



Pigato grapes in Bruna vineyard (above); Ligurian Sea (right).

ALAN TARDI

It never fails: I get in the car and head west, up into the Alta Langhe and the mountains. When I eventually come through a pass (or a tunnel) and begin the long, curvy descent, I feel a sense of excitement and almost giddy anticipation. I get out and take a deep breath: the air has a certain crispness and buoyancy and its own special perfume, a mix of delicate flowers, salt, and schist. Even the light here seems different, bright and diaphanous, like the clear water of the Mediterranean. I'm in Liguria, facing the sea.

Many people know Liguria through its chic coastal destinations, like Portofino and the Cinque Terre. Others are familiar with its delicately aromatic oils from the Taggiasca olive or its fragrant basil used in *pesto genovese*. But Liguria also produces exceptional wines from

unusual grape varieties that offer compelling expressions of this extraordinary place. Most of them remain practically unknown outside their immediate area of production.

Since Italy is a peninsula, the vast majority of its 18 wine regions touch water. But none embraces the sea quite the way Liguria does. In fact, this scythe-shaped appellation, one of Italy's smallest, resembles a curved hand gently cupping the Mediterranean. The fingertips touch France, the wrist borders Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, and the space above the fingers, along the spine of the Apennine Mountains, contains Piedmont. The city of Genoa, right in the middle of the curve, divides Liguria in two: the western side is called the Ponente because that's where the sun sets; the eastern side is the Levante.

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Reawakening by the Sea





Prima Terra Zuncone vineyard in Cinque Terre.

Bisson vineyard in Golfo del Tigullio.



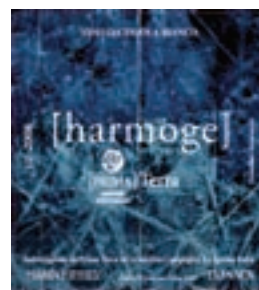
The Terroir

Despite its small surface area (a little more than 13,000 acres, nearly 70% of which is covered by forest), Liguria is a land of dramatic contrasts. Its complex geological history can be detected in its steep mountains and twisted cliff faces, broken by perpendicular valleys that open to the water. Here, mountain meets sea and a continental climate meets a Mediterranean one. The land shoots straight up from the coast—you can climb to 1,300 feet in a matter of minutes.

While there are a few flat areas of alluvial soil, comprising fine clay with lots of sand and stones, most vineyards are planted up in the hills, where the steep plots are often barely accessible by foot. There is a notable difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures at these elevations, along with a wide variety of soil types: the typical *tarso*, consisting of finely shredded rock; *terra rossa*, which is red due to its high iron content; and *terra bianca*, with lots of chalk and phosphorus. Most of the soils are quite loose and thus retain little water, making for restrained, lighter-bodied wines with crisp acidity, minerality, and elegance. High or low, flat or steep, the proximity of the vineyards to the sea is a major factor; nearly constant sea breezes ventilate the vines, while salty mists contribute a pervasive sapid quality to the grapes.

Everywhere you look, the hillsides are lined with ancient terraces of dry stone

Roberto Germani and Francesca Bruna, owners of Bruna.



LIGURIA



Bruna vineyard in Colline Savonesi (left).

walls called *fasce* (pronounced FA-shay), originally built by inhabitants known as the Ligure, in an ingenious (some might call it desperate) attempt to make something grow on an incredibly difficult terrain. Over hundreds of years, these hand-crafted terraces have sculpted the landscape into a special terroir, representing a unique synthesis between people and place—one that is encapsulated in its wines.

Vineyard parcels, naturally fragmented by the topography, are often further divided by inheritance. The majority of wineries are small family operations with an often-miniscule volume of production. Although wine has been produced in Liguria since at least ancient Roman times, most of it was for personal consumption until only recently.

Grape Varieties

Liguria is divided into four provinces: Imperia, Savona, Genoa, and La Spezia. The eight Denominazioni di Origine Controllata and three Indicazioni Geografica Tipica (see box) are based mainly on indigenous grape varieties.

Vermentino is the predominant grape, and the only one grown throughout the entire region. Some say it came from Sardinia or southern France, where it is known as Rolle, though others argue it appeared here first. Vermentino is also grown in neighboring Tuscany and in Piedmont, where it is known as Favorita. Whatever its origins, there is no doubt that Vermentino has found its true home in Liguria. It is versatile enough to adapt to the region's drastically varied

microclimates, expressing itself and its environment in many different ways.

Most of the other grape varieties are closely connected with particular subregions. Pigato got its name from the Ligurian dialect, in which *pighe* means “mark” or “blemish”; when ripe, the grape turns golden yellow and develops distinctive dark spots on its skin. Pigato grows almost exclusively on the Ponente side—especially in the province of Savona near the coastal town of Albenga, where it may be labeled Pigato di Albenga or Pigato Albenganese. Some vineyards (including those of the legendary Massaretti winery) are planted in the flat plains around Albenga; others are higher up, near the hamlet of



LIGURIAN APPELLATIONS

DENOMINAZIONI DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA	INDICAZIONI GEOGRAFICA TIPICA
Cinque Terre and Cinque Terre Sciacchetrá	Colline Genovesi or Colline del Genovesato
Colli di Luni	Colline Savonesi
Colline di Levante	Golfo dei Poeti della Spezia
Golfo del Tigullio	
Ormeasco di Pornassio or Pornassio	
Riviera Ligure di Ponente	
Rossese di Dolceacqua or Dolceacqua	
Val Polcevera	



Lunae winery (top) and vineyard in Colli di Luni (above).

Ranzo. Generally speaking, the former are more intense and fuller-bodied, while the latter have more perfume. Although Pigato and Vermentino were long thought to be completely different grapes, ampelographers have recently proved that they have the same DNA. Their expressions are quite different, however: while Vermentino tends to show more aromatics (including floral notes), a light-to-medium body, and exotic fruit flavors, Pigato is more muscular and restrained, with an almost oily viscosity and more pro-



nounced earthy-mineral flavors.

Rossese most likely came to Europe from the Middle East by way of Greece. It is unclear whether it was first cultivated in Liguria or in Provence, France (where it is called Tibouren), but Rossese has certainly found its niche in Imperia and Savona. Grown in the steep mountains bordering the twin valleys around the towns of Dolceacqua and Soldano, it produces a rather dark, full-bodied wine with fairly high alcohol. The Rossese di Dolceacqua DOC, established in 1972, is Liguria's oldest; with at least one year of aging, the wine may be labeled Superiore. Rossese is also produced around Albenga under the Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC. This version (sometimes referred to as Rossese di Campochiesa) is notably lighter in color and body than the Dolceacqua, but both are distinguished by their intense, exotic aromas and distinctive varietal character. There is also an extremely scarce white grape called Rossese Bianco that grows almost exclusively around Dolceacqua, in addition to limited plantings in La Spezia and Piedmont.

Lumassina is a white variety found only in Savona. It comes in still, sparkling, and *frizzante* versions (some producers even make a sweet *passito*) and, as if that weren't complicated enough, goes by two other names: Buzzetto (in the area of Quiliano) and Mataosso (or Mataòssu).

Bianchetta, which means "the little white one" in Italian, is a white grape that grows in the province of Genoa and typically makes straw-colored, light-to-medium-bodied wines.

Bosco is the most important grape of La Spezia and the predominant variety (more than 60%), along with Vermentino and another local

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

White

VERMENTINO

Durin Lunghera, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$18

With a production of about 17,000 cases per year, Durin is one of Liguria's largest producers. This Vermentino's unusual nose suggests a resinous clay pot infused with dried flowers and candy shop. It has a soft attack and a light body, with strawberry-licorice flavors, a creamy finish, and just enough acidity to pull it off.

Laura Aschero, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$25

This golden-to-straw-colored Vermentino offers pleasing notes of shiny new shoes and lavender honey. Clean baked-apple and crisp Bosc-pear flavors emerge on the tightly wound palate and keep evolving through the finish. Nicely proportioned, understated, and elegant, it keeps you coming back for more.

Punta Crena Vigneto Isasco, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$25

Transparent straw color with golden-green reflections. The nose features fairly aggressive, almost harsh notes of green grass accompanied by slate and a hint of varnish. Tight acidity with a suggestion of *petillance* grips the palate, which then relaxes into medium-bodied, supple flavors of white peach, kiwi, and gooseberry.

Santa Caterina Poggi Alti, Colli di Luni DOC 2010 \$NA

Pale golden-yellow, the Poggi Alti sends up appealingly subtle aromas of cedar and tobacco leaf with hints of honeysuckle. The initial attack of candied lemon rind segues into dry, chalky minerality and an almost bitter finish. Fuller-bodied than most Vermentinos, it is thus more appropriate for grilled pheasant breast or roast boar than for fish.

PIGATO

Cascina Fèipu dei Massaretti, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$15

A fresh, slightly peachy aroma is followed by a bone-dry palate with firm acidity and hints of dried apricot. Medium-bodied and well balanced, this wine is highly mineral, almost salty, with a pleasantly bitter finish.

Durin Braie, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$19

The invitingly subtle nose of apricot and chalk is both fresh and intense; the palate is full, but nicely balanced by firm acidity. Notes of roasted pear with a touch of clove make for a sweet finish, followed by a savory aftertaste.

Laura Aschero, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$35

Pale yellow-gold, with restrained notes of varnished wood and dried flowers. The palate is lively and nicely proportioned; emerging baked-apple flavors are perfectly balanced by crisp, tart acidity, which follows through to the dry, mineral finish.

Maria Donata Bianchi, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$37

An intriguing bouquet, subtle yet intense: not so much fruit as old perfume and dried flower petals. The palate is clean and well balanced, with a viscous note of lemon syrup that isn't heavy or cloying. Flavors of dried, macerated figs with a touch of resinous tree bark are followed by a long, sweet-and-sour finish. I suspect a bit more than the listed 13% alcohol.

Massimo Alessandri Della Curia, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2009 \$NA

The nose offers fresh aromas of apple blossoms with a hint of toast. On the palate, the first impression is of a tingly *petillance*, followed by roasted pear; firm acidity then carries through to a pleasant, dry finish. Well proportioned and intense, yet elegant and restrained, the wine belies its stated 14% alcohol and could improve further with a bit of aging.

Massimo Alessandri Vigne Veggio, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2009 \$NA

Pale gold in color, with refined yet potent aromas, this old-vine Pigato is alcoholic and almost meaty. The full, rich palate features flavors of baked apple and ripe white honey fig. A creamy finish leaves a mouth-coating sensation. Big and intense, but not heavy-handed.

Punta Crena Vigneto Ca' da Rena, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$15

Brownish-gold, with an unusual chestnut-honey scent. A sweet, oily, almost

syrupy attack is quickly followed by tongue-tickling acidity. The ripe, stewed fruit has a late-harvest intensity that lingers even after the minerality of the finish—reminiscent of a dry Alsatian Riesling.

CINQUE TERRE

Cantina Cinque Terre, Cinque Terre DOC 2010 \$NA

A pale straw color leads to light, lemony scents of grass, wild herbs, and cement. Clean and crisp on the palate, the co-op's basic wine combines a tart lemon-mineral finish with a hint of wild strawberry.

Cantina Cinque Terre Costa da' Posa di Volastra, Cinque Terre DOC 2010 \$NA

Shiny, pale gold in the glass, with ripe green apple on the nose, this is the roundest and richest of Cinque Terre's crus.

Cantina Cinque Terre Costa de Campu di Manarola, Cinque Terre DOC 2010 \$NA

Pale, transparent yellow with golden highlights. Its subtly exotic bouquet of starfruit, bitter melon, and Asian pear makes it the winery's most aromatic bottling.

Cantina Cinque Terre Costa de Sèra di Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre DOC 2010 \$NA

With its grapefruit-rind aroma and honey-lemon palate, this is the crispest and most elegant of the co-op's crus.

Cantina Cinque Terre Libeccio, Cinque Terre DOC 2009 \$NA

Macerated and partially fermented on the skins, the Libeccio shows a pale yellow-gold hue. The palate is a bit creamy at first, but a lively *petillance* heralds flavors of Golden Delicious apple, turning to mulled gooseberry with a touch of caramel on the finish.

Forlini Cappellini, Cinque Terre DOC 2009 \$26

An attractive golden-yellow color leads to intense, extracted notes of stewed golden plum, acacia honey, and narcissus flowers, with an appealing hint of oxidation. This Cappellini is rich and full on the palate—viscous, but not heavy—yet has an almost silken suppleness and just enough acidity to balance it out. A long flavor arc continues well past the earthy finish. Stellar example of the rocky terroir of the Cinque Terre.

OTHER WHITES

Bisson L'Antico, Colline del Genovesato IGT 2010 \$14

Made from an obscure, apparently indigenous grape variety called Cimixia, this wine is pale yellow, with a fresh nose of underripe crab apples. The clean palate shows a bit of *petillance*; a core of baked apple crumble is beautifully balanced by crisp acidity, leading to a sea-salt finish.

La Cantina Levantese Costa di Brazzo, Colline di Levante DOC 2009 \$NA

Clear with a light-yellow sheen. Invitingly fresh aromas of white peach and lemon zest are followed by a light-to-medium-bodied palate with firm acidity and bitter-almond flavors, then a dry, mineral finish. Made from the same blend of Bosco, Albarola, and Vermentino as in Cinque Terre, this wine is leaner and less expressive, but carries its 13% alcohol well.

Maccario Dringenberg Rossese Bianco Lady Dringenberg VdT 2010 \$15

Produced in minuscule quantities by Giovanna Maccario, daughter of one of the oldest winemaking families in the Dolceaqua area, and her German-born husband, Goetz Dringenberg. A fine nose of white-flower blossoms leads to a perfectly proportioned mouthfeel, full of ripe pineapple fruit with tart acidity, and a clean, dry, mouthwateringly mineral finish. This Rossese Bianco is elegant and understated—you would never guess it had 13.5% alcohol.

Massimo Alessandri Viorus VdT 2009 \$NA

50% Viognier, 50% Roussanne. Medium-dark golden yellow in color, and viscous enough to resemble a liqueur when poured. Intriguing aromas of clove, cinnamon, white pepper, and vanilla extract are followed by a thick, intense palate. The Poire Williams flavors become quite sweet, but there's enough acidity to keep the wine from being cloying.

OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

Pino Gino Bianchetta Genovese, Golfo del Tigullio DOC 2010 \$NA

Light golden-straw with green reflections. A pretty bouquet of fresh-cut grass and hay has an underlying hint of caramelized kumquat. The attack is soft, but the palate is full and mouth-puckeringly sour. Ripe pear and honeydew-melon flavors emerge midpalate, followed by more acidity and a dry, mineral finish with lingering tartness.

Prima Terra Harmoge VdT 2008 \$45

Made by Walter de Battè, this blend of Vermentino, Bosco, and Albarola from Cinque Terre and Colli di Luni shows a dark-amber color with a brownish hue. The nose suggests caramel-coated fresh fig, wet earth, and varnished wood, with a hint of gaminess. The palate is intense, but not sweet, with extracted flavors of dried fig, dried banana, and toasted walnuts. There's enough acidity to keep the wine going through a long finish of mouth-drying minerals and tannins. Peculiar yet compelling, especially with roasted pheasant or boar.

Punta Crena Mataòssu Vigneto Reiné, Colline Savonesi IGT 2007 \$18

Shiny gold with yellow-amber highlights. An intense, concentrated, almost unctuous nose features overripe, shriveled fruit and toasty oak, but the palate leads off with ripe flavors of fresh papaya, caramelized fig, and Mandarin orange, backed by lively acidity and a mineral edge. This wine is big and multilayered, with a long finish and a mouth-coating aftertaste—it makes a brash statement and manages to pull it off.

Rosato**Bisson Ciliegiole, Golfo del Tigullio DOC** 2010 \$17

Bright reddish-pink in color. An earthy nose of dark, wild berries and licorice root leads to flavors of bright strawberry and sour cherry. Bone-dry, the wine seems much bigger than its 12% alcohol would suggest. It makes a great accompaniment to roast pork and grilled chicken, as well as fish.

Cascina Praié Ros'è VdT 2010 \$NA

40% Grenache, 40% Mourvèdre, 20% Barbarossa. Pale salmon-orange, with an appealingly delicate nose of apple blossoms and sour cherry, accompanied by whispers of clove and white pepper. After a soft attack, this likeable *rosato* seems almost creamy on the palate, with lemony applesauce and cinnamon flavors evolving to fresh berries on the finish. It supports its 13% alcohol with grace and elegance.

Lunae Mea Rosa, Golfo dei Poeti IGT 2010 \$17

Made from the rare Vermentino Nero grape. A lovely, pale orange-pink color leads to a fresh peach-blossom perfume. Crisp acidity accentuates ripe tangerine and melon flavors. The wine finishes with pleasantly tart watermelon-rind bitterness and a sweet, lingering aftertaste. Simple, lively, and drinkable, even at 13% alcohol.

Red**Bruna Pulin, Colline Savonesi IGT** 2009 \$21

Sweet, intense aromas of ripe black plum and star anise are followed by a palate that is big, soft, and luscious, but not heavy, despite 14.5% alcohol. Red fruits are backed by hints of rosemary, black pepper, and cinnamon stick, turning to bitter chocolate on a dry, slatey finish.

Cascina Fèipu dei Massaretti Rossese, Riviera Ligure di Ponente DOC 2010 \$15

Reddish-pink in color. Pronounced alcohol (listed as only 12.5%) competes with an interesting nose of cardboard box, burnt toffee, and nasturtium. After a bit of *petillance*, the palate becomes lean and earthy, finishing with sour redcurrant flavor and eucalyptus cough-drop sweetness.

Cascina Nirasca Ormeasco di Pornassio Superiore DOC 2009 \$NA

A dark brick-red color leads to an alcoholic nose, underlaid with aromas of blackcurrant and brandy-soaked raisins. The rich palate features flavors of stewed plum and dried juniper berry, backed by tart cranberry acidity and hints of black

pepper and clove. Tannins come out on the finish. This is a big, appealing wine with lots of room to grow.

Guglierame Sciac-trà, Ormeasco di Pornassio DOC 2010 \$NA

Made by two brothers who live in the castle of Pornassio, carrying on the tradition of Ormeasco's most historic winery. This version, colored a transparent reddish-pink with a slight brown hue, displays scents of overripe dried berries and forest floor. The palate features a tart raspberry flavor with an almost rubbery edge. Restrained and earthy, the wine is a good match for roast quail. Only 12% alcohol.

Innocenzo Turco Granaccia Vigneto dei Cappuccini, Colline Savonesi IGT 2008 \$NA

Brick-red with a brown rim. An attractive nose of ripe black cherry, bitter chocolate, roasted coffee bean, and leather leads to a soft entry of tart, ripe pomegranate and dried cranberry. Supple tannins appear on the long, rather sweet finish, followed by a pleasantly bitter aftertaste. A big, concentrated wine that is still taut and focused, it has no problem supporting its 13.5% alcohol.

Lunae Niccolo V Riserva, Colli di Luni DOC 2005 \$21

An intense purple-velvet color leads to notes of ripe black cherry, milk chocolate, and licorice, backed by toasty new oak. The wine is lush, full, and extracted on the palate, with a long, refreshingly dry finish marked by woody tannins. Big and muscular, but well proportioned to support its 14.5% alcohol, it shows no signs of age. An unequivocally New World-style wine from the biggest player (more than 30,000 cases a year) in the Lunigiana area.

Pino Gino Ciliegiole, Golfo del Tigullio DOC 2010 \$NA

High in the hills above Chiavari, the little town of Castiglione Chiavarese is a world apart from the chic seaside resorts along the southern coast of Genoa. This reddish-purple bottling is correspondingly different, displaying notes of ripe black cherry and cassis with hints of leather and rosemary. Full-bodied and well-knit, it has a rich black-plum core and an earthy, almost gamey quality. Firm tannins support the finish.

Santa Caterina Rosso, Colli di Luni DOC 2007 \$NA

Wild mint, sage, and Mediterranean brush appear on the nose, along with a hint of grilled game. The taut and leathery palate features stewed berry conserve, followed by a green-tannin finish and an aftertaste of white pepper. Lean despite its 13.5% alcohol, it could be paired with braised wild rabbit.

Terre Bianche, Rossese di Dolceacqua DOC 2010 \$31

Bright garnet-red with an eye-catching transparency and pretty aromas of rose petal, pomegranate, bitter almond, and tree bark. A soft entry is supported by a delightful lemonade acidity; tart strawberry flavors quickly give way to chalky minerality and a refreshing bitterness on the finish. The wine's 13% alcohol is gracefully carried.

Passito**Arrigoni Cinque Terre Sciacchetra (375 ml)** 1999 \$NA

This is the king of Liguria's *passiti* and one of the most famous in Italy. Painstakingly made by hand from minute quantities of primarily Bosco grapes, it resembles chestnut honey in its dark amber color. Alcohol gives an edge to the intense maple-syrup aroma. On the palate, a soft, lemony acidity and minerality keep the wine from becoming weighty or cloying. Macerated prune flavors combine with a smooth honey-lemon-tea sensation on the finish.

Cascina Fèipu dei Massaretti Passito di Pigato La Bice VdT N.V. \$NA

Subtle aromas of fragrant lemon rind and rocks are backed by pronounced alcohol. The mouthfeel is viscous, but not heavy, as in a good Ligurian olive oil. Moderately sweet roasted-pear, dried-apricot, and pistachio flavors on the midpalate are tempered by crisp acidity and an almost salty finish.

Prices are current estimated retail.

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LIGURIA



Punta Crena vineyard in Riviera Ligure di Ponente (left).



variety, Albarola, in the blends for Cinque Terre DOC and Colline di Levante DOC. A rare sweet wine of the Cinque Terre called Sciacchetrà is made almost exclusively from Bosco because of the grape's thick skin, which allows it to dry well and resist mold.

Ormeasco (the name comes from the town of Ormea, just across the border in Piedmont) is a Ligurian mutation of Dolcetto. It grows in Imperia, high up in the mountains around the town of Pornassio, and can be distinguished from the Piemontese version by its distinctive red branches. It is also a bit less fruit-forward because of the mineral-rich soils and high altitude of Liguria. Ormeasco Superiore must be aged at least one year; other versions include a *passito* and a paler, almost-*rosato* type called Sciac-tra' (which means "crush and take away" in the local dialect).

Granaccia is the Ligurian name for Grenache, which undoubtedly came here from southern France. It grows primarily in Savona, especially around the town of Quiliano, where efforts are under way to have Granaccia di Quiliano recognized as a subzone of the Colline Savonesi IGT.



Local Flavor

Whether it's a pairing of a full-bodied Granaccia, Dolceacqua Superiore, or Ormeasco with a dish of rabbit or lamb in the mountainous interior; a lemony Lumassina with fried fish; or an oily Vermentino with more substantial seafood, the delicately aromatic, crisply acidic, elegantly mineral-driven wines of Liguria provide the perfect accompaniment for its varied cuisine. These same qualities make the wines extremely food-friendly and versatile enough to go with many different styles of cooking.

But while Liguria offers a breathtakingly beautiful retreat for foodies and tourists, it is not an easy place to live and work. Because of the rough terrain, the earliest inhabitants struggled simply to eke out a living, and many still struggle today. A once-prosperous flower industry is all but extinct; the area around San Remo, still known as the Costa dei Fiori, is littered with vacant greenhouses. While the olive-oil business crawls along and the tourist trade gallops, the wine industry hobbles. Making wine here is an expensive, back-breaking, time-consuming endeavor that is often not worth the trouble, especially if you have to struggle to sell it. More and more farmers are getting too old to work their tiny plots, and many of the ancient terraces that were so painstakingly constructed are being abandoned and left to crumble, their faint outlines barely discernible under an overgrowth of trees.

The Cinque Terre cooperative, founded in 1973, is the standard bearer for winemaking in the spectacular area of the "Five Lands," which has become a national park and a UNESCO World Heritage site. This co-op has enabled

KEY PRODUCERS

Arrigoni

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Importer: Rosenthal
Wine Merchants
www.madrose.com

Bruna

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www.brunapigato.it
Importer: Robert
Chadderdon Selections
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**Cascina Fèipu dei
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Not yet imported

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Not yet imported

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Guglierame

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Not yet imported

Innocenzo Turco

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La Cantina Levantese

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Not yet imported

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Terre Bianche

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www.vinemerchants.com



Terre Bianche winery (top) and vineyard (above) in Dolceacqua.



more than 300 small farmers to continue growing grapevines and others to expand their winemaking operations and strike out on their own. But according to Matteo Bonanini, longtime president of Cinque Terre, “We have a saying here: every time the church bell tolls, another vineyard is lost.”

On the surface, the prospects for Ligurian wine look bleak—yet perhaps a sea change is coming. Consumers and professionals alike have a new appreciation for terroir-driven wines with personality, elegance, and restraint. Wine buyers are seeking unusual products to offer their customers, and importers are searching for more artisanal producers; in today’s sophisticated distribution system, limited quantities are not as problematic as they once were. Young winemakers are starting up new operations or imparting energy into older ones. Many producers are looking to export their wines for the first time.

While Liguria will always be an area of limited production, it may be on the verge of a comeback that will not only permit the continuation of its ancient viticultural traditions, but will allow its unique wines to be appreciated by a much wider global audience. 🍷