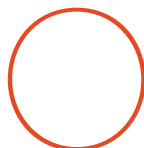


VALPOLICELLA

Though this Veneto region is steeped in ancient history, its wines are evolving to suit modern tastes all while maintaining their distinctive, varied characters. Andrea Briccarello picks his favourites



ne of the most historic and important wine regions in northern Italy, since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, Valpolicella has been blessed with stunning terroir and an array of native varieties perfect for producing world-class wines.

The region is divided into three sub-zones: Classico, Orientale and Valpantena. Classico, to the northwest of Verona, includes the communes of Fumane, Marano, Negrar, Sant'Ambrogio and San Pietro in Cariano.

To the east is the Valpolicella Orientale with the communes of Illasi, Mezzane di Sotto and Marcellise, and sandwiched in between is the Valpantena, north of Verona.

As the name suggests, the Classico area is traditionally seen as the most 'classic' expression of Valpolicella. Here, the wines are usually very elegant, with plenty of juicy red hedgerow fruits and a remarkable acidity and freshness, driven by the white soil that surrounds the vineyards.

The Orientale sub-zone produces muscular, intense, voluptuous expressions of Valpolicella, as well as powerful amarone, the region's speciality made from 'passito' grapes, dried after harvest for a period of up to three months. The Valpantena is a beautiful valley in Valpolicella that produces some great wines from its rich limestone vineyards. It benefits from cool breezes, which give the wines finesse and crunchy, wild red-berry fruits.

Like a diamond with multiple facets, Valpolicella has many styles and characters. 'Basic' Valpolicella is usually an easy, early-drinking wine to be enjoyed with cold cuts and light cheeses. Valpolicella superiore is aged in oak for one year minimum, for a more complex, structured character. Valpolicella ripasso is produced by leaving fresh Valpolicella wine in contact with the skins left over from the amarone process for 15-20 days, making it richer, more seductive and higher in sugar and alcohol.

The biggest trend of the last few years has been the steady reduction of oak, resulting today in a much lighter and fresher Valpolicella. Better vineyard management and temperature control seems to be the key when it comes to this fresher, juicier style, which often has classic cherry-stone flavours and velvety tannins, and is typically made from the fruit of higher, cooler vineyards. Even amarone, known for its luscious, intense character, is being crafted in a more elegant way. One of the most fascinating and individual wines in the world, amarone is one to contemplate: it needs time to age and to be appreciated. It carries a lot of history and tradition, but in the last few years, it has gone through a change in style, making it more approachable and easier to pair with modern cuisines. Key here is a longer drying period for the grapes of four to five months.

In my hospitality career, Valpolicella wines have always been sought-after and appreciated by guests due to their open character and generosity of fruit; from vibrant and juicy to ethereal and majestic, these wines are a must on any wine list and in every cellar.



Ca' La Bionda, Casal Vegri, Valpolicella Classico Superiore

£27.49 Top Selection

The fourth generation of the Castellani family has been practising organic viticulture across its 29ha of vines in the Classico zone since 2000, and has been certified since 2012. Superiore calls for a longer ageing process: in the case of Casal Vegri, 18 months in large oak casks and a further six months in bottle. The single-vineyard Casal Vegri doesn't undergo any appassimento, for a true expression of Corvina.

Drink 2022-2028 Alc 13.5%