

Understanding Italian labels

5 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

Sicilia, white.

cantina means literally 'cellar' or 'winery'. A **Cantina Sociale** is a co-operative winery.

Chianti, usually the original heartland of a wine zone. Something to heed for.

crus, especially in Piedmont, a specially designated vineyard.

DOC, Denominazione di Origine Controllata, Italy's belated attempt at a system of designating its superior wines benchmarked in the image of France's appellation contrôlée. Some argue it was imposed too early and too strictly, others that it was too late and not strictly enough. The truth is probably that the Italians do not willingly submit to regulation. For the consumer, DOC means precious little, for in many DOCs the allowed yields are often too high to guarantee quality in the resulting wines.

DOCG, Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, the higher-DOC category introduced for the 1982 vintage and to which some DOCs have since been promoted. DOCG wines are reliably among Italy's better bottles though promotions have sometimes been purely political.

fattoria, farm (a *fattoria* is even smaller).

frazzane, tightly sparkling.

IGT, Indicazione Geografica Tipica, a category of wines created in 1992 as an approximate equivalent of the French [Vino de France](#).

liquore, strong, usually fortified.

metodo classico or **metodo tradizionale**, bottle-fermented (sparkling wine).

passito, strong (and usually sweet) wine made from dried grapes.

Riserva, generally denotes prolonged ageing under carefully prescribed conditions.

rosso, red.

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spumante, sparkling.

Superiore, usually a little higher in alcohol (15.5 to 17%).

toraja, wine estates or smallholdings.

vendemmia, vintage.

vendemmia tardiva, late harvest.

Vino da Tavola, Italy's supposedly basic table wine category, designed to be on a par with France's *Vin de Table*. In the 1980s and 1990s it included a significant proportion of Italy's best wines, which didn't conform to any DOC regulations, especially but by no means exclusively in Tuscany (the so-called *Superheroes*). Many such wines are now classified as IGT.