


CLUB CHEVALIER

HEIRLOOM GRAPES

NOVEMBER 2018



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In the 2012 edition of their seminal work *Wine Grapes*, experts of the vine Jancis Robinson, Julia Harding, and José Vouillamoz catalogued no fewer than 1,368 unique grape varieties. The authors specified that these represent only those cultivated on a large enough scale to be commercially available; in reality, they estimated there to be thousands, if not tens of thousands, of additional types of wine grapes in existence. Other research has shown that, of these myriad specimens, only a dozen or so make up roughly 90 percent of the surface area planted to wine grapes worldwide. What, then, of the countless others?

There is no doubt that certain grapes are inherently “nobler” than others—the finest expression of Gros Plant, for example, will never come close to rivaling the finest Chardonnay on the planet. But that is not to say we shouldn’t place value in other varieties outside the tried and true classics such as Pinot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Riesling, Barbera, and the like. Numerous lesser-known, less-cultivated grape varieties are more than capable of yielding wines that are at the very least interesting, and occasionally downright superb. The globalization of the wine world and the emergence—and subsequent domination—of commercial trends in wine consumption have all but eradicated a great number of the viticultural gems once found tucked away in all corners of the Old World. Many of these, as it turns out, have something unique to say, offering new flavors to curious drinkers while embodying a rare link to a region’s history and culture.

Luckily, there are still vignerons eager to protect and preserve these traditions. Aware that they possess something special and rare that deserves to be perpetuated, they proudly wave the flag for their region’s heirloom varieties instead of letting these grapes, and the wines made from them, go completely extinct. The choice is not always an easy one: commercial pressures and other socioeconomic factors often favor uprooting these old treasures in favor of more recognizable, more marketable, or higher-yielding vines.



Here you will discover six examples from Italian and French vigneroni who have resisted the tendency to globalize their vineyards, honorably sustaining the varieties native to their respective *terroirs*. Some represent the last remaining ambassadors of an otherwise lost variety, while others have gone out of their way to revive a grape from near-extinction. And though we will never come close to acquainting ourselves with all of the 1,368 wine grapes in cultivation, perhaps we can be enriched and inspired from tasting and savoring something other than yet another Sauvignon Blanc.



2017 VAL DE LOIRE FIÉ GRIS

◆ ÉRIC CHEVALIER \$25

FIÉ GRIS is a local name for Sauvignon Gris, a gray- to rosé-hued relative of the Sauvignon Blanc grape. Mostly abandoned in the Loire Valley and Bordeaux, where formerly it was planted with some regularity, the grape may be in the early stages of a comeback. Éric Chevalier's version is solid proof that there is merit to the grape as a *monocépage*—it gives a unique, highly aromatic wine loaded with spicy and even tropical nuances. André Chatenoud of the Château de Bellevue in Lussac-Saint-Émilion has also planted some in order to make a white Bordeaux, while Éric is lucky enough to have a parcel of older vines to work with.

➔ *Also known as Sauvignon Rose, this grape variety was widely planted in the Val de Loire and Haut-Poitou regions before the phylloxera crisis, but disappeared to the great advantage of Sauvignon Blanc, its closest cousin. Nowadays, only a select few vigneronns still cultivate this rare grape, with the goal of exploiting its unique aromatic properties.*

The parcel was destined to be torn up by its previous proprietor, who was eager to retire, but his most faithful client—a sommelier from a restaurant on the Atlantic Coast—reached out to us in order to preserve this fascinating variety.

This is a wine of real character that fully expresses the intimate relationship between the cépage and its special terroir in the Pays de Retz.

—ÉRIC CHEVALIER

2017 VENEZIA GIULIA MALVASIA “CHIOMA INTEGRALE”

◆ VIGNAI DA DULINE \$45

THE NAME of this lovely wine highlights the Duline philosophy: “No trimming of the shoots!” This applies to *viticoltore* Lorenzo Mocchiutti's hair and beard as well as to his vineyards. *Chioma* in Italian means “long hair” and “canopy of tree leaves.” Though it is generally accepted that vines are trimmed of excess leaves or fruit to concentrate a vine's efforts toward healthy bunches of grapes, Lorenzo and Federica let their vines find their own balance, choosing not to trim any of their vines. Suffice it to say that this is one of Duline's many secrets to success. Malvasia Istriana, a form of the Malvasia grape native to the Istrian Peninsula, produces deliciously complex white wines that are a far cry from other Malvasia produced in central Italy. This is a seductive apéritif and an excellent seafood white.

2017 COTEAUX DU LOIR *ROUGE* “CUVÉE DU ROSIER”

◆ PASCAL JANVIER \$20



THIS REASONABLY PRICED, delicately flavored charmer is made from 100 percent Pineau d'Aunis, an indigenous red grape we hold dear to our collective hearts because of its mystifying aromatics, low alcohol, and bright, juicy texture. White pepper, roses, and strawberry fields come to mind, while a subtle palate-tickling spritz livens it up further (this effect

is intentional, but if it bothers you, simply shake up the bottle or decant it). A team player at table, this red works well with many diverse cuisines; try it with numbing Szechuan fried chicken for a delicious revelation.

2016 COLLINE SAVONESI CRUVIN ◆ PUNTA CRENA \$34

LIGURIA IS BEST KNOWN for its crisp, aromatic whites—perfumed quaffers that get along nicely with the seafood-based cuisine. The region's rare red wines often feature Sangiovese imported from nearby Tuscany or Granaccia (Grenache) from southern France, but other Ligurian reds spotlight indigenous grapes planted only in very localized areas. Nothing could be truer of Crovino, a dark-skinned red grown, as far as we know, exclusively by the Ruffino family of Punta Crena in their vineyards overlooking the seaside town of Varigotti. Crovino gives low yields, and its berries tend to fall to the ground upon achieving full ripeness, inciting other growers to tear out their vines in favor of less fussy varieties. Fortunately, we can still enjoy a taste of Varigotti history through this delightfully soft, spicy, medium-bodied red. It shines alongside Ligurian pasta dishes—*pansotti* with *salsa alle noci* (walnut sauce) is a classic—or cuisine from the region's mountainous interior, such as roast rabbit with taggiasca olives and wild herbs.



2015 VIN DE FRANCE *ROUGE* “COSTA NERA”

◆ CLOS CANARELLI \$94

CORSICA BOASTS a wealth of rare, indigenous grape varieties, but many of these fell out of favor over the latter half of the twentieth century as the French government went on a crusade of sorts to replace them with varieties from the mainland—Grenache, Carignan, Syrah, and so on. This sort of vinous colonialism neglected to account for the fact that the Corsican grapes were perfectly adapted to the local *terroir*, whereas grapevines from the Rhône or Provence thrived under completely different conditions; ultimately, it led to the loss of many unique wines. Thanks to a proud group of Corsican vigneroni, led by Antoine Arena, Jean-Charles Abbatucci, and Yves Canarelli, dozens of heirloom grape varieties have been identified and brought back from the brink of extinction in a valiant effort to reproduce what might resemble the traditional wines of Corsica’s past.

One such grape, Carcaghjolu Neru, is endemic to southern Corsica and has now been replanted by a handful of vigneroni across the island. Canarelli’s Costa Nera is riveting proof that this grape belongs on the granite slopes of Figari. Deep, dark, powerful, and mineral-driven, this is Corsica’s answer to Cornas—loaded with nuances of pepper, graphite, wild fruit, and herbaceous maquis, full of drive and freshness. This is truly a grandiose monument to the power of Corsica’s heirloom grapes.

2011 FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI REFOSCO DAL

PEDUNCOLO ROSSO ◆ LA VIARTE \$35

LIKE ALTO ADIGE and France’s Alsace, Friuli’s turbulent history has endowed it with a fascinating cultural diversity. Near Italy’s border with Slovenia, road signs are written in both Italian and Slovenian; even the architecture points to a notable Slavic influence. Friuli also boasts a complex viticultural heritage: La Viarte’s well-exposed terraced vineyards are home to a number of native heirloom varieties. Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso—a subvariety of Refosco named for the red color its stalks acquire at ripeness—prosperes in the Colli Orientali district, a series of foothills between the Alps and the moderating Adriatic Sea. Seven years after the vintage, the pronounced tannins and acidity of this 2011 have melded into a thing of elegance, with mouth-coating fruit that hints at plum and blackberry. You will appreciate it best alongside a hearty autumn feast.



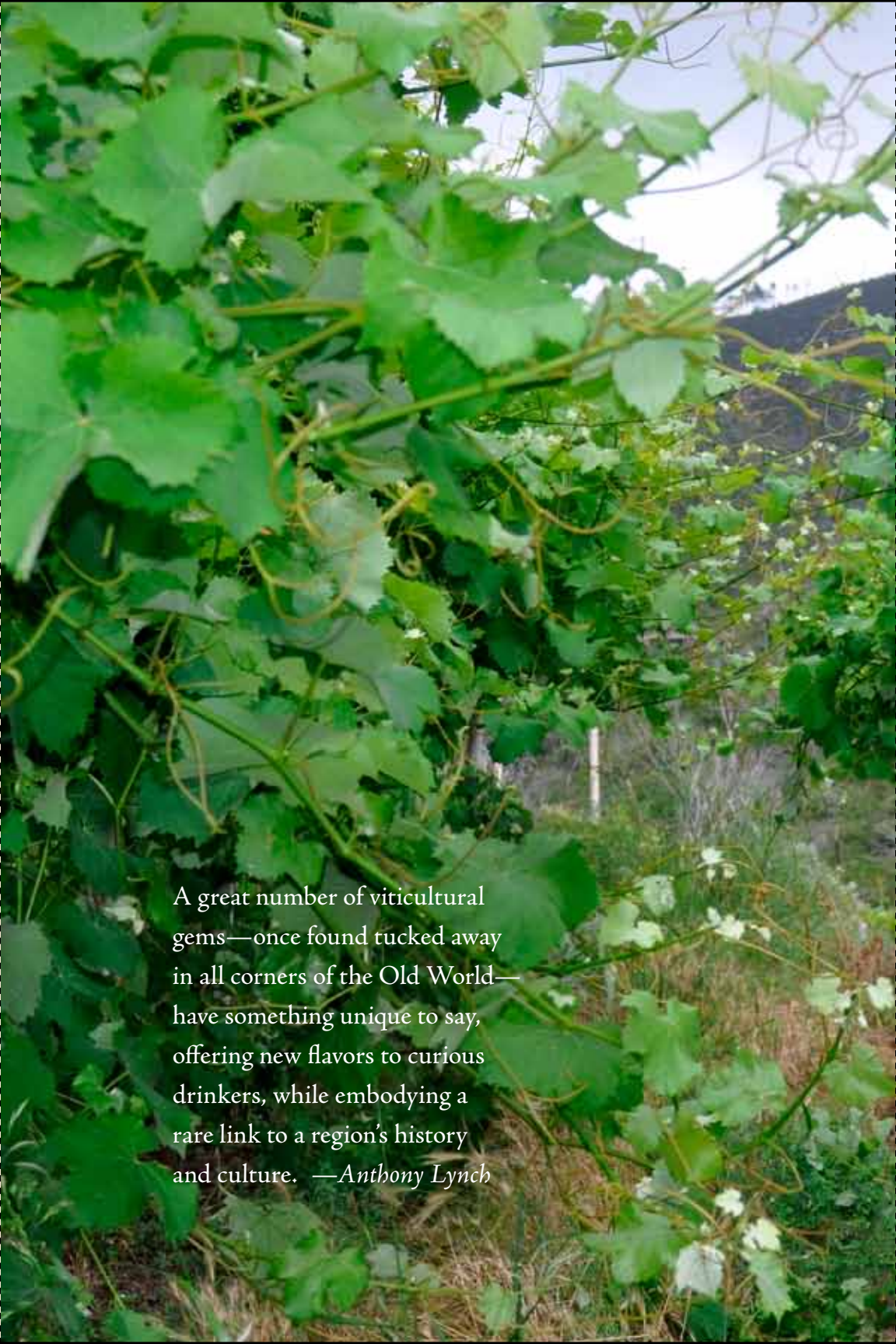


2017 Val de Loire Fié Gris <i>Éric Chevalier</i> LOIRE	Sauvignon Gris	20-year-old vines Gravel, silt, sand	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Decant optional	Tropical fruit, jalapeño, stone, flowers Rich, luscious, crisp, exotic	Drink now
2017 Venezia Giulia Malvasia “Chioma Integrale” <i>Vignai da Duline</i> FRIULI	Malvasia Istriana	Vines planted in 1960 Red clay, limestone	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–54° F Decant optional	Pine, fresh herbs, citrus, sea salt Zesty, lively, silky, mouthwatering	Drink now
2017 Coteaux du Loir Rouge “Cuvée du Rosier” <i>Pascal Janvier</i> LOIRE	Pineau d'Aunis	25-year-old vines Clay, sand	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	White pepper, rose petal, strawberry, damp earth Bright, delicate, tart, ethereal	Drink now
2016 Colline Savonesi Cruvin <i>Punta Crena</i> LIGURIA	Crovino	Vines planted in 1950, 1984, 1999 Sandy gravel	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Wild berries, black pepper, clove, tobacco Juicy, supple, medium-bodied	Drink now
2015 Vin de France Rouge “Costa Nera” <i>Clos Canarelli</i> CORSICA	Carcaghjolu Neru	Vines planted in 2007 Granite	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Blackberry, graphite, roasted spices Dense, firm, focused, assertive	Drink now through 2025
2011 Friuli Colli Orientali Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso <i>La Viarte</i> FRIULI	Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso	Vines planted in 1983, 2006 Ponca (marl and sandstone)	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours	Plum, forest fruits, mocha, dry bay leaf Intense, mouth- coating, velvety, elegant	Drink now through 2025

cover: Paolo Ruffino of Punta Crena. Photo © Dixon Brooke
inner panel: Francesco Valori, owner of the Ronco Pitotti
vineyard, and Lorenzo Mocchiutti of Vignai da Duline.
Photo © Joanie Karapetian

middle top: Pascal Janvier.
Photo © Tours Val de Loire Gastronomie
middle bottom: Ruffino kids in the vineyard.
Photo © Dixon Brooke

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A great number of viticultural gems—once found tucked away in all corners of the Old World—have something unique to say, offering new flavors to curious drinkers, while embodying a rare link to a region's history and culture. —*Anthony Lynch*