

Italy's rising stars

Who are the producers you may not have heard of, but who'll be making bigger and bigger waves in the coming years? Our three Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chairs for Italy pick four names each



Richard Baudains is a wine writer, editor, judge and translator who lectures in wine journalism in Italy



Ian D'Agata is a wine writer, author and educator, named Italy's best wine journalist in 2012 by the *Comitato Grandi Crus d'Italia*



Monty Waldin is a wine writer, author, broadcaster and biodynamic winemaker and wine consultant based in Tuscany



Photographs: Filippi company(2)



Filippi, Veneto

Recommended by Monty Waldin

Filippo Filippi's Soave estate is where volcanics, organics and a few other things combine to produce intense, dry white wines of textural completeness.

His vineyards are rare for Soave in being planted with heirloom cuttings of Garganega, Soave's classic grape. They produce unfashionably (for Soave) low yields of bunches of small, loose, yellow grapes whose delicate almond and lemon flavours would turn toffee-like if exposed to too much direct sun. This is why Filippi grows them hanging down underneath Soave's traditional tall, leafy pergolas. 'We want the grapes to see the sun, but don't want the sun to see the grapes,' he says. Pergola vines are much more labour-intensive

'We want the grapes to see the sun, but don't want the sun to see the grapes' Filippo Filippi (pictured above)

and thus expensive to work than the lower hedge-like vines which are becoming fashionable in some parts of Soave.

Filippi uses organic compost 'which helps keep the soil cool so the grapes ripen slowly'. He says: 'Only like this can you make authentic Soave, meaning a dry white tasting round and ripe but also lively and crisp.' For someone who preaches authenticity in the vineyard, it's no surprise to learn Filippi's winemaking is non-interventionist.

Above left: Filippo Filippi checks his pergola-trained Garganega grapes have not caught too much sun.

Above right: the Filippi estate in Soave, where labour-intensive but not interventionist work in vineyard and cellar produce 'ethereal' wines

Clean, modern Soave this is not. His Vigne delle Brà cuvée comes from a single vineyard, a mini-plateau in the quiet, isolated wooded tablelands above Soave. Filippi ages the wine on its spent yeast for more than a year, to accentuate its inherent creamy richness. There is no oak. This is Soave whose combination of ethereal, translucent fruit flavours and savoury old-vine richness make it a nourishing meal in itself.



Filippi, Vigne della Brà, Soave Classico, Veneto 2006 18.5/20pts (95/100pts) £26 *Vini Italiani*

Dense, piercing, almond, camomile and iris palate sprinkled with grainy lemon freshness. A pick-you-up and calm-you-down wine rolled into one. **Drink** 2013-2015 **Alcohol** 13%



Abbazia di Rosazzo, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Recommended by Richard Baudains

The Abbey of Rosazzo was founded in 1070 and wine has been made in its cellars since the 13th century. The terraced vineyards below its walls have survived invasions, plagues, earthquakes and wars to hand down to today unique biotypes of ancient local grapes Pignolo, Ribolla Gialla and Picolit.

The abbey is the property of the Church, which gave up direct management of winemaking in the 1970s, putting the vineyards and cellars out to lease. Past incumbents have included the Zamò family and the well-known local winemaker Walter Filiputti, but in recent years a series of vicissitudes had led to a decline. In 2009 the lease was taken over by one of the region's historic producers, Livio Felluga. For the 98-year-old and still very active Felluga it's a return to his roots. It was at Rosazzo, in the shadow of the abbey, that Felluga, back in the 1950s, planted the first vineyards of what is today the region's largest privately owned wine estate.

The investment and expertise placed at the service of Friuli's oldest vines, in one of the greatest places to grow wine in the whole region,



is already showing results. Felluga has abandoned monovarietals and concentrates all the best fruit into a single, outstanding estate wine made from a cuvée of the abbey's most representative white varieties. The 2011 vintage will come out under the new DOCG Rosazzo denomination.



Abbazia di Rosazzo, Colli Orientali 2010
18.5 (95)

POA **Liberty Wines**

Fresh, intense nose of ripe apples, peaches, camomile, jasmine, sage and orange peel. Concentrated palate: fresh and solid with a salty vein of mouthwatering tanginess. Long, lightly oaky finish. **Drink** 2013–2018 **Alc** 13%

Above: Livio Felluga (centre) with his children – the next generation to take over the running of the Abbazia di Rosazzo vineyards their father planted in the 1950s



Above: Massimiliana Spinola of Castello di Tassarolo with her horse Titouan, who has replaced tractors in the biodynamic vineyards

Castello di Tassarolo, Piedmont

Recommended by Monty Waldin

Gavi is a spritzily crisp white wine that punches way above its weight. Gavi is a small region but has the good fortune to be located near where France's Côte d'Azur morphs into Italy's Ligurian coast. Think sun, sand and expensive fish restaurants tailor-made for slender, neutral white wines.

Perhaps because Gavi sales are so healthy, the wine itself has become predictable and formulaic. But change is afoot in the form of Massimiliana

'Massimiliana Spinola is quite the revolutionary. In fact, she's become Gavi's most anti-modernist grower'

Spinola. Although her family has owned Castello di Tassarolo estate since the 13th century, Spinola is anything but a blind follower of tradition – she's quite the revolutionary. In fact, she's become Gavi's most anti-modernist grower. From 2006 she ditched modern vineyard sprays in favour of certified organic methods and hand-stirred biodynamic teas (the first in Gavi). She is replacing vineyard tractors with horses. And in the winery she is even stripping Gavi down to its bare bones with a range of preservative-free wines. These come in both still and sparkling form and are labelled 'NS', meaning they contain no added sulphite preservatives. Gavi is well suited to this style because its grape, Cortese, is almost as naturally tangy as the lemon juice you'd sprinkle over a freshly prepared fruit to help it retain its freshness. Castello di Tassarolo's Gavi NS is everything that personality-free modern Gavi is not.



Castello di Tassarolo, Spinola Gavi NS 2011
18 (93)

£8.99 **Vinceremos**

Soft apple-crumble flavours, tangy and broad not spritzy and lean, with an enveloping savouriness. **Drink** 2014 **Alc** 12.5%

Luigi Baudana, Piedmont

Recommended by Richard Baudains

With its two hectares of old vines and a maximum production (in a good year) of 10,000 bottles, Luigi Baudana is one of the smallest wine estates in the Langhe. Its austere tannic Barolos, typical of Serralunga, have a faithful local following but until now have been rarely seen outside the region.

However, whole new perspectives for the label have been opened up by the acquisition of the estate by one of Piedmont's most universally respected producers, the Vajra family from Barolo. For Aldo Vajra the opportunity is a dream come true: 'Serralunga is where, many years ago, I was taught how to prune by one of the old-timers in the village. I've never forgotten the finesse of his Barolo and I always longed to go back and make wine in Serralunga and rediscover those aromas.'

Vajra has maintained the original name of the

estate and will continue to produce its two single-vineyard wines from the historic crus of Ceretta and Sori di Baudana, where an elevation of 350m, a southwest to southeast aspect and the classic white calcareous marl soils create just about perfect conditions for growing Barolo. The takeover went through in January 2009, but collaboration began in 2008, and already in this vintage the hand of Aldo and his oenologist son Giuseppe is evident in



the purity and suppleness which make Vajra's wines a joy to drink.

Luigi Baudana, Ceretta, Barolo 2008 18.5 (95)
£32.50 **Fine & Rare**

Fresh and young aroma of sour black cherry at the front and classic liquorice, tar and violets at the back. A touch of sweet oak on the palate, smooth ripe tannins and a long finish with a lovely savoury-sweet contrast. Burgundian style. **Drink** 2014–2025 **Alc** 14.5%

Below: the historic Ceretta cru of the Luigi Baudana estate in Barolo, now owned and run by the Vajra family, one of Piedmont's most famous producers



Balia di Zola, Emilia-Romagna

Recommended by Richard Baudains

Claudio Fiore comes from a family of winemakers and agronomists. Consultant oenologist Vittorio Fiore was one of the key figures in the Tuscan wine renaissance of the 1980s and 1990s, and both his sons have followed in his footsteps, with the difference that rather than consulting, the Fiore now own and manage their own estates.

The family made its name in Tuscany, but was among the first from outside the region to believe in Sangiovese's potential in Romagna. Having previously consulted there, Vittorio Fiore bought the Castelluccio estate at Modigliana in the late 1990s, and in 2003 the family acquired a property in the same village called Balia di Zola, that Claudio runs with his agronomist wife Veruska Eluci.

Renovation of the 5ha of vineyard occupied the initial period, but production is now progressing, revealing a terroir of huge personality supported by extremely sensitive winemaking. The style is refined (a comparison with Burgundy is not out of place) with pristine character on the nose and intense, grippy concentration on the palate. The unoaked Balitore is fresh, floral and vibrant, made for immediate drinking. The Redinoce Sangiovese



Riserva comes from a calcareous marl plot at 250m above sea level from old vines with yields of 1kg of fruit per plant. Like all the Balia wines it ferments with indigenous yeasts. They're both highly recommended for fans of Sangiovese, and an eye-opener for anyone unfamiliar with the wines of Romagna.



Balia di Zola, Redinoce Sangiovese Riserva 2009 19 (96)

N/A UK www.baliadizola.com

Intense, complex and refined earthy and berry fruit noses. Round, fresh palate that becomes long, concentrated and grippy, with fine, tight tannins, ending on pepper, anise and bay. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 13.5%

'Highly recommended for fans of Sangiovese, and an eye-opener for anyone unfamiliar with the wines of Romagna'

Above left: husband-and-wife team Claudio Fiore (oenologist) and Veruska Eluci (agronomist) of Balia di Zola



Above: Donatella Sartarelli and husband Fabrizio Chiacchiarini are Verdicchio to the core at their Marche estate

Sartarelli, Marche

Recommended by Ian D'Agata

You know where an estate's heart lies when you realise that it only grows, and makes wine from, a single grape variety. There is no equivalent in Italy to Sartarelli, where the estate's motto might as well be 'Verdicchio or Bust'.

I've written before (in *The Ecco Guide to Italy's Best*

Wines) that Sartarelli's Balciana Verdicchio is one of Italy's three greatest whites and nothing since has made me think otherwise. True, husband and wife team Fabrizio Chiacchiarini and Donatella Sartarelli have tinkered with the wine lately, seeking less richness and residual sugar (Balciana, a true late-harvest white made only in the best years, until recently had more in common with a big Alsace white than anything Italian: witness the gorgeous 2006 and 2007 versions); still, the wine is deeper and richer than most Italian whites made today.

Meanwhile, the middle-level Verdicchio, Tralivio, is better than ever, and no longer Balciana's far inferior little brother. Lately, the Sartarelli family has launched a sparkling Verdicchio that is not unlike a good Prosecco in its charming upfront fruit and floral aromas and flavours. It doesn't surprise that Ferrari-loving Fabrizio's wines move forward at dizzying speeds.



Sartarelli, Tralivio Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore 2011 17.5 (91)

£11-£14 **AG Wines, Astrum Wine, Vini Italiani**
Fresh aromas of peony, iris and buttercups mingle with notes of golden delicious apple and fresh thyme; then light and lively with harmonious acids and sneaky concentration to its white stone-fruit and floral flavours.

Drink 2013-2015 **Alc** 13%

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Pievalta, Marche

Recommended by Monty Waldin

One of the often unremarked aspects of Italian wine is just how many growers make both still and sparkling wines. In France and Germany producers tend to specialise in one or the other.

Alessandro Fenino of Pievalta trained as a sparkling-wine producer but now makes mainly still wines from 27ha of Verdicchio grapes. These grow in the historically castle-clad (*castelli*) hills around Jesi in the Marche along central Italy's Adriatic coast. Fenino says the key thing about making either fizz or still wine is having 'flavours which taste crisp but ripe, rather than crisp in the sense of unripe or green – you cannot talk of elegance and sourness in the same breath'.

Fenino is getting rave reviews for his range of Verdicchio, still and sparkling, not only from the wine media but from his bosses at the merchant house of Barone Pizzini. It makes mainly sparkling wines from its northern Italian base and installed Fenino to manage its Verdicchio vineyards soon after they bought them in 2002. Fenino adopted biodynamics to temper the extremes of Pievalta's terroir: intense heat, blinding light, dark clouds, prolonged dryness, cool nights and rainy squalls. 'Terroir means weather, not just soil,' says Fenino.

Vines which can happily deal with climate shocks stay stress-free. A stress-free vine is best placed to provide the ripeness of flavour a naturally crisp-tasting grape like Verdicchio needs to be enjoyable. Pievalta's Verdicchio dei

Castelli di Jesi perfectly combines this sense of confident expressiveness and poised restraint.



Pievalta, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore 2011 18.5 (95)

£10.25 **Vintage Roots**
Generous waxy acacia and tangerine fruit flavours cut by a well-judged, mouthwatering, sea-salt finish.

Drink 2013-2016 **Alc** 13%

'The 2,000 bottles of Vallerana Alta sell out almost instantly'

Antonio Camillo, Tuscany

Recommended by Richard Baudains

Antonio Camillo's official job title at the Poggio Argenteria winery is director of production, but he and owner Gianpaolo Paglia are really partners in a shared vision. Over the past decade the two have developed the projects that have taken Poggio Argenteria to the cutting-edge in the Maremma.

As a natural extension of the relationship, in 2008 Antonio began to produce wines under his own label, scouting out old vines in the hills away from the coast, cultivating the plots organically and vinifying the grapes with a minimal-intervention approach at Poggio Argenteria. He first targeted Ciliegolo, a variety native to southern Tuscany which is frequently used to give body and fruit to the Sangiovese-based Morellino di Scansano, but which is rarely seen as a monovarietal.

The entry-level Principio, fermented and aged briefly in stainless-steel vats, expresses the fresh cherry and plum aromas of the grape, with a typical note of violets in the background. On the palate it is round and fleshy, but it also has a freshness that makes it irresistibly drinkable. The single-vineyard selection Vallerana Alta comes from half a hectare of low-yielding, 50-year-old vines and in the cellar it gets the full-on red wine treatment: fermentation in conical wooden vats, long maceration, and ageing in five- and 10-hectolitre barrels. The resulting 2,000 bottles sell out almost instantly. Get your name down now for the new 2011 vintage, due out later this spring.



Antonio Camillo, Vallerana Alta Ciliegolo, Maremma 2010 18.5 (95)

POA **Les Caves de Pyrène**
The nose starts oaky, then opens with an array of violets and Mediterranean herbs underlaid by sour-cherry fruit. The palate is firm and deep, with fine salty tannins, and a very long, silky finish with a dry, plummy character. Still a little austere. Drinking now but will improve.

Drink 2013-2018 **Alc** 13%

Top left: Verdicchio vines under snow at the Pievalta estate in the Marche

Below: one of the Ciliegolo vineyards Antonio Camillo farms for wines under his own label





'[Farming each plot differently] is a challenge. But it stops you thinking you can take natural cycles for granted' **Jan Erbach of Pian dell'Orino (above)**

Pian dell'Orino, Tuscany

Recommended by Monty Waldin

Jan Erbach is a German making red wine in Tuscany, just like a horny-handed Burgundian might. He studied organics in Germany, was asked to leave his homeland to plant organic vineyards for an Italian client and ended up farming 6ha of his own Sangiovese in Montalcino with his Italian partner Caroline Pobitzer. As Montalcino has a very varied terroir, Erbach felt the only way to make more complex wine was 'to think like a Burgundian, and work several vine plots all in very different spots, rather than having all my vines in just one place'.

Erbach's approach is rare in Montalcino. It allows him to make red wine from just one variety (Sangiovese) while building textural and flavour complexity into his wine. He says: 'Sangiovese gives broad mouthfeel on clay soil, but becomes more exotic on stonier soil. We get red-fruit aromas from Sangiovese on cooler, wooded spots and black-fruit flavours from lower, warmer spots.' Erbach admits that having to farm each plot differently 'is a challenge. But it stops you thinking you can take natural cycles for granted.' During winemaking he barely crushes his hand-picked Sangiovese grapes, creating 'more an infusion than fermentation'. The gentle crimson hue of his Rosso di Montalcino has a noticeable internal brightness to it. As this is a wine with a diverting story to tell, you should drink the bottle one glass at a time every night for a week, to see how the wine evolves.



Pian dell'Orino, Rosso di Montalcino 2010
19 (96)
£22 **Les Caves de Pyrène**
Crisp hawthorn aromas, followed by rounder but still firm red-cherry and raspberry flavours that coat rather than strangle your tongue for a richly digestible mouthful.
Drink 2013-2017 Alc 14%

Cataldi Madonna, Abruzzo

Recommended by Ian D'Agata

If it were not for Luigi Cataldi Madonna, a philosophy professor, and his winemaker Lorenzo Landi, few would know of the qualitative heights Pecorino can achieve in Abruzzo. In fact, Cataldi Madonna's two Pecorino bottlings rank among Italy's best whites (especially the old-vine bottling: the 2008 and 2010 are marvels); and the rather creamy, fruity Trebbiano d'Abruzzo is also at the top of Italy's quality white wine heap.

Ask Luigi if he doesn't think that the herbal, melon, fig and citrus aromas of his Pecorino wines aren't too reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc, and he'll guffaw, tongue firmly in cheek: 'Listen, people are getting it all wrong: it's not that Pecorino is similar to Sauvignon, it's Sauvignon Blanc that is Pecorino-esque!' Producers in the Loire and New Zealand will be happy to hear that. Pleasantries aside, the reductive winemaking employed by Cataldi Madonna and Landi has brought out the cleaner, crisper side to Pecorino's aromas and flavours, previously unrecognised.

For those who like big reds, few are better than the smooth, refined Toni Montepulciano d'Abruzzo or the easy-drinking Malandrino. Though there are now many award-winning wines from Abruzzo (sometimes inexplicably, given what's in the glass), the quality of Cataldi Madonna's efforts are light-years ahead of most everyone else in the region.

'It's not that Pecorino is similar to Sauvignon Blanc that is Pecorino-esque'

Luigi Cataldi Madonna of Cataldi Madonna (below)



Cataldi Madonna, Malandrino, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo 2010
17.5 (91)
£21 **Astrum Wine Cellars, Corks of Cotham**
Juicy dark plum, red berry and spicy floral aromas and flavours. You'll never want to put the glass (or bottle) down... your relatives will start whispering.
Drink 2013-2016 Alc 13.5%



Tiberio, Abruzzo

Recommended by Ian D'Agata

Italian wine insiders clamour for the wines of Tiberio, recently making some of the country's most exciting mineral whites and fruity reds – though to most people it's still unknown.

Riccardo Tiberio, a sales manager at a big Abruzzo co-op, decided to start his own winery in 2000, after finding an old Trebbiano d'Abruzzo vineyard he especially liked. He launched his first vintage in 2004 and the rest is history. It's a small family-run operation and Riccardo's children are now mainly running the show: Antonio looks after the vineyards and Cristiana makes the wines. She's a chemistry graduate who teaches biochemistry to local wine enthusiasts in her spare time.

The herbal Pecorino is a standout, the mineral Trebbiano d'Abruzzo is almost as good and the Cerasuolo is, in my view, is one of Italy's five best rosés. This year Cristiana launches a deeper bottling of Trebbiano called Fonte Canale.

Cristiana's drive and pride is pushing her to make wines that clearly speak of the varieties and their land.



Tiberio, Pecorino 2011 18 (93)
N/A UK www.tiberio.it

A laser beam of fresh herbs and minerals, juicy, bright acidity and a lingering lemony-herbal-mineral quality that will have you looking for refills. Often.

Drink 2013–2018 **Alc** 13%

'Cristiana's drive and pride is pushing her to make wines that clearly speak of the varieties and their land'



'My hope with Quintodecimo is that people will start to realise that we in Campania also make stellar wines'

Luigi Molo of Quintodecimo (pictured above, with his wife Laura di Marzio)

Below: Riccardo Tiberio started his eponymous Abruzzo winery in 2000; since the first vintage in 2004, the wines have become some of Italy's best

Quintodecimo, Campania

Recommended by Ian D'Agata

Luigi Moio is a professor of oenology at Naples University and one of Italy's greatest consultant winemakers. He's also the country's most eminent expert on many of southern Italy's native grapes.

Moio's beautiful, recently built Quintodecimo estate is a must-visit, as it is also the source of rich, concentrated Aglianico and Taurasi reds and modern, full-bodied whites from Campanian varieties Fiano, Greco and Falanghina. Though some understandably might prefer lighter, fresher whites made with the same varieties, Moio's intent is to make wines meant to age, and they therefore have impressively big structures.

He is also setting bottles aside to show how the wines improve with time. 'People always focus on Barolo or Brunello, Gaja or Sassicaia. My hope with Quintodecimo is that people will start to realise that we in Campania also make stellar wines, similarly clean, precise and ageworthy.' His lovely family is behind him, ensuring his vision will stand the test of time.



Quintodecimo, Terra d'Eclano Aglianico 2009 18 (93)

£29.28 **Justerini & Brooks**

Bright red cherry fruit, tar and spicy minerals on the nose. The palate has a rich, tactile mouthfeel and great length – a modern-day version of a great southern Italian red.

Drink 2013–2020 **Alc** 13.5% **D**

