Winemaker: Dario Guerra
Generation: 3rd

Ribolla Gialla Brut

With just 10 hectares of vines in the Colli Orientali DOC, Guerra Albano is a discovery we're exceptionally proud of at Small Vineyards. Here, 40-year-old vines and an average of just 900 grams (less than 1 bottle) per plant help deliver a sparkling wine with true poise and complexity. With an array of orchard fruit and lively minerality, this Brut also exhibits the estate's trademark "marrow" quality that bespeaks of soft minerals and salt. The bubbles are soft and silky, with an elegant, lingering finish.

WINEMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Dario Guerra is a 3rd generation producer (his father's name was Albano) who farms 10 hilltop hectares in Friuli's esteemed Colli Orientali DOC. While it's normal for producers to have 2 or 3 green harvests, Dario – rather amazingly – treats every vine as an individual, constantly sculpting them all season long!

ENOLOGIST

Dario Guerra

TASTING NOTES

Color	Sunlight
Nose	Orchard fruit with floral undertones
Palate	Lively, mineral-driven, and complex
Finish	Elegant, lingering

VINEYARD & VINIFICATION

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Vineyard Location	Friuli Colli Orientali DOC, Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Vineyard Size	10 ha
Varietals List	100% Ribolla Gialla
Farming Practices	Grapes organically farmed (non-certified), dry farmed, and picked by hand.
Elevation	220 m
Soils	Ponca (flysch) and calcareous clay
Maturation Summary	Bottled for 4 months
Alcohol	12.0 %
Acidity	5.6 g/liter
Residual Sugar	1.3 g/liter
Annual Production	10,002 bottles

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GUERRA ALBANO

When asked about his approach to winemaking, Dario Guerra just smiles and offers, “we are students of the leaves.” Getting to know him, one begins to realize this is an entire way of life for his family and far from hyperbole. Working up to 15 hours a day in the field, the Guerra’s are in a near-constant state of green harvest, sculpting individual plants all season long so that (no matter what the weather does in a particular vintage) they effectively have every exposition to choose from. “Wine is made in the vineyard, not the cellar,” adds Dario, who believes what happens post-harvest should only have a 10% influence on the final result. For this reason, Guerra Albano also uses a soft, peristaltic pump - with the added benefit of producing less astringent wines with more integrated tannins. “He’s a totally unique winemaker,” marvels our Italian partner, Antonio Sanguineti. “Dario is just nature and mathematics.”

Like the lion’s share of small estates across Europe, Guerra Albano farms their grapes organically, but remains non-certified. A key part of this equation for Dario (and countless others across France and Italy) is dry-farming. Given that his average vine age is 40 years old, it’s not unusual to have roots diving 30-50 feet straight down into the hillside, resulting in complex, terroir-driven wines steeped in Friuli’s telltale minerality. Consistent with his philosophy of working in tandem with nature, Dario doesn’t terrace – he says he prefers to work with the natural gradient of the hill, which also helps him to avoid rocks and take full advantage of the rich ponca topsoil. As this flysch-driven layer only goes down for the first meter or so, it can be easily thinned or lost through displacement. However, “if instead you choose the right clone and disturb the land as little as possible,” he says, “you create a natural cycle.”

Like so many classic winemaking regions, Friuli owes much to its prehistory: In the Late Jurassic, much of Italy’s NE was covered by the shallow Paratethys Sea. As the earth cooled and waters receded, vast deposits of limestone and calcareous clay were left in its wake. Throughout much of Colli Orientali, ponca - also known as opoka across the Slovenian border at Edi Simčič - offers a rich layer of topsoil, beginning just 20 cm down. Underneath, for the next 50-70 cm, alternating tiers of clay & argilla can typically be found, further enhancing the aromatics and acidic backbone of the region’s traditional wines.

REGION

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

Situated in the NE corner of Italy, Friuli-Venezia Giulia borders Veneto to the west, the Austrian Alps to the north, Slovenia to the east, and to the south has a short coastline along the Adriatic Sea. The combination of warm maritime breezes, chilly subalpine nights, and clay-based soil creates the perfect terroir for white wines in particular. Unsurprisingly, 77% of Friuli’s total production is devoted to its bianchi (higher than any other Italian region). Overall, they’re prized for their aromatics, big-boned acidic structure, and flinty, mineral-driven finesse. Although relatively small in terms of geography, like Piedmont this region is home to a large number of artisanal, family-run vineyards. With 4 DOCGs and 12 DOCs, Friuli ranks third amongst Italy’s 20 autonomie in its percentage of DOC wine production (behind only Trentino-Alto Adige and Piedmont). The Collio and Colli Orientali del Friuli DOCs are generally held in the highest esteem, with Grave del Friuli being the most prolific.

In terms of terroir, the most important influence on Friuli's vineyards is their position between the Alps and the Adriatic. Wine styles vary depending on whether an estate enjoys a Mediterranean climate near the sea or the alpine continental climate further inland. Higher vineyards in the north/northeast may rise above the low-lying cloud banks that can linger between the hills and the coast. This allows grapes to soak in the sun and develop to their full phenolic potential without overripening; aromatics are deepened, and a wine’s acidic structure becomes more pronounced. At lower altitudes closer to the coast, producers may count upon more stable, maritime weather, but this comes with less dramatic swings in diurnal temperature.

FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI DOC

Established in 1970 as Colli Orientali del Friuli (trans: "eastern hills of Friuli"), this designation slightly altered its name in 2011 to the current iteration: Friuli Colli Orientali DOC. Whatever the label, this subalpine zone has long been home to some of Friuli's most prestigious vineyards. Estates often sit at a higher altitude (with an average of 400 meters) and tend to be terraced on gently rolling hills. Higher planting densities, older vines and the continental climate all lend themselves to lower yields, and greater concentration. The hills themselves are the product of millions of years of alpine tectonics, as evidenced by the complex, stratified, mineral-rich soil. Known as ‘ponca’ in the local dialect, the predominant soil type is flysch, formed by repeated sedimentary cycles over time that result in alternating layers of calcareous marl and sandstone. Like other cool soil types in the north, ponca promotes later ripening, higher acidity, pronounced aromatics, and high extract - not least of all for white wine.

At slightly more than 1900 hectares (4700 acres) under vine, Colli Orientali is modest in size, but still has more than double the real estate of Collio DOC, which is tucked just beneath it. A narrow strip pressed along the Slovenian border, it begins near Friuli’s northern border with Austria and runs down to the environs of Buttrio. Some two-thirds of production are devoted to whites, such as Friulano, Ribolla Gialla, Malvasia Istriana, Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio. Along with 5 additional approved varieties, blends can be of any proportion, but to include the varietal on the label, a wine must be at least 85%.