Winemaker: Silvestro Colli & Mariano Mampieri
Generation: 1st

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Cesanese di Olevano Romano DOC Superiore

To say “a great wine from Lazio” is usually a misnomer. Italia’s greatest city, Rome, may be the center of the Ancient World, but the wines have historically left a lot to be desired. Not anymore! Cesanese, Lazio’s most important variety, is thriving at Compagnia di Ermes, a tiny boutique estate nestled high in the Apennine foothills. Spiced cherry, pomegranate, fig, and dark currants are surrounded by firm, dusty tannins in this full-bodied (yet unoaked) Superiore. Just 5000 bottles made.

WINEMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Perched high in the dreamy village of Olevano Romano, this rustic, 3-hectare estate is run by longtime friends and winemaking patners, Silvestro Colli and Mariano Mampieri. Together with their daughters, they focus almost solely upon Rome's most important historical red grape: Cesanese.

ENOLOGIST

Mariano Mampieri

TASTING NOTES

Color	Rich ruby
Nose	Dark cherry, violets, hint of peach pit
Palate	Dark fruit, firm tannins, and a low-yield mouthfeel
Finish	Long and dusty

VINEYARD & VINIFICATION

Vineyard Location	Olevano Romano DOC, Lazio
Vineyard Size	3 ha
Varietals List	100% Cesanese
Farming Practices	Non-certified organic; grapes picked by hand and dry-farmed
Elevation	450 m
Soils	Volcanic and clay mix
Maturation Summary	In neutral barrels for 2 months, in Steel 8-12 months and bottled 3 months
In Steel	8-12 months
Alcohol	13.5 %
Acidity	5 g/liter
Residual Sugar	3.3 g/liter
Annual Production	5,000 bottles

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COMPAGNIA DI ERMES

The tiny, 3-hectare estate of Compagnia di Ermes is tucked high in the gorgeous hillside village of Olevano Romano, in turn located in the Apennine foothills some 45 minutes E-SE of Rome. With a sunny, southern Italian climate, gentle alpine breezes, and lush vegetation all around, it's the type of place where, at any given moment, time seems to stand still. Alongside a charming inn, winemaker Silvetro Colli and his family also run their bustling restaurant - called Il Boschetto - that can compete with some of the capital's very best. On a typical evening, the place is packed with native Romans who make the drive up... but few or no American tourists. If you're flying into Rome, it can be an amazingly peaceful place to stop and stay for a few nights while you catch your breath! Ultimately, Silvestro and his longtime friend, Mariano Mampieri, founded the estate to supply their clients with a true, artisinal example of Rome's main historic grape: Cesanese. Along with the Olevano Romano DOC, there are only 2 other appellations (in nearby towns) that are renowned for their robust, terroir-driven wine. Beyond these sites, the great irony is that the main red grape of Lazio still suffers from a poor reputation. By rights, given the vast influence of the Roman Empire, we should all be drinking Cesanese with our Tuesday night pizza instead of Sangiovese!. For better or worse, however, even 2000 years ago, the Romans weren't especially lauded for making wine – they definitely knew how to export winemaking technology, but their own juice apparently left much to be desired. Enter Compagnia di Ermes, as this small batch, hands-on wine is enough to change anyone's opinion of this fascinating grape. Winemakers Mariano Mampieri and Silvestro Ciolli are all about quality over quantity: they basically make one wine and production is just 5000 bottles per year! Thanks to the low yields - and despite being unoaked - this Superiore nearly drinks like a big Riserva. So, for anyone who wants something unique and truly artisanal, this wine is exactly what Small Vineyards is all about!

REGION

LAZIO

Long known for its affordable—and often unremarkable—wines designed largely for the everyday table in Rome, Lazio has slowly begun to increase its reputation with an increased spotlight on smaller production and a host of native varieties. First inhabited and farmed by the Etruscans, the region was of course most famous for the Romans themselves, who brought with them a vast trade network and countless improvements in agriculture. Ironically, however - and despite their well-chronicled passion for wine - the Romans never made a name for themselves when it came to the actual quality of their juice. This lack of reputation lasted well into the 20th century, in part due to the effects of WWII, which left great swathes of Roman vineyards in shambles. It took many years for producers to return to the area in earnest... and the advent of international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in the 1980s left Lazio with a bit of an identity crisis. In recent decades, however, the tide has shifted as more producers shift toward quality over quantity, and local grapes such as Malvasia and Cesanese begin to capture more attention.

Today, Lazio has just 3 DOCGs: Cannelino di Frascati, Frascati Superiore--both white wines--and Cesanese del Piglio, the only red amongst them. Of its 27 DOCs, the majority also focus on whites, such as Colli Albani, Est! Est!! Est!!!, Orvieto (whose borders spill from Umbria into Lazio) and Frascati. Trebbiano and 2 biotypes of Malvasia – Malvasia di Candia and Malvasia Putinata (trans: "freckled")—are the most widely represented, with an emphasis on high acidity to cut through the richness of Roman cuisine. As for reds, noteworthy grapes include Aleatico (grown near Viterbo), Montepulciano (Castelli Romani), Nero Buona (near Latina), and Sangiovese. High in the Apennine foothills east of the capitol city is where most of the quality Cesanese is produced. 2 additional designations– Cesanese di Affile and Cesanese di Olevano Romano--are located a stone's throw both from one another and the nearby Piglio DOCG.

OLEVANO ROMANO DOC

Established in 1973, the Olevano Romano DOC is small - encompassing roughly 8000 cases of production each year - and only includes red wine. Not surprisingly then, it focuses almost solely upon three tiers of the Cesanese grape variety: Rosso (minimum 85%), Superiore (90%, 7 months required aging), and Riserva (24 months aging, with at least 6 in the bottle). The appellation takes it's name from the community of Olevano Romano, located high in the Apennine foothills some 75 km east-southeast of Rome, but also includes parts of nearby Genazzano. Olevano Romano is one of a tiny number of DOC/Gs devoted to Lazio's historic grape... with all 3 located at high altitude and in close proximity to one another.

Generally speaking, two different clones of Cesanese are grown in this area: Cesanese di Affile and Cesanese Comune (both also named after nearby villages). Vines benefit from the altitude (450 meters on average) and also clay, volcanic, and sandstone soils, producing structured wines that often display elements of cherry, earth, spice and balsamic (or even teriyaki). The climate is warm, with lush vegetation that includes bamboo species that are thought to be native to this region. (In the old days, farmers would often use the bamboo to create triangular, tent-like trellises for their vines.)