-quality wine, but when putting it in the context of tradition, quantities produced and popularity all around the country, this local specialty deserves its place in the book. Cviček is one of the few wines in EU made by blending red and white grapes, as they were traditionally mixed in the vineyard and harvested together as a field blend. Cviček is a pale ruby, dry, light, tart wine, with maximum 10% abv. It is made of Žametovka (40–50%),



Cviček is an idiosyncratic specialty of Slovenia, and the people of Dolenjska are tremendously proud of it.

Kerin's modern cellar is nicknamed the House of Blaufränkisch, creating many different styles of the variety.

Sparkling Cviček just might satisfy even the most demanding wine-lovers.

Blaifränkisch (15–20%), Kraljevina (10–15%), up to 10% Welschriesling, and up to 15% of other grapes permitted. There are hundreds of producers of Cviček, and most important are **KZ Krško**, **Bajnof**, **Brcar**, **Frelih**, **Jarkovič**, **Jelenič**, **Karlovec**, **Mastnak**, **Martinčič**, **Pirc**, **Pleterje Charterhouse**, **Štemberger**, **Zajc**. Some delightful sparkling wines based on Cviček are also made. What makes Cviček so popular? With low alcohol levels this is an easily quaffable beverage, and its high acidity cleans the palate making for a good pairing with everyday dishes. There is also the collective pressure of widespread popularity, implying that “since everyone loves it, it must be good!” Indeed, some adore Cviček religiously. It is wise to rather change the subject than argue about Cviček’s merits with the locals. Well, to be perfectly honest, the general quality of the wine has recently gone up indeed.

Alongside Cviček, dry and medium-sweet whites are produced in addition to a rare few sweets. It is probably red wines, especially from Blaifränkisch, where greatest progress has recently been made. The style can be young, fresh and vibrant, or oak aged. If you try some from **Jarkovič**, **Jelenič**, **Kerin** or **Štemberger** you’ll be pleasantly surprised.

Frelih, whose story started back in 1892, just after phylloxera, was a pioneer of “sparkling Cviček”. Penina od fare (based on Žametovka) is a premium sparkling wine indeed, and so are other sparkling wines of the house, in addition to the still and floral Sylvaner. The winery is managed by a mother-daughter lineup. Young Lojze **Kerin** presents himself as the House of Frankinja, producing over half a dozen different styles from this indigenous grape variety.

Alongside Cviček, **Martinčič** with his signature rooster label, makes good white and red varieties, especially Blaifränkisch and sweet Welschriesling in what is one of the most important and consistent wineries in Dolenjska.

A breath of fresh air arrived to Dolenjska with **Domaine Slapšak**, a small family estate from the high-altitude village of Telče, with a Frenchman from Champagne married into the family. You guessed it – fine elegant sparkling wines based on indigenous Žametovka and Chardonnay are produced at the domain and mostly exported. Brut reserve (white) seems to be better, but the Brut Rosé made 100% from Žametovka is definitely the best expression of Žametovka I have ever tasted, by far. Has Žametovka arrived to a new stature by giving sparkling wine instead of Cviček?

Zajc, a rather large private producer, treats wine as a serious business, which is not entirely commonplace at these geographic coordinates. With powerful branding talents, his flagship wines are Cviček and Blaifränkisch.

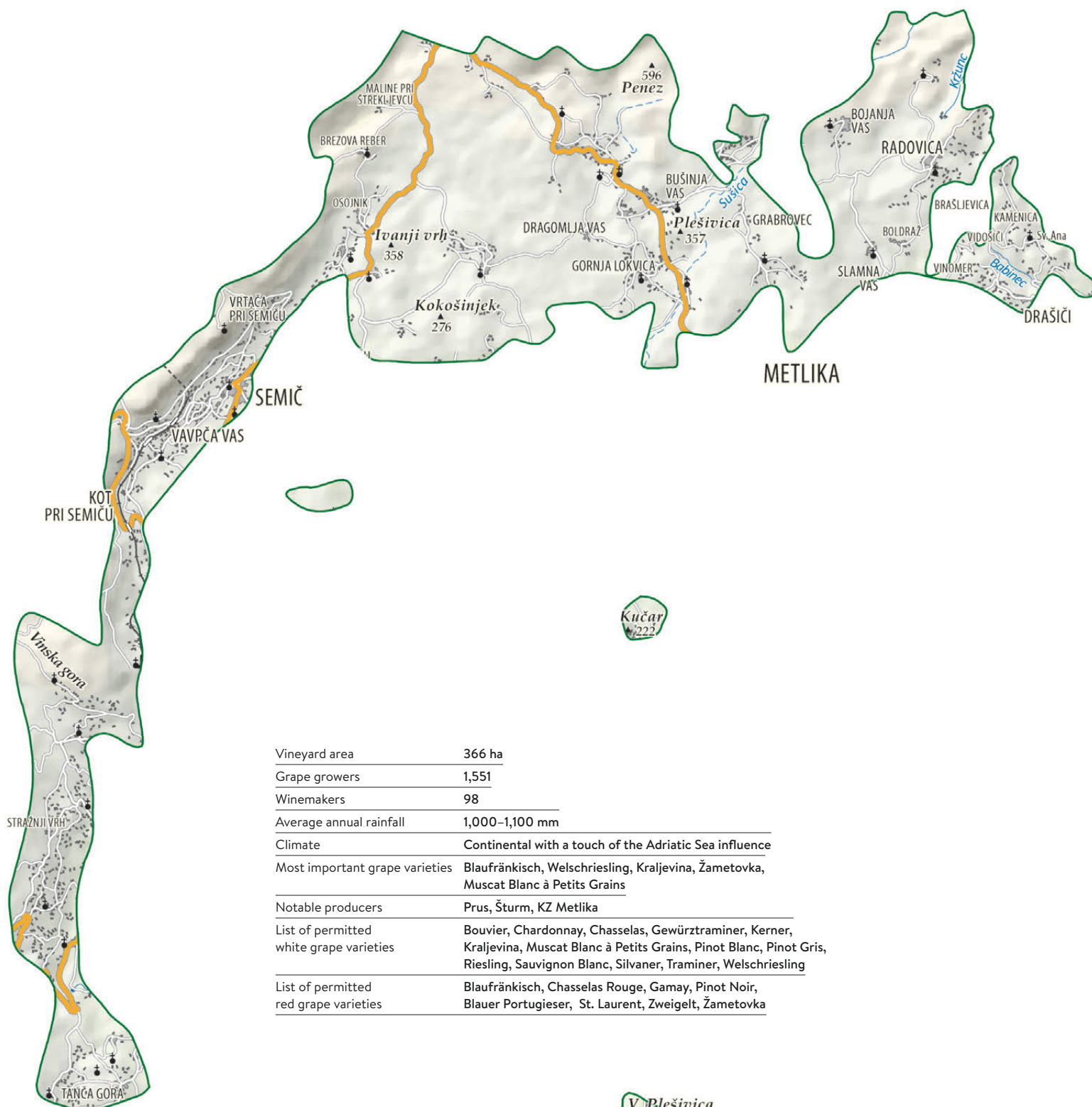




BELA KRAJINA
DISTRICT



BELA KRAJINA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	366 ha
Grape growers	1,551
Winemakers	98
Average annual rainfall	1,000–1,100 mm
Climate	Continental with a touch of the Adriatic Sea influence
Most important grape varieties	Blafränkisch, Welschriesling, Kraljevina, Žametovka, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains
Notable producers	Prus, Šturm, KZ Metlika
List of permitted white grape varieties	Bouvier, Chardonnay, Chasselas, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Kraljevina, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Silvaner, Traminer, Welschriesling
List of permitted red grape varieties	Blafränkisch, Chasselas Rouge, Gamay, Pinot Noir, Blauer Portugieser, St. Laurent, Zweigelt, Žametovka



Introduction

Bela Krajina, the land on the sunny side of the Gorjanci Mountains, is our smallest wine district, located in the eponymous region (White Carniola) in south-eastern Slovenia. The name literally means “White March” where “march” refers to a border territory organised for military defence and “white” comes from the typical tree of Bela Krajina – the birch, or perhaps from the traditional white woven folk costumes made of linseed linen. Bela Krajina is a landscape with predominantly Karst characteristics. If Črnomelj is the most populous city in Bela Krajina then Metlika is the wine capital, with Semič second to the two.

Position

The main part of the *Metlika* wine sub-district lies just north of the town Metlika. To the north, it is protected from cold northern winds by the marly Gorjanci mountain range and is partly bordering the hills of the Croatian Plešivica wine sub-district.

Črnomelj and *Semič* sub-districts lie jointly on a narrow strip south of Semič and west of Črnomelj. To the west of the district, it borders the mighty and ancient Kočevje Forest growing on the dolomitic and limestone Rog Plateau. In the south and east the Bela Krajina district is wide open to the warm southern winds, and limited by the Kolpa River and the Croatian border. Kolpa River humidity is favourable for forming noble rot and some of the district flagship wines.

Climate and Soil

Bela Krajina is built on limestone and dolomite, while as many as 22 different soils were defined in the district. Vineyards are mostly planted on red-brown karstic limestone soils, and limestone outcrops are found in the midst of the vineyards quite often in *Semič* and *Črnomelj* subdistricts. Erosion can be a big issue, and there are villages, notably Vinica, where winegrowing was completely abandoned due to this phenomenon. The level of topsoil can vary from a very shallow to deeper in a matter of less than a meter, with bedrock breaking through the topsoil here and there. In northwest around Drašiči, St. Ana and Radovica, where vineyards are most frequent, flysch soils with sandstone, marl and conglomerates are present.

The climate is sub-Pannonian which belongs under continental, with a Mediterranean precipitation regime. To get more specific – this means very cold snowy winters and scorching summers. Črnomelj was holding the all-time Slovenian temperature record with 40.6°C measured in 1950, until it was surpassed by Cerklje ob Krki (40.8°C) in 2013. Vineyards are planted on altitudes between 210–390 m.

A Bit of History

As some village names suggest (Vinica, Vinomer), wine production was historically very important and was often the main source of income here. Nevertheless, due to geographic barriers (Gorjanci to the north, Kočevski Rog Forest to the west) the trade was mostly local including Carniola, as opposed to the trade of Štajerska or Vipava which took place across Europe. Bela Krajina does not boast the shiny history displayed by some other districts, and to be honest, the situation has not changed much. Most of the wine is still sold locally and across Dolenjska. At the end of the day, what else can one expect from a 400 ha big district. Back to the past...

Similar as in other winegrowing regions across Kranjska and Štajerska, the extensive vineyards in the surroundings of Metlika that belonged to different noble families were also managed by the so-called *gorski mojstri* (or Bergmaister – person in charge of the vineyards, responsible for organizing labour in

Muscat Blanc
à Petits Grains

A Traminer berry





The historical and the contemporary hand in hand, KZ Metlika

the vineyard, collection of produce etc). An unique form of cooperative wine production in communes, called *sošeske zidanice* (literally ‘neighbourhood wine cottages-cellar’), emerged as early as in the 17th century as a kind of “wine banks”. Member winegrowers would put their surpluses in, and for each litre of wine borrowed or consumed, a litre and a half had to be returned in autumn with the new vintage. Bigger amounts of wine were needed for weddings or heavy works. The debts were carved on wooden boards called *rovaš*. Any profit was then used for common good, a form of social security used to help families in need or to maintain public roads, churches, cemetery and the “wine bank” itself. The peak of *sošeske zidanice* occurred during the phylloxera era, and the concept was shortly after mostly abandoned. Today in Drašiči, there still exists a 250-year-old *sošeska zidanica* which functions by the old rules and is a well visited spot for tourists coming to Bela Krajina.

The first texts about wines from Semič, Metlika, Črnomelj and Drašiči were written in the 1840s and 1850s. In 1843, *Novice* (‘the News’) reported that wine from Semič was selling at higher prices compared to those from the Vipava and Dolenjska districts.

In 1854, only ten years later after the famous *Vinoreja* winegrowing compendium by Matija Vrtovec, a priest from Škocjan named Janez Zalokar wrote the book *Umno kmetovanje in gospodarstvo* (‘Sensible Agriculture and Economy’) where he also elaborated upon vines, wines and winemaking. He listed nearly 50 varieties growing around Metlika, of which a big majority are no longer cultivated. The list includes varieties such as Belina, Belica, Mužnik, Imbrina, Kraljevina, Raša, Štajerka, white and Red Španjol, Zelenika. These varieties were used to produce red and white blends and were regarded as superior to those from Dolenjska or the Vipava Valley, as documented in the newspaper *Novice* in 1843.

Janez Trdina (1830–1905), a writer from Dolenjska, sang great praise for Bela Krajina’s viticulture:

“The greatest importance and honour in the Bela Krajina belongs to the vine. The world here is delightfully exposed to the sun, with the limestone soil serving well both vine and grape alike, so that wines made here are without doubt among the best in the entire Austria-Hungary”.

In the 1870s Trdina also documented that Anton Navratil, a province deputy, brought best cuts from France, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Primorska, and grafted them in a French way most successfully. Grafting was accepted in Europe as the best solution to fight the phylloxera only in 1881, at the International Phylloxera Congress in Bordeaux. Navratil was ahead of his time, thus, since phylloxera arrived to Bela Krajina in 1885.

Before phylloxera, wines in Bela Krajina were not of particularly good quality, since the winemakers were lacking basic skills such as racking, sulphuring etc.

As in most other regions, the lice epidemic completely reshaped the face of the plantings. Before the phylloxera over 60 varieties were present here, while at the start of the 20th century the number was already far lower.

In 1897, after phylloxera, a new list of recommended varieties for Bela Krajina was defined in Novo Mesto: Kraljevina, Zelenika, Grganja, Vipavska Sipa, Štajerska Maslovina, Welschriesling, White and Red Španjol, Veltliner, Žametovka, Tičenska and Plavec. Quite a few of these are today non-existent.

The economic importance of winegrowing is aptly illustrated by the fact that after the phylloxera devastation, the population of Bela Krajina shrunk from 30,000 to 22,000.

In 1908 and 1909, the first wine cooperatives were founded in Črnomelj and Metlika respectively. The latter still exists in present times. 1929 saw the construction of the first local cooperative cellar in Metlika. It was destroyed during WWII and then completely rebuilt in 1955. It was here that the first officially



recognized Slovenian ice wine was created from Welschriesling in 1986 in the Metlika cooperative, under the charge of dr. Julij Nemanič.

In 1932's vine assortment, a shift occurred towards reds as officials believed the red varieties would fetch better prices due to their quality and consistency. The goal was to shift from 70:30 in favour of whites to a balanced ratio of 50:50. The list appeared as follows: Grüner Veltliner, Gutedel, White Burgundian (was it Chardonnay or Pinot Blanc?) and reds: Red Kraljevina, Portugalka, Žametovka Blaufränkisch, Pinot Noir. Today, the situation again favours whites in about a 70:30 ratio.

In the 1970s, the law prescribing the permitted varieties was a tad too stiff (which still seems to be the case in many parts of Europe). Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, which had been the pride of Bela Krajina for as long as people could remember, was for example not allowed. So, many anecdotes rose up from that unlikely situation.

The Yellow Muscat of Martin Plut from Drašiči, who was for decades one of the most visible winegrowers post-WW2, was making heads turn all over Ljubljana. So, it happened that certain influential "comrades" helped him out a little, and all of a sudden, in 1972 the road Metlika-Drašiči was miraculously asphalted. Plut held the opening speech on 22 November 1972.

At local tastings after 1977, Yellow Muscats would regularly receive the highest scores, but they were denied a championship title since the jury, formed of professors from the Biotechnical Faculty and the Agricultural Institute of Slovenia, kept "throwing" them out of regular contest. Understandably, the winemakers loudly protested.

Luckily, when a stellar dry(!) Yellow Muscat by Otmar Šturm Sr., father of Otmar Jr. who is in charge today, appeared among the finalists at the Ljubljana International Wine Competition in 1982, the authorities finally eased their unreasonable stance, permitting it at last in 1987.

For quite a long while, bottled wines were produced in Bela Krajina only by cooperatives. Private producers, namely Plut, Šturm and Prus, emerged in the 1980s.

What Grows There

It is a small miracle that this tiny piece of land gives three very distinct wine styles. Bela Krajina makes cool-climate varietal whites, continental reds and world-class dessert wines.

Although Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains grown in this district is probably the country's best, it is **Metliška črnina** PTP (literally 'Red from Metlika') which is the signature wine of the region. Metliška črnina is a simple, fruity and spicy, light to medium-bodied refreshing red blend intended to be consumed very young, though in good vintages, it will easily keep for five or more years. It must contain up to 60% of Blaufränkisch and a minimum 30% of Žametovka, while the rest can be any red permitted in the district. The prescribed 30% of Žametovka is a topic of hot discussion, since some winemakers suggest it would be beneficial to reduce the Žametovka content to create finer wines with more colour. Metliška črnina from **Šturm** is a reference of the style, and **KZ Metlika** is the biggest player on the scene. If Metliška črnina does have at least some traction around the country, its white counterpart **Belokranjec** PTP is very much a local affair. This, again, is a simple blend made of Welschriesling (30–50%), Kraljevina (20–30%) and at least two more white varieties, none exceeding 10%. Bela Krajina can show its best when producing varietals, white and red. Muscats from **Šturm** and **Prus** can be excellent, whereas **Plut**, **Pečarič** and **Dolc** are not far behind. The styles include dry to lusciously sweet and everything in between. Welschriesling is the most common white, though not very inspiring. Other whites include Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Riesling.

Birch is the most typical tree of Bela Krajina

Winter in Bela Krajina





Otmar Šturm of the Šturm winery

In terms of reds, **Blafränkisch** can give some good results, though there is still much to be accomplished here. Those made by Šturm are already very good. Where Bela Krajina truly excels is botrytis wines and ice wines. Prus makes stunning sweets which display precision, delicacy and complexity rarely seen anywhere on the planet, and Šturm is not lagging too far behind. These are without doubt world-class wines that can be aged for decades. In conclusion, we should mention the indigenous variety **Blauer Portugieser** (Portugalka) usually produced in the “nouveau” style, which has lately developed some sizzling popularity.

The list of other notable producers: **Dolc**, run by a man who changed his family name to Vinopivec (“Winedrinker”), proudly displaying the year 1834 when a wine cellar was built on the property, **Malnarič**, **Pečarič**, **Anton Plut** – son of Martin Plut mentioned above, **Simonič** (sparkling wines), and the up-and-coming **Šuklje**.



From today's perspective, it seems downright incredible that Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains only became a permitted variety in Bela Krajina in 1986.

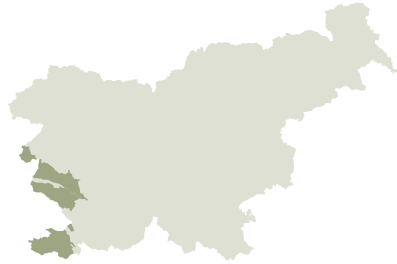
The precision and definition of sweet wines from the Prus Wine Cellar border, at times, on the surreal.

Wines bearing the mark of Recognized Traditional Denomination (PTP) can easily be put in the category of cultural heritage.





PRIMORSKA
REGION





GORIŠKA BRDA
DISTRICT



GORIŠKA BRDA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	1,802 ha
Grape growers	723
Winemakers	127
Average annual rainfall	1,500 mm
Climate	Mediterranean with continental influences
Most important grape varieties	Ribolla Gialla, Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignonasse, Pinot Gris
Notable producers	Movia, Marjan Simčič, Edi Simčič, Jakončič, Bjana, Blažič, Erzetič, Ferdinand, Kabaj, Klet Brda, Klinec, Kristančič, Ščurek, Piro, Zanut
List of permitted white grape varieties	Chardonnay, Glera, Klarnica, Malvazija Istarska, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Pergolin, Picolit, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Poljšakica, Prosecco, Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignonasse, Verduc, Viognier
List of permitted red grape varieties	Barbera, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Pokalca, Refosco, Syrah

Introduction

Goriška Brda or Brda is a small stretch of land at the very western end of Slovenia, dedicated to wine-growing and fruit growing. Wine and cherries are without doubt its two most important crops.

Brda has been a hotspot of the Slovenian wine scene ever since Slovenia claimed its independence in 1991. It is here that much innovation started, including the introduction of barriques and the return to “low-intervention” winemaking, and where the quest for top quality wines, critic scores and innovative PR has been most intense.

Brda is a melting pot where producers constantly challenge one another and push boundaries. Not all is gold here, but this is certainly the district with the highest concentration of high-quality producers in Slovenia for whites, reds and sparkling wines. All this makes Brda a favourite weekend destination among wine lovers who can enjoy plentiful options for winery tours, accommodation and excellent food. The recognition of Brda was further enhanced in 2015 with the locally very popular 2015 soap opera *Ena žlahtna Štorija* (‘A Noble Story’), which takes place in the picturesque Brda landscape.

Position and Geographical Features

Geologically speaking, Brda is the continuation of the Vipava Valley, which is actually divided by the Soča River into two units – Brda in the west and the Vipava Valley in the east. This usually comes as a surprise, even to most Brda winemakers.

Brda appears very much like an amphitheatre open to the south, with several northeast-southwest oriented ridges featuring soft, rounded top-hills with no rocks or stones on the surface. Climbing the 23 m high observation tower in Gonjače, which is certainly recommended, one enjoys an amazing view of more than 40 villages and hamlets, numerous churches, vineyards and orchards – all in one place. This is a very compact, agricultural and hilly piece of land, cut across by the state border between Slovenia and Italy. The Slovenian part represents around two thirds of the Brda area, totalling 72 km². To the south, east and west, it is embraced by Italy’s famous Collio.

There is no city in Brda, only numerous villages and hamlets dedicated to winegrowing and fruit growing. Dobrovo, Medana, Ceglo, Vipolže, Kozana, Višnjevnik, Plešivo, Neblo, these make the list of the most reputable. The closest town is Nova Gorica just across the Soča River.

In the west, the district borders the Idrija (Judrio) River and the Friuli region. To the south, close to Vipolže towards Mossa, the district is open towards flats that are fertile though unsuitable for winegrowing. To the south-east, the Soča River (Isonzo) defines its limits. Sabotin Hill limits Brda to the north-east and Korada Hill in the north. Senik is the northernmost village. Vines are grown starting from an 80 m altitude in the south, and up to 400 m of altitude around Višnjevnik in the north.

Climate and Soil

Mediterranean influence arriving from the south is clearly felt. The northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea, the Trieste Gulf, is just over 20 km away. The Alps to the north are about as close, too, introducing a chilling touch to the Brda lands, which results in a Mediterranean climate with strong alpine influences. Summers are warm to hot and not too dry, though drought periodically can be an issue, as it occurred in 2011 and 2012. Winters are mild with only a few days below zero. Snow is a rare feature here, usually lasting no more than a couple of hours.

The Burja (Bora) wind is frequent, though not as violent as in the Vipava Valley. Frosts are rare but can occasionally appear in the spring, reminding of the continental aspect of the local climate. Precipitation

“Opoka”
is the local
expression
for marl

Autumn in
Goriška Brda





Terraced vineyard in Goriška Brda

averages around 1,500 mm, pretty high for a wine region, and increases with altitude as one moves from the sea inland.

The flysch soils are sediments of an ancient ocean, manifested as layers of clay, marl, limestone and sandstone. These are poor soils, very suitable for vineyards.

All this results in medium to full-bodied whites and in reds with good levels of freshness, balanced acidity and often notable minerality.

A Bit of History

Vines were already widespread in Brda before the Roman invasion (Young Iron Age), as attested by the remnants of grape pips discovered by archaeologists in the village of Golo Brdo.

In 100 AD, the ancient Romans facilitated the local expansion of viticulture. Amphorae used for wine and olive oil trade and transportation were manufactured in the “Villa Rustica” mansion in the village of Neblo. The first written documents on viticulture likewise go back to the Roman times, when Strabona wrote that Aquileia supplied wine to the neighbouring peoples. At that time, vines were traditionally cultivated on various fruit trees. This cultivation method survived until the end of the 19th century. Winemaking must have been an important business as Herodian documented that a bridge over the Soča River was built using barrels. It is highly possible, in fact, that wooden barrels were invented in Friuli. Moreover, amphorae were a widely used vessel of transport, and the village of Lokavec close to Duino (Devin) held an important workshop crafting them.

After the disintegration of the Roman Empire and the intrusion of barbaric tribes, the viticulture nearly perished, yet managed to survive those chaotic times as proven by a document from 762 and several other records of the times, stating that neighbouring farmers were obliged to pay 100 amphorae to the monastery in Salt di Povoletto, north of Udine. Farmers appear to have produced more wine than they could consume, and it can logically be assumed that wine was a trade commodity at the time. The viticultural “renaissance” occurred in the Middle Ages, with the period of flourishing monasteries in the 11th century. Perhaps the most important actors were the Benedictines from the marvellous abbey of Rosazzo founded in 1091. They traded with Venetians and Germans, promoting the fame of the local wine. After the 11th century, numerous contracts describing the sale of vineyards speak of the existence and importance of viticulture in these parts. In the Middle Ages, a special form of feudalism called “colonate” was established here, persevering until as late as the second half of the 20th century. It is in the 13th century that “Goriška Brda” is first mentioned as “Colles” or “In Collibu” or “In der Ecke” (14th century) in German. “Ecke” – a wine from Brda, and “Rainval” – Ribolla are also mentioned by Ottokar at the turn of the 14th century. Chroniclers report of a disastrous 1327 harvest, especially poor in Ribolla, and of two excellent years: 1462 and 1482. More years seem to have brought bad harvests than good ones, though, causing famine among the people. Upon the passing of Leonhard of Gorizia (the last count of Goriška) who died in 1500, Brda were granted to the Habsburg dynasty. Paolo Santonino (1440–1508), a traveller, wrote about “Rebolio”, an excellent wine he had the pleasure of enjoying in Goriška. In the 16th century there was lively wine trade between Goriška and Carniola, and later via Kobarid and Bovec with Carinthia (Koroška).

The 16th century was a very good time for wine in Goriška, especially when the import of wines from Veneto was forbidden and after the Ottomans seized Hungary, interrupting the wine trade with Austria and causing a general rise in prices. From the 16th to the 18th century, land registers (*urbariums*) report that taxes were often paid in various wines and in Ribolla. Thus, Ribolla was at the time considered to



be another, different type of wine. In 1594, Joseph Formentini, a Goriška Archdeacon, wrote to Patriarch Francesco Barbari asking him to provide six different varieties of wine, proving they were already aware of varieties then; harvesting, pressing and maturing them separately.

The 17th century was marked by Austro-Venetian wars and the plague. Carinthians were the biggest buyers in Brda then, and they were buying strong which led to the growth of winemaking in the region. Carinthians purchased immediately after the harvest, and the cellars were often empty in December already. They were able to dictate the price, as the wines from Goriška had no local market as opposed to Friuli which was selling to Veneto as well. It is important to note, once again, that Ribolla was still considered to be a special type of wine and was managed separately from the other wines, as evident from the books of the Franciscan monastery in Gorizia, where in 1635 the recorded price was 12 liras for an “orno” of wine and 35 liras for an “orno” of Ribolla.

In 1751 the empress Maria Theresa implanted a new cadastre, which served as the basis for taxation. In the Attems family land register, one can see that the taxes of their “coloni” sharecroppers were paid in wine but also in Ribolla and Refosco grapes. In 1781 in his book *Clima Goritiense* the doctor Anton Muznik described Brda as a great source of white wines, with Ribolla standing out and having the best bouquet among them all, rivalled only by the nowadays almost extinct Cevedin (Čedajc). He also mentioned Picolit, Garganja, Prošek, Roženplaca and some others.

Muznik wrote of the vinification of whites and reds, which basically followed the same procedures as today (white wines were not skin fermented), except that crushing was done by bare feet and stalks were only removed at the very end.

In 1786 emerged the first classification of the Gorizia and Gradisca County vineyards, created under the rule of Emperor Joseph II. They were classified into 7 ranks, with those from Brda belonging to the first three. The “first growths” were Barbana, Spodnje Cerovo, Dobrovo, Gonjače, Števerjan, Fojana, Imenje, Matrinjak, Šmartno, Medana, Kojško, Kozana, and only four additional vineyards from outside of Brda.

The proximity of Trieste and its port played an important role in trade and the development of Brda wines. In 1797, Napoleon’s troops invaded the region. The French soldiers were apparently avid consumers of local wine, especially sweet Picolit and Ribolla.

Starting with 1814, when Brda was returned to the Austrian empire, began the century of prosperity. This was a time of free trade and agricultural development, and the birth of many institutions that contributed to economic and social growth.

In the 19th century, farmers in Kras and Vipava were free folk, which was not the case in Brda and Istria where the farmers were colons or tenants. Winegrowing in Primorska, where vineyards were in the hands of small farmers, was generally lagging somewhat compared to Styria where their owners were bigger, more strategic-minded landowners.

According to Karol Czoernig, wine was the most important commodity of Brda in the second part of the 19th century. He also wrote that as of 1872, the wines of Goriška ranked among the best in the Monarchy.

In 1880 count Baguer planted the first classical vineyard as we know it today, without tree support and unlike the previous “ronki” where vines had been planted on terraced plots of land. He planted 315 hectares with Ribolla, Riesling, Blaufränkisch, Portugieser, Burgunder and Oporto.

When grape phylloxera descended on the land in 1888 (with oidium breaking out in 1852 and peronospora in 1878), many indigenous varieties were lost. On a positive side, the less suitable locations were abandoned and good ones developed further.





The flavour of Brda wines holds a hint of the cold air from the Alps



Old bottles in the Klet Brda wine cellar

The beginning of the 20th century, the post-phylloxera era, saw viticultural transition from “ronki” to specialised, mono-varietal vineyards with densely planted vines strapped to stakes. The yields rose to 13.6 hl/ha in 1901. Bordeaux and Burgundy varietals were then introduced, though the extensive planting of the latter emerged only in the 1950s.

The list of wine grape varieties just before WWI was thus: Ribolla (Gialla and Verde), Glera, Tržarka, Garganega, Pergola, Pika, Meina, Slankamenka, Zelen, Kraljevina and Klarenca.

The First World War (1914–1918) heavily hurt wine production in Brda, as the front lines were not far away and Brda was part of the battle hinterland with many graveyards and hospitals. In the wake of WWI, progress resumed once again. The list of recommended grape varieties compiled by the local Research Station for Viticulture and Oenology in 1922 included: Sauvignonasse, Welschriesling, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Traminer, Sylvaner, Malvazija Istarska and Ribolla Giolla. For the reds these were Cabernet, Merlot and Pinot Noir (*Črni Pinot*). As documented in a business monthly, the price of Brda wines was significantly higher compared to those from the Vipava Valley, but red Teran from Karst was priced even higher. This was mostly due to Vipava having field blends, while Brda and Kras made “pure” varietal wines.

In 1922, 38 colons bought 230 hectares of land from their landlords, establishing the first cooperative in Brda. Da Varda in 1932 compared wines of the Vipava Valley with those of Brda saying that Ribolla Giolla was mutual to both regions, but made for stylistically different wines as those of Brda were fermented in barrels while those from the Vipava Valley were fermented on the skins.

In 1945 Ribolla Giolla accounted for 80% of all the regional grapes, whereas the 1952 Dobrovo exhibition showcased Ribolla Giolla, Merlot, Malvazija Istarska, Pinot Gris (Rulander), Sauvignonasse (Tokaj), Riesling, Zopavka, Moscato, Veltliner, and Traminer.

In 1947 Brda became part of Yugoslavia, and the farmers only then became owners of land. In the other Slovenian wine regions this happened 100 years earlier, in 1848 already. Major landowners, counts and wealthy farmers were expropriated and 12 cooperatives were founded in Brda alone. However, joining Yugoslavia didn't bring only positives to the small farmer. An impenetrable, strongly guarded border was delineated with Italy, and quite many farmers had their properties split between the two countries. Brda also lost its traditional Italian markets, in addition to finding itself rather cut off from the rest of Slovenia. To travel from Brda to Nova Gorica, a twisted and narrow road via Plave had to be taken up until 1985, when the corridor Osimo was finally opened, passing through Italian territory.

The cooperative “Kmetijska Zadruga Brda” was established in 1955 and was for decades the sole economical force in Brda. It was there that the fathers and grandfathers of many of today's private producers acquired important winegrowing and making skills.

The first private producers (Kos and Bužinel) appeared in the 70s, while the legendary Brajda, the first association of private producers saw light in 1986. Bužinel, Dolfo, Kren, Dušan Kristančič, Marjan Simčič and Ščurek are counted among its founding members. Together with Movia, who led the Brda renaissance, they managed to push Brda back to the very pinnacle of Slovenian wine regions in a matter of a decade. One of the keys to the re-emerging success of Brda was the generation of youngsters born in the 1960s and early 1970s, who took over family properties in their twenties with full support from their fathers. The generation shift was swift, productive, clear-cut and taking place just before and shortly after Slovenia's independence in 1991. The youngsters were brave in their ideas, encouraged by each other's efforts and the wind of change sweeping across the country.



Notably, many top wine brands in the region are named after the grandfathers or grand-grandparents (etc.) of the family, almost never after their fathers (Edi Simčič winery being one of the rare examples). This curiosity stems from the fact that the fathers of current owners belonged to the post-WWII generation which lived in socialism where any private initiative was undesirable or even forbidden. It was their predecessors, thus, who mostly took the bold entrepreneurial steps, by either buying a farm, starting family wine production or the like, which paid off in contemporary times.

In Brda certain family names such as Kristančič, Simčič, Jakončič are very frequent, which might create – and is actually creating – some confusion among consumers here and there. A bit of caution is usually enough to avoid surprises.

November 2015 saw the release of *Terra Magica*, a promotional movie made by the (now unfortunately late) Jure Brecejnik. It is a beautiful story about the land of Brda, its winemakers and their wines. The movie features appearances by three female Masters of Wine (MW) – Hong Kong-based Debra Meiburg, London-based Caroline Gilby, and New York-based Christy Canterbury.

About Ribolla

The first mention of Ribolla in Brda appears in 1336, in a purchase contract from the village of Višnjevnik. In the 14th century, Ribolla was called *rinfolium*. Until the 19th century, it did not denote a grape variety but rather a type of wine. At the time, Ribolla was an expression for a winemaking process producing a particular style of wine. It referred to a white wine from Friuli, Goriška and Istria based on the Ribolla Gialla grape (around 50%) and picked late to achieve the highest possible sugar level. It was sold immediately, two weeks after the harvest, as partially fermented must. The first written records on Ribolla as a variety were made by Vrtovec in 1844.

What Grows There

Before the phylloxera pestilence, Brda grew the same grapes as the Vipava Valley, with Ribolla being the most important grape.

Today, the production of Brda consists of two thirds of whites, and it is these that put Brda among the most prominent winegrowing regions on the planet. Reds are more popular locally. Since the quality of reds has improved significantly in the last decade, increasing numbers of reds now get exported as well. **Ribolla Gialla** is the signature grape of the district and its flagship fruit, contributing more than a fifth of the total crop. A few decades ago it was on the verge of extinction (as a top quality grape at least), but after its vibrant renaissance it is now firmly back on the throne. Ribolla is produced in different styles – classic varietals made in stainless steel, oaked, macerated, all the way up to sparkling wines and blends. A traditional white blend from Brda was made from Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignonasse and Malvazija Istarska. Today, international whites, especially Chardonnay and Pinot Gris as well as Sauvignon Blanc, replace Malvazija Istarska in these combinations.

Chardonnay arrived to Brda only after the Second World War, but is now well established as the second most important grape. To be frank, Chardonnay can be very, very exciting in Brda, especially when aged in oak and/or blended, usually with Ribolla Gialla. It makes for a firm, powerful style which pleases the critics easily.

Merlot is the most important red, with good reason. Cabernet Sauvignon all too often just does not get fully ripe here, although the local market adores it. Some juicy medium to full-bodied varietals are made, however, it is even more popular in blends with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

Marjan Simčič

Ribolla Gialla





Aleks Simčič of the Edi Simčič winery

Pinot Gris found a unique expression in Brda. In its style it is neither Gris, neither Grigio. It obtains sugar easily and gets full-bodied like those from Alsace, often on the edge of overripeness. It is much more restrained in aromatic profile, though, being almost closer to Grigio in that manner.

Aromatic **Sauvignonasse** (Zeleni Sauvignon) has seen better times. In Slovenia (and Italy) it was known under the name Tokaj, but after this name was officially trademarked by Hungary, the producers could not agree on a new one, agonising the wine's popularity. In his blog, the photographer of this book for example counted as many as 37 synonyms used for the variety! Far too much for clarity. The producers finally agreed to call it Jakot, as of today, this is still not an official name for the variety.

Pinot Noir can get stunning, though only select producers such as Movia, Marjan Simčič and recently Jakončič manage to get it right every time.

Some of the best Brda wines are **blends**, white and red. Whites are built around the Chardonnay-Ribolla Gialla pair with Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignonasse often part of the equation. These are oak aged, medium to full-bodied beauties with a complex aromatic profile and the capacity to age well. In reds, the winning formula is usually similar to Bordeaux Right Bank wines – a base of Merlot with a small part of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Again, these are medium to full-bodied reds. Some are more on the elegant side, others tend to be robust and full-bodied, while most of them will reward mid-term cellaring.

In light of the almost Mediterranean climate it comes as a surprise that Brda has the greatest concentration of high-quality **sparkling wine** producers like Bjana, Medot and Silveri, all counted among Slovenia's best. Though the eastern part of the country is making greater amounts and better sweets than Primorska, some sweet wines from Brda are simply standouts. The preferred production method is *passito* and Ribolla Gialla is the queen here. Sweet Picolit might be better known among wine-lovers, but realistically it cannot outdo Ribolla Gialla.

Who is Who

Klet Brda is one of the few remaining wine coops in the country, and the largest winery in Slovenia. We can firmly state they are a bright example of how a coop should look like, an ultimate proof that big wineries can regularly produce quality wines able to compete on demanding export markets.

It was established in 1955, but year zero for them is 1957 when a new cellar was complete and the first harvest carried out. For decades, until the first wave of private producers in the 80s, they represented the only Brda wine producer bottling its wines. At that time though, their product was of average quality at most, and when the markets of ex-Yugoslavia were lost in the nineties, an inevitable quest for quality improvement was earnestly pursued. Some measures, like bringing down the yields, were not always well received among the members but the management was firm in its course. The coop bloomed in the new millennium, when London-based Angela Muir, MW, began providing consultancy. The shift was obvious, especially in the Quercus line, and quickly paid dividends. Under Muir's custody, then-young Darinko Ribolica developed into one of the most knowledgeable oenologists in the country. His wine-making skills are apparent, regardless of the grape variety or style of wine in question. Thus, the wines became suitable contenders for export markets. Today, Klet Brda is a success story uniting 400 families – the biggest Slovenian wine exporter, especially successful in the USA, China, UK and Benelux.

Their wines are produced in several lines. Villa Brici is the starting point, but the Quercus line is undeniably where you'll find great value for money, especially with Pinot Grigio and Ribolla Gialla. The Bagueri line, sold in premium bottles, is responsible for serious wines receiving medals and press coverage, especially



GORIŠKA BRDA DISTRICT

Chardonnay and Merlot. This brand used to be so popular many wine lovers thought Bagueri was actually a producer, not just a brand. The A+ line represents their top tier with two oak-aged blends. The white is made with Ribolla, Chardonnay and a dash of Picolit, while the red is your typical Right Bank blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Red appears to be more popular, white usually excels.

If one should ask wine lovers and professionals, Slovenian and international alike, which winemaker influenced the modern Slovenian wine scene most profoundly, charismatic Aleš Kristančič from the **Movia** estate would take first place for sure. He has been described as a genius, madman, workaholic, marketing guru... He's all that, quite probably, but above all incredibly passionate. Passionate about wine, passionate about life. No doubt, he is one of the most striking individuals in the contemporary wine world who was never afraid to explore the unknown while constantly raising the bar. When I visited Hong-Kong for the first time, presenting myself to the sommeliers there and explaining I was from Slovenia, a frequent remark I received was: "Ah yes, Movia..."

In Ronda, Spain in 2008, top wine journalists lead by Jancis Robinson featured Aleš Kristančič among the dozen most influential wine creators in the world. The other names included Paul Drapper, Michel Rolland, late Denis Dubourdieu, Alvaro Palacios, Peter Sisseck and Dirk van der Niepoort, just to give you an impression of the company. He was the first Slovenian winemaker to appear in the world's top restaurants, being recognized also by Wine Spectator, Wine and Spirits, and other top magazines. When "Movia" guides tastings or speaks in public, it is always an event filled with zest, laughter and his legendary recurring phrase: "tsak, tsak". With his *Veliko belo* and *Veliko rdeče* (Big Red and Big White), he introduced a range of premium wines to the Slovenian scene, giving example and confidence to the other winemakers of the region. His Pinot Noirs are always excellent, but it is Puro, a sparkling wine that comes with the lees still in the bottle, that creates a proper show when opened. Kristančič rec-

Ribolla Gialla can give wines rightfully at home in the very best restaurants of the world.

The gently opaque Lunar, which spends in contact with the grape skins for weeks, was popular far before "orange" wine was even a thing.

The Brda Wine Cellar is a cooperative successfully uniting over 400 winegrowers, as well as our nation's biggest exporter.



Miran Sirk of the Bjana Wines

Stojan Ščurek of the Ščurek winery





The cherry tree is a symbol of Brda

ommends turning the bottle upside down for at least a day before doing so. While still flipped, the bottleneck ought to be submerged in water while the cork is being removed, so as to catch the disposed yeasts in the liquid. A dedicated tool called “purista” was even developed to perfectly open his sparkling wines. Lunar is another creation by Movia. Ribolla Gialla grapes de-stemmed, uncrushed and put in a special upright oak barrel. After 8 months, on the day of the full moon, it is simply decanted into the bottles. Unpressed, unfiltered, unsulphured. These, naturally, come with plenty of sediment and plenty of taste. Movia wines are made with minimum or no added sulphur.

With his rockstar haircut and impeccable fashion style, **Marjan Simčič** is the man of another superstar winery from Brda. He and his wife Valerija are well-travelled, and finding them both at home is not an easy task.

His winery is based in Ceglo, literally a couple meters from the Italian border. As with many winemakers from Brda, the family used to grow grapes and sell them to the local cooperative until the game changed in the 80s. Marjan Simčič initially gained popularity on the Slovenian market, then repeated his success in Italy, USA and UK among others. His wines receive constant high marks from the world’s top critics and magazines, including Wine Spectator, Decanter, Jancis Robinson, Steven Spurrier, James Suckling ... The house makes wines of three quality grades. The first line Brda Classic represents whites produced in stainless steel but still capable of short-term ageing. Pinot Gris and Ribolla Gialla count among the most popular here. In the next line, Cru Selections, recognized by the attribute “Selekcija”, things are definitely stepping up. These are oak-aged, refined but powerful wines. Sauvignon Blanc, Ribolla Gialla and Chardonnay, they all have a dedicated following, and I personally find the Ribolla Gialla extremely exciting, as well as the Sauvignon Blanc. *Teodor belo* and *Teodor rdeče* (Teodor white and red) are always found among the very best Slovenian premium blends, while the powerful, structured yet elegant Pinot Noir has been, along with Movia’s, one of the first Pinot Noir specimens demonstrating just what wonders the variety is capable of here. Some of Marjan Simčič’s best wines are released under the label Opoka Cru. Opoka stands for “marl”, suggesting these wines hail from select, marl-rich soils. Again, it is Sauvignon Blanc, Ribolla Gialla and Chardonnay that thrill Marjan enough to have granted them the “Grand Cru” status in his cellar. Among the reds, it is Merlot that shows greatness, with the latest addition of Pinot Noir. Selekcija and Opoka wines are rich, savoury, full-bodied and ageworthy gems that nicely demonstrate the full potential of Brda. And yes, there is also Leonardo, the highly prized luscious “stickie” made of dried Ribolla Gialla grapes. These wines do come at a premium, but discovering what some of the best wines of the Brda district and Slovenia taste like is well worth the price.

Edi Simčič from Vipolže is actually not related to Marjan Simčič in fact, except when it comes to their shared passion and skill at producing some of the top wines in Brda. The man at the helm of this winery today is Aleks Simčič, creative and cosmopolitan winemaker recognized by his radiant smile. It is no wonder that the labels on his bottles portray dogs cheerfully at play.

The person whose name graces this winery is the venerable Edi Simčič, father to Aleks Simčič. He decided to break with the cooperative and go solo in the early 1990s, at the dawn of national independence. He believes in the power of nature, and his motto: “*Nature itself speaks to those who can listen*” is the spirit of the house. With grandson Jure Simčič, the next generation is already firmly engaged in the family business.

A rather unique feature of this winery is their decision to only produce higher-priced and premium wines. Low yields and strict selection in the vineyards on the best slopes are of paramount importance, while aging in the winery happens exclusively in oak. Wines are released in two lines: essential and premium.



GORIŠKA BRDA DISTRICT

The essential line features Pinot Blanc, rosé, and white and red blends. Oddly enough, the premium line offers more options and choices. Their Malvazija Istarska is especially tasty, and so is Pinot Gris (more in the style of Pinot Gris than a lean Pinot Grigio). His Chardonnays rank among the best in the country, especially from the vineyard Kozana whose shallow topsoil layer over the bedrock bears wines of power and elegance in equal degree. Duet Lex, a premium red Bordeaux blend, and the white Triton Lex featuring Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Ribolla Gialla are among favourites with the connoisseurs. Red Kolos, a blend of “happy barrels” destined for Duet, is their top wine, though some might prefer Duet Lex over Kolos. The latter remains one of the biggest and most expensive reds in Slovenia.

Wines from this address are usually full-bodied, with intense flavours and a distinctive savoury character. In the past, some might have found them too “big”, even, but wines from Edi Simčič winery are getting more and more defined and refined from strength to strength.

Aljoša Jakončič is the frontman of the **Jakončič** family estate based in Kozana. The (hi)story tells of his grand-grandparents Mihael and Carolina who were producing wine at the estate already back in 1847, whereas the contemporary Jakončič tale of success starts in 1992. While Brda might be an excellent base for full-bodied and intense wines, Jakončič creates some of the district’s most elegant expressions. Aljoša believes wines with lower alcohol levels better represent the vineyard and the grape variety. It is easy to overblow things. The estate might not have a “superstar” status on the international scene yet, though in Slovenia they count among the most reputed houses. Nevertheless, they are firmly present on some of the most demanding markets such as USA, China, Japan and several EU countries. Their wines come in two lines. The Jakončič line presents entry-level wines, and it might be one of the most consistent ranges in the country with Ribolla Gialla upping the game and even Cabernet Sauvignon giving ample pleasure. The Carolina line is a step up from that. Carolina white, an oak-aged Ribolla Gialla–Chardonnay blend, recently with a dash of Sauvignon Blanc, is always superb and received the

Many winemakers from Brda built their reputation on white and red blends, among them Edi Simčič Wines.

The elegant Jakončič Carolina Red is an exquisite approximation of premium Bordeaux blends.

The thrilling white blend Stara Brajda features old local varieties like Pika, Glera and Tržarka.





Canopy management, Tibor Jakončič of Piro Wines



Serving Ribolla Gialla 1957 from the Klet Brda wine cellar

very first gold medal ever awarded to a Slovenian dry wine at the Decanter Awards back in 2008, repeating the success with two successive golds in 2016 and 2017. Carolina Rebula is quite the wine as well. If the typical premium red Brda blends are Merlot–Cabernet Sauvignon, Carolina red is the opposite – Cab/Merlot! Yet, it is counted among the best Slovenian reds and is for sure the most elegant and “Bordeaux like”. His Carolina Noir (Pinot Noir) can be exciting, too.

Omnipresent Stojan Ščurek is an iconic figure of the Slovenian wine scene. Well, with the aid of his five(!) sons, he can afford to go around and socialise a bit more than the other winemakers. In the local dialect *ščurek* means “cricket”, which is also the beetle featured on the family labels, sitting on the violin. The house produces over 20 different labels, quite a number for a 20 ha family estate. Ščurek Pinot Blanc when properly done (not every single year) is one of the best local expressions of this less-popular variety. Creamy texture, a complex nose of juicy yellow fruits. A real treat and excellent value. Rdeča Brajda (red) is an always popular blend, while oak-aged Bela Brajda (white) features quite an unusual combination of Ribolla Gialla, Picolit, and several locals, namely Glera (prosecco grape), Tržarka and Malvazija Istarska. This is an excellent white whose years of ageing pay off well.

If Stojan Ščurek is flamboyant and a bon vivant, his neighbour Borut Blažič from Plešivo is his complete opposite. He is rather on the quiet side, saying few words, leaving the wines to speak for themselves and for people to make up their own minds. The wines, though, are captivating. Compared to his colleagues, wines in his “classic” line are already a bit bigger and ageworthy. At a certain point Borut realized that they might be too big for everyday consumption and shifted his style to more elegant, easier drinking ones. Now his Ribolla and especially Sauvignonasse might be one of the best in Brda. His Selekcija line features full-bodied, aged wines. Whites are made with prolonged skin contact. For sure, this is one of the top addresses in Brda.

The Bjana winery got its name after the hamlet Biljana where the house of Miran Sirk is based. The fact is not well known, but at this address you will find the oldest wine cellar in all of Brda. The house was built in 1205, and some parts of the cellar from that period remain. Today’s cellars are, of course, much bigger, to accommodate the 100,000 bottles of annual production at what is considered by many the finest sparkling wine estate in the country. The house makes some still wines, too, but their focus is absolutely on sparkling ones – a rather rare practice in these meridians. The number of their labels is limited to four. Bjana Brut (Chardonnay and Ribolla Gialla), Bjana rosé (Pinot Noir and Ribolla Gialla) and Bruto Zero (Chardonnay, Ribolla Gialla) spend 36 months on the lees and represent a beautifully refined and delicate style of sparkling wines. Cuvée Prestige is matured in oak barrels and spends 42 months on the lees to develop a complex toasty flavour.

The gentle and sophisticated style of Bjana sparkling wines is quite surprising considering Brda lie in zone C, which is classified as the warmest among EU vineyards. Success and quality did not come overnight, it was a long path of gradual growth and improvement leading to today’s premium status. Good vineyard site selection, often with northern exposure, careful grape sorting, attention to detail, time, dedication and patience; these pillars now bring great results to the house time and again. Bjana was the first Slovenian sparkling wine producer to receive a gold medal at the Decanter awards, in 2014, repeated every year to date and is the only Slovenian winery to receive two stars for its wine in Tom Stevenson’s Encyclopaedia of Champagne and Sparkling Wines.

Marko Skočaj from Medana’s Dolfo winery, one of the founding members of the legendary Brajda association, was only 19 when he took over the farm from father Rudolf. The senior Skočaj firmly believed it was left in good hands, and as it turned out, he was more than right. Marko decided to name the



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winery after his grandfather Dolfo. The house is known for their provocative and cheeky labels featuring a running male silhouette with an unambiguous erection, and for their outstanding wines. Dolfo wines are released in Classic and Reserva lines, while the recently released Spirito sparkling wine quickly made quite some noise among sommeliers in the country.

Višnjevnik is a hilltop hamlet where the lineage **Erzetič** established their farm back in 1725. The family was never part of the local cooperative, and in 1980 Anton Erzetič started bottling his wines, beginning with a few thousand bottles at first. The full shift to bottling happened in 1985 when Aleksij took over the property. This makes Erzetič one of the oldest Brda wineries with an uninterrupted production of bottled product, and one of the first in the country in general. As we write this, the throne has been succeeded by son Andrej, the winery now making some of the most reliable Brda wines vintage after vintage. Wines in his “fresh” line, especially Ribolla Gialla and Pinot Grigio, represent what Brda varieties are all about. The biggest hit of the house is *Damski rosé* – Ladies’ Rosé, which has some residual sugar and was anecdotally made by mistake. Be as it may, today, only rosé Batič is equal in reputation to this one. The specialty of the house is their kvevri cellar accommodating 12 earthenware kvevri vessels of different sizes. Sentio is a very good sparkler.

“We want you to experience our Brda terroir – the saltiness of the Adriatic Sea and the freshness of the Alps,” says the landing page of the **Ferdinand** winery from Kojško. In 1997 Matjaž Četrnič, the winemaker and owner of this family estate, restarted the family winemaking tradition that had begun with his grand-grandfather. Their wines come in three different lines – stainless steel Classic, oak-aged Epoca, and the house pinnacle Brutus line with its old vineyards, unfiltered and untamed wines. Sinefnis is their brand of sparkling wines, a joint venture with winemaker Robert Prinčič. Ribolla Gialla, the focus of the house, is present in all four available styles. Epoca Pinot Grigio and Epoca red are much recommended. The latter can match many of the drastically more expensive Bordeaux reds from the Right Bank.

Sparkling wines from Bjana Estate offer great proof that truly outstanding results require specialization and focus.

The Blažič Sauvignonasse is always among the fuller-bodied, yet nevertheless shows a clear and refined varietal character.

The line Epoca features full-bodied and matured wines known for their elegance.



Cabernet Sauvignon

Contemporary wine cellar at the Simčič Marjan Family Estate





Kabaj is another winery that managed to achieve triumph on the US market. It culminated in 2015 when Kabaj was included in the top 100 wineries according to Wine & Spirits Magazine. The face behind the winery, Jean Michel Morrel is a restless soul, always on the move. He is a Frenchman who had practised oenology in Bordeaux, Languedoc and Italy, until he married a Slovenian girl and found fertile soil for the making of his own wines here. Ribolla Gialla, Ravan (Sauvignonasse), Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon and Corpus constitute his range of whites, where a Pinot Blanc is often a standout. Cuvée Morel is an elegant Merlot-based Bordeaux blend that can easily age for at least a decade. The other wines are typically French in style, showing more on the palate than on the nose, and are well-matched with food. Cuisine is precisely the realm of Katja, Jean-Michel's wife, who runs a restaurant serving delectable local dishes on the family property in Šlovrenc. Certainly worth a trip!

The specialty of the winery is Amfora, a blend of Ribolla Gialla, Malvazija Istarska and Sauvignonasse. Grapes are destemmed and then fermented and matured collectively with the skins in original Georgian *kvevris* (a sort of large earthenware amphora). Jean-Michel did spend quite some time in Georgia – the wine cradle of the world – to master this ancient method of vinification. Results are impressive. The wine is of amber colour, slightly tannic with an entirely unique aromatic profile.

“Back to the roots” would be the perfect slogan for the **Klinec** winery from Medana, another among the finest of Brda, producing wine since 1918. Not only their vines and wines, which are both pristinely organic, the whole family strives to live truly in sync with nature. The vineyards are grassed, surrounded with bushes and trees, homemade compost is used for fertilising. Spraying is done with herbal and vegetal extracts only. The aim is to keep the soil alive and active.

Aleks, the head of the family, is one of the most avid explorers of alternative woods such as acacia, mulberry, wild cherry. Their casks are between 300 to 2,000 litres in size, and Aleks is happy to explain the local expressions for the different casks sizes: *kalater*, *golber*, *šartin* and *baton*.



Aleš Kristančič
of Movia Wines
serving his Lunar

Andrej Erzetič
of Erzetič Wines
checking his
kvevri

Ribolla Gialla has been experiencing a veritable renaissance, fuelled by outstanding examples like the one made by Erzetič.

If there is an authority on the *kvevri* in Slovenia, it is certainly Jean Michel Morel, who spent much of his time in Georgia.

Pavo Red of the vintage 2009 was the first-ever Slovenian red wine to receive a Gold Medal at the Decanter World Wine Awards.

Grapes are macerated from five to thirty days, with only native yeasts used for the fermentation. Wines emerge off the beaten path, unfiltered, full of flavour with a highly distinct character.

In addition, the warm and friendly inn at the property, ran by wife Simona, will serve you some of the most delicious local food you can imagine. And yes, you can stay the night as well. A place to experience Brda in its full horizon: wine, food, people, nature.

Kristančič Dušan is another founding member of the Brajda association. His winery is based in the centre of Medana, next door to Klinec, Belica... When Dušan took over the property in the early 80s, the farm was growing fruit and breeding livestock, but they soon specialised in wine and created the brand Kristančič featuring on its labels a peacock, *Pavo Cristatus* in Latin. The estate is now run by Dušan's children. Marko commands the winery, Tereza is in the back office. Like Blažič and Nando, and unlike your typical Brda producer, they are introverted rather than extroverted by nature. They might not appear in the newspapers too often, but their wines do make regular appearances on the tables of wine lovers who respect quality, consistency and value for money – the latter being quite a rare bird in Brda.

The Kristančič line features dry white and red varietals that hit the market soon after harvest. Their Pinot Gris and Chardonnay are always fine, while Cabernet Sauvignon is a top seller. Chardonnay won a trophy (best dry white of the show) at the International Vino Ljubljana competition in 1993 already! The Pavo line represents premium ageworthy oak-aged wines. Pavo Red is an always generous, full-bodied Bordeaux blend, which collected the first Slovenian gold medal and regional trophy for red wine at the Decanter World Awards. A very good address indeed, then. A less known fact is that Kristančič is the best-selling family estate brand on the domestic market.

Medot started in 1987, going on to become the first sparkling wine producer in Slovenia to position its Medot Brut as a premium product. It certainly had all the necessary ingredients. Aging it for 5 years on the lees, the late Zvonimir Simčič, a respected oenologist, was adept at the winemaking art, and his son Igor used his innate marketing talents to place their creations through Yacht racing, a project known as Esimit which happened to be recognised by the UN. Today, the Medot winery is managed by Igor's own son Simon. Some critics might (rightly) claim that their Medot Brut spends too long on the lees, making for an acquired taste, but they have listened and went for less ageing. In any case, Medot Brut Rosé is top-shelf stuff, no discussion.

Andrej Kristančič from the **Nando** winery is based in Plešivo and could be described as yet another quiet, less talkative guy. Nando had gone private in 1994, soon realizing conventional styles just weren't his thing anymore, and a decade ago thus took the low-intervention path. Nando whites undergo prolonged maceration, are unfiltered and come in two lines: the Blue and the Black line. These are unfiltered, pristine, with only a minuscule amount of sulphur added. Hence, some call them "orange wines". For years, the **Piro** winery from Vipolže under the head of Marjan Jakončič was a well-hidden Brda pearl. They made quite some noise and much surprise when receiving a trophy for their dry Chardonnay at Vino Ljubljana at the turn of the century, a result achieved by select few wineries from Slovenia. "Piro" is the Furlan version of the name Peter, who bought the farm in 1932. Wines have been bottled at the property since 1994, and the style of the house is to make huge, full-bodied, but very tasty, very good, flavoursome wines. Especially Pinot Gris easily edges close to 15%. With the youngsters Tibor and Tomaž taking over, the wines lost a tiny bit of their huge body but remain ever so delicious. Bosq (meaning "forest") is the name of their top vineyard, responsible for many of the winery's top tier wines.

The **Prinčič** estate filled its first bottles already in 1987. Their basic line consists of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, while the premium Mihael line boasts a





Before the harvest



Sparkling wine bottles in the *pupitre* awaiting riddling

Ribolla of intense flavour and the oak-aged blends Mihael Belo and Mihael Rdeče. The peak of their offer consists of the red and white Mulit blends, the latter surprising with the addition of the Viognier variety. The Gašparin family made its fame with the restaurant Pikol in Nova Gorica, one of the most renowned in the country. Just before the turn of the century, Boris Gašparin fell in love with a Brda vineyard and started the story of Silveri sparkling wines, a tale that continues with his sons Tadej and Taras. Their sparkling wines are made using the classic method and spend at least two years on the lees and 6 months in the bottles before release. Brut, Rosé, White, Nature 0, and Blanc de Blanc are five sparkling wines, now accompanied also by three still wines. This makes perfect sense – in the restaurant, one does not drink only sparklers. The new generation is not afraid to get in line with daring marketing ideas such as creating a fancy white bottle for the Silveri White while serving it with ice and lime. Yes, they do sell a lot of these in their restaurant, but you will be pleased enjoying them outside Pikol as well.

Borut Kocijančič from the Zanut winery took over from his father in 2007 and things have just gone up since then. The winery is based in Neblo on the Italian border. Their full-bodied, ripe and juicy Merlot Brjač is arguably one of the best Merlots in the country. Augustus Cabernet Sauvignon, though never as good as their Merlot, still shows that in good years and on the right locations, Cabernet Sauvignons delivers far more than one would usually expect from Brda.

The list of other notable producers should also include Aleksander, Atimo (Filip Koletnik's endeavour creating remarkable "orange" wine from purchased grapes, each time from a different vineyard and with only some 800 magnums made annually), Belica, very much recommended for its agritourism, Benedetič, Brandulin, Constantini, Emeran Reya, Čarga, Dobuje, Mavrič, Moro, Peršolja, Pulec, Reia, Ronk, Simčič Karol & Igor & Marijan, considered the biggest private producer in Brda, Štekar known also for his appearance on the popular TV reality show, Šibau and Valter Sirk.



Excellent sparkling wines from house Medot are frequently associated with sailing races.

Chardonnay does great in all the Slovenian winegrowing districts. The splendid representatives of the Piro Winery never lack body.

The full-blooded and opulent Merlot Brjač proves the great potentials of this variety in Brda.



VIPAVSKA DOLINA
DISTRICT



VIPAVSKA DOLINA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	2,265 ha
Grape growers	1,846
Winemakers	297
Average annual rainfall	1,400–1,500 mm
Climate	Continental with Mediterranean influences
Most important grape varieties	Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Malvazija Istarska, Ribolla Gialla
Notable producers	Batič, Burja, Guerila, Mlečnik, Tilia, Sutor, Vipava 1894
List of permitted white grape varieties	Chardonnay, Glera, Klarnica, Malvazija Istarska, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Pergolin, Picolit, Pinela, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Poljšakica, Prosecco, Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignonasse, Semillon, Vitovska Grganja, Welschriesling, Zelen
List of permitted red grape varieties	Barbera, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Refosco, Syrah

Introduction

Vipavska dolina (Vipava Valley) is the biggest district in the Primorska region and the second biggest in Slovenia. The valley is verdant and has long been famous for its wine and fruits, especially peaches, apricots and cherries. The name is derived from the Vipava River which flows through the fertile land. Its shape reminds of a slightly broken west-east oriented letter “L”. The biggest town is Nova Gorica on the very border with Italy, sometimes referred to as the local Las Vegas. The name Gorica – *gorca* means a small hill, but also a vineyard in old Slavic language. A bit more inland, Ajdovščina is the second biggest town and home of Fructal, Slovenia’s most well-known fruit processing factory. The picturesque town Vipava is the home of the first winery in the area, Vipava 1894. The town accommodates the Faculty for Viticulture and Oenology and several wine bars in a matter of a hundred meters. Vipava might be small, but it is a wine town as real as they get. The list of notable wine villages in the district includes Branik, Bilje, Dornberk, Erzelj, Orehovica, Planina, Podnanos, Podraga, Sv. Martin, Slap, Šempas and many others.

Position and Geographical Features

The Vipava Valley is a narrow vale lying in western Slovenia, between the Friuli lowland and central Slovenia.

It is squeezed between the Trnovo Forest to the north and the Karst plateau to the south. To the east, it is closed with the immense Nanos plateau, to the west open towards the Friuli lowland and the Adriatic Sea. Vipava Valley is a junction where the Mediterranean, Alps and the Karst all meet.

The east-west perimeter of the valley is 40 km, while its widest part in the direction north-south is 10 km – not very different from Napa Valley in size. From the west, the Mediterranean climate seeps far inland. This enables many Mediterranean plants and fruits to thrive, such as figs, persimmon, laurel, oleander. It is said that the Adriatic Sea can be felt in the vale, though it cannot be seen from any point within it.

At the western end, where the valley is at its widest, the valley floor is at 60 m of altitude, getting narrower as the terrain climbs towards the Nanos plateau to the east. This lower part of the Valley is called **Lower Vipava Valley** and receives more Mediterranean influences compared to **Upper Vipava Valley** which starts east from the Hubelj River flowing through Ajdovščina. These two parts of the valley have distinct enough climates. In Austro-Hungarian times especially, the Hubelj River was the border between the central Carniola and the coastal “Littoral” provinces. The consequences are still present today, especially if one looks at the varieties planted in each of these two parts of the valley.

In Ajdovščina the valley turns towards the south-southeast in the direction of Podnanos. It then turns again to the southwest towards Razdrto, with Ložice being the last winegrowing village before the land gets too cold. There is a second river in the valley, Branica, which created its own parallel dale in the southern part of its bigger sister.

Climate and Soil

The Vipava Valley is a place where the sub-Mediterranean and subalpine (continental) climate encounter and heavily mix, causing frequent strong winds and intermittent amounts of heavy rainfall. Winters are mild and summers hot and mostly dry. Spring frosts and the occasional hail can be an issue here, while summer droughts appear quite often. As one moves from the estuary of the Vipava River in the west towards Ajdovščina to the east, average temperatures fall while the level of precipitation rises. In Bilje, the average annual temperature is 13°C, while in Lože on the east side it is only 11°C.

Marl mixed
with iron oxide

A traditional
vaulted cellar
in the Vipava
Valley





A young vineyard, Samo Premrn of Pasji Rep Wines

In Slovenia, the Vipava Valley is notorious for its powerful *Burja* wind. Approximately ten times a year, it reaches speeds over 120 km/h, here and there even up to 200 km/h, causing roads to be closed for trucks and trailers, and also breaking vines and drying out soils. The amount of rainfall is among the highest in the Slovenian wine districts. 1,500 mm of annual precipitation, reaching at times as high as 2,300 mm (i.e. Zalošče in year 2014) does not seem like an ideal winegrowing climate at first – precipitation is roughly 2,5 times as much as London receives! On the other hand, the Vipava Valley gets three times more sunny hours than London, too. How come? This is due to several heavy downpours that in aggregate contribute some 600–700 mm of the rainfall. The remaining 900 mm, distributed across the rest of the year, sound way more winegrowing-friendly, certainly, and the results support the view.

Until the Tertiary period, the Vipava Valley was covered by the Pannonian Sea. The bedrock therefore mostly consists of limestone. The topsoil consists mostly of Eocene flysch, found up to the 400 m altitude. Flysch is not one single rock but instead consists of sand, sandstone, marl, clay and also limestone layers. At higher altitudes, erosion and weathering caused the limestone bedrock to surface.

The vineyards in the Vipava Valley can be divided into four distinctive groups:

- Vineyards at the northern edge of the valley on the footsteps of the Trnovo Forest. These are mostly south-facing, lying at altitudes between 200–380 m predominantly on limestone soils with some marl outposts, notably in Vrhpolje, Šempas. These vineyards never lack water since the Trnovo Forest Plateau acts as a rain barrier.
- Very fertile vineyards on the floors of the valleys of the rivers Vipava and Branica, where soils are mostly alluvial and suitable for the most basic wines only.
- Hills in the valley. Compared to the vineyards in the north of the valley, these vineyards lie on lower altitudes, and therefore erosion is less of an issue. Soils here are predominantly flysch with layers of marl, sandstone and clay.
- Vineyards at the south of the valley close to the Karst plateau. Soils here are mostly flysch and limestone.

Winegrowing practices in the Vipava Valley are a challenging endeavour, as there is no steady pattern of rainy and dry seasons, forcing winemakers to stay constantly alert and ready to promptly react in the vineyard. This includes tasks like crop thinning, leaf removal, spraying and vigour control. Generally speaking, the situation is not exclusive to the Vipava Valley, as it applies to most of the Slovenian districts in some degree, though the Valley is a standout nevertheless. Certainly not a New World situation.

A Bit of History

The history of the Vipava Valley is very much related to the history of its wines. Winegrowing was most likely practiced here already in Celtic times, and the name Vipava likely derives from Celtic words *wip* and *ach*, the first meaning “valley” and the latter “rock”. During the Roman era, the Vipava Valley was part of a major trade route connecting Aquileia, Ljubljana (Emona), Ptuj (Poetovio), and Sremska Mitrovica (Sirminum) in the region of Pannonia.

The explosion of winegrowing started at the beginning of the second millennium, when the land belonged to the Patriarchate of Aquileia, which throughout the times governed a significant part of today’s Slovenian territory and had a profound impact on Slovenian history. Later, local life was very much shaped by noble families such as the Herberstein, Thurn and Lanthieri who owned lands in Vipava.



The latter nobles built a famous manor in Zemono, on a small hill with a stunning view, which still stands and now accommodates one of the very best restaurants in Slovenia – “Pri Lojzetu”.

Not much is documented from the Middle Ages, however land registers, registers and accounting books attest to the propagation and growing significance of winegrowing. In that historical period, two local wine centres emerged: Gorica and Vipava. The former even had grapes in its city crest. Among the written documents, Ottokar’s Chronicle from the turn of the 14th century deserves particular mention, listing 17 types of wines seized from the Venetians in the early 1280s, including wine made in Vipava (“*Wein von Wippach*” in original; *Vipavec* in Slovenian), Pinela (Pinol), Ribolla (Rainval) and Malvasia. Traveller Paolo Santonino (1440–1508) wandered the land, leaving writings of “Rebolio”, an excellent wine from Goriška he had the chance to drink.

Zelen from Pasji rep (Dog’s Tail) is mentioned in the 1499 Goriška county land register. In 1582, in the first documents describing the vibrant wine trade of Ljubljana, wines from the Vipava Valley and the Karst were regarded as the most important. In the book “*The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*”, written in 1689, Johann Weikhard von Valvasor (Janez Vajkard Valvasor) writes that in the Karst and in the Vipava Valley, more grapes were grown than grains. They made whites and reds alike, and sold them abroad as well. A special mention went to the Vipava Valley white which, when enjoyed in excess reportedly “*often makes children out of grown men, and fools out of wise ones, and is thus called Kindermacher* (‘Children-maker’)”. The villages Pasji rep by Orehovica, Vrhé, Vrhpolje, Podraga, Slap and Lože are mentioned as especially suitable for bearing good wines. Wines from the Primorska region were traded across Austrian countries and Bavaria.

In 1765, an agricultural society was founded in Gorizia. Its additional mission, next to grain agriculture and livestock farming, was also to spread winegrowing expertise.

The 19th century was a good time for winegrowing in the Vipava Valley as the surface area of vineyards was expanded, especially in the second part of the century. In 1836, the Valley had 3,596 ha of vineyards, as opposed to the 2,200 ha or so of today. Vintages 1834, 1868 and 1890 were reportedly particularly rich in terms of quality and quantity.

An essential milestone for the Vipava Valley winegrowing, and for Slovenian winemaking as a whole, was the book *Vinoreja sa Slovenze* (‘Winegrowing and Winemaking for Slovenians’) written by the priest **Matija Vertovec** in 1844. In the book he advised winegrowers and winemakers how to improve their practices and encouraged them to do so, providing examples. He warned against crop over-density, advising the planting of vines in rows and removal of the appropriate leaves so as to expose the grapes to the sun. He also advised against planting on the plains, so as not to cause a vine crisis due to excess supply. Honestly speaking, the farmers didn’t really heed his advice, as practices in the Vipava Valley stayed rather rudimentary until a few decades ago. Vertovec also proposed how the Vipava white (*Vipavec*) blend should be composed, typically a blend of Ribolla, Malvazija Istarska, Welschriesling, Pinela, Klarnica, Zelen.

The Regional (Deželna) Agricultural School in Gorica was founded in 1869, teaching viticulture and winemaking in Slovenian language.

Soon, in 1873, it was followed by the fruit and winegrowing school in Slap by Vipava. These schools were contemporary with the world-famous Geisenheim Viticulture Research Institute of Germany (1872), and arrived only a decade after the first viticultural and oenological school and research centre in Klosterneuburg, now recognized as the first wine school in the world, had opened in 1860.

Farmers in the Austrian Empire received land in their possession in 1848, in the time known as the Spring of Nations. This may sound like good news, but quite some of them quickly went broke as they

Snow is a rare phenomenon in the Vipava Valley

Radivoj Lisjak, wine library





Barrel

didn't possess enough comprehensive skills to grow crops and manage the farm. In the Vipava Valley, the farmers were handed very small parcels. It's not surprising they felt the need to unite, and more than 20 cooperatives thus formed between 1894 and 1907. The first one, established in 1894, survived both World Wars, the Italian occupation and the Yugoslav regime, but did not survive man's stupidity and greed. Its winery **Vipava 1894** was detrimentally sold to speculator private owners in 2015, and is currently (2017) undergoing difficult times, although the new Austrian owners, one of whom is the well-known winemaker Hannes Sabathi, represent a welcome new beacon of hope.

Phylloxera devastated the district vineyards between 1888 and 1890, causing an almost total collapse of winegrowing in the Valley.

After the phylloxera pestilence finally passed, the newly replanted vineyards were created in rows and on the slopes, as Vertovec had already suggested over half a decade ago. It was perhaps the first time farmers really began following the advice of experts and authorities. As in the other winegrowing regions, the post-phylloxera replantings never reached the surface area that had been planted before the louse invasion. Many vineyards, especially in higher altitudes, were abandoned.

In 1903 the first wine cellar was built in Vipava. It is interesting to observe the arguments presented to the bank by the stakeholders when asking for the loan for their new cellar. One of the arguments said they wanted to change how local wine was made, saying they desired to shift from Spanish practices advocating longer maceration of whites and reds to French practices advocating shorter macerations. Curiously enough, this was proposed by Vertovec as well. The Wine Society, the successor to the first local coop, must have had some thriving business as it opened offices in Vienna, Graz, Bratislava and Karlovy Vary between 1905 and 1913. The times, though, weren't always dandy. During WWI, the Society had to lend a significant part of its money to the Austro-Hungarian state. They never got it back, because they finished the war being part of another country – Italy. The Vipava Valley belonged to Italy until 1943, which were not happy times for the locals. The regime favoured Italian wines, importing them to the Valley as “Italianization” was pressured all around. Italians were members of most of the management boards then. Some think that the “hurdles” to winegrowing incurred in that period were even more significant than those suffered under Yugoslavia.

In the 1960s, a new wave of replanting was conducted. Due to mechanisation, the distance between the rows got wider and terraces were introduced. On the downside, the number of plants per hectare decreased and bigger yields were being forced per plant. Now, a recent trend in the valley is to increase the density of vines back to as many as 10,000 plants per hectare, what some call the “traditional” or “Burgundian” way.

Up until WWI, the vines in the Vipava Valley and the Goriška region were generally planted in the plain on the fields (*planta*) together with other plants. A certain breed of maple or willow tree was used to support the vines.

In his 1844 book, the aforementioned Matija Vertovec described wine varieties grown in the Vipava Valley at the time, creating an important historical testament. He described 35 white and 12 red varieties, suggesting also that there were “way too many of them”.

As in the other regions, it was phylloxera that decimated the number of varieties, fulfilling Vertovec's wishes in a twisted way. Out of the 47 varieties listed, only Ribolla, Malvazija Istarska, Pinela, Zelen, Refosco, Vitovska Grganja and Klarnica survived to be grown commercially today.

Although they were in the minority, the local reds played an important role before international reds arrived in mid-20th century. Vrtovec wrote about Refosco, Refoškot, Schioppettino (Pokalca), Pinot



Noir, Marzemino, Cordovat (Gnjjet) and Blaufränkisch. In 1926, in the Agricultural Journal, Bohuslav Skalicky advised Dolenjska winemakers to grow Blaufränkisch. His argument was that it gives 18% sugar and more, even making for bottled wine in Vipava!

In 1969, dr. Dušan Terčelj documented the following vine structure of the old Vipava Valley vineyards (at that time divided into three sub-districts):

- Lower Vipava Valley: Ribolla (40%), Klarnica (40%), Malvazija Istarska (15%), Others: 5%.
- Middle Vipava Valley: Ribolla (40%), Poljšakica (30%), Malvazija Istarska (10%), Others (20%): Klarnica, Pergolin, Remka, Glera
- Upper Vipava Valley: Ribolla (60%), Welschriesling (10%), Pinela (10%), Others (20%): Zelen, Malvazija Istarska, Poljšakica, Zelenika, Remka etc.

Obviously, Ribolla was by far the most planted grape. In the Upper Vipava Valley, which was part of the Carniola region, “Austrian” varieties such as Welschriesling, Riesling, Veltliner, Müller-Thurgau, local Pinela and the indigenous Zelen added some spice to the varieties grown, while in the Lower Vipava Valley Malvazija Istarska dominated.

Vipava Valley got its first official assortment in 1953. At that time, international varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon were already marching into the valley, so the numbers above are not exactly representative of the spirit of the age, but they do give a good idea about the vines growing in vineyards there at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, international varieties account for over half of all the vineyards in the Valley.

In the 1970s and early 1980s there was a big shift toward reds, especially Merlot, upping the share of reds from 15% to today’s one third.

The book *Stare primorske sorte vinske trte* (‘Old Vine Varieties of Primorska’) was published in 2015, describing 44 white and 8 red very rare varieties from the Primorska region. All of the described varieties are planted in specially designated research vineyards in Nova Gorica, Dobrovo, Kromberk and Koper, which act also like a Noah’s Ark for some varieties that are almost extinct. White Refosco, White Terano, Danijela, Dišečka, Kanarjola, Planinka anybody?

In the late 1970s the first bottlings from private producers arrived on the market, with Radivoj Lisjak pioneering in 1978. Today, there are round 50-60 producers bottling their own labels.

What Grows There

Many things! Whites, reds and rosés are all important. Although the Vipava Valley is not particularly large in hectares planted nor in actual size, it offers quite a range of varieties and styles. It was here, with Mlečnik and Batič, that the first serious steps toward sustainable and organic winegrowing were taken in the 1990s.

Merlot is the number one grape of the Valley, with over half of the country’s Merlot being planted here. No wonder some of the most successful Slovenian Merlots and Merlot-based blends come from here. It thrives especially in the Lower Vipava Valley, which is significantly warmer than the upper part, but there are some superb examples found in the upper one as well. There is plenty of Merlot to go around, and so, much of it goes into entry-level wines, blended and varietal alike.

If I were to pick two places where **Sauvignon Blanc** shows its best in Slovenia, it would be Štajerska and the Vipava Valley. Especially in the upper part of the Valley, with its more continental climate, Sauvignon Blanc often gets crisp (try Tilia or Piana), vibrant, showing a lovely aromatic profile as well as very





Snow storm

particular oak-aged styles (Sutor). **Chardonnay** is another international variety that grows just right in the Vipava Valley. The best examples can compete with much pricier representatives from globally established regions. Sutor can be considered the local pioneer of fine oak-aged Chardonnay, and today there is a good number of great Chardonnay producers in the Valley, including Mlečnik and Batič. Some of the Upper Vipava Valley whites could be easily confused with those from the Štajerska Slovenija district, due to their aromatic profile, freshness and rather high levels of acidity. Certain winemakers have even been accused by a handful of less open-minded connoisseurs that they are copying “Styrian wine”. It might be Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay that produce the majority of the wine in the Vipava Valley, but it is the local varieties that have recently been getting a lot of attention.

Ribolla Gialla, once by far the biggest variety in the district, might still be sizeable in hectares here, but the first association with Ribolla now firmly lies with the Brda district, though Mlečnik, Batič and Guerila do make some serious examples with prolonged skin maceration.

Malvazija Istarska shares the same destiny, since a lot of it is planted but not many varietal examples are on display. Istria takes all the glory when it comes to Malvazija Istarska, though those hailing from Vipava can easily match their sisters from Istria, recently. Just check with the houses Guerila, Sutor or Batič for example. Be as it may, it is becoming increasingly important.

Zelen and **Pinela** are two local varieties grown only in the Vipava Valley. Zelen is considered a native variety and is a specialty of the Upper Vipava Valley, though not exclusive to it. The hectares planted with these two varieties are modest (6% of all whites in the Valley), but they have been making quite a splash. They are the identity, the heart and soul of the Vipava Valley, produced by practically every winemaker there.

With all the whites mentioned above, it is inevitable for some **white blends** to emerge, both premium and entry level. Though Vertovec in 1844 advised that Vipava white be made of local varieties only, this example is followed by few (Batič, Burja and Guerila among those well-known). Not a critique, just a fact. The valley’s blends usually employ Chardonnay as the backbone, adding local varieties, i.e. Pinela, Zelen, Malvazija Istarska to conjure up extra distinction and spice (try Planta from Štokelj). Almost every top producer here makes their premium white blend. Adding **Klarnica** and **Vitovska Grganja**, two more grapes indigenous to the valley, the latter being especially on the rise, the picture of whites is very much complete.

Quite a lot of **Cabernet Sauvignon** is planted here, but none of it is really special since the climate is simply too cold. Nevertheless, the Slovenians love it...

It is **Pinot Noir**, if in the right hands, that makes some remarkable elegant and long-lived wines in the Vipava Valley, especially when connected with the names Tilia and Burja.

Barbera is another specialty of the Valley, since no other region in Slovenia produces it. It used to be rather undrinkable, be it as a varietal or blended with Merlot, but lately, some decent attempts have been made with success.

Rosé feels at home in the Vipava Valley. Enough red varieties are planted to make it, and the climate is still cool enough to bring that freshness and vibrancy so important for premium rosé. Batič makes one with some residual sugar, which is one of the two most recognised rosés in Slovenia; Guerila, Piana and Štokelj make some of the best; while Lisjak is highly approachable.



Who is Who

Ivan **Batič** and his son Miha from Šempas in the Lower Vipava Valley are devoted to biodynamic (Demeter) practices. In the cellar, wild yeasts do the job while fermentation is uncontrolled. Cellar tasks follow the phases of the moon.

Medium-dry rosé made with Cabernet Sauvignon might be their most popular wine, but the tasteful and varietal Pinela, Ribolla, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris that receive several days of skin maceration actually give a more exact idea of the winery. Zaria is a field blend of seven different whites, picked at the same time and macerated for some 30 days. Their top-tier Angel White consists of several local whites and Chardonnay, while Angel Red is a Bordeaux blend. Ivan and Miha are restless in their experiments, always trying to fathom nature's deepest secrets, knowing it to be an endless journey. The results are usually excellent.

Primož Lavrenčič was once part of the Sutor winery but with the vintage 2010 started producing his own wines under the name **Burja**. Lavrenčič is a big advocate of local varieties, growing Ribolla, Malvazija Istarska, Welschriesling, Zelen, Refosco, Blaufränkisch, Pokalca, reasoning these are the best grapes to express the Vipava Valley terroir. As an exception to the rule, his personal passion is Pinot Noir.

Few people in the country examine and study their vineyards and soils as closely as Lavrenčič, who is also an adherent of biodynamic practices. He makes six different wines only. As a tribute to the old Vipavec (Vipava white) recipe proposed in the mid-19th century by Matija Vertovec, he created Burja White – a blend of Ribolla, Welschriesling and Zelen that became one of the most distinguished wines in Slovenia. Another tribute, this one to local reds, is the scintillating Reddo, a blend of Pokalca, Blaufränkisch and Refosco. Lavrenčič believes this was a traditional red blend in the Vipava Valley before the terrors of Phylloxera. His Zelen is always outstanding, truth be told, while Pinot Noir impresses

The winegrowing practices of Batič Winery border on anarchy it would appear, yet their results are always spectacular.

Burja Bela, a blend of old indigenous Vipava Valley varieties, is an exemplary demonstration of the valley's terroir.

Zelén from biodynamic grapes as it is made on the Guerila estate is a first-rate reference of this indigenous Vipava Valley variety.



Vinification
of Pinot Noir

Malvazija Istarska





Zmago Petrič of Guerila Estate

vintage after vintage. The top tier single-vineyard Burja Stranice and Žorž (Pinot Noir) are the latest additions to this remarkable range.

Guerila is a winery based in Planina, owned by Zmago Petrič who's been following organic standards for a number of years and also obtained a biodynamic certificate in 2014. His Zelen and Pinela are two of the most authentic tokens of these indigenous varieties, and if you desire a reference rosé, grab the one from Guerilla for sure. Ribolla is 'out of the box' but very much excellent. His Roma and Cuba are "weighty" structured white and red blends that perhaps need a pinch of polish, while Retro is a top blend of four local white grapes made with prolonged maceration and no filtration, a highly original expression of Vipava. A winery that made colossal progress in the last few years.

Krapež is best known for his Merlots and his Lapor white and red blends produced in a more traditional style, though his Zelen frequently gets even more impressive.

Lisjak ('male fox') appears to be a very common name among winemakers in Primorska. **Lisjak Radivoj** from Zalošče accounts among the oldest private winemakers in the country. He never got his big break, but has been quietly and consistently present since the 70s, creating nice fresh varieties that won't let you down.

Lisjak winery is a family playground for young winemakers, brothers, Tomaž Lisjak and well-travelled, knowledgeable Klemen Lisjak (PhD in food science). The house is well known for its modern, super fresh Sauvignon Blanc, Rosé and Merlot, which are always amazing value.

Energetic Bogdan Makovec from the **Mansus** winery from Brje made news with his Klarnica, an indigenous Vipava Valley variety. He was the one to put this nearly forgotten local treasure back on the map, making all possible styles from dry to sweet, aged in acacia wood...

Mlečnik estate is situated at the western edge of the Vipava Valley, in Bukovica. Mlečnik just might be one of the tallest winemakers on the planet, but more importantly, he is one of the pioneers of organic winegrowing in Slovenia, crafting only 12,000 bottles from 9 ha of vineyards and firmly believing that low-yield training helps vines bolster their resilience.

He was heavily influenced (at least at the outset) by Joško Gravner, famous Slovenian winemaker found just across the Italian border. Mlečnik and his family firmly believe in organic farming and sustainability, which became their complete lifestyle. His practices include high-density vineyards, only natural means of protection, low yields, short period of maceration for whites with no temperature control and no filtration. He makes Ribolla Gialla, Sauvignonasse, Chardonnay, Merlot and a white blend, Ana in "orange" style. These wines have tremendous character and occupy a special place in the picture of Slovenia's wine range.

Pasji rep is a well-known winery named after a legendary vineyard mentioned already by the historian Valvasor. Franc Premrn was among those few who had helped save Zelen from extinction as a variety. Recently, when his son Samo took over the estate, quality has improved by leaps and bounds. Today, they produce excellent Zelen, Malvazija Istarska and Pinot Noir. The white Jebatschin, a blend of Malvazija Istarska, Ribolla Gialla, Zelen; and the red Jebatschin, a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, are more than convincing, too!

Piana is a new, modern micro winery run by Barbi V. Močivnik and her father Ljubo Vrčon, producing excellent and smart Malvazija Istarska, Sauvignon Blanc, rosé and Merlot which are listed in some top Slovenian restaurants and are excellent value for money.

Santei is another small, green winery in the Branica Valley, established in 2007 by Matej and Sandra Bizjak, ex businesspeople who longed for a different kind of life. In their quest for perfection they now



grow local Malvazija Istarska, Ribolla, Zelen and Pinela, plus their bread-and-butter Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Merlot making wines in two tiers. A winery to keep an eye on.

Sutor is a winery ran by Mitja Lavrenčič who began bottling his wines in 1991. Their name Sutor means “shoemaker” in Latin, once the craft performed at their property. Sutor quickly became one of the leading and most well recognised houses in the Vipava Valley and Slovenia in general. They were the first to show a truly oaky Chardonnay to the Slovenian public, a style which they no longer boast today but was clearly ahead of their time. Besides Chardonnay, they make Malvazija Istarska, Sauvignon, and a Merlot named Red. All their wines are oak-aged, complex, of top quality with lots of personality, perfectly expressing the variety and the origin.

Franc Vodopivec of the **Slavček** winery is another producer from the valley creating low-intervention wines made from organic grapes, resulting in full-bodied amber-coloured unfiltered whites, robust fuller-body reds and very particular sparkling wines.

Štokelj might be a small producer, but his Pinela and rosé rank among the best in the country. Then, there’s also the well-kept secret of his delightful white Planta, a brilliant blend of Ribolla and Chardonnay. So much to taste here!

Matjaž Lemut calls his Tilia (Latin for linden tree, the Slovenian national tree) family estate, founded in 1992, the “house of Pinot”. His first success came with the super young Sauvignon Blanc released in November harvest year, but it is now largely the duty of Pinot Gris to take centre stage and entertain wine lovers. However, it is the other Pinot, Pinot Noir, that attracted the attention of Jancis Robinson and elevated Tilia among the brightest names in the country. He makes it in three different quality levels. The entry-level Vipava Valley line finally hit the quality spot we expected in 2016, the Estate Line is where we’d recommend betting your money, while the white label is a Pinot Noir of extremes, in-

Sauvignon Blancs from the Vipava Valley keep in stride with those from the Štajersko end of the land.

Premium Chardonnays aged in barriques broke ground for house Sutor. Starting off as somewhat too oaky, they are now simply exquisite.

The Štokelj Estate might be small, but their Pinela has been a reference for this variety for years.



Primož Lavrenčič
of the Burja
Estate

Dried Merlot
grapes





Old oak barrel, Tilia

cluding the price. His Rubido, a blend of Merlot with a dash of Cabernet Sauvignon, is a well-crafted premium red blend. Lemut is immensely active, counselling up-and-coming wineries, teaching, advising... so it is a small wonder he manages to find the time to create wines at this level.

Vipava 1894 was once the oldest existing cooperative in the country. After a few turbulent years under shady ownership, it was finally sold to Austrian winemakers that seem to know the business. In Vipava 1894, they produce a vast range of wines from very simple inexpensive to some seriously good whites in the premium range. The quality has improved in the last few years and there were many pleasant surprises such as the Zelen Lanthieri, Barbera....

A list of other notable producers would include the **Cigoj** estate well known for their agritourism, **Colja** from Branik making good value whites and reds, **Ferjančič** from a 200-year-old (1809) estate who's been bottling his wines from 1995 and convincing with his Pinela and Rosé, **Fornazarič** from a 150-year-old estate bottling since 1991 who might impress with his Chardonnays, and young **Jamšek** who regularly makes some of the best Welschriesling in the country as well as one of the few good Barberas. **JNK** releasing their wines only after 3 to 4 years. **Nafa** is a new, modern winery creating nice Sauvignon Blanc and rosés, owned by the Škerlj family who made their fortune manufacturing stainless steel vats. **Lepa Vida** is recognized by its bottles in the shape of the female body (hence *Lepa Vida* – “Beautiful Vida”). The well-established **Saksida** winery is one of the Valley pioneers having entered the market in 1985. **Poljšak** is another 200-year-old estate, bottling their wines since 1995. Peter Stegovec is the fifth generation of the **Sveti Martin** (St. Martin) property established by his great-great-grandfather, Peter. Ivan **Svetlik** is an entrepreneur who became enamoured with Ribolla grapes. He makes only one wine – excellent long macerated Rebula Grace, vinified by Matjaž Lemut from the Tilia estate.



Klarnica, an indigenous variety of the Vipava Valley, is bottled by only four winemakers in the world.

We used to call this variety *Tokaj*. The full-bodied, matured *Jakot.E* from JNK wine house represents one of the first domestic “orange” wines.

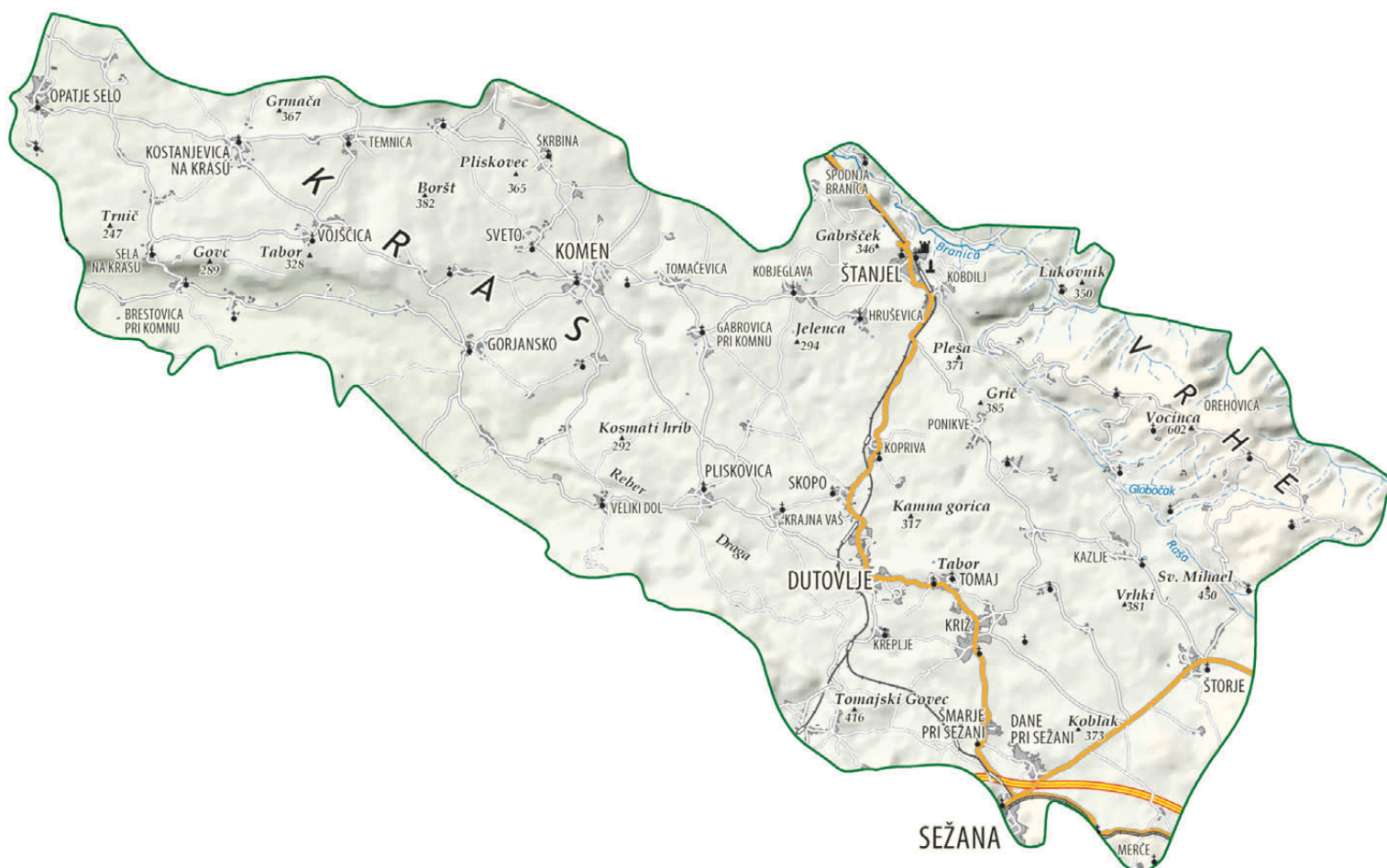
The passion of Matjaž Lemut from the Tilia estate are Pinots.



KRAS
DISTRICT



KRAS DISTRICT



Vineyard area	578 ha
Grape growers	799
Winemakers	144
Average annual rainfall	1,500–1,700 mm
Climate	Continental
Most important grape varieties	Refosco
Notable producers	Čotar, Boris Lisjak, Renčel, Štemberger, Vinakras
List of permitted white grape varieties	Chardonnay, (Glera), (Klarnica), Malvazija Istarska, (Pergolin), (Picolit), (Pinela), Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, (Poljšakica), (Prosecco), (Ribolla Gialla), Sauvignon Blanc, (Sauvignonasse), Vitovska Grganja, (Welschriesling)
List of permitted red grape varieties	(Barbera), (Cabernet Franc), Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, (Pinot Noir), Refosco, (Syrah)

*Varieties in brackets are actually allowed only in the small sub-district Vrhe. See more under the Climate and Soil below.

Introduction

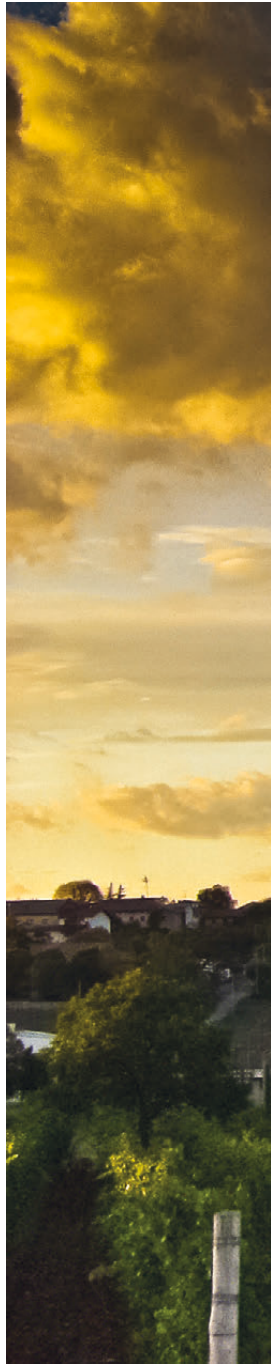
Kras (Karst) is a small district, the smallest of the four in the Primorska region. As the name suggests this is an essentially karstic region, featuring underground caves and karst phenomena on the surface, scant trees and quite a lot of shrubbery. The region was facing deforestation until the late 19th century. Green colour, however, has for a couple decades been gradually coming back, along with the fields and forests. To clean the ground, farmers would for centuries collect stones from their fields, vineyards and properties, building rock walls around them. This gives the landscape a special feel and a visual sensation of just how stony it is. The region is now in vogue, as wealthy people from the capital are deciding to move to its unspoiled and peaceful surroundings. In the mind of a Slovenian, the district has a very positive, almost romantic connotation, with Teran and prosciutto being the first two words associated with Karst. Lipica, the birthplace of the world-famous white Lipizzaner stallion with its 400 years of history perhaps comes to mind next, or perhaps the amazingly beautiful Škocjan Caves.

Position and Geographical Features

Karst as a geographical region is a significantly bigger than the Karst wine district. The latter is positioned on a limestone plateau between the Vipava Valley to the northeast and Gulf of Trieste in the southeast. The vineyards are planted on altitudes between 200 and 400 m. Zooming out a bit, one can see that in the west, the Karst borders Italy and morphs into its Carso DOC region. To the southwest, the border is an extended mountain range peaking with Mount Lanaro (Volnik) at 545 m. The range creates a natural barrier towards the sea, greatly diminishing the Mediterranean influence of the warm Gulf of Trieste. Carso DOC, located on the coast on other side of the hill, receives more Mediterranean influences compared to the Slovenian part where continental influences are prevalent. To the south, Karst borders the Ljubljana-Trieste motorway and is enclosed by the Brkini Hills in the east. The biggest town is Sežana, the most important wine villages are Komen, Tomaj and Dutovlje with its famous annual “Feast of Teran and Prosciutto” taking place in August.

Climate and Soil

This is a very rocky region with little topsoil and no surface water. Although the average rainfall suggests there is too much water to grow grapes, it is well spread across the year with the most rainfall in October-December and the least in February, March, July and August. The rain is responsible for much of the soil erosion. The climate is a combination of the Mediterranean, alpine and continental influences. Winters are hard, with some occasional short-lasting snows. Spring frosts are rare due to the proximity of the Adriatic Sea. Bora, the mighty northerly wind coming from the continent, called *Burja* by the locals, is an important feature here. It brings cool, dry air and can do harm in the vineyard, during flowering especially. It also dries the soil and causes wind erosion. No wonder that the soils are shallow or non-existent in this stony region. On the other hand, before the harvest the Bora can dry the moist in the vineyards in a matter of hours, repel botrytis and prolong the ripening season for another week. The bedrock is a layer of limestone over 1000 m thick. Typical Karst soil is “*terra rosa*” (i.e. “red soil”) locally also called *jerina*, a particular red clay soil formed by the weathering of the limestone, which receives its colour from the high iron oxide content. Agricultural lands are therefore very scarce, scattered and precious. In the northern part, where the Karst district touches the Vipava Valley, lies the sub-district *Vrhe*. This sub-district has no karst characteristics and is, with its flysch and marl soils, more similar to the Vipava Valley, including the varieties grown there.





Štanjel



It takes quite some determination and passion to make wine in the Karst, but it is in the DNA of its people to grow grapes no matter what. In these conditions the family business approach is crucial, with all its pluses and minuses. There is little chance a big multinational will ever touch this ground.

A Bit of History

The history of grape growing in the Karst might well go back to the 1st century AD. It is perfectly possible that wines from the Karst were already treasured in Roman times by Pliny (23-79), though historians are not in unity regarding the wine he was referring to when writing about the *Vinum Pucinum*, a wine made in the rocky hills close to the spring of the Timav River. The venerable age of Livia Drusilla, also known as Julia Augusta, the wife of Roman Emperor Augustus who lived to see her 87th birthday, was attributed by Pliny entirely to the consumption of this *Vinum Pucinum*. The exact place of *Castellum Pucinum* is not exactly determined as of today, with Duino cited as the most likely place.

In the Ottokar Chronicle from the turn of the 14th century, Teran is mentioned as being seized from the Venetians in the early 1280s.

A land register from 1296 documents that farmers from Karst paid their duties in wine, mentioning specifically Teran and Ribolla.

In the Middle Ages, wines from the Karst were prized across central Europe, especially by the Germans. In 1582, in the first documents describing the vibrant wine trade of Ljubljana, wines from the Vipava Valley and the Karst were mentioned as the most important. In his book “*The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*”, written in 1689 by Johann Weikhard von Valvasor (Janez Vajkard Valvasor), the noble historian described the production and trade of “Karst black wines”, crediting them with high quality as well. Priest Vrtovec wrote in his *Vinoreja* winegrowing compendium in 1844 that Teran was produced from Refosco grapes in the Karst and often sold at high prices to the nearby port of Trieste.

On the other hand, there is no written evidence about vineyards of major size in Karst before the phylloxera outbreak which arrived in 1888. In those times, vines were grown more as a side crop in the edges of the fields, often using maple trees as support. The low-quality “Gned” was still important then, a variety that is today no longer grown. In the wake of the post-phylloxera replanting in the first decades of the 20th century, the vineyards became more concentrated and purer, unmixed with other crops. Refosco became the leading variety and an overhead vine-training system locally known as *latnik* was brought in from South Tyrol.

In 1931 when the district was under Fascist Italy, they forbade trading wines with under 10% of alcohol, which directly impacted Teran. Growers would thus add other varieties to increase the alcohol levels. Development slowly continued after the Second World War, with a second replanting conducted in 1950.

Until the 1980s the overhead trellising system *latnik* was still the favored one. Then, especially in the newly planted vineyards, the Guyot system began gaining dominance due to the lower costs of trellising and workforce, not necessarily due to quality reasons. Nevertheless, the *latnik* remains a fixture of the Karst landscape, though tending such highly trained vines can be a tedious task requiring some extra equipment like ladders and low-height tractors. In the recent extremely hot years like 2007, 2012, 2013 and 2015, the shade provided by the *latnik* trellising appears to have been quite beneficial. Neither of the three local varieties: Refosco, Malvazija Istarska and Vitovska Grganja do not enjoy being exposed to the sun too much. At the end of the day, *latnik* trellising gives the Karst landscape its charm and character.

Trellising typical
of Karst (*latnik*)

Teran is by far
the most
important
wine of the
Kras district

When Slovenia became independent in 1991 it was a glorious age for Teran, which was considered to be one of the “most Slovenian” wines. Accordingly, there was a big expansion of Refosco plantings between 1993 and 2002.

What Grows There

Teran, Teran, and Teran. There is no other wine district in Slovenia so firmly dominated by one wine. 75% of the grapes grown are Refosco, from which Teran is made. Refosco blends, especially with Cabernet Sauvignon, or the latter as a varietal, are popular though achieving no outstanding results.

Teran PTP is a deep-coloured ruby red wine with violet tinges, grown on terra rossa soils and made 100% out of Refosco grapes. The alcohol level is low to moderate (10-13%), with typically high acidity levels. It is a highly particular wine, very much appreciated all around Slovenia especially in traditional simpler inns and taverns.

A better version of the above, with stricter rules and found only in bottles, is called “**Izbrani Teran PTP**”, where *izbrani* means “selected” or “special”. Teran is rarely a high-quality wine, though some wineries can produce notable examples. Some locals claim that its quality is dependent more on the vintage than the winery. Apparently, in 2010 and 2014 nobody made anything decent, while in 2011 and 2015 when phenolic ripeness in Refosco was possible, things went very well.

As Teran was considered a wine to be drunk within the first year of making, tendency arose to produce something more ageworthy and so **Teranton** was introduced in 1979 by Miran Vodopivec, at the time the chief oenologist in the Vinakras coop. The grapes for Teranton are picked later and only in the good years, achieving better phenolic ripeness and higher sugar content. Maceration can take up to 6 months, while maturation takes several years in small and big oak barrels. It arrives on the market some 6 years after the vintage.

High acidity and rather low tannin content makes Refosco a good choice for sparkling wine, which often has more appeal than Teran itself.

A couple open-minded producers have realised that it is perhaps a bit too cold in the average year for the reds here, including Refosco, to fully ripen, sparking an evident shift toward whites which generally also have more international potential than Teran. Vitovska Grganja, a native Karst variety found only here and in the Vipava Valley, was a decade ago practically non-existent even in Slovenia, but is now a popular favourite with the Malvazija Istarska following.

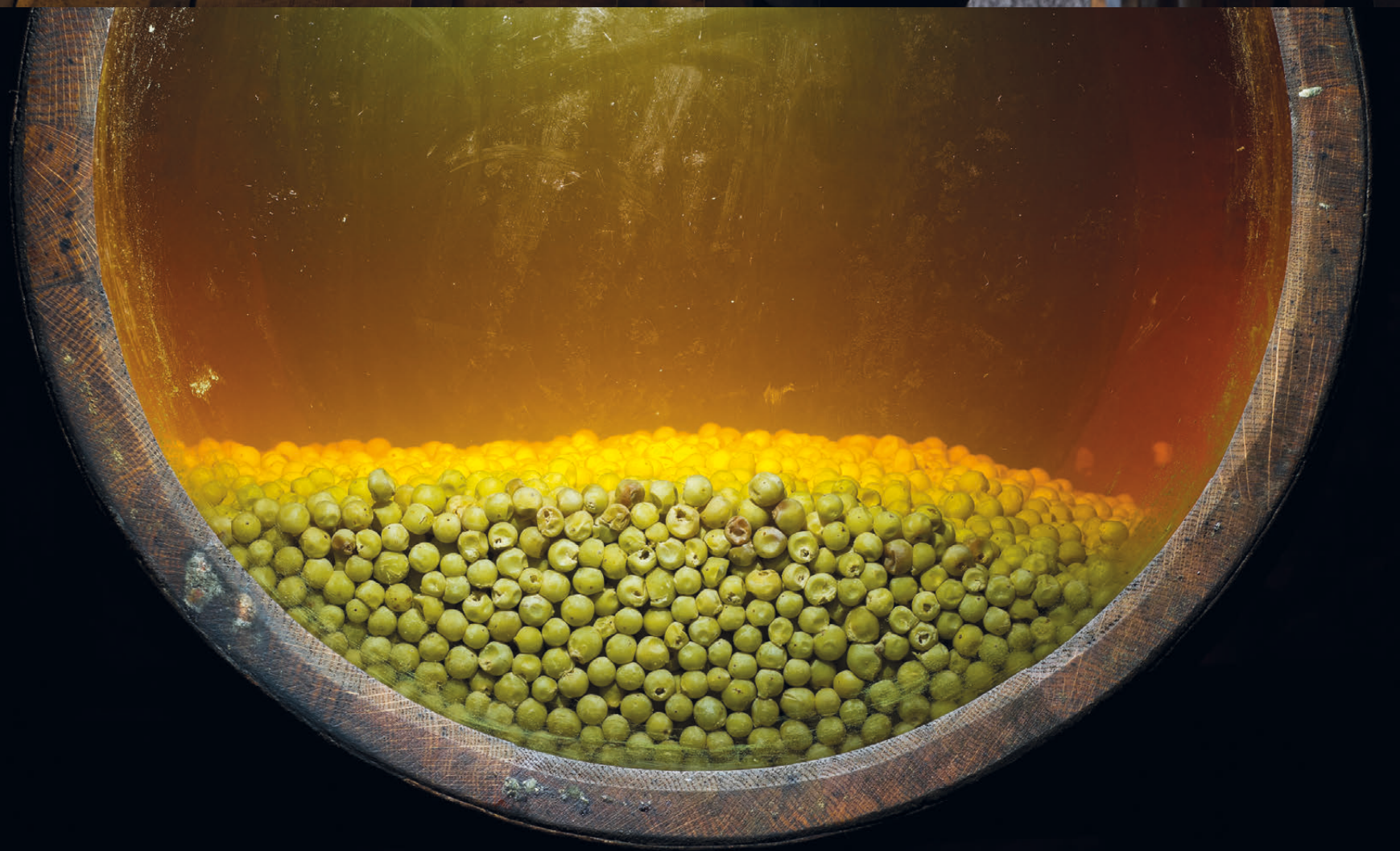
These two varieties are used to produce anything, from classic varietals made in stainless steel to long-macerated “orange” wines.

The sheer dominance of Teran and red wines in Karst is perhaps a bit artificial, driven by patriotism and emotions. In the higher Karst, in places such as Tomaj or Dutovlje, it was still a decade ago practically blasphemy to think about growing whites. Now, this is changing. In the highly comparable Italian district Carso DOC, the share of whites is for example close to 50%. There is certainly potential to explore in this context as today’s varieties are often not planted according to the soil type but more according to market demand. Deeper, heavier and wetter clay soil is what Refosco really needs to retain humidity even in the driest months. On top, harvest should be prolonged into the late October to achieve phenolic ripeness. In truth, there are far less hectares of such soil to be had here, some 60 ha according to sources, compared to the acreage (430 ha) today planted with Refosco. On the other hand Vitovska Grganja and Malvazija Istarska do fine in lighter and shallower soils. Vitovska Grganja would go “crazy” if planted in rich soil, resulting in overly diluted wines. Can we expect a serious shift towards whites in the future?





Refosco



Who is Who

Perhaps the most recognised winery from Karst is **Čotar** from Gorjansko run by Branko Čotar and his son Vasja. They started making wine in 1974 for the needs of their own restaurant. In 1990, they began bottling and selling to other establishments. Since their wine business keeps growing, the restaurant is now open only by appointment. They produce with a minimalistic, non-intervention approach, macerating whites for 4–10 days and reds for 10–20 days using native yeasts only. Wines are unfiltered and whites are, as a result, slightly hazy. Labels feature Branko's fingerprint on the reds and Vasja's on the whites. They make varietal Vitovska Grganja, Malvazija Istarska, Sauvignon Blanc, Teran, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon; the red blend Terra Rosa and two sparkling wines called "White" and "Red".

Joško **Renčel** is a small producer from Dutovlje known as "the Poet of Karst", an unconventional man producing wines that are often surprising and unpredictable. He was completely unknown to the public when Valter Kramar from Hiša Franko, one of the very best restaurants in Slovenia, discovered him and put him on his wine list in the early 90s. He was the first local winemaker to shift away from Teran, discovering the boons of the other varieties. Renčel is notorious for picking very late, sometimes going over the hill as a result. All his whites receive prolonged maceration, but he still wants them to retain their varietal character. His whites are on the market after four years, Teran after two-three years.

Vinakras cooperative is the biggest producer in the district and one of the few remaining cooperatives in the country. In 1947, when first grapes were bought from the farmers counts as the starting year for Vinakras, though it was formally constituted in 1955. In 1971 they built a new wine cellar in Sežana. Teran in various quality levels is the essence of their production, including a sparkling and sweet one. Those labelled Prestige and Elite can actually get very good. Vitovska Grganja and Malvazija Istarska are of merit as well.



The restless spirit of Joško Renčel infuses his entirely unconventional wines, too.

The quality of Teran has been steadily rising, especially with the most important maker of this wine.

Boris Lisjak is one of the founders of Slovenian private winemaking, and his seal of recognition is a bottle designed by the famous Oskar Kogoj.

Mateja Kodrič
of the Širca-
Kodrič winery

Vitovska Grganja

KRAS DISTRICT

Boris Lisjak from Dutovlje started bottling his wines in the early 1970s as one of the first private producers in Slovenia. Today, his name is always first that comes to mind when somebody mentions a good bottle of Teran. He also makes solid Cabernet Sauvignon, Vitovska, and Sara which is a blend of Refosco, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The shape of his bottles, created by famous designer Oskar Kogoj, is quite extraordinary. The bottles might be difficult to handle and store, but to many they look very beautiful and are sought as presents.

Sebastjan Štemberger, living in Šepulje on a self-sufficient organically run farmhouse with 350 years of winemaking tradition, is generating more and more attention with his wines. The vineyards are based both in Kras and in the Vipava Valley, two thirds are 40 years old and pergola-trained. Reds are good, whites, especially Vitovska Grganja, can be marvellous. His approach might be minimalistic, but Štemberger wants his wines to be complete. Indeed, they do show good definition, something wineries with a “natural” approach aren’t always able to achieve.

Marko Fon runs a small family-based winery **Vinogradi Fon** in Brje, close to Komen. He grows three varieties only: Refosco, Vitovska Grganja and Malvazija Istarska, saying he has no idea what do to with Merlot or Chardonnay. He prefers small-sized vineyards, grows grapes using organic principles and keeps a low-intervention approach in the cellar. Production is minute.

The list of other well-known wineries from Karst includes **Štoka**, **Štok**, **Širca-Kodrič** and **Colja**, all gaining their reputation with Teran, plus the organic **Marko Tavčar**.



Vitovska Grganja has been exploding in popularity, and the “orange” one from house Štemberger will show you just why.

Terra Rossa
Grape leaf
in autumn

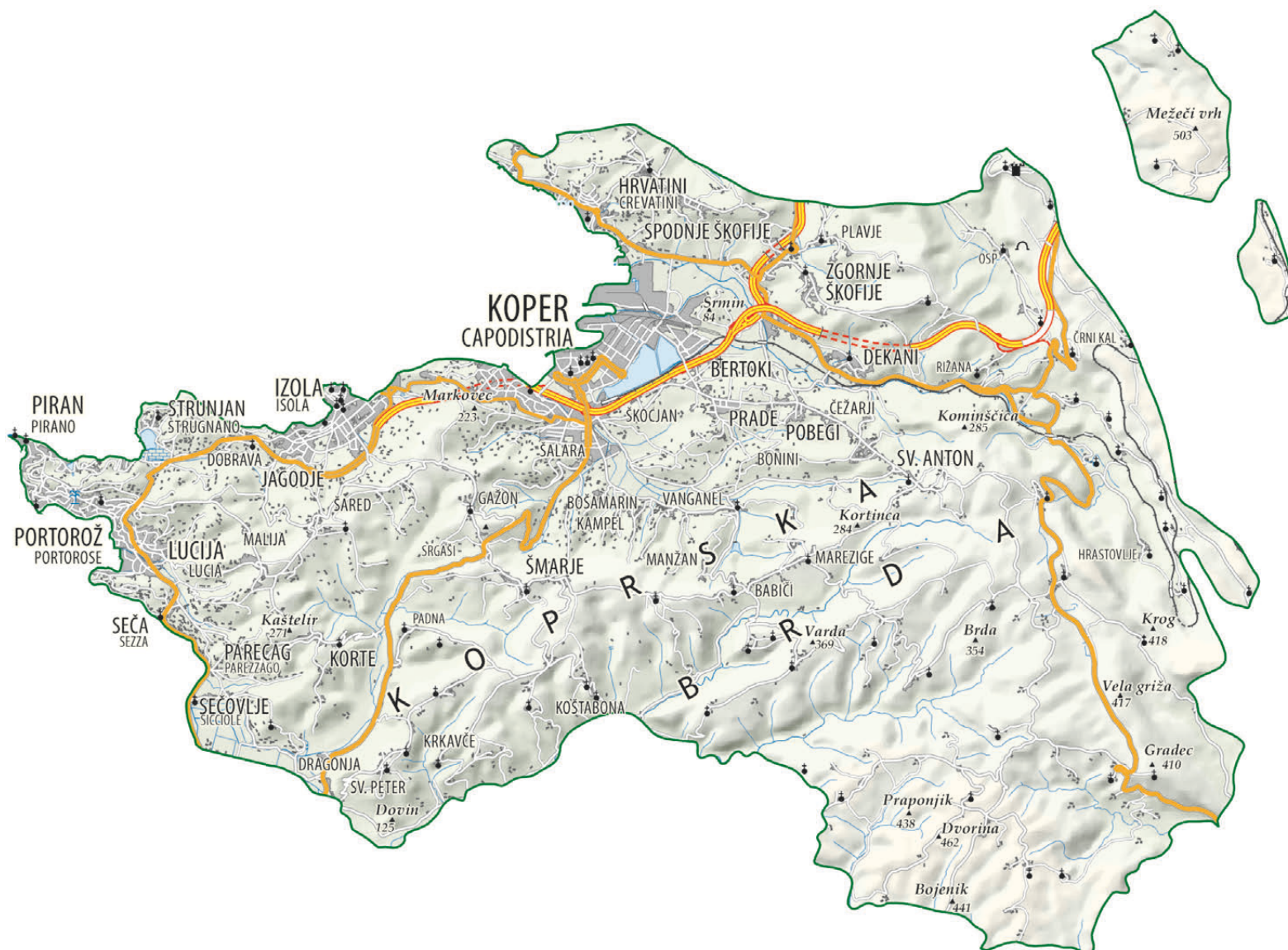




SLOVENSKA ISTRA
DISTRICT



SLOVENSKA ISTRA DISTRICT



Vineyard area	1,836 ha
Grape growers	1,922
Winemakers	175
Average annual rainfall	900–1,300 mm
Climate	Sub-Mediterranean
Most important grape varieties	Refosco, Malvazija Istarska
Notable producers	Santomas, Vinakoper, Pucer z Vrha, Brič, Bordon, Klen'Art, Korenika & Moškon, Montemoro, Rojac, Steras, Zaro
List of permitted white grape varieties	Chardonnay, Malvazija Istarska, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc
List of permitted red grape varieties	Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cipro, Gamay, Maločrn, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Refosco, Syrah

Introduction

Slovenska Istra (Slovenian Istria) is Slovenia's southernmost wine district and the only one with direct access to the sea. The name Istria is derived from the Histri, a fierce Venetic-Illyrian tribe which lived in the region until the Romans subdued them in 177 BC. Istria is the largest peninsula in the Adriatic Sea, shared between Slovenia and Croatia, with a significantly smaller north-western part belonging to the former and a much bigger part to the latter. The biggest city is Koper. Izola, Piran and Portorož are other important tourist centres on the Slovenian coast. Marezige with its annual Refosco Feast (*Praznik refoška*) is perhaps the most famous village inland.

Position and Geographical Features

The northern part of the district borders Italy, to the east it touches the Karst plateau called Čičarija, while to the south it borders Croatia and its own Istria wine district. The border between Istria and Karst is especially obvious in the northeast, with remarkable cliffs on display. To the west, the district's border is drawn by the coast of the Trieste gulf, the northernmost and coldest part of the otherwise warm Mediterranean Sea. Two rivers flow through the district, Rižana River in the north and the bordering Dragonja River in the south.

Climate and Soil

The bedrock in Istria is composed of Eocene flysch sediments, the topsoil is mostly marl-flysch and sandstone-flysch. The climate is sub-Mediterranean with warm to hot, dry summers and mild winters. Frosts are no issue here, but winds can do damage, breaking buds and shoots or interfering during the flowering. The northerly, continental and colder wind is called *Burja* (Bora) and can reach enormous speeds up to 200 km/h, regularly exceeding 120 km/h. The southerly wet and warm wind coming from the sea and bringing rain is called *Jugo* ('the Southern'). Maestral is a mild thermal summer breeze in the direction from sea to land, the latter getting warmer more rapidly than the water.

This is the warmest district in the country, allowing "hot-blooded" varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and lately Syrah to fully ripen during most of the years, something no other Slovenian district can claim. The district is divided into the *coastal* sub-district, with vineyards at up to 250 m of altitude descending to nearly sea level, and the inland part with the *Šavrini Hills* featuring long, wide and well-defined ridges and valleys with altitudes reaching 400–500 m. The vineyards there can reach an altitude of up to 400 m. Villages are typically nestled at the hilltops.

Soils are rather similar in both sub-districts, but the continental influence is significantly stronger in the inland sub-district compared to the coastal one, resulting in some 2°C lower annual temperature averages. On top of that, the coastal sub-district has less extreme temperatures in winter and summer alike, along with warmer nights to boot.

Rainfall in the coastal part averages around 1,000–1,100 mm, while inland it can reach up to 1,300 mm. Precipitation is not evenly distributed throughout the season, with one peak in September–November and another at the end of spring. In the months of July and August, droughts can be a concern.

A Bit of History

Drinking vessels from necropolises found in Istria dating to the Iron Age reveal that wine was regularly consumed here way back in BC times. It is likely, though, that the wine was then not produced locally but imported.

Grape leaf

Boštjan Zidar
of Vinakoper





Refosco maturing in old oak barrels

The expansion of the Roman Empire contributed to the development of winegrowing in Istria. Roman mentions of Istrian wine are rare, but the winemakers of Istria are proud to mention Pliny (much like their fellows from Karst) and his writings on Vinum Pucinum.

When the Histri were defeated in 177 BC, the towns of Tergeste, Pola and Parentium (Trieste, Pula and Poreč) were founded in 1st century BC. Plenty of archaeological findings, including amphorae and several “Villa Rustica” – a set of buildings containing an agricultural section – speak of the importance of winemaking here. Some ancient Villa Rustica estates were discovered with a preserved press or several of these, though none were found in today’s Slovenia. They appear to have been capable of pressing large amounts of grapes. Wines from Istria were not often documented in Roman times, but quite many Istrian amphorae of the “Dressel 6” type were unearthed, mostly around the Po River and Istria but also close to Rome in Carinthia, Budapest. Olive oil was another important Istrian commodity.

After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD and up until 6th century AD, due to its excellent geographic position and distance from the major Barbaric invasions, the agricultural activities in Istria (including the production of wine) didn’t stagnate as they did in other parts of today’s Slovenia. In 538, the Gothic military commander Cassiodor who reigned over these lands was ordering wines from Istria for his soldiers. Istria was a vibrant trade centre with goods coming in from as far as northern Africa. That changed in the 7th century with the invasion of the Langobards and the Avari-Slavs. Roman population moved to the coast where winegrowing continued on a much smaller scale with a very closed economy. Vineyards are mentioned in the famous *The Placitum of Riziano* assembly from 804. In 932, the town Koper committed to paying 100 amphorae of wine annually to the Doge of Venetia to uphold their alliance.

At the end of the 13th century Istria became part of the Republic of Venetia where Istrian growers were subject to high export duties (20%-30%) when trading outside their land. No wonder, then, that smuggling, especially of wine and salt, become an issue that didn’t end until the collapse of the Republic in 1797. In the 13th century, vines were widespread in Piran and its hinterland, wherever there was agricultural land, enjoying a dominant position among the crops. Wine was a top export merchandise sold to Venice, to the wider Mediterranean, to Holland, Germany and also inland to Carniola, while lots of it was also consumed locally within well-regulated and taxed wholesale and retail trade. Exporting wine from Piran was the main objective of four out of five cargo expeditions in the period from 1280 to 1340. Wine was so important that even debts, leases or inheritance were sometimes expressed in wine, acting as money itself!

Vineyards belonged to the commune, the church and to private holders. The way the vines and vineyards were supposed to be tended was regulated in detail. Riboleum (Ribolla) is the first wine mentioned by name, in an inheritance document from 21 April 1235 referencing a vineyard in Strunjan. It most likely referred to a type/origin of wine and not the variety as we know it today. The Ottokar Chronicle from the turn of the 14th century lists 17 types of wines seized from Venetians in the early 1280s including Wine from Muggia, Ribolla, Greek wine, Teran, Muscat, Malvasia. Wine was mostly stored in oak and ash tree barrels, but other vessel such as amphorae were still used, too.

The bishop Giacomo Filippo Tommasini (1595-1655) from Novigrad wrote comprehensively in his time about varieties, winegrowing districts, how vines were cultivated and how wine was made, and where the Istrian wine was traded. He also wrote about the potential developments of the wine business and described the following wines: **Prosecco**, **Muscat**, highly prized *King’s Wine*, sweet **Ribolla** from Isola and Muggia, **Kosmatica** (“long-haired”) aka **Pelosa** or **Calcionesa** which likes heavy soils as opposed to **Pirella**, which likes stony places. Black and sweet **Refosco** aka **Grand Teran** took the highest spot among red wines, followed by **Gropella** and red **Hrvatica** (Croatina?). The record of whites included gentle Ci-



vidin with tiny berries, **Tribian**, **Malvasia** and **Imperatoria**. “*Wines from Istria are praised,*” compliments Tomassini, “*as they are produced with no added water.*”

Črnokalec (wine from Črni Kal) was mentioned in 1681 by Valvasor. He also wrote that Istria made huge quantities of good, mainly red wine.

After the fall of the Republic of Venetia in 1797 and a brief period under the French Provinces (1809–1813), Istria became part of the Austrian Empire up until WWI.

Pietro Stancovich, a canon from Barbano, published in Milano a book in 1825 describing different methods of winemaking, making an account of wines from Istria. He divided them into “bottled” (Monte Moro, Pikolit, Arzioli, Šantoma, S. Petronio) and varietal (Marzemino, Refosco, Prosecco, Cividino, Ribolla, Muscat). He states Istrian wines were being exported to the New World where they were appreciated as much as Spanish and French ones. However, when export diminished after a particular crisis, he urged winemakers to improve quality by discontinuing old habits and embracing new knowledge, as found in the cited works of respected physicists, chemists, agronomists and oenologists.

Going on, he describes how in Istria, grapes were not pressed with presses, but rather put in massive wooden vessels and crushed with bare feet.

In the 19th century many winemaking techniques such as de-stemming, maceration, racking, fining, sulphuring, topping-up... were already well understood but all to rarely used.

Agronomist Carlo Hugues in 1889 writes in his booklet that cleanliness and the use of sulphur are essential, and that a layer of green mould is not good protection for the barrel, neither an acetic smell from the barrel a good sign as some were claiming. He adds that the harvest time is not a question of habit but rather a matter of scientific fact that should be measured with instruments. Sound wisdom that could use a greater following even today. He also describes a bad habit that “ought to be urgently avoided”: fermenting white grapes together with the skins.

Just before the phylloxera outbreak, many vineyards in Istria, very much like in the Karst in those days, featured a training system called “*na klen*” (onto the maple tree), where maples evenly distributed at a few meters of distance, or mulberry or oak trees as well, provided support to four vines each. The crowns offered protection against rain and reduced the pressure of downy mildew and powdery mildew.

In the “*brajda*” training system, forked stakes (*rogovile*) were used instead.

After the phylloxera, these systems were mostly replaced by the overhead training system called *latnik* and the so-called *pared* where single vines are planted in rows and supported by stakes. Until WW2, vegetables and crops were grown between the vines, though farmers soon realized that wasn't best for the produce.

Phylloxera broke out in 1880 and was first spotted around Piran. Because the vineyard area was doubled in years 1880–1900, there was no shortage of wine after all. When the pest passed, the vineyards were successfully replanted with American rootstocks. During WWI, downy mildew (*peronospora*) and powdery mildew (*oidium*) affected the vineyards extensively due to the lack of workforce and maintenance. From 1918 till the end of WWII, Istria was part of Italy and faced stiff competition from other regions since Italy was at the time the second biggest producer of wine after France. Still, the vineyard surface area remained unchanged. It is interesting to note that white wines were favoured during this period, as Istria was a northern region in the eyes of the Italians and the country already had more than enough reds. In 1948, 60% of the vines planted here were whites! It was during the 1950s when today's list of varieties for the district was determined, more or less, though in quite different proportions than it appears now.

Only in Istria
are there
vineyards with
a view of the sea

Piran





Tartrate crystals forming in oak barrels

In 1947 the VINO (Wine) Company was formed, trading wines from Istria and setting up cellars all around the peninsula, with the main one stationed in Koper. The company was buying wine from farmers and selling it to inns, restaurants and bars, a lot of it was exported. In 1954 it transformed into VINO-KOPER, what is today **Vinakoper**. Their new cellar was finished in 1951 and remains in the same place. Curiously, the barrels for the new cellar were crafted in Tacen close to Ljubljana, including one of the biggest wooden barrels in Europe with a volume of 41,427 litres which is still on display in the Vinakoper cellars. Tacen used to be an important barrel-making centre, selling its product all across Slovenia, Dalmatia and even Serbia.

Following WWII, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot were brought from France in order to demonstrate that these two international varieties can grow successfully in Istria (they sure can!) and because Refosco was barely known outside of Trieste. Refosco started gaining its dominance in the 70s. With the replanting, some varieties, namely Moscato Rosa (Cipro), Plavina (Maločrn), Borgonja, Belica from Izola, Kanariola became extinct or pushed to the brink of existence.

Let us also mention some old varieties such as Bjankera, Beli Muškat ('White Muscat'), Duranija, Belina, Pagadebiti, Kanarjola, that are of no economic importance but have been part of the Istrian story for centuries.

After the Second World War the vineyards began stagnating and the quality of wine in Istria was, honestly, below average for some time. There was a saying that Istrians are good winegrowers but rather mediocre winemakers who'd often store wine in the same place as the other crops or even in their workshop. The quality situation in the Slovenska Istra began to improve rather late, only in mid 1980s, when Iztok Klenar arrived in 1985 to Vinakoper as chief oenologist. The year coincides with the first bottling of a private producer in Slovenska Istra. The honour goes to Ivan **Bordon** from Dekani.

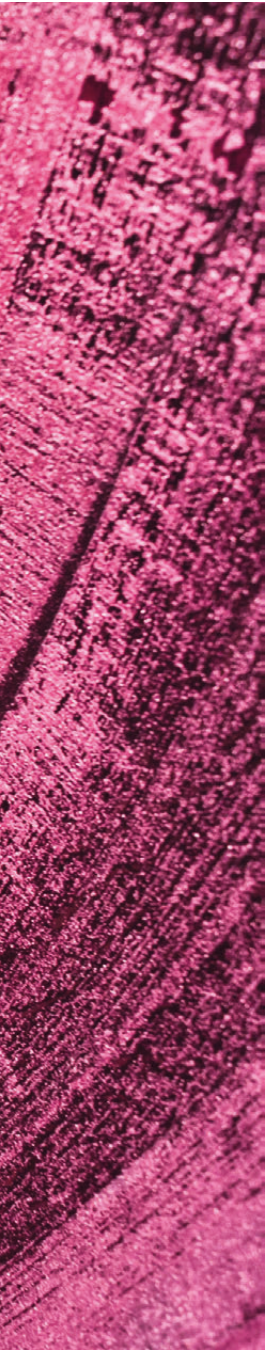
What Grows There

Refosco is king and Malvazija Istarska queen, as winemakers like to say when referring to their most important varieties. Refosco today populates 45% of the vineyard area, while Malvazija Istarska takes a good 30%. King and queen indeed. Except in the small Karst district where Refosco takes 75%, there is no other district where one or two varieties exhibit such dominance. It was not always like this, as seen in the history chapter above. Whites became a major force while Istria was part of Italy, whereas Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon were favoured after WWII, being replanted as the Refosco planting material was inferior. From the 1980s on though, Refosco was on a meteoric rise, almost completely monopolising the "picture of Istria". In the last decade or two, Malvazija Istarska has been gaining momentum as winemakers realised they went a bit overboard with the Refosco craze and could use something to serve with fish.

A couple decades ago, Refosco was not a very particular thing. There was a lack of supply and everything sold fast, so the Refosco was often overcropped, giving rather green, unpleasant, highly acidic wines that were consumed as house wine all around the country. Perhaps it was the opaque colour that appealed to the unsophisticated consumer?

The condition of Malvazija Istarska was perhaps even worse. All too often, it was on the edge of even being drinkable, heavy, flabby and even oxidised, faulty, hazy. Why bother anyway, since Refosco was doing so much good business...

Then, starting with the 90s, things changed drastically. Numerous private producers joined the scene while Vinakoper was already steadily raising the quality game.



Refosco has since become much more civilized. The producers learned that finding good warm vineyards was beneficial, yields ought to be controlled, and that some extra hanging time would help reach physiological ripeness, better sugar levels and knock down the acidity Refosco is never lacking.

With Malvazija Istarska the challenge was rather opposite. Sugar and consequently alcohol levels are easily on the higher side, while preserving acidity and freshness is another challenge. Producers opted to plant Malvazija Istarska in cooler vineyard sites and to pick earlier.

The district is perhaps the only one where Cabernet Sauvignon can ripen properly in most years. Syrah is the latest asset in the vineyards, showing lots of promise.

Who is Who

Santomas is for sure the most internationally well-known producer in the Slovenska Istra district. The family tradition of winegrowing started in late 19th century already, but really took off in 1997 when Ludvig Nazarij Glavina, a businessman from Šmarje who made his fortune trading, inherited the property from his late father and decided to establish the Santomas winery. He was always aiming high, comparing his wines at blind tastings with the best in the world to see where he needed to go.

He quickly realised he could use assistance from somebody with a broader perspective, hiring as consultant Claude Gros, the Frenchman from Languedoc who is perhaps even better known for his Shirazes at the Château La Negly. Gros fell in love with the savage Refosco grape and carried it to levels previously unknown in the region. Ludvik's daughter Tamara, a trained biologist, who is today the chief oenologist and head of the winery, joined her father in 2005. Their reds are full-bodied, robust, intense, complex, with the top tier wines easily aging a couple of decades. The newly planted Syrah vineyard (2008) is something to keep an eye on. Their Malvazija Istarska is one of the best on the coast.

With the advent of the Santomas Wine Cellar in the late 90s, a fresh breath of air blew across Istria.

Vinakoper is the biggest national producer of Refosco, and their line Capo d'Istria features their premium selection of wines.

Pucer's Malvazija Pristna is a true classic and one of the best expression of this variety in the whole of Istria, including the Croatian side.



Flysch soil.
Uroš Rojac
of Rojac Wines

Tamara Glavina
of Santomas
Wines





Since 2015, the paramount quality (which was always there) is confirmed by scores from Wine Advocate routinely reaching over 90, even up to 94+ points.

Vinakoper was for a long while the only name connected with Istria. The winery was formed in 1947. Today they own 570 ha of vineyards, one third of the district's total, which makes them the biggest vineyards owner in Slovenia though not the biggest producer. The entire winery is formed around Refosco and Malvazija Istarska. The former is, no guessing needed, their most important variety.

Their wines are produced in four basic ranges. Wines from the Capris range are often among the best-value wines in the country, while the Capo d'Istria range, coming at quite a price, brings some of the best Refosco, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon from Slovenia. Their Merlot can be surprisingly good, and the Sladki Muškat ('Sweet Muscat') is, rightly, one of the best-selling wines in Slovenia.

Their "House of Refosco" at the winery site, just near the exit from the H5/H6 motorway, is a well visited attraction. A wine shop and tastings are available on the spot.

Valter Pucer named his winery **Pucer z Vrha** to distinguish himself from other Pucers who are rather numerous in the area. Pucer z Vrha has dedicated himself to Malvazija Istarska and there are only two hectares of it! Well, he has a dash of Muscat in the vineyards, too, but no Refosco. Must unusual for this district where the grape is normally ubiquitous. Perhaps such dedication explains why his Malvasias are easily the best around, perhaps even in the entire region, including Croatian part. His range includes several, the premium ones being full-bodied and a bit heavy, but his stainless steel Malvazija Pristna is simply a reference!

Ivan **Bordon** was the first private producer in the district, who started bottling his wines in 1985. The winery's range includes Refosco, Malvazija Istarska, Merlot and rosé, but it is perhaps his blend of all three main Bordeaux varieties with Refosco, called Bon d'Or, that made him renowned with the wider public. A sparkling rosé named Ana, after his daughter who now manages oenology, is his latest addition to the range.

Brič is with its 40 ha the second biggest estate in the Slovenska Istra after Vinakoper. The winery lies on the very border with Croatia and features a beautiful building designed by famous architect Boris Podrecca alongside a lovely view across the inland hills of the Slovenian and Croatian Istria. It arguably belongs among the 100 most beautiful cellars in the world. This is one of the very few wineries in Slovenia owned by a non-Slovenian, a Croat in this case. In Slovenia, Brič struggled to achieve the penetration and recognition one might expect from a representative of its size and quality.

The latest and increasingly significant player on the coast is the winery **Klen'Art**. Aleksander Klenar and his well-known father Iztok, ex-winemaker at Vinakoper, are doing a great job with their classic sparkling wine based on Chardonnay and Pinot Gris, as well as Refosco and Malvazija Istarska of course. International flair is contributed by both Cabernets, Merlot and, surprise, surprise, Pinot Noir.

Korenika & Moškon winery is based inland in Korte. The family has had a long history of producing wine, however, the bottling processes started in 1985. Their bread and butter are Refosco and Malvazija Istarska, but international grapes such as Pinot Gris, Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains, Cabernet Sauvignon and some white and red blends add to the portfolio. Quality in this winery has improved a lot recently, which might be connected to their conversion to biodynamic.

Matjaž Babič founded **MonteMoro** in 2000. Traditional Istrian varieties, Refosco, Malvazija Istarska and Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains form the base of the winery range. These are produced as varietals, while international grapes are used to make blends. Their top line is called aMorus, presenting big, robust and quite expensive wines.

With its size and track record of production since 2002, **Rodica** counts among the notable wineries in the region. The quality at this estate can vary, and wines are occasionally a little rough, however Rodica

was one of the first organically certified wineries in the country, and their hospitality capacities make them an important touristic factor in the Istria hinterland.

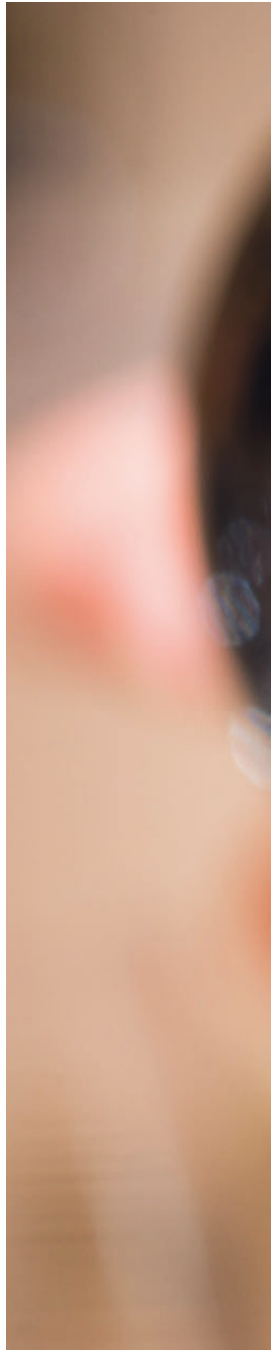
Rojac family settled in Gažon in the 17th century. Energetic Bruno Rojac released his first bottles in 1994. I will personally never forget my first arrival to the property as a fresh student, alongside my younger brother. It was dark outside, we were terribly late and just wanted to say hello, apologize and leave. But Bruno received us with a big smile and an open heart. He died much too soon, in 2005 when his son Uroš, a trained agronomist had to take over. Minimal intervention is the main idea behind the wines that occasionally lack a bit of definition but are still among the most visible in the region.

STeraS winery is run by the young and knowledgeable Tilen Praprotnik. His parents were no farmers, but they fell in love with the region and bought a property in Šared, moving there from the city. Steras corresponds to “from terraces” in translation, implying that their vineyards are positioned on slopes. Malvazija Istarska and Refosco are, naturally, the main varieties at the property. Recently they planted a vineyard with local varieties such as Kanarjola (Canaiole Bianco), Istrian White, Cipro, Pinjola and White Refosco (Glera). Some of these will go varietal!

A very tall man, Bruno **Zaro** used to be a basketball player in his youth until falling head over heels in love with wine. His Malvasias are always good, even the very basic one which he serves by the glass in his wine bar. He also makes nice white and red blends called Folo Bianco and Folo Rosso. The white is a blend of Malvazija Istarska and Pinot Gris, while the red blends Refosco and Cabernet Sauvignon. He runs the Manzioli Wine bar in Isola, which we can only recommend. His son Matej is now about to take over the family business.

The list of other notable producers includes **Černe**, **Gordia** making macerated whites (aka orange wine), and **Klabjan** who advocates a natural approach with minimalistic intervention, crafting wines in two ranges: white label (15–30 year-old-vines) and black label (30+ year-old vines).

It's good to keep in mind
there are several Malvasias
around the world, but Malvazija
Istarska has been the
one making waves for several
years now.





Cheers!



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