

Abruzzi and Molise

5 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

In a nutshell: Good value and improving vint.

Main grapes: Montepulciano (red); Trebbiano (white).

These are the western regions on the Adriatic coast of Italy between the Marche and Puglia are equally hot & most isolated, and those that also manage to produce excellent wine from the combined red and white grapes varieties that dominate production here are to be congratulated.

The red grape varieties officially sanctioned here are the Montepulciano (also planted in the Marche for red wines and a local Trebbiano, called Trebbiano di Abruzzo and also known as Bombino Bianco). In general, the red wines have been a great deal more generous than the whites, even if most of them are the more too-demanding, but highly priced products of the local co-operatives.

In the hands of the late, near-fatalist Eduardo Vassallo, however, **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo** has become a full wine: deep, dense, brooding and capable of becoming yet more interesting after many years in bottle. His trick is much lower yields than average and extreme selection, sending the great majority of the crop to a dump and choosing only the very best grapes for the wines carrying his label. If this had been exceptional, his **Trebbiano d'Abruzzo** stands even higher above the norm, another concentrated essence of quality that can be equalled at best as the white burgundy. Other Abruzzo producers are beginning to present a challenge to his methods.

In Molise, the pace-setter is Di Majo Norante, a family concern that began following organic methods years before they became fashionable (and another of Corvetti's clients). The best wines are made from Montepulciano and the great red and white grapes Aglianico, Fiano, Falanghina and Greco of southern Italy.

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo is usually better priced relative to its warmth and flavour. The best wines come from the hills around Teramo and **Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Colture Terrane** has been awarded its own DOCG.