

Below: the high-altitude vineyards of Cantina Terlan in Alto Adige

# My dream dozen whites

Want to try the best dry whites Italy has to offer? Tom Hyland picks his 12 all-time favourites, an eclectic bunch of wines that all offer abundant regional character, cellaring potential – and huge enjoyment

FOR DECADES, ITALY'S white wines offered little in terms of structure or complexity; their role was that of an aperitif or as a partner with lighter cuisine. Thankfully, over the past 15 to 20 years, dedicated vintners from Alto Adige to Campania and several regions in between have been crafting stellar whites that have broadened the focus of Italian viticulture.

According to Roberto Giuliani, a leading Italian wine journalist, this shift started with a change of mindset by producers. 'In recent years many white wines capable of ageing have been created – until recently, it was only red wines that enjoyed this quality. Now wine lovers are changing their perceptions and starting to buy not only approachable whites for early drinking, but also whites to cellar and drink with some age,' he says.

These personal favourites illustrate this upward trajectory in quality and complexity, spanning a range of varieties, regions and price points.

## Vigne Marina Coppi

**Fausto, Colli Tortonesi, Piedmont**

**First vintage 2007**

**Variety** 100% Timorasso

**Average annual production** 6,500 bottles

'Why are you journalists so interested in a wine with such limited production?' owner and winemaker Francesco Bellocchio asked during my recent visit to his property. Given the quality and unique nature of his Timorasso, he must have known the answer, as it is a white that is much greater than the sum of its parts.

Named for Bellocchio's grandfather Fausto Coppi, a champion cyclist from this area during the 1940s and '50s, the wine combines high acidity and great richness on the palate with notable persistence and minerality;

it is highly reminiscent of a premier cru or grand cru Chablis. It also evolves beautifully over time; Bellocchio recommends cellaring this wine, and drinking it when it reaches eight to 10 years old. If only any of us could wait that long!



**Vigne Marina Coppi, Fausto, Colli Tortonesi, Piedmont 2013 94**

£29.35-£39.99 Exel, Liberty, The Wine Reserve

A dynamic version of the indigenous Timorasso variety. Pear, lemon oil and hibiscus aromas; powerful mid-palate, robust texture; lengthy finish with distinct minerality. Steel tank-fermented and -matured. Great potential. **Drink** 2018-2026 **Alcohol** 14%

*'Vigne Marina Coppi's Fausto is highly reminiscent of a premier cru or grand cru Chablis'*



## Cantina Tramin

**Nussbaumer, Alto Adige**

**First vintage** 1990

**Variety** 100% Gewürztraminer

**Average annual production** 65,000 bottles

Is there another grape variety with as pretty an aromatic profile as Gewürztraminer? Offering perfumes of roses, with notes of lychee, grapefruit and even a hint of lanolin, a beautifully rendered Gewürz is like no other white wine. The grape's name – literally 'spicy one from Tramin' – is apt, as the small town of Tramin is home to several excellent examples. Cantina Tramin, one of the region's finest cooperatives, produces this special bottling, Nussbaumer, every year, and it stands out, not only for its varietal purity – which is unparalleled – but also for its complexity and persistence. Other local examples may be weightier or more floral, but the Nussbaumer is distinguished year after year by its overall harmony and finesse – as well as that characteristic sensation of spice on the finish.



**Cantina Tramin, Nussbaumer Gewürztraminer, Alto Adige 2015 93**

£21.50-£25.99 **Exel, Hallgarten Classic**, stylish version of this famous Alto Adige variety from one of the region's great cooperatives. It boasts lychee, yellow rose and mango perfumes, has substantial depth of fruit and abundant spice on

the finish. It also ages surprisingly well. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 15%

## Cantina Terlan

**Vorberg Pinot Bianco Riserva, Alto Adige**

**First vintage** 1993

**Variety** 100% Pinot Bianco

**Average annual production** 55,000 bottles

While most examples of Pinot Bianco from Alto Adige are tasty, straightforward, steel-aged wines, the Vorberg Riserva takes things up a notch or two, as the cooperative sources high-elevation fruit (450m-950m) and matures the wine in large oak barrels. There is abundant spice, and – while the acidity is a touch lower than usual with this variety due to the later harvest – the richness on the palate and balance give it a multi-dimensional character not often found with Pinot Bianco. Best of all, this is an inspired partner for a wide variety of foods, from river fish to roast veal.



**Cantina Terlan, Vorberg Pinot Bianco Riserva, Alto Adige 2014 92**

£28-£33 **Widely available via UK agent Astrum Wine Cellars**

Alto Adige's everyday variety is given a serious treatment here; high-altitude vineyards; ageing in large barrels; beautiful texture and spice; expressive quince, saffron and white pepper; cellarworthy; great track record. **Drink** 2018-2030 **Alc** 14%

**Below: Cantina Tramin winery's design reflects the colour of the vineyard**



**Above: Franz Pratzner dug up his orchard and replaced it with Riesling vines**

## Falkenstein

**Riesling, Val Venosta, Alto Adige**

**First vintage** 1995

**Variety** 100% Riesling

**Average annual production** 40,000 bottles

While Riesling is not the first white variety you associate with Italy, there are some notable versions produced in the north. Among the most distinctive is that of Falkenstein in Val Venosta, not far from the Swiss border. This is an area ideally suited to the variety, as owner and winemaker Franz Pratzner will tell you, given the steepness of the hills along with the clay, slate and sandy soils. He compares this spot to the Wachau in Austria. Pratzner, a former apple producer, transitioned to grape varieties about 30 years ago. He ferments his Riesling in large acacia casks, and then ages the wine on ➤

*'Sleek, subtle and understated, Falkenstein compares favourably to other great Rieslings around the world, yet it has its own unique charms'*



Photographs: Mick Rock/Cephas; Mauritius Images GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo