

# Friuli-Venezia Giulia's native whites

The region's lesser-known white varieties Friulano, Malvasia Istriana, Ribolla Gialla and Vitovska are gaining recognition. Michael Garner profiles each one, and picks 18 of his top-scoring wines

Back in the 1970s, Friuli-Venezia Giulia was hailed as 'the promised land' for Italy's burgeoning fine white wine scene. Winemakers such as Silvio Jermann and Mario Schiopetto, having embraced modern winemaking philosophy and new technology, became legends. Such privileged status continues today, at least at national level; for now, the area's wines remain less well known further afield.

About 75% of production here is white, and while Friuli might be best known for its excellent and distinctive Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon, the region's talented winemakers are now gaining a reputation for varieties regarded as native. Four in particular stand out: Friulano, Malvasia Istriana, Ribolla Gialla and Vitovska. Across the region's four DOCG and 12 DOC areas, these account for about 14% of vineyard plantings.

**Friulano** (Sauvignonasse in Chile, Sauvignon Vert in Bordeaux) is clearly the 'favourite child', with almost 9.5% of plantings. A versatile grape, Friulano works well as a fresh, young varietal; the red apple and yellow peach fruit characters have mineral and saline notes, supported by a juicy freshness and silky palate. Extra time on the lees and/or judicious ageing in wood (preferably the traditional oak or chestnut botti) develops extra intensity, bringing candied and preserved fruit tones as well as rich, savoury leesy qualities. Friulano is capable of ageing well – up to 10 years in some cases.

**Malvasia Istriana**, with about 1.5% of vineyard plantings, remains an enigma. The most distinctive of the various Malvasia varieties, it is characterised by pronounced mineral aromas and flavours. Good Malvasia Istriana will be firm-bodied, with a floral-toned, white peach character and a sharp, Seville orange-like acidity. Developing well in bottle over three or four years, it can take on almost Riesling-like notes.

**Ribolla Gialla** (about 3% of plantings in Collio and Colli Orientali, where it has DOC status) swims against the tide. Whereas most of the region's white wines are rich and ripe, strong

on texture, aroma and flavour, Ribolla Gialla is much lighter-bodied, with higher than average acidity. Best drunk young, a typical version shows notes of white pepper, turmeric root and spring flowers with hints of Asian pear and fragrant lemon. Such delicacy requires careful wood treatment, if any.

Lean, lithe and full of vigour, **Vitovska** is made in tiny quantities only in the Carso area but is nonetheless worth seeking out. A classic Vitovska has remarkable freshness, with smoky and limey mineral notes, lively acidity, and a saline finish. It's worth noting that blends such as Collio Bianco and Colli Orientali Bianco (both DOC), containing a combination of Friulano, Ribolla and Malvasia, can also be stunning.



**Michael Garner** is a co-owner of Italian wine specialist Tria Wines, and DWWA Regional Chair for northern Italy. His second book, *Amarone and the Fine Wines of Verona*, was published in 2017 (£30, Infinite Ideas)



PHOTOGRAPH MARCO MILANI

**Lis Neris, La Vila Friulano, Friuli Isonzo 2010**

£29.40-£34.80 (2017) Hedonism, Tannico  
Working with low yields, ageing in tonneaux and using frequent batonnage prior to bottling, Alvaro Pecorari makes a Friulano capable of sustaining many years' ageing. The 2010 is full, ripe, richly perfumed and textured, and shows immaculate poise and length. A benchmark example from a good vintage. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%



**Picéché, Jelka, Collio 2015**

POA (2016) Bat and Bottle  
Following fermentation and lees ageing in large barrels, this blend of Friulano, Malvasia and Ribolla is matured for a further three years in cement. About 3,500 bottles of gloriously perfumed and rich wine are produced, displaying flashes of camomile, orange blossom, marzipan and walnut, with a long finish of seasoned oak and mineral notes. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



**Toros, Friulano, Collio 2019**

£27 Tannico  
The Collio denomination is renowned for its opulent and powerful wines that originate from the characteristic marl and sandstone soils known locally as *ponca*. Fermentation and ageing in stainless steel allows the pristine fruit characters of this bottling to shine through in their untrammelled glory, before a long, clean, salty and creamy finish. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 14.5%



**Doi Mats, Friulano, Friuli Colli Orientali 2019**

N/A UK [www.doimats.com](http://www.doimats.com)  
A little more than 1,000 bottles were produced of this singular Friulano from a tiny garage winery in Colli Orientali. It's aged partly in used barriques and partly in clay anfora. Sourced from low-yielding old vines, the wine displays uncommon life and energy: round and ripe with minty, limey, juicy fruit flavours that carry notes of woodsmoke and sea salt. **Drink** 2021-2027 **Alc** 13.5%



**Murva, Melaris Malvasia, Friuli Isonzo 2017**

£20.50 Tannico  
From less than 1ha of vines at Moraro in the Isonzo denomination, this small, family-run winery produces about 4,000 bottles annually of intense and aromatic Malvasia. Redolent of marzipan and orange blossom, the palate is rich in mineral, bitter orange and candied fruit flavours, with superb balancing acidity. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



**Parovel, Barde Pôje, Carso 2016**

N/A UK [www.parovel.com](http://www.parovel.com)  
The Carso denomination produces Friuli's most mineral-toned wines thanks to the area's unique sandstone and marl terrain. This wine spends about six months on the lees followed by extra ageing in the bottle. Scented lime and white peach aromas marry with great sapidity, leading to a long, juicy, dry and smoky finish. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%



**Ronco del Gelso, Toc Bas, Friuli Isonzo 2019**

£20.30 (2018) Tannico  
Made in a traditional style with 12 months' ageing on the fine lees in large 25hl casks, this is classic old-school Friulano: full, round and rich with good texture and length. Flavours of hazelnut and fennel with cool, juicy, green fruit notes lead to a long, smoky and salty finish. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 13.5%



**Specogna, Friulano Riserva, Friuli Colli Orientali 2016**

POA Liberty Wines  
The third generation of the Specogna family farms about 20ha of land at Rocca Bernada in the Colli Orientali. Following 24 hours' skin maceration, and fermentation and ageing in barrel, this intense, single-vineyard Riserva is loaded with lime marmalade and candied fruit notes over rich, salty and nutty flavours. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



**Castello di Buttrio, Ribolla Gialla, Friuli Colli Orientali 2019**

£21 Tannico  
From vineyards surrounding the 17th century castle, Alessandra Felluga produces a Ribolla Gialla fermented and matured on the lees in stainless steel. It's fresh, ripe and delicate, with newly mown hay, camomile and yellow flower aromas. Juicy, floral and herbal-toned flavours of Asian pear are balanced by brisk acidity. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13.5% ▶



**Drius, Malvasia, Friuli Isonzo 2019**N/A UK [www.driusmauro.it](http://www.driusmauro.it)

Following fermentation in stainless steel, 25% of the wine is matured in botte for about eight months on its lees. The nose is broad, ripe and full with floral and mineral notes, while the palate is ripe and fleshy with the classic long, tapering and stony dry finish so typical of the variety. **Drink** 2021-2027 **Alc** 13.5%



92

**Ferlat, Friulano, Friuli Isonzo 2019**N/A UK [www.ferlatvini.it](http://www.ferlatvini.it)

An extreme example of Friulano from this tiny cellar at Cormons in the Isonzo DOC. Fermented in cement with lengthy lees ageing and the malolactic completed, the wine just about negotiates the tightrope across the pitfall of oxidation to an abundance of full, leesy, salty and nutty mineral flavours. Highly individual! **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13%



92

**Le Vigne di Zamò, Ribolla Gialla, Friuli Colli Orientali 2019**

£17.50 Vinissimus

Partly fermented in stainless steel at low temperatures, the remaining 20% ferments in 25hl oak barrels and the wine stays on the fine lees for eight months before bottling. Fragrant jasmine and pear aromas usher in a light, fresh and delicate palate of great poise and lovely acidity. Subtle and understated. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 13%



92

**Rodaro, Friulano, Friuli Colli Orientali 2019**N/A UK [www.rodaropaolo.it](http://www.rodaropaolo.it)

The fresh and youthful style of Friulano can be deceptively simple. Here, the ripe, lively, scented nose of red apple and yellow peach has hints of angelica and lemon zest, while the palate is full and juicy with citrusy acidity and a satisfying, lightly salty finish: hedonism in a glass. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



92

**Cantina Produttori Cormons, Uve Autoctone, Collio 2018**N/A UK [www.cormons.com](http://www.cormons.com)

120 families farming 350ha of vines make up the cooperative at Cormons. The Collio Bianco is a blend of Friulano, Malvasia Istriana and Ribolla Gialla matured for about 16 months in large oval-shaped botti. With lemon candy and jasmine aromas, the wine is rich and juicy with balanced oak and pretty floral notes. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



91

**Castelvechio, Vitovska, Carso 2019**N/A UK [www.castelvechio.com](http://www.castelvechio.com)

This organic wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and stored on the fine lees in stainless steel. It shows focused aromas of green fruit, nettles and herbs. The palate teems with zingy and crunchy gooseberry and lime flavours, balanced by lively acidity and a tapering, sapid and mineral-toned finish. **Drink** 2021-2023 **Alc** 12.5%



91

**Le Due Torri, Friulano Superiore, Friuli Grave 2018**N/A UK [www.le2torri.com](http://www.le2torri.com)

Le Due Torri produces handcrafted wines from 8ha in the Grave DOC. This example of the little-used Superiore category (which involves additional ageing before release) follows the basic tenets of modern winemaking for a full-throttle style with promising development of aroma and flavour, yet which retains good freshness. **Drink** 2021-2024 **Alc** 13%



91

**Pizzulin, Friulano, Friuli Colli Orientali 2019**N/A UK [www.pizzulin.com](http://www.pizzulin.com)

Denis Pizzulin farms 11ha of vines at Prepotto in the Colli Orientali. While the area is best known as the home of the red grape Schioppettino, it can produce excellent whites too, as this delicious Friulano ably demonstrates. Salty, lightly roasted cashew nut flavours are lifted by hints of camomile and evening primrose. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 14%



91

**Russiz Superiore, Friulano, Collio 2019**

POA Available via UK agent Dalla Terra

Partly fermented in barrel and partly in stainless steel with additional lees contact and bottle ageing, this modern-style Friulano offers a broad range of aroma and flavour. The ripe, peachy fruit is supported by good acidity, while the oak confers a lightly buttery texture, resulting in impressive roundness and depth. **Drink** 2021-2025 **Alc** 13.5% **D**



91






  
CASTELLO DI BUTTRIO

Decanter  
PANEL TASTING  
**92**  
PUNTI

[www.castellodibuttrio.it/en](http://www.castellodibuttrio.it/en)

 [castellodibuttriowines](https://www.facebook.com/castellodibuttriowines)

 [castellodibuttriowines](https://www.instagram.com/castellodibuttriowines)



USA/UK: looking for a distributor

**TOROS**  
VIGNE E VINI DEL COLLIO  
Azienda Agricola TOROS FRANCO



Decanter  
PANEL TASTING  
**94**  
PUNTI

[www.vinitoros.com](http://www.vinitoros.com) | [info@vinitoros.com](mailto:info@vinitoros.com) | +390481/61327

 [@AzAgrTorosFranco](https://www.facebook.com/AzAgrTorosFranco) |  [@toros.vini](https://www.instagram.com/toros.vini)




**Drius**


Decanter  
PANEL TASTING  
**92**  
PUNTI

[www.drius.it](http://www.drius.it)

+39 048160998

[info@driusmauro.it](mailto:info@driusmauro.it)

 [@driuswine](https://www.facebook.com/driuswine)

 [drius.wine](https://www.instagram.com/drius.wine)

Canada:

[www.regazziwines.com](http://www.regazziwines.com)

Australia:

[www.godotwines.com.au](http://www.godotwines.com.au)

**COLLIO**

Denominazione di Origine Controllata

VINO DA UVE AUTOCTONE




Decanter  
PANEL TASTING  
**91**  
PUNTI

[www.cormons.com](http://www.cormons.com)

[info@cormons.com](mailto:info@cormons.com)

PH: +39 0481 624 71

 [@cantina.cormons](https://www.facebook.com/cantina.cormons)

 [@cantina\\_prouttori\\_cormons](https://www.instagram.com/cantina_prouttori_cormons)