

LUGANA

World Class White with Italian Finesse

If for years Lugana was Italy's best kept oenological secret, known mainly to the throngs of tourists who descend every year on the sparkling shores of Lake Garda to visit the area's picturesque villages and the charming 13th century Sirmione Castle, the secret is now out. This

structured yet graceful white wine enjoys a growing number of admirers around the world. Lugana's vertical rise, fuelled by increasing consumer demand, has doubled sales in the last six years, and generated intense investments in cutting edge technology and increased

planting by already established producers in the denomination. If in 2007 there were just 790 ha of vines dedicated to Lugana, that figure rose to over 1,000 ha in 2011 and yielded more than 10m bottles, 48% of which are exported globally. Given the fallout from the economic

difficulties over the last few years, Lugana's remarkable upsurge is all the more impressive.

Against the backdrop of its magnificent setting, in an area celebrated for its white wines 2,000 years ago by the Roman poet Catullus, Lugana is a testament to the concept of terroir. Grown in the flat areas of the Garda basin on the southern tip of the lake, in an area spanning both the Lombardy and Veneto regions, Lugana is made from a single grape that was once thought to be part of the modest Trebbiano family. This native grape, which must account for a minimum of 90% of the wine under Lugana's production code although most producers now use it exclusively, was until recently called

Trebbiano di Lugana, also known as Trebbiano di Soave.

Local producers and wine experts always believed it was impossible that the grape behind Lugana, a wine with depth and structure that needs at least a year or two in bottle to fully develop, was really Trebbiano. Recent DNA testing has provided the answer Lugana's growers have long suspected: their grape's genome boasts characteristics that are inconsistent with other Trebbianos. The denomination has now distanced itself from the drab Trebbiano name and its bland implications. "The native grape behind Lugana has now been officially renamed Turbiana, the local name for the variety," explains Carlo

Veronese, the director of Lugana's growers' consorzio. Encouraged, most producers now rely solely on Turbiana and no longer add other grapes such as Chardonnay, which subdued Lugana's vibrant, spicy character.

Besides its unique indigenous grape, Lugana's unusual growing conditions also play a crucial role in its winning formula. While most of the world's best white wines hail from hillside vineyards and relatively high altitudes, Lugana is grown for the most part in low-lying plains in dense, lightly

coloured clay soil that covers a bed of mineral rich glacial moraine. According to producers, this compact soil forces the vines to produce fewer berries and leads to concentrated flavours, rich texture and full body. Besides the thick clay that naturally restrains the grape's vigour and forces roots deep down to the nutrients below the surface, the lake's almost Mediterranean microclimate allows ideal ripening for Turbiana, a variety that matures unusually late.

In a real testament to the >

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theory behind terroir, when planted in other areas outside of the denomination, Turbiana does not perform well and cannot produce wines with Lugana's finesse and uplifting minerality.

Turbiana is one of Italy's most flexible grapes, and Lugana comes in several different versions: Lugana, Lugana Superiore, Lugana Spumante, and most recently Lugana Riserva and Lugana Vendemmia Tardiva, all regulated under the EU's DOP designation. Producers determine wine style directly in the vineyards and carry out separate harvests for each variation. The refreshing Lugana Spumante is made from the youngest vines that are picked

the earliest to retain higher acidity. This sparkling wine is then made in the charmat method of refermenting in steel tanks. Grapes for the straight Lugana are picked just when they reach full maturation. Lugana is young and vibrant with succulent citrus and green apple flavours balanced with smooth texture. The creamy and structured Lugana Superiore on the other hand is made with grapes harvested in the second half of October, and usually hails from an estate's oldest vines. A number of top Lugana producers have carefully maintained a wealth of very old plants, and today many of Lugana's vines are over fifty years old. Besides

lending depth and concentration, these ancient clones are also being propagated and replanted throughout the denomination.

Lugana Riserva, debuting in 2013, is the logical evolution of the Superiore, but is aged for at least two years, developing more complexity and mineral intensity. Lugana Vendemmia Tardiva, debuting in 2012, on the other hand is made from over mature grapes harvested at the end of October and early November. Richer and more concentrated, Lugana Vendemmia Tardiva is even richer and more opulent but without the sappy sweetness of a passito, and is more similar to German Spätlese wines. According to Francesco Montresor, of the family owned Ottella estate and President of the local consorzio, clay is crucial to the structure, complexity and longevity of Lugana Superiore, Riserva and Vendemmia Tardiva. “The lighter, more compact clay in Lugana is highly suited for late harvested grapes and produces rounder, fuller-bodied wines with good ageing potential”.

KERIN O'KEEFE'S TOP LUGANAS

‘Lugana is one of the most exciting white wines made in Italy thanks to its unique growing conditions, very old vines and native grape Turbiana, which excels exclusively within the growing zone. Not only can producers make so many different styles from one versatile grape, but the straight Lugana is a superb wine that can be drunk young or after a few years as it gains complexity, while the Superiore and Riserva are among the very few Italian whites that continue to develop and improve with five to seven years bottle ageing,’ says Kerin O’Keefe. Here are her top picks:

Famiglia Olivini Lugana Spumante Pas Dosé 2007
N/A UK. www.olivini.net
Refermented in bottle and on its lees for four years. Fresh and smooth with lemon, sage and almond notes. Elegant perlage. Drink: now- 2015. Alcohol: 13%

Tenuta Rovaglia Lugana ‘Vigne di Catullo’ 2009
£18.06 [Colombier Vins Fins](http://ColombierVinsFins)
55 year-old vines generate rich floral and peach aromas with concentrated peach, citrus and mineral flavours. Stunning depth. Drink: now-2019. Alc: 13%.

Nunzio Ghiraldi Il Gruccone Lugana 2009
N/A UK. www.nunzioghiraldi.it
Almond and mineral aromas with creamy lemon, apple and mineral palate balanced by crisp acidity. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 13%

Cascina Le Preseglie Lugana ‘Hamsa’ 2009
N/A UK. www.agriturismolepreseglie.com
Fresh and bright with tropical fruit sensations, steely mineral notes and silky texture. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 13.5%

Le Morette Lugana ‘Vigneto Mandolara’ 2010
N/A UK. www.lemorette.it
Lovely floral fragrance with green apple, tropical fruit and almond flavours. Creamy texture with energizing mineral and crisp acidity. Drink: now - 2013. Alc: 12.5%

Cascina Maddalena Lugana 2010
N/A UK. www.cascinamaddalena.com
Bright floral and spice bouquet. Granny Smith and citrus flavours punctuated by mineral purity. Long, clean finish. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 13%

Felciana Lugana ‘Felugan’ 2010
N/A UK. www.felciana.it
Exotic and floral nose with creamy citrus and stone fruit flavours. Lovely mineral uplift and nice length. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 13%

Pasini Lugana 2010
£15.54
Selected Italian Imports
Loaded with spice, apricot, citrus and mineral sensations. Fresh and clean with lovely depth of flavours. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 12.5%

Pilandro Lugana ‘Terecrèa’ 2010
N/A UK. www.pilandro.it
Pretty floral nose with apple and peach aromas that carry over to the palate. Nice concentration and silky texture. Drink: now-2013. Alc: 13%

Zamichele Lugana 2010
N/A UK. cantinazamichele@alice.it
Intense floral and spice aromas. Creamy lemon, exotic fruit and spice flavours with flint notes. Lovely. Drink: now- 2013. Alc:12.5%