

# The Riviera Grapevine

A blog for all things wine related along the  
French & Italian Riviera

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## Five Rooms with Vine Views

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I've got holidays on the mind. We're heading to Croatia in a couple of weeks and one of the things I'm most excited about is the chance to discover the local wine whilst we're there, and all the wonderfully foreign sounding grape varieties I'll be able to cross reference with my (new) bible Wine Grapes on our return!

Since booking the flights, I've spent a fair bit of time browsing through numerous identikit beachside villas in Zadar. Please don't take that last sentence as a complaint, it's just that every enticing photo of a sunset, beach, or perfectly positioned glass of wine on the balcony overlooking said beach and sunset, makes it that little bit tougher for me to decide on one. Just one! You see, I seem to suffer from severe indecision, a very irrational inability to easily chose one meal in a restaurant, one hotel, etc for fear of missing out on something better. Thankfully Zadar's not a wine landscape dotted with boutique vineyards each offering rustic B&B style accommodation, then this indecision would be even more pronounced. Luckily, when I've been fortunate enough to be holidaying in such places, such important decisions have been made by others and I've been introduced to some amazing gems to which I have returned year in year out. My favourite place in the world is a vineyard/agriturismo in Serralunga, Piemonte, however I've got a weekend booked there at the end of May, so I'll keep quiet until then!

Right, so where am I going with the above ramblings? This thought process got me thinking about what local vineyards offered onsite accommodation. In Italy, it's known as Agriturismo, in France I guess you'd describe it as a vineyard with an onsite Chambre d'Hôte. There's definitely many out there, although the properties are more concentrated in the outer reaches of my search area in Eastern Liguria and the Var. That's not to dismiss the area close to the border however, there are a few surprises to be found. The five below are a mix of where I've stayed and where I'd love to stay one day, and since they are all in different locations, each producing different wines, I need not worry about having to pick just one. Since the perfect weekend break for this grape fan is a weekend tasting wine, with the added bonus of not having to drive home afterwards, my aim is to try them all!

Here goes:

### 1) **Cascina La Maddalena, Rocca Grimalda - 'Stayed before, can't wait to return'**

Ok, so whilst [Cascina La Maddalena Bed & Wine](#) may technically be in Piemonte, it hugs the border with Liguria and is an easy three-hour drive from Nice. In what is prime Gavi country, the production here is somewhat surprisingly limited to red wines (and a grappa of course), something to best forewarn those who favour their white varietals. We stayed here on a girls weekend last year, due to its proximity to the shopping outlet [Serravalle](#), and so enamoured were we with not only the surrounds, but also the lovely ladies that ran the agriturismo, I think some of us would have been more than happy to relax there, rather than go shopping. Whilst the rooms, which can be described as rustic chic, are spread between the two main buildings, the centre of activity is the enormous kitchen/dining/tasting room. Dinner included an array of cheese and charcuterie presented on an enormous wooden board running the width of the table. All accompanied, of course, with wines made from the grape vines we were overlooking. Being Piemonte

the wines are mainly made from Dolcetto and Barbera (no Nebbiolo however – it's a little south-east of Barolo country), and it's impossible to deny that a wine doesn't taste better than when you're on the soil in which it grows!

### 2) **Terre Bianche, Dolceaqua – ‘Great wines & great setting’**

I love Ligurian whites, and if I remember correctly Terre Bianche's Vermentino was my introduction, and is still easily one of my favourites. That perfect wine for a summer afternoon – fruity, floral, well-balanced with crisp acidity. Terre Bianche can be found in the hills above Dolceaqua – a medieval village found high up in the valley between Ventimiglia and Bodighera, making it an easy day trip destination. So, whilst I haven't stayed friends have, and the accommodation comes highly recommended. A selection of simple, yet tastefully decorated rooms, a few even inside restored barracks used during World War II, the location of this vineyard is pretty special with sweeping views from the mountains behind down towards the Ligurian Sea. Doesn't get much better than that! Their Rossese di Dolceaqua, the first Ligurian wine to receive its own DOC (the equivalent of the French AOC) – is a lovely fruit driven red that makes for very easy drinking. For the last two years, Terre Bianche has been named in Wine Spectator & Vinitaly's "Finest Italian Wines-100 Great Producers", considering the amount of producers in Italy, a proud achievement!

### 3) **Collet de Bovis, Bellet – ‘I live in Nice, but if I didn't ....’**

Up along the ridge behind western Nice the views sweep down over the valley of the Var and encompass the Cap d'Antibes and the Esterel Massif through to the craggy Bayou of St Jeannet and the snowy peaks beyond. Not the stereotypical Nice panorama of the Baie des Anges, yet still a view that manages to distract me on my daily drive home from work! Here you'll find the 50 hectares of vines that make up the AOC Bellet, and more specifically Collet de Bovis, growing grapes on a mere 3 hectares of this. Even though the vines were first planted in 1974, it was 1991 when the first wines were commercialised, until then the production had remained the reserve of family and friends. This award-winning vineyard has a self catered Gite to rent by the week, a free-standing house where you can settle in to watch the operations of a working vineyard and sample at your leisure the results. And take in the view, of course!



### 4) **Società Agricola Valleponci, Finale Ligure – ‘One day....’**

I came across their website a few years ago and have been wanting to go since. Thinking about it I really don't know why I haven't, as it's the perfect distance from Nice for a weekend break, however I seem to recall a minimum booking of two nights, and my lovely other half won't budge on his Saturday morning football, which makes the two night weekender a bit more difficult. If you're into your cycling, climbing, hiking type activities Valleponci is perfectly located in the hills along the historic Iulia Augusta, yet only a quick drive down to coastal beaches such as Alassio. With only four rooms, it's an intimate choice, and there's the added bonus of an onsite restaurant (with a menu that I wouldn't have a hope in hell of ever deciding on just one dish to order), as well as a garden terrace which makes a perfect setting for summer meals. Wine production is two reds and a white – Rossesse, Granaccia, Pigato – you can't get more Ligurian than that! Yum!

### 5) **Château Saint Martin, Taradeau – ‘For that special occasion’**

There is an elaborate history to be discovered at Château Saint Martin in the Var. Whilst the beautiful Château dates from the 18th Century, wine making has a long history on this site, introduced here as early as the 10th century by monastic orders. They produce an extensive selection, to include a sparkling blanc de blancs & rosé. I've tasted the last two vintages of their Grand Réserve Cru Classé rosés which were impressive, and I'd like the chance to taste the rest of their wines. I'd say their bed and breakfast is slightly more luxurious than many that fall into the same category, all furnishings inspired by the century which saw the construction of the Château, many original. Each of the beautiful five rooms has its own story to share –