

Untold Italy Episode 229: From Grit to Grapes - How Puglia is Redefining its Wine Culture

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 229.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy

Ciao a tutti! Benvenuti to another Italian wine episode and this time we're visiting the beautiful Puglia region. Our friends Olivia and Andrea from Italian Wine Tales are here to tell you all about this exciting and up-and-coming wine region that's emerging from being historically an area of mass wine production rather than a place known for refined and curated wine.

We've chatted about the renaissance that's going on in Puglia in just about everything - tourism food and rejuvenation of the cities and now it's time to talk about wine. It's an exciting time to visit Puglia so let's hear all about what you'll be drinking when you get there.

Katy

Bentornati. Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast, Andrea and Olivia.

Olivia

Ciao, Katie.

Andrea

Ciao, Katy.

Olivia

Ciao, everyone.

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Katy

Yay. Hooray. So good to chat with you again. Now, what's new in the world of Italian wine?

Olivia

What have we been drinking lately? Well, actually, I just did our order for our wedding. We're having a little Brindisi in the piazza afterwards. Since it's going to be in Umbria, I decided to order some sparkling wine from one of our favorite wineries in Umbria. They do a sparkling rosé and a sparkling white. It's called Cinino, which means little thing in Umbrian dialect. I thought that was a nice touch. That's what our guests will have to look forward to.

Andrea

Yes.

Katy

Okay. Well, I hope you got quite a few bottles of that rosé because as you know, I do like a rosé. Anyway, that was a bit of a cheeky question because, of course, wine has been evolving in Italy since well before the Romans, as you know.

Olivia

Yes, exactly.

Katy

Anyway, It's so great to have you back. Before we get started on talking about a region that we're really passionate about, can you quickly give everyone a quick bio and let them know why you're so thrilled to talk about Italian wine?

Andrea

We're thrilled to talk about Italian wine because we have our own blog and Instagram page, which is called Italian Wine Tales, where we try to talk about Italian wine in a friendly way so that it's accessible to everyone, but giving the right information so that you can get accustomed to the Italian wines.

Olivia

We're both undertaking our Sommelier certificate at the moment. That led us to become more passionate about Italian wine and create Italian Wine Tales.

Katy

You're doing such a great job. It's so great to I think, just, not simplify, but just make it, as you say, more accessible, because I think wine appreciation and tasting can be a little bit intimidating at times. It's great to have it in a more friendly way, as you say.

Katy

I've been looking forward to today's chat because, of course, we're going to explore the wine of one of our favorite regions in Puglia, which is also one of Italy's biggest wine-producing regions, but I'm sure one that not a lot of people know much about. You can help everyone picture what it's like. Can you describe Puglia and its geography and point out maybe where the winemaking areas are?

Andrea

Yes. For everyone that doesn't know what Puglia is, first of all, picture Italy, so the boot. Puglia is right at the heel. So southeast Italy. It's on the sea. It's a very beautiful region, especially in summer, where wine is now becoming an up and important part of their economy and their part of the society.

Andrea

It wasn't until the 1970s, where a big change in terms of your wine production happened, and it focused mainly at the beginning on a wine called Negroamaro, a red wine. And now, still to this day, there is a lot of red wine produced there, Negroamaro or Primitivo, which is the most famous one. And for the American listeners, you might know it as the Zinfandel, the same grape, just produced differently, of course.

Olivia

Find

mainly at the beginning

But it's interesting, Puglia, because for a long time, it is one of the biggest wine producers, but it was all bulk wine and was being sent all over Italy and even in France to cut wine. And it was the white Puglia wine was actually being used as the base for Vermouth, which was interesting. So it's not really until more recent times that Puglia wine has started to become... They've improved the methods of producing in the cellar, but also in the vineyards. And it still hasn't reached its full potential. I think this is a wine region to watch. And you can also get a lot of really good value wines from Puglia at the moment, too. But it's definitely an up-and-coming one. We'll see some really interesting wines coming out of this region in years to come.

Katy

Yeah, it's so interesting, isn't it, how we're seeing Puglia? It's a little bit under the radar. It's going about its own business, quietly, quietly, just building up expertise, not just in wine making, but also in tourism. But there's a lot of similarities there. I think it's really fascinating. It's exciting to watch an area where they're not bound by so much tradition, so they've got a little bit more artistic license maybe to try some new things.

Andrea

I was saying that it's interesting because there are red wines, as I said, but white wines and roses as well, which we might talk about later a bit more because especially for the rosé wine, there is a little interesting and curious story about it, which I'll tell you later when we come to it.

Katy

Okay. All right. Let's get a little bit deeper into the region and the wines. Where do you want to start, red or white, or we'll leave rosé to the end?

Olivia

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Maybe we start with the red wines because we should say that most of the wine produced in the area is red or rosé. The main grapes are Negroamaro, Primitivo, which Andre mentioned before, and the Troia grape, Uva di Troia. The wines down here... Puglia is a very hot region - they have hot summers and mild winters. All of that to say is that, therefore, the wines are quite alcoholic normally, too. They're big, they're fruit-forward. There's nothing... They're a big glass of wine is what I'm trying to say.

Andrea

It's hard to drink them by themselves. It's better to drink them while you're eating a meal.

Olivia

They pair perfectly with the food down there. Yes, exactly. There's a lot of vegetable-based dishes in Puglia, but also a lot of meat-based dishes, too, which you might not think at first, given that they're also on the Coast. But they do have a big tradition of lots of sausages and baked lamb and meat like this, which goes perfectly with the Primitivo from Manduria or even Bombino Nero is another red wine great.

Katy

I think it's interesting. Maybe these wines may be a little bit more familiar to our palettes as people from as they like to say in the UK, call us the New World. The New World Wines from California or from Australia, they're a bit more bold and they've got a lot more, I guess, It's a bit more punch in the face or punch in the mouth.

Olivia

That's the words I'm looking for. I think especially if people like a big, bold red and they're looking for something that's the most top quality in Puglia, You'd look for Primitivo di Manduria, DOC. We've spoken in other episodes about what DOC means, like a mark of quality. This is a really strong, full-bodied wine. When we say full-bodied, we really do mean full-bodied. It's aged in a barrique, you can expect those candied fruits, fig, almonds, licorice, tobacco. That's a delicious wine, but a foody wine, obviously. You're not having that for aperitivo hour.

Katy

Tell me, what's a barrique?

Olivia

A barrique, it's a wooden barrel. That's a good question.

Andrea

Yes, it's where you put wine to age, especially red wine. Often you can find it when you have an aftertaste of licorice or tobacco, those like

Olivia

Vanilla, even

Andrea

Yes, Exactly. It's very important also the oak or the wood that it's made of, especially there are some woods that are specifically grown in parts of Europe, like Slovenia or France, which are specifically grown just to make barriques because it's very important, the wood that you use.

Olivia

For example, they would not really use at all here for obvious reasons American oak, because they've got the European oak, but it's also a little bit more porous.

Andrea

You have to smoke it before you use it. Then, of course, the more you use it over time, the better it is because it absorbs the wine and it lets the wine breathe as well. Because as she said, it's porous, so air can filter through in and out, and it helps the wine age correctly.

Katy

Where will we find these wines? If we think about the main towns in Puglia, we've got Bari, which is the capital, which we had heard about on the podcast a few weeks ago, and that's on the Coast. A lot of people probably know Alberobello and maybe Lecce. Where are these wine-growing regions?

Andrea

We have wine-producing areas, especially in Valle de Itria, Martina Franca, and Cisternino.

Olivia

The Itria Valley.

Andrea

Exactly. Itria Valley, yes. Exactly. Something also has producer on Bari. But I would suggest, especially, Alberobello, not only for the wine producing itself, but because it's also a very beautiful town and it's amazing to visit.

Olivia

The Trulli houses.

Andrea

Exactly. They have the typical Pugliese houses, which are called the Trulli. They're very magical. If you manage to go and visit, it's a magical experience.

Olivia

In the Valle di Itria as well, the Itria Valley, Locorotondo is another town that we also visit on our tour, by the way, in Puglia. But they produce a lot of wine. And there's a place there where you can even go and have an aperitivo in the vineyards. You can just walk down from the town. We can put that in the show notes, maybe. And yes, it's full of vineyards in the Itria Valley. Near Lecce, you've got to get out a little bit. Lecce is like the town and around of Lecce. They don't really produce wine. So you've got to go back up towards Ostuni, where they produce lots of wine. And they've got a really interesting wine that is produced also in France and South Africa with different names. It's called the Ostuni DOC, it's a red wine. In French, it is- I guess it's called Cinsaut.

Andrea

I'm reading it Cinsaut. In South Africa, It's called Hermitage. But it's an easy red wine. So maybe that one could go with your aperitivo if you're looking for a Puglia as a red wine to have for aperitivo.

Olivia

And then if you go all the way down to the very south of Puglia, you come to the Salento area, which absolutely beautiful. That's great for beaches. They've got some stunning beaches, but also stunning wine. They produce a lot of wine. Obviously, that's going to be really high alcohol, too, because it gets incredibly hot in the Salento.

Olivia

And then if you come back up on the other part of Puglia, when you're going back up, what's that park called, Andrea Gallipoli? I need another coffee. If you come back up around there, they produce a lot of wine, too. And that's where you'll find, going back up there, Manduria. Manduria is an amazing wine-producing area, and they say that that's where the best of the best Primitivo comes from.

Katy

Can you tell us about some of the up-and-coming wineries there, like some of your favorites, where you can try some of the typical and maybe some more exciting versions of these local wines.

Olivia

Well, I have to mention, first of all, it's a small winery, which normally on this podcast, we give bigger wineries, which we will give one to go and visit. But being Australian, we have to talk about one called Morella because it's in Manduria. I just love this story because it's an Australian woman and her husband who are running the winery, and they produce all these different kinds of Primitivo wines.

Olivia

It's a biodynamic winery, too. That can be a little bit interesting to visit because they follow the cycles of the moon. Maybe we might have to do another episode about biodynamic winemaking one day. It's very interesting. But they're making really top-quality, award-winning wines there. It's a really small winery. If you're looking for more of an off-the-beaten-path experience, you could go there. Of course, since the wife's Australian, they speak English. That's another good thing. Whereas a lot of these other smaller wineries, they don't... you really do need to visit with a tour to get the most out of your experience.

Olivia

But we do have another option for you as well.

Andrea

Which is called I Pastini, which is at the heart of the Itria Valley. You are in a beautiful land between Locorotondo and Martina Franca. In this winery, their goal is to recover and promote

the ancient grape varieties that were found and grown in the Itria Valley, originally. They're doing a good job at that.

Olivia

Yeah, and that's a nice one to visit as well in the sense that on their website, it's very easy to navigate and book a wine tasting in English, which is not always the norm.

Andrea

As we always say when we talk about Italian wine, whenever you want to visit the winery, always remember to book in advance because that's very important. It's very hard to just show up and have tasting.

Katy

That's because these people are working and actually making wine or doing every other job they have around the winery. It's really not as much like what we have in the United States or Australia, where they have working cellar doors, except for some of the really bigger wine companies like Antinori maybe in Tuscany, and more established places. Definitely make sure you book.

Olivia

But we haven't mentioned as well, Puglia also produces white wines. So if you like white wines, then you're in the right place, too. I mean, they really have something for everyone here, as well as sparkling. And even they're starting to make some really interesting Spumante. So if you like sweet sparkling, it's for you too.

Olivia

But for the white wines, the main grapes are Verdeca, Malvasia, and everyone will be familiar with Chardonnay. But the Verdeca I love. On our tour in Puglia, we go to a secret winery where we have this delicious Verdeca. Every time we go, I have to buy a bottle because it's mineral and crisp and you've got green apple notes and the flowers. It's just perfect with seafood, of course, which Puglia has a lot of seafood too.

Andrea

It's good to pair with one of the typical regional dishes, which are the Orecchiette con le cime di rapa. The Orecchiette is the typical pasta shape, as you all know, every region in Italy has their own pasta shape. In Puglia, they have the Orecchiette, which I call like that because they resemble little ears. This white wine that Liv was mentioning pairs perfectly with this typical dish. So absolutely a must to try.

Katy

Oh, yeah. I could go for a plate of that pasta and a glass of wine right now. Oh, goodness. Where is that one produced? Is that around the Vale di Itria as well?

Olivia

Yeah, a little bit further down. It's just out of Ostuni, around that area. That leads us as well to talk about rosé, too. Because in Puglia, they also make delicious rosé wine.

Andrea

Which is not very known in the sense that whenever you think about rosé, you don't have to think about Puglia. But they have this interesting way of producing rosé here because how do you produce rosé? You either have a blend of red and white wine together, or you leave the the red grape in contact - the juice of the red grape in contact with the skin, because the color of the wine is taken by the skin, but not for long.

Olivia

A couple of hours.

Andrea

Exactly. In Puglia instead, they have this interesting system called sistema "a lacrima", which you could translate as like teardrop system or something like that.

Olivia

Teardrop, yeah.

Andrea

And they put the red grapes in bags and they gently press it. They gently squeeze it so that the must, the juice, the best part of it drips down like tears. So it stays in contact with the skin for a very, very limited amount of time. And it drips down from these bags like a tear. And they produce rosé wine in this way, which is a unique way to do it.

Olivia

We've never seen it anywhere else. We've heard about it anywhere else before. Yeah.

Andrea

They use Negroamaro for it - the red grape, one of the most famous of the region. It's a rosé wine Negroamaro. If you like Negroamaro, but you want it a bit lighter, in a bit lighter version, you can try this rosé wine.

Katy

That sounds amazing. What would you eat with that one?

Andrea

You could eat as well something light, for example, some fish, for sure, or a pasta dish, but...

Olivia

Or bacala.

Andrea

Bacala.

Andrea

But I would suggest it also for a nice aperitivo, it would go nice perfectly by the beach.

Olivia

Yeah, exactly. When we're on tour in full, I have to say the rosé is always everyone's favorite because it's that perfect in between and the weather's always balmy and not too hot, but not too cold. So everyone's pairing their rosé with all the delicious things that we eat from the

burrata that's drizzling down your face because it's so creamy and delicious to the beautiful fresh seafood and lots of raw seafood because they have - in the Bari episode you were talking about the Pugliese, sashimi-style seafood. Even with that, it goes delicious.

Katy

Bits of crunchy Taralli as well.

Olivia

Exactly.

Andrea

My love.

Katy

Yeah, we love it. They're so good, aren't they? They're so moreish. Their Taralli are the little biscuits or savory cookies, and they're really crunchy and they come flavored with different things. They're yummy. Once you pop, you can't stop - that's not an idea.

Olivia

They're addictive.

Katy

But I feel like it's not mass-produced. Some ladies have been hand-rolling that, so it's all good.

Katy

Yeah, absolutely. If you come on tour with us, we learn to make Taralli biscuits, too, which is very dangerous because you won't ever stop making them.

Katy

Now, the thing about Puglia, and I can imagine it's especially true with the wineries, is that you will definitely need a car to get it around, right?

Olivia

Absolutely. Look, I mean, you mentioned in the Bari episode as well that that's a good base if you're not going to have a car because you can get to a few places like Polignano, Monopoli or Lecce. But besides that, it is extremely difficult if you don't have a car.

Katy

I mean, part of the beauty of it is it's not a slick operation. It's really more rustic and you're really meeting people that are trying new things and doing something a little bit different, and they're learning along the way. I just think that's so much more charming in a lot of ways than if someone's... It's nice to have a very professional experience, but sometimes it's also really lovely to have a charming face-to-face local experience.

Olivia

Totally. Absolutely. The people in Puglia, the hospitality is another level. They're so generous, they're so friendly and welcoming. When you visit these wineries as well, that's the experience you're going to have. It's not a commercial experience at all.

Andrea

It's very authentic, I would say.

Olivia

Even if we don't like using that authentic word.

Katy

Oh, that's me. That's my issue. But with those wines, for me, my instinct is that they're easy drink. You drink them straight away. Are they these things that you cellar or not so much?

Olivia

Well, you can. Given that the quality of the wine production is improving constantly, now you can, especially with the Primitivo, you could definitely cellar the red wine.

Andrea

The red wines, especially. The red wines. The ones that age in the barriques, of course. But if you want to buy, there are, as we said, red wines, for example, the Ostuni DOC or the white wines you can buy.

Olivia

Bombino Nero, that's something to just drink now.

Andrea

We're not saying that because they're not good, they are very good.

Olivia

They're ready to drink. Exactly.

Andrea

They're ready to drink once they hit the market.

Olivia

Especially the white wines. I drink them sooner rather than later as well.

Katy

Are there wineries set up for shipping to all different parts of the world?

Olivia

Absolutely. Depends which one you go to, but most of them, I would say, especially the ones we go to on tour, you can ship. Just to Australia is always the issues only thing. Anywhere that you go because shipping is so expensive. Some wineries offer it, but it's a really high price tag. But to the States, it's always pretty reasonable to ship.

Katy

I feel like it's worthwhile to ship if you can cellar things for a while. But if it's something that's is quick and easy to drink, it might be not worth shipping.

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Katy

Puglia, I think it's a very exciting place to visit, and for so many levels, the food, the wine, and the beautiful scenery as well. But I just had a thought as well. Maybe visiting in winter is probably not a good idea. I think most of these places will probably be closed, right?

Olivia

Yeah, I think the only-

Andrea

It's not the best time in winter, I would say.

Olivia

Yeah, the only reason I would maybe visit in winter, which I know is on your bucket list, Katy, is Christmas time. But it wouldn't be from a wine perspective, that would just be from seeing the beautiful Christmas lights set up in these charming towns in the Itria Valley. But yeah, not for wineries.

Katy

No, probably not for... Actually, someone reached out to me after the Bari episode and said, Oh, when's the best time to visit? I do think it's probably late spring to early fall, early autumn, because like we're saying, they're not as mature as the other side, which is great for the country. They like to have a nice long break.

Olivia

Absolutely, yeah. Then they work really hard in the summertime.

Andrea

They do.

Olivia

Likewise as well, visiting in the heat of the summer, that's also maybe not the best time if you can find it because it gets so hot. If you're going to do that, just think you're going to be at the swimming pool of your villa or at the beach. You're not going to want to do a lot of sightseeing in the heat. It gets extremely hot.

Katy

Yeah. Up in 35 to 40 degrees Celsius and above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It is a very hot area, which, lucky for them, makes amazing wine, so that's good. Exactly.

Katy

Well, I just love how Puglia is quietly building itself into a force to be reckoned with, both in terms of wine and tourism. It's really quite the renaissance, and I can't wait to see what's ahead for them. Can you?

Olivia

Oh, we can't wait. We're looking forward to that. We love Puglia. But it's exciting as well because they haven't reached their full potential yet. In everything, I guess, in of wine and also hotels that are being developed.

Andrea

Let's see how it goes.

Olivia

Hotels that are being developed. Yeah, let's see how it goes.

Katy

Yeah, I think it might be going back. I'm feeling the pull of Puglia, definitely. Okay, now, if our listeners are keen to learn more about Primitivo and the other wines of Puglia and the Teardrop Rosé. How can they stay in touch with you and Italian Wine Tales?

Olivia

You can follow us on Instagram at @italianwinetales, as well as on our website, italianwinetales.com. We also have a Facebook community, Italian Wine Lovers, where people share their favorite wines and have a bit more of a collaborative discussion about Italian wines and what everyone's drinking at the moment.

Katy

Amazing. Grazie, Liv and Andrea. Thank you for sharing your knowledge of this delicious wine region with us on Untold Italy today.

Olivia

Thank you, Katy.

Andrea

Thank you, Katy for having us.

Olivia

It's always a pleasure. Thanks for having us again. Ciao.

Andrea

Ciao.

Olivia

Ciao, ciao.

Katy

Puglia really is so exciting these days - from the wine to its lovely cities and towns and of course the delicious food we pair with the wine. I've yet to meet anyone who was disappointed by the time they spent in Puglia, including some very particular wine-loving friends who were a bit skeptical of what they would find there.

Our Untold Italy Tours Puglia trips are extremely popular and we could have sold out several more than we offered in 2024. So if you're interested in joining us to explore this fascinating

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region and enjoy its amazing wine and visit wineries carefully selected by Olivia you'll need to sign up early to avoid disappointment.

As always we've provided a full list of the wines, grapes and places mentioned as well as a link to our Puglia tours into our detailed show notes for this episode found at untolditaly.com/229 Make sure you have a look around our website while you're there. There are hundreds of articles designed to help you build your dream trip to Italy. We're very proud of the information we send out into the world. It's based on a love for Italy and checked regularly so you know it's up to date

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app. That helps us reach more Italy-loving travelers just like you.

On next week's episode, we're headed to another beautiful part of Italy to explore and uncover unique experiences in the Untold way.

But until then it's "ciao for now".