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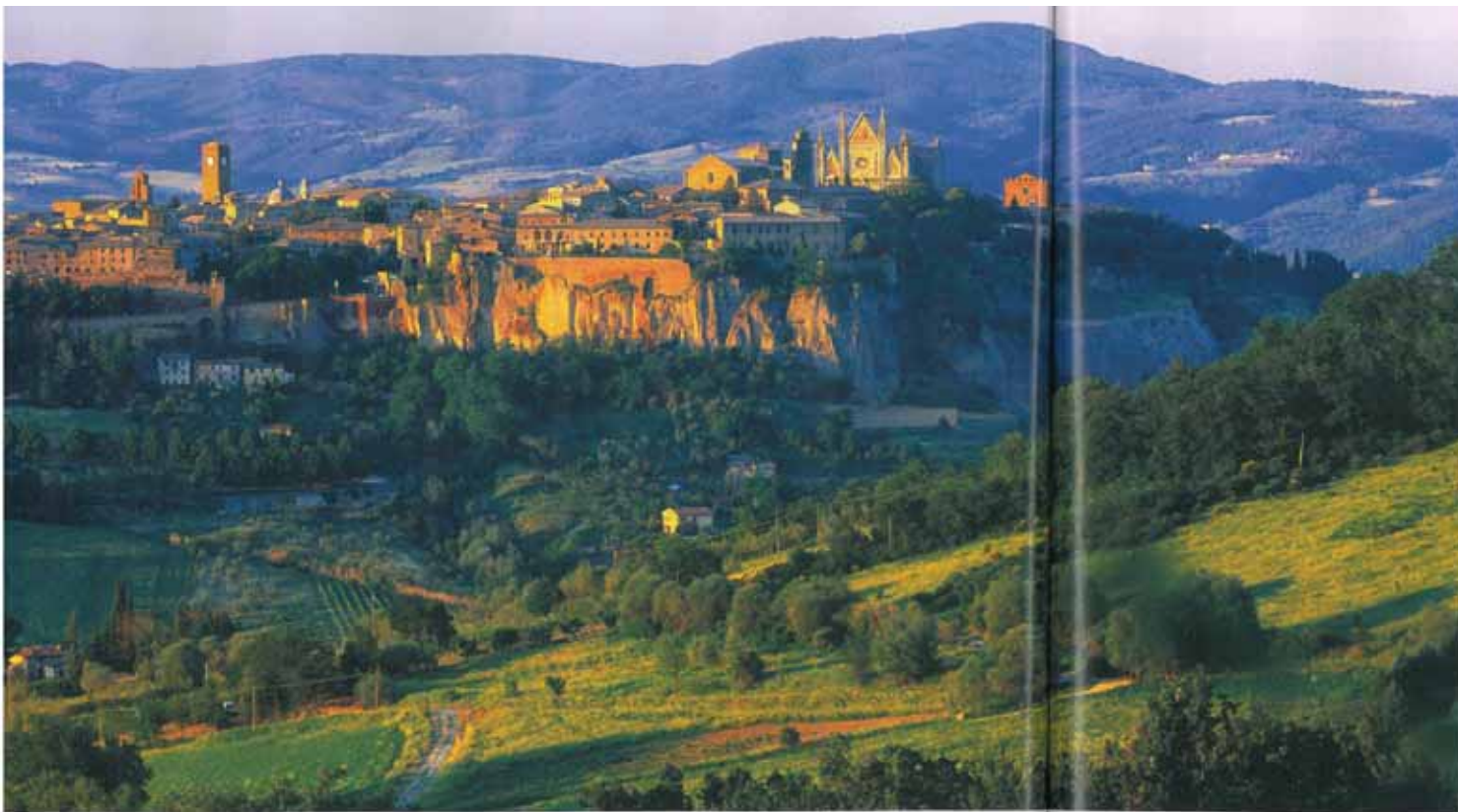
ITALY 2012

**From Tuscany to Sicily:
celebrating Europe's most
diverse wine country**

Voyage of discovery

**The regions, varieties & names
to know - PLUS where to stay**

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Homage to Umbria

This is a region with unique local grape varieties, a growing band of talented producers and a stunning landscape. **Jane Hunt MW** expects great things

FOR THE FIRST time, Umbria walked away with a Decanter World Wine Awards (DWAA) gong this year – the Regional Italy Red over £10 Trophy for Cantina Peppucci's Alter Ego 2007, a Sagrantino-based wine made at the family estate near Todi. An achievement in its own right, but more so given that this central Italian region has until recently remained relatively unknown.

For many, Umbria is the Shangri-la of Italy's wine industry; a beautiful, landlocked and historic land, the home of St Francis of Assisi. However, it's often overlooked in favour of its showier neighbour, Tuscany, leaving the Lungarotti and Caprai families fighting a long, lonely battle (see panel, right) to promote Umbrian wine further afield. Happily, some worthy back-up has now



Left: Cantina Peppucci's Alter Ego 2007 won last year's Decanter World Wine Award Regional Italy Red Trophy, the first time an Umbrian wine has taken such an honour

arrived, and the region can no longer be dismissed as a two-trick pony.

Umbria can be divided into eight principal wine regions (comprising about a dozen DOCs and DOCGs), with red wines produced mainly from Sangiovese, Canalicolo, Montepulciano and Sagrantino, along with the usual international suspects. Whites come largely from Grechetto, Trebbiano, Trebbiano Spoletino, Malvasia and Chardonnay. But only the white Grechetto and the red Sagrantino are unique to Umbria, and it's fortunate that both these varieties have considerable individual character.

Modern methods

In recent times, the first area to come to wine drinkers' attention was the Torgiano DOC, situated just to the south of the regional capital Perugia. Here, the Lungarotti family developed its Sangiovese-

Above: Orvieto, long derided, has finally started to produce white wines of considerable class

based wines, culminating in the Vigna Monticchio Riserva becoming one of the first to achieve DOCG status in 1990. The family continues to dominate the town but is not immune to local competition. Nearby, Terre Margitelli produces the very good Mirantico Torgiano Rosso and also one of Umbria's best examples of Grechetto. Its rich, honeyed and elegantly oak-aged Greco di Renabianca is one of the flag bearers for this local variety, joined by examples from Arnaldo Caprai, Antonelli and Goretti.

'For white wine, the future of Umbria lies with Grechetto,' says Gianluca Goretti, an opinion firmly echoed by Chiara Lungarotti. Goretti's estate, just south of Perugia in the Colli Perugini, produces Il Moggio, a barrel-fermented Grechetto with great finesse and potential longevity. Lungarotti also sees a future for Vermentino, which she says 'maintains a fine acidity despite our hot summers'.

To the southeast is the beautiful hill town of Montefalco. While the Sangiovese-based Montefalco Rosso DOC forms the backbone of production here, it is also home to the formidable Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG. This tannic and powerful grape of uncertain parentage was



Umbrian pioneers: Lungarotti & Caprai

Two influential families have contributed enormously to the development of Umbrian wine – the Lungarottis of Torgiano and the Caprais of Montefalco.

Giorgio Lungarotti was the first to recognise the need for local farms to move beyond traditional sources of income and set about developing the region's first commercial wine enterprise. For a period of time in the 1970s and 1980s, it seemed that no Italian restaurant the world over would be complete without its Sangiovese-based Rubesco Torgiano Rosso. The family company continues to thrive today under the expert leadership of Giorgio's daughter Chiara.

Further south, the Caprai family also began developing its estate in the 1970s and 1980s, in Montefalco, establishing the indigenous Sagrantino grape on the world stage for the first time. Realising that the traditional ways of producing this powerful wine were unsuitable for international palates, they set about taming it. Under the stewardship of Marco Caprai, the wines continue to garner international awards and critical acclaim. The family is also currently leading a local sustainability project combining environmental, social and economic elements.

As the only notable players in Umbria for so long, the families have sometimes been portrayed as rivals. From a distance, the Lungarotti family might seem to be trying to protect its premier position



Above: Marco Caprai is helping to increase recognition of Umbrian wine

Top: Chiara Lungarotti (right) and her sister, Teresa, are building on their heritage

from the 'southerners' with the big wine. In truth, the two companies are very different. Lungarotti sees its place as building on the traditions of the past, producing wines for easy enjoyment as well as some flagship bottles. The Caprais, on the other hand, had to start from scratch: there was no heritage to build on; Sagrantino had no profile; and without the family's determination, the dream of a range of premium wines from Montefalco would not have been successfully achieved.

Whatever the rivalry, the hard work of both has created an established market for Umbria to build on.



originally used to make a sweet red *passito* (dessert wine) drunk at celebrations, mainly Easter. But gradually, production has turned to dry red examples. Arnaldo Caprai was the first estate to fully develop Sagrantino in the 1980s, but its award-winning bottles now vie for attention with excellent examples from Francesco Antano, Antonelli, Colpetrone, Villa Mongalli and Perticaia.

Montefalco is also the base for one of Umbria's most interesting winemakers, Giampaolo Tabarrini. This energetic producer is making single-vineyard Sagrantinos with real terroir expression, and an equally good Montefalco Rosso that includes a healthy dollop of Barbera. His talent further extends to the region's most striking white variety, Trebbiano Spoletino, with his wonderfully rich and complex Adarmando. An ancient local clone of Trebbiano, much research has gone into saving and developing this historic but little-known grape. Not to be confused with its workhorse namesake, Spoletino produces ripe, pungent wines from producers such as Novelli and Perticaia, as well as Tabarrini.

Further southwest is the stunning cathedral town of Orvieto. Now producing white wines of real class and minerality, the many new examples are a world away from the neutral style of old-school Orvieto. Seek out producers such as Altarocca, Barberani, Palazzone and Decugnano dei Barbi to discover just how good wines from this town can be.

Across the region, other fine producers are becoming established sources of premium wines. Sportoletti, based near Assisi, makes one of Italy's best-value reds and, from the shores of Lake Trasimeno, Madrevite is producing excellent wines from Rhône varieties, including the brilliantly named Che Syrah Sarà. And not forgetting DWWA

Map: Maggie Nelson

Hunt's six of the best from Umbria



Antinori, Castello Della Sala, Cervaro Della Sala 2009 ★★★★★ 19pts/20
 £39–£45 **Berkmann, Fine & Rare, Majestic, Slurp, Swig**
 Complex tropical fruit nose with hints of wood. Impressive weight and structure, full of flavour, sweet and ripe citrus fruits and pear. Toasty vanilla

alongside a distinct hazelnut character.
Drink: 2012–2016. **Alcohol:** 13%

Terre Margaritelli, Greco di Renabianco, Torgiano 2010 ★★★★★ 18.5
 £17.99 **Laytons**
 Youthful, clean and intense expression of Grechetto, with notes of spicy vanilla and honey. A short period in wood has helped to temper the crisp acidity. This wine is complex, weighty, rich, ripe and balanced, with intense fruit.
Drink: 2012–2016. **Alc:** 13.5%

Barberani, Classico Secco, Orvieto 2010 ★★★★★ 17
 £7.50 **The Wine Society**
 Attractive, fresh and clean, with hints of white fruit and citrus. Refreshingly crisp, soft and correct, with an elegant mineral tone and some nuttiness.
Drink: 2012. **Alc:** 12.5%

Tabarrini, Sagrantino Colle alle Macchie, Montefalco 2004 ★★★★★ 19

N/A UK www.tabarrini.com
 Dense nose, with warm mineral notes and hints of tar and chocolate. Complex and impressive dark fruit flavours, mineral character. Marked but controlled tannins, rich and powerful but accessible, balanced and long.
Drink: 2012–2020. **Alc:** 15%

Cantina Peppucci, Alter Ego, Todi 2006 ★★★★★ 18.5
 £24.95 **Secret Cellar**
 Powerful nose, with earthy forest aromas, plum, herbs and spicy wood. Intense, with obvious alcohol and tannin. Dark fruit flavours combine with tobacco, oak and spice.
Drink: 2012–2018. **Alc:** 14.5%



Sportoletti, Rosso, Assisi 2009 ★★★★★ 18
 £11 **Bancroft, Lea & Sandeman**
 Intense nose, still young and dominated by spicy red and black fruit. Dry backbone with juicy black fruit, red cherry, tobacco, sweet spice and lively acidity. Robust.
Drink: 2012–2015. **Alc:** 14%

For full details of UK stockists, see p89

Trophy-winner Filippo Peppucci, who says of his flagship Sagrantino-based Alter Ego: 'It's a true wine, an expression of our territory'.

Spreading the word

While Umbria now produces some excellent wines, and has the benefit of two unique, local grape varieties, it needs to be more vocal in telling its story to wine drinkers. As with many Italian wines, the passion for 'invented' names does little to help the consumer make an informed choice. The name of a grape variety and the word 'Umbria' included on labels could make a world of difference.

And although many producers are doing excellent work individually towards higher quality, there appears to be a lack of collaboration. The Umbrian people are known for being somewhat uncommunicative – even with close neighbours – and this is no less apparent in the wine world. Hopefully younger generations will break the mould in years to come, and allow Umbria to build on its rightful place as a producer of excellent Italian wines. **W**

Jane Hunt MW is a Regional co-Chair for Italy at the Decanter World Wine Awards

'Many new examples are a world away from the neutral style of old-school Orvieto'