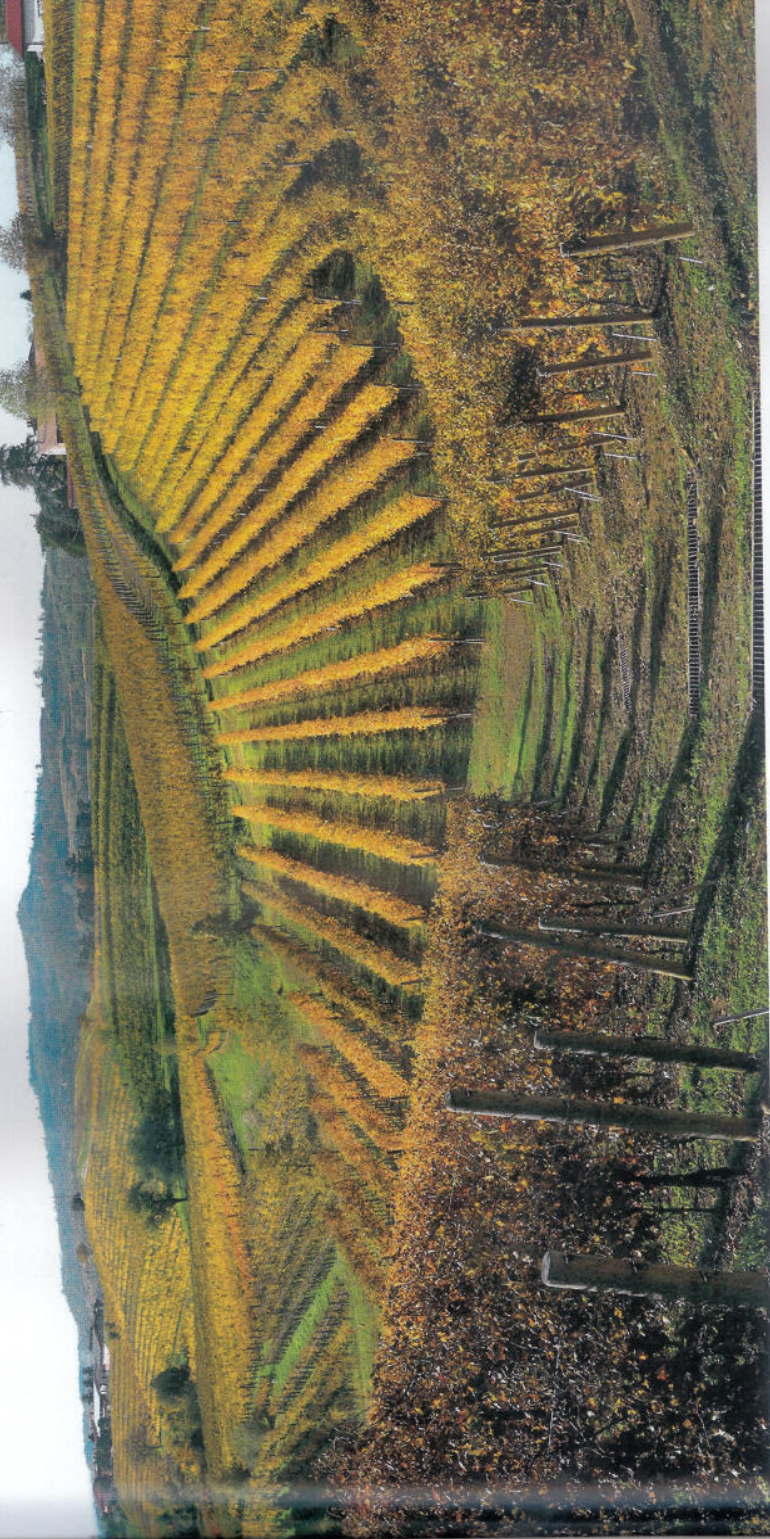


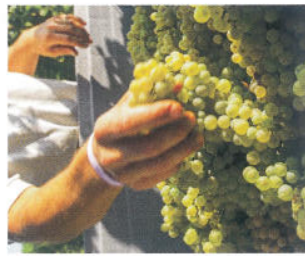
'The important thing is not to pick too early, as aromatic complexity only occurs when the grapes are very ripe' Adriano Gigante



Photograph: Rocco Cesellin

in Pinot Grigio. The best soils, especially marl, can give minerality to the wines, but other factors, such as vine age, altitude and exposition, matter too. The important thing is not to pick too early, as aromatic complexity only occurs when the grapes are very ripe.' Andrea Felluga of family winery Livio Felluga adds: 'We blend wines from different elevations to get more complexity. But it's crucial that the vines grow on poor soils.'

As in Alsace, it takes a fairly high ripeness level to give wines that are really expressive. Below 13%, Pinot Grigio can show a pleasant grassiness but little aromatic complexity or weight of fruit. Of course, the right balance is hard to achieve. Giorgio Badin at Ronco del Gelsso produces sensuous and



Above: fruit from La Tunella produces a perfumed wine, which is 'concentrated and suave'

voluptuous Pinot Grigio, but the alcohol is high and the relatively low acidity can result in a lack of persistence. Most producers suppress malolactic fermentation to keep maximum freshness in the wines, but a handful of top estates such as Livio Felluga and Le Vigne de Zamò embrace partial or total malolactic, without ending up with flabby wines. Andrea Felluga asked me whether I could detect that his Pinot Grigio had gone through malolactic, and I had to admit I couldn't.

The Isonzo region has a strong reputation for Pinot Grigio. Just 20km from the Adriatic, it's flatter than Colli Orientali and Collio and the terroir differs, with stony, clay soils that encourage early ripening. The best wines come from the plateau

Pinot Grigios to make you drink again

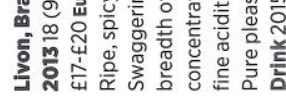
Lis Neris, Gris, Isonzo 2011 18.5/20 (95/100)
£20.42-£24.50
D Byrne, Hedonism
Sumptuous apple and mango nose. Quite exotic. Creamy apple compote flavours on the palate, opulent but not heavy. Spicy and complex, with a seductive texture and limpid, lifted finish. Good length. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alcohol** 14%



Vie di Romans, Dessimis, Isonzo 2012 18.5 (95)
£22.28-£33.40
Widely available via UK agent, Liberty Wines
Pale copper-pink. Rich, nutty pear nose. Creamy, powerful and spicy, with a juicy texture, yet has pungency and fine balancing acidity. Very long. **Drink** 2015-2024 **Alc** 14.9%



Livon, Braide Grande, Collio 2013 18 (93)
£17-£20 **EuroWines, Simply Wines**
Ripe, spicy nose, pear crumble. Swagging palate. With great breadth of fruit, this is concentrated but accessible, with fine acidity to balance the wine. Pure pleasure and fine length. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Schiopetto, Collio 2011 18 (93)
£20 **New Generation Wine**
Subtle, floral, ripe pear nose.



Rich, creamy and concentrated, with fine but discreet acidity. Delicious fruit, nutty but bright and elegant. Long. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13%

Toros, Collio 2013 18 (93)
£25.99 (2011)
Selfridges
Bracing melon and mango nose, seems oaky although it is unoaked. Firm and concentrated, with extract and vigour, ample personality and good length. **Drink** 2016-2024 **Alc** 14%



Branko, Collio 2013 17.5 (91)
£19.40 **Hedonism**
Heady floral nose with ripe apple fruit. Good attack, lively but also has weight and concentration, with just a hint of sweetness. Balanced and long. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Dario Princič, Collio 2006 17.5 (91)
£26.67 (2009) **Exel**
Coppery colour. Startling nose of strawberry, honey and flowers. Medium-bodied, with a grape-skin burr, moderate acidity, and a firm dry finish. Biodynamic. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13%



La Tunella, Colli Orientali 2013 17.5 (91)
£11.25 **Corney & Barrow**
Perfumed citrus and apple nose. Concentrated and suave, yet has firm underlying acidity. Fresh and citric but shows some mineral complexity and fine length. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13%



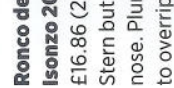
Livio Felluga, Colli Orientali 2013 17.5 (91)
£21.52-£27
Widely available via UK agent, Liberty Wines
Delicate pear nose, pretty and elegant. Suave and juicy, with depth. Intense with a long spicy finish. Finesse. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13%



Marco Felluga, Mongris, Collio 2013 17.5 (91)
£16.49 **AG Wines**
Rich, heady pear nose. Full-bodied and concentrated, with plump pear fruit. Spicy and long, with potential to age. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13%



Ronco del Gelsso, Sot lis Rivis, Isonzo 2012 17.5 (91)
£16.86 (2011) **Savage Selection**
Stern but ripe apple and melon nose. Plump and rounded, close to overripe with a hint of



sweetness. Creamy, tangy, long finish. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 14.5%

Specogna, Ramato, Colli Orientali 2011 17.5 (91)
£18.99 (2013) **Fortnum & Mason, Lockett Bros, Luvians Bottle Shop, The Wine Tasting Shop, Valvona & Crolla, Vini Italiani, Winedirect, WoodWinters**
Onion skin in colour. Super-ripe strawberry nose. Fresh, sleek and concentrated; dry, long and firm. Personality. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Venica & Venica, Jesera, Collio 2013 17.5 (91)
£23.50-£25 **A Moveable Feast, Woodford Wine**
Opulent, apple nose. Firm and dry, a touch austere now and lightly phenolic, concentrated and textured. Quite long with a spicy finish. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



The following Pinot Grigios are also of high quality but not available in the UK:
2013: Angoris; Borgo San Daniele; Butussi; Castello di Spessa; Colutta; Cornelli, Amplius; Draga; Luisa; Masut da Rive; Primosic, Murno; Ronchi di Manzano; Ronco del Tassi; Vigne di Zamò; Zorzettig
2009: Keber Riserva; Villa Russiz

See p88 for details of UK stockists

nobility in a grape variety is its ability to age, then Pinot Grigio can indeed pass that test when treated with respect in the vineyard and the winery.

Wood-ageing is rare. Gallo uses about 15% new oak, while Lis Neris ages the wine in 500-litre barrels; Ronco di Gelsso, Branko and Borgo San Daniele use large casks. Almost all others eschew small oak, and those who do use it seek textural complexity rather than an overtly oaky flavour.

Pinot Grigio differs from that other Pinot Noir mutation, Pinot Blanc, in that its skins, when fully ripe, are light brown in colour. Many producers press directly so that none of that pigment tinges the must; others, however, prefer a moderate amount of skin contact to give wines that either resemble Provencal rosé or, in some cases, take on a coppery hue. Such wines, known here as *ramato*, are increasing in number and can have an individual appeal, with more red-fruits aromas and a more grainy texture. There are good versions from Ronco Soreli, Scarbolo and Draga. 'Orange' wines, made with long maceration on the skins, are still rare, though Flaibani in Colli Orientali makes one from biodynamically farmed grapes.

Was my view of Pinot Grigio changed after a few days of intensive visits and tastings? Absolutely. I already knew the bland, flavourless offerings in Europe's supermarkets were a travesty, but at the other extreme on this trip I found very few wines that were overblown or blowsy. Instead there was a parade of full-bodied but poised wines, with an array of aromas and flavours, seductive textures and exemplary balance. **D**

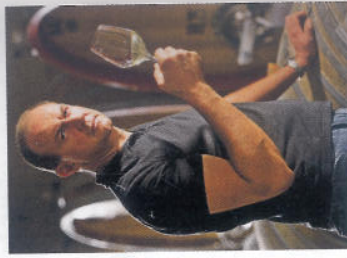
known as the Rive Alte. One of Isonzo's leading and most thoughtful producers, Gianfranco Gallo at Vie di Romans, says: 'Remember that Pinot Grigio is a mutation of Pinot Noir, so I tend to think of its ripening pattern in much the same way. I don't want overripe fruit, but I do want grapes that are phenologically ripe. Just picking on the basis of acidity is not sufficient. Acidity is important, but so is the tannic structure of the wine which will support that acidity on the palate.'

Built to age

Structure aids longevity. Giampaolo Venica at Venica & Venica in Collio pulled some old vintages from the cellar. The 1988, the oldest, was still fresh, the 1993 acidic and angular, and the 1995 and 2001 were splendid, with a nuttiness developing on the nose but no oxidation. 'The oldest vintages,' remarked Giampaolo, 'were made with much higher yields than we would accept today, and the wines are still alive, even if nearing the end of their lives. We protect against oxidation but encourage the maximum extraction from the skins, both to give good colour and to have the extract that will allow the wine to age.' Gallo also opened some older bottles. The 2000 was a touch oily, but the 1996 was sensational: still zesty and taut with no sign whatsoever of age, a wine that had retained its lemony aromas and intensity of fruit.

Yet the majority of Pinot Grigio produced, even in Friuli, will be drunk young, and it's not a wine that demands age, though its full aromatic expression needs a year or so in bottle. But if one of the signs of

Top: with its gentler slopes, and stony, clay soils, the vineyards of Vie di Romans in Isonzo produce powerful wines with the ability to age



Above: Giorgio Badin at Ronco del Gelsso uses large casks to age his Pinot Grigios, giving rounded wines with a long finish

Stephen Brook has been a contributing editor to Decanter since 1996