VINO DALMATIA

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A publication of Vino Dalmacije and Cheers Croatia Magazine

Dalmatia
VINA CROATIA *vina mosaica*

CHEERS CROATIA *magazine*
WINE NEWS + CULTURE

Contents


Welcome to
Dalmatia!

01

There were almost 9 million domestic and foreign visitors to Dalmatia in 2024.* They come for the mild climate, the intense summer sunshine and the crystal-clear sea. For activities by sea (sailing, kayaking, windsurfing) or land (picnicking, hiking, cycling) Dalmatia delivers beautiful landscapes and friendly people. Its heritage and culture are visible everywhere—from the well-preserved vestiges of ancient Rome to the immutable rites of modern coffee culture.

And then there is wine. Dalmatia's wines speak of ancient history and the modern world, of geography, politics, science and economy. More important than these, though, the wines of Dalmatia are about land, honest work, tradition, family and the pleasures of the table. If the question of a culture is "What do you value," in Dalmatia wine shows the answer.

Vino Dalmatia is a single-issue magazine about Dalmatian wine and wine culture. It defines the wine-growing landscape and the region's many indigeous grape varieties. It also draws in crucial details of history, food and daily life, and helps answer the question of which wines to seek out—whether on a wine list or at the winery.

This magazine is the result of a collaboration between Vino Dalmacije (the official regional wine association, page 14) and *Cheers Croatia Magazine* (the online magazine about Croatian wine, page 11). It is for visitors and those planning a visit, Dalmatian wine lovers and those who work with Dalmatian wine around the world, and journalists interested in Dalmatia and its wines. We hope it is informative and inspires a closer connection to this place, Dalmatia.

*Croatian Bureau of Statistics; dzs.gov.hr

← *Hiking Hvar*

What is Dalmatia?

Picture the shape of a boomerang, open to the right. This is Croatia. The lower arc of the boomerang lies along the coast of the Adriatic Sea, and Dalmatia—one of Croatia's four major wine regions—occupies the central and southern part of this coastline. Across the Adriatic, the coast of Italy is only 150 to 250 kilometers away.

Dalmatia's northern reaches lie on the island of Pag. It proceeds to the southeast, including the major cities of Zadar, Šibenik, Split and Dubrovnik. Inland, the Dinaric Alps divide Dalmatia from continental Croatia as well as from Bosnia and Herzegovina. And at the region's southernmost tip lies Montenegro.

Like most wine regions of the world, Dalmatia has a telescoping series of wine designations, focusing in from regional names to subregional to individual vineyard positions. Dalmatia's largest designated wine subregions (three of them, which translate to Northern Dalmatia, Dalmatian Hinterland and Central and Southern Dalmatia) were established during Yugoslavia and are considered by many winemakers in the region to be outdated, although they still appear on wine labels. In this publication, the Dalmatian vineyards are divided instead according to the four Dalmatian counties—see the map in each relevant chapter. As regional tourism is also organized by county, this approach would seem to make sense until consensus is reached on a redefinition of major growing regions. In the meantime, the regional association Vino Dalmacije is working to establish a unified "Dalmatia" protected designation of origin (PDO).

Dalmatian wine: from strength to strength

Dalmatia's superpower as a wine region lies in its dozens of indigenous grape varieties (page 22), most of which have not spread beyond Dalmatia's boundaries—in some cases barely beyond a single island. One famous exception, of course, is Zinfandel, known in Dalmatia as Tribidrag or Crljenak Kaštelanski (page 90 for that story). Dalmatia has learned to treasure its native grapes, and has set about rescuing more of these promising varieties while refining its approach to the two most prevalent of them: Pošip and Plavac Mali. Discovering these wines can help give visitors a true sense of the place where they stand, and reconnect members of the Dalmatian diaspora to their culture and cuisine.

At the same time, this multifaceted collection of indigenous varieties allows Dalmatian winemakers to respond to the demands of the market. The welcome rise of rosé wines (page 42) is a testament to this, but also the growing emphasis on white wines and lighter reds shows that winemakers are listening to what international visitors want to drink (particularly in the summer heat), and using heritage varieties to fill the gap.

Tourism is Dalmatia's great boon, and wine tourism (page 62) is increasingly a focus of small cruise companies and individual tour providers as a way to build history, nature, food culture and local heritage into their options for guests. Wineries themselves are catching on to the benefits of offering sustainable activities in addition to lodging for visitors eager to partake of the "winery lifestyle." The fact that, by far, the majority of Dalmatian wine is sold in Dalmatia is a benefit in this case. Visitors are getting an "only in Dalmatia" experience—something they can't access anywhere else in the world.

The world, however, has its eye on Dalmatian wines—witness 92 Decanter awards in 2025. Sommeliers around the world, looking for something new to add to their wine lists, have tapped Dalmatian wines from indigenous varieties. International investment in Dalmatian wine growing has created new vineyards on overgrown land or that not previously used for agriculture. And movements such as organic and biodynamic wine growing and the surge in natural wine create a breadth of selection on the domestic market that could hardly have been imagined 25 years ago. As successive crops of viticulture and enology students work to refine (and redefine) Dalmatia's wine styles, its wine and wine culture will only reach greater heights.


Croatia
DINARIC ALPS
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Montenegro
Zadar county
Zadar
Šibenik-Knin county
Šibenik
Split-Dalmatia county
Split
ADRIATIC SEA
Italy: 225 km
Dubrovnik-Neretva county
Dubrovnik
Croatia
Dalmatia
50 km
N

A little history, mostly recent

Histories of wine in Dalmatia often focus on ancient history: wine making by the Illyrians, the tribes who lived in Dalmatia before the arrival of the ancient Greeks, then the Romans, both groups adding their own important details to the story of wine in the region. This helps to establish the roots of Croatian wine making in the ancient world. But few winemakers or histories talk about the 20th century, which has arguably the most impact on the way the picture of Dalmatian wine today has developed. For this reason, we will focus on the massive changes in society and wine growing in Dalmatia beginning around the time of the phylloxera epidemic of the late 19th century, which has set the foundation for the modern wine business.

Dalmatia's Golden Era of wine making spanned about 20 years, from the early 1870s to 1893, and the boom was entirely due to the devastation wrought by the sap-sucking phylloxera louse in France. Dalmatian winegrowers had experienced a setback earlier in the century due to oidium (powdery mildew) starting about 1857. But by 1867, when phylloxera was discovered in France, oidium was under control and Dalmatia was well placed to provide strong red wine exports as the vineyards of France were destroyed.

The Dalmatian economy relied on wine, as the harsh landscape was not conducive to commercial crop plantations. Only grapevines and olive trees seemed to thrive in the stones. So the French loss was Dalmatia's gain, and there was massive planting to fill the demand from France and later other countries whose vineyards were dying. Related industries such as barrel making, storage and shipping also boomed.

Soon, however, the solution to phylloxera was discovered and the French vineyards were replanted. For a few years Dalmatia enjoyed healthy exports to other countries affected by the vine epidemic. But by 1894, phylloxera had made its way to Dalmatia. Dalmatia's all-time record harvest of 1893 was halved by 1897. Phylloxera made its way slowly south, not reaching the more remote islands until the 1920s. Such was Dalmatia's dependence on grape growing that tens of thousands of people lost their livelihoods and emigrated during that time, especially from the islands.

Adding insult to injury, from 1893 to 1903 the Wine Clause was in effect. Part of a trade agreement between Italy and Austria-Hungary, it allowed wines from two provinces in northern Italy to be sold to Austria-Hungary at a much lower customs duty than other wines, including those from Dalmatia. The large quantity of Italian wine flowing into Austria-Hungary supplanted Dalmatian wine exports. What wine Dalmatia was able to produce as phylloxera ravaged the vineyards could no longer be sold to western Europe, which had begun replanting, or to Austria-Hungary.

By World War II, Dalmatian vineyards had been replanted, although to a lesser extent than during the Golden Era. The post-phylloxera replanting marked a transition from mixed vineyards to the monovarietal plantings favored today. But during the war, lack of vineyard labor struck another blow to vineyard area—it decreased again, by about 40 percent (Bašić).

After the war, the social and political systems of Yugoslavia changed dramatically with the institution of communism. (It is important to note that, in 1948, Yugoslavia ceased to be aligned with Soviet communism and followed its own path. For most of its existence, Yugoslavia was a market-based socialist system, and most Croatians refer to "socialism" rather than "communism.")

The new system effectively placed a 45-year pause on individual wine making. Families were allowed to produce wine for their own use, but not for sale. Fruit not needed within the family was sold to the local state-run winery, priced by weight, not by variety or quality. The state established its own vast vineyards in various easy-to-farm fields, including those at Nadin, Drniš, Imotski, Vrgorac and the Neretva delta. International, easy-handling varieties were planted, which explains the presence of varieties such as Trebbiano Toscano, Merlot, Syrah and Grenache in Dalmatia today. State-owned wineries and co-operatives were built to process this fruit and that of the family winegrowers.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia and then the Homeland War in the 1990s, Dalmatian families who were still growing grapes found that the wineries where they sold their fruit were gradually failing without their former support from the state. This forced many families to begin producing their own wine, and now they could bottle and sell it. Croatian fine wine making was again underway.

Rural life: promise and hope

Looking past the glorious views and the luxury image of the winery lifestyle, most wineries in Dalmatia remain small, family-run businesses. Maintaining these requires dedication and the buy-in of young generations. The modern patterns of emigration from rural Dalmatia are the same as those in every other rural, southern European region—youth are understandably attracted to the greater employment and social opportunities in urban areas.

And in Dalmatia, wine growing is particularly hard work. The need to create even modestly arable land from stone-covered ground, as well as the patterns of land being passed down through generations, have led to the fragmentation of agricultural land. Travel between multiple small plots makes vineyard work inefficient, and makes value-added methods such as certified organic farming difficult in spite of the seemingly ideal climate. (Small plots mean many neighbors who aren't necessarily organic growers themselves.) Vineyard expansion is virtually impossible in many areas, without the funds to create new vineyard land where none has been before.

But there is another side to this coin. While the difficulty in finding workers at harvest time has led larger wineries to hire labor from abroad, for small farms, the traditional family and community support structures kick in. There is strong connectivity within extended families here, and pulling together for grape (and olive) harvest strengthens these bonds.

Perhaps most importantly, wine is still valued in Dalmatia as a part of everyday life. Thousands of traditional home winemakers still make small volumes of "garage" wine each year to share with family and neighbors in the time-honored way, or sell from the tank into the customer's own container. In fine wine, more young entrepreneurs (page 78) are making the decision to hold onto family land and join the global class of rural food artisans. Many attend enology school, and take advantage of opportunities to travel and work at established wineries in other countries. Young talent, the science of winemaking and the spread of creative ideas from around the world are the fuel for Dalmatia's growing reputation for fine wine.

Most wineries in Dalmatia remain family-run businesses.

The Dalmatian wine label

Every wine-producing country has its own quality and geographic designations. A look at a wine label can be helpful in deciphering these.

1. Grape variety. In Croatia, any single grape variety shown on the front label indicates that wine is made from a minimum 85% of that grape. If it's a blend, the wine is usually given a proprietary name, and the breakdown of the blend may be given on the back label. This is up to the winery.
2. The vintage, or the year the grapes were harvested. The Croatian word is *berba*; you may see vintage worded as "Berba 2024" or "Berba 2024. godina" (Harvest 2024th year). Occasionally no vintage is listed on the label; this indicates that the bottle contains a blend of vintages.
3. Zaštićena Oznaka Izvornosti (ZOI). This is the Croatian translation of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), the EU system of designating protected regions for the production of wines. Each region has its own guidelines that must be followed in the vineyard and winery in order to use the system. Most countries had their own systems before the EU was formed, or before those countries joined the EU. Kontroliranim Zemljopisnim Podrijetlom (KZP) means controlled geographical origin and is Croatia's own wording from its original system. You might see any of these three terms on Croatian wine labels, and they all mean basically the same thing: that this wine is from a specific place registered within Croatia or with the EU especially for wine production. That place name usually appears next on the label.
4. Sredna i Južna Dalmacija (Central and Southern Dalmatia) is the region where the wine was made—the registered "designation of origin" referred to in #3. Vinogorje Hvar (Hvar Vineyards) is a more specific geographical origin.
5. "Wine from Croatia," a required origin statement.
6. Optional style statement. In this case, the wine is a dry white wine from the Bogdanuša variety. (This winery has kindly translated all of the above into English.)
7. "Contains sulfites." A legal requirement in the EU when wine contains at least 10mg/liter of this antioxidant additive, and the vast majority of wines do.
8. Starting from the 2024 vintage, EU wine labels must show an energy value and list of allergens on the label. A list of ingredients must also be shown, either on the label or via a scannable code on the label.
9. Percentage alcohol.
10. Recycling information.
11. "Produced and bottled..." This is where you find the legal name of the winery. Sometimes the name of the wine on the front label is a brand name or a fantasy name, but the official name of the winery is always here. "Filled" or "bottled" means the bottles were filled at the winery. There are various situations when wine may not actually be bottled at the winery that made it, but this adds an advanced level of detail.

A quality description may also be used on Croatian wine bottles, which does not appear on this label. Vrhunsko Vino means "premium wine" and is meant to be the top quality available. Kvalitetno Vino means "quality wine" and is meant to be the second level. Dalmatian producers are increasingly omitting these terms, although there is a movement to redefine them by applying new standards. ◊

Historic salt pans in Ston, Pelješac peninsula ↑

Cheers Croatia Magazine

This privately owned, online publication is a reliable source of free, English-language information about Croatian wine. It includes tips for visitors designing travel itineraries; facts for those who sell Croatian wine as importers, at retail or in restaurants; and tasting and buying resources for Croatian wine lovers around the world.

Among the tools it offers travelers is a Winery Finder, which provides locator maps and contact information for all Croatian wineries with tasting rooms, organized by region. Readers will also find a calendar of wine events in Croatia that are open to the public.

Read the magazine at cheerscroatiamagazine.com and find it on Instagram @cheerscroatiamagazine.

Igrane, Makarska riviera

Vino Dalmacije: The Dalmatian Wine Association

Vino Dalmacije (Wine of Dalmatia) is a regional association of wine producers and winegrowers in Dalmatia. Founded in 2012, it became the official regional association in 2020 under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. It covers the area of the four Dalmatian counties and, on the basis of membership, represents the majority of winemakers and growers.

The main goal of the association is to position Dalmatia as a region known for its top-quality wines and to strengthen the wine brand in Croatia and abroad. It does this by encouraging the development of wine tourism, improving wine-making practices, and promoting the Dalmatia wine region using the most important "tool," the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO/ZOI).

To these ends, Vino Dalmacije works as a representative body in communication with state institutions, ministries and agencies, and is also responsible for legislation in the field of wine and viticulture. The association seeks to revise the legal framework for planting vineyards, wine production and the development of wineries, and to develop public tenders for business improvement. Its main current activity is the creation of PDO Dalmacija, which would bring together the entire area and all its winemakers and growers, and facilitate communication with consumers.

As part of its mandate to further the regional wine brand, Vino Dalmacije plays an important role in organizing events, fairs and professional meetings for the exchange of knowledge and experiences. It sponsors two major wine tastings each year that showcase its member wineries, the Dalmatian Wine Festival in Split in spring and Dalmatian Wine Icons in Zagreb in fall. Each is a grand "walk-around tasting" where winemakers or their representatives are available to answer questions, and each offers a wide-ranging list of masterclass tastings led by Croatian and international experts. These two annual tastings offer wine-making colleagues, sommeliers and buyers, press and the general public an opportunity to sample some of the best wines Dalmatia has to offer.

For more information about Vino Dalmacije, see vinodalmacije.com. The above text is taken in part from that website.

Vino Dalmacije's management and supervisory board

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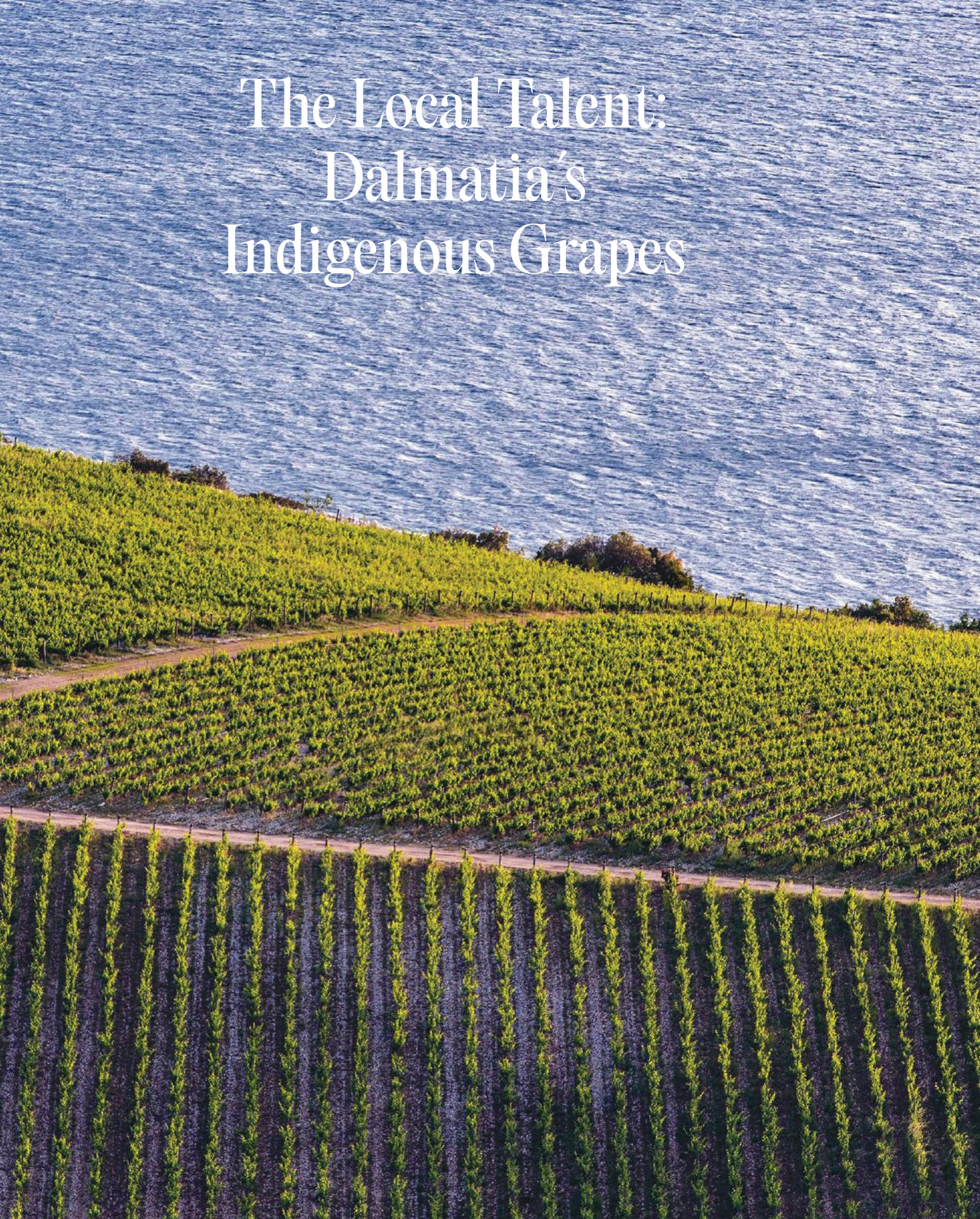
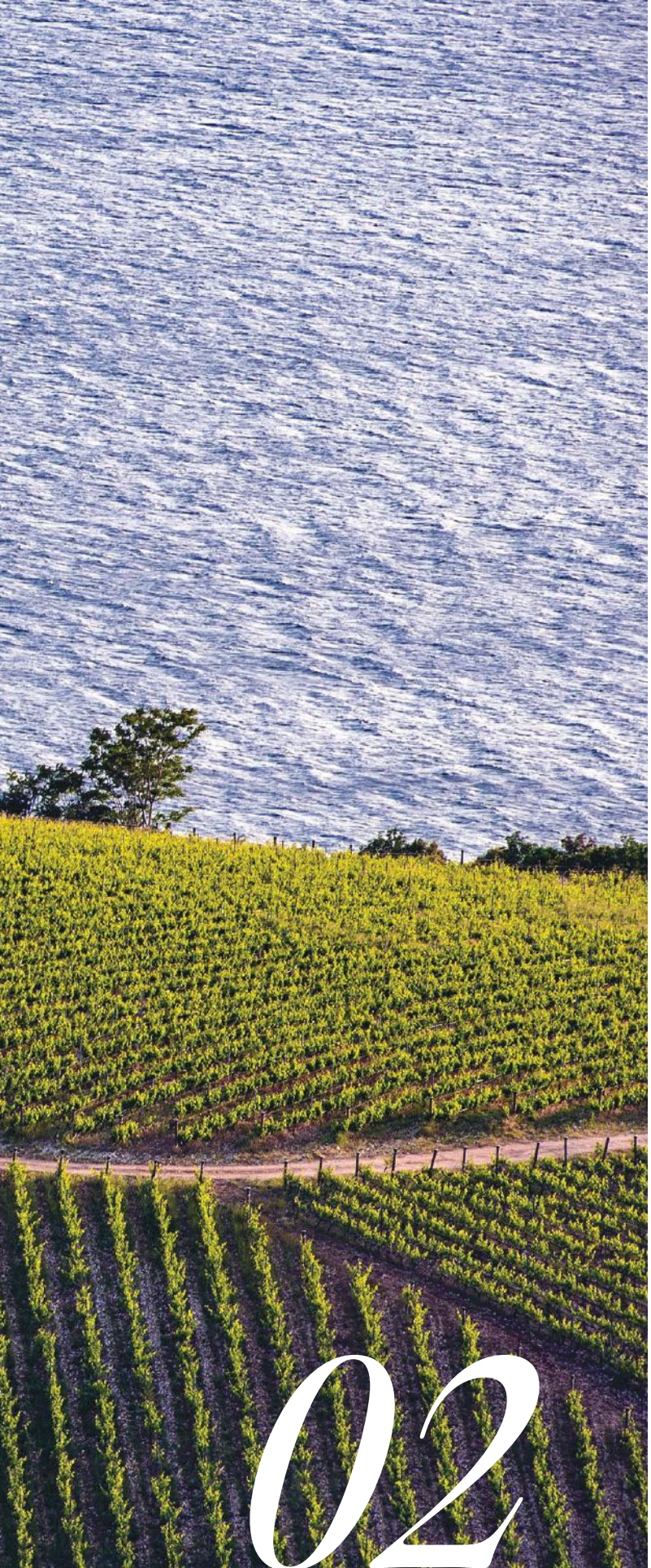
↓ Vino Dalmacije's Wine Icons tasting in Zagreb

The Local Talent: Dalmatia's Indigenous Grapes





02

Native . . . indigenous . . . autochthonous. These are the new magic words for lovers of food and wine. Globalization may have its benefits, but life at a human scale wants genuine, local, meaningful foods, wines and experiences. For this, wine lovers are seeking out original—indigenous—grape varieties wherever they go, whether to their local wine bar or on their annual escape. And here, Dalmatia can offer dozens of flavors that are unique in the world.

The indigenous advantage

Imagine a grape variety that is grown only in one small region of one small Central European country. Only five wineries make wine from this grape, and the wine is not exported. For most wine lovers, tasting it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

This grape exists. It is the red variety Svrdlovina (page 36), grown in the fields and low hills roughly east of the city of Zadar. It offers a snapshot of the flavor of Dalmatia's northern vineyards, a genuine experience of one place on this planet.

Svrdlovina is an extreme example of what indigenous grape varieties can offer to wine adventurers. For the region or winemaker working with these grapes, they represent an opportunity for distinction, a new connection to an old tradition and a direct line to their heritage.

Beyond the benefits to consumers and sommeliers looking for something new, biodiversity is the chief advantage of indigenous varieties. In the face of climate change, the grape varieties that have adapted to their terrain and conditions for centuries are more likely to continue to thrive under challenging conditions. These varieties can offer new possibilities for regions whose own grapes are under pressure from new climate patterns, whether they are planted directly or bred with other hardy varieties.

The Bordeaux region's recent approval of the Portuguese indigenous varieties Alvarinho and Touriga Nacional for planting trials is one example of this.

The rise and fall and rise of indigenous varieties

Of the four main wine regions of Croatia, Dalmatia has by far the most indigenous varieties. This is largely because of the patterns of trade, conquest and settlement in the coastal regions of the Mediterranean.

The Illyrians were growing grapes and making wine on the eastern Adriatic coast long before the Greeks began trading there in the 4th century BCE and colonized Faros (Hvar), Issa (Vis) and many other locations. These early trade routes and settlements brought new grape varieties from foreign lands to the Dalmatian coast and islands. Wine growing (and trading) continued through the ancient Roman presence in Dalmatia, the arrival of the Croats in the 6th century CE, the 400-year influence of the Venetian Republic and the incursions of the Ottomans from continental regions. Over the centuries, some of the vines introduced from foreign lands spontaneously cross-bred to become genetically distinct, new varieties, making them indigenous to Dalmatia.

Dalmatian vineyards reached their greatest extent from the 1870s to 1893, when they supplied wine to France and other areas of Europe already devastated by the deadly vine insect phylloxera. In 1894, phylloxera arrived in the north of Dalmatia and slowly spread to the south and the islands by the 1920s. The "sap-sucker," as it was referred to in Dalmatia, killed virtually all grapevines and began a decline in wine growing that affects the region to this day. It was a massive blow to indigenous varieties. The biodiverse vineyards of mixed, mostly indigenous vines that were common in Dalmatia had been lost.

↓ *Amphoras found in the wreck (1st century BCE) of a Roman merchant ship in Vela Svitnja bay, Vis*

Why Mixed Vineyards?

Modern vineyards are usually monovarietal—planted with a single grape variety. This began with the mass replanting in Europe after phylloxera and was reinforced by the popularity of varietal wines (made from a single grape variety). In the 19th century and earlier, however, it was more common to have mixed vineyards, or field blends.

Mixed vineyards were a practical solution to unpredictable weather, disease and other potential problems each growing season. A mix of vine varieties with different strengths and weaknesses was a guarantee of harvest. If one variety failed to pollinate or rotted on the vine, the remaining, unaffected varieties would take up the slack. Varieties with complementary features were often planted together: low acidity with high, or good yielding but neutral varieties with lower yielding but finer quality ones. Both red and white varieties might be mixed in the same vineyard, but first all of the white and then all of the red varieties would be harvested and vinified together by color.

In Dalmatia, old varieties that were typically in mixed plantings—varieties such as Gegić, Vlaška, Mekuja, Prč, Drnekuša, Svrdlovina and Ljutun—are now in danger of disappearing unless they are of sufficient quality to be rescued.

The mass emigration from the Dalmatian islands and rural areas that resulted from phylloxera and parallel societal problems led to a decline in the farming population overall. Replanting began, but it was the easiest varieties to grow, those with abundant yields, and those that adapted well to phylloxera's solution—grafting to American rootstocks—that were most planted. Indigenous varieties that yielded lower, no matter how high in quality, tended to be overlooked in the rush to resume wine production as a means of survival.

And then . . . war is unkind to grapevines. The two world wars destroyed recently replanted vineyards and claimed the lives of farmers who cultivated them. Afterward, the priorities of the large, state-controlled wineries of Yugoslavia further diminished the number of indigenous varieties. Grapes sold by weight to these wineries led farmers again to favor easy-to-farm, high-yielding varieties. This put many indigenous varieties at a disadvantage—but favored others, such as Pošip and Kujundžuša, which were abundant producers. Then, just as Yugoslavia began to break apart in the early 1990s, Croatia once again went to war.

The net effect of this string of crises was a drastic reduction in the number of indigenous varieties grown in Dalmatia. It was a similar story in many wine-producing regions in Europe. In the final decades of the 20th century, a worldwide trend in favor of international varieties (fuelled in part by wine critics such as Robert Parker) saw growers replacing indigenous vines with international ones such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, that people recognized and wanted to drink.

But heritage varieties were quietly being grown by winemakers who remembered them. Some vines were biding their time in abandoned vineyards or in household gardens. By the early 2000s, when the trend for international varieties began to wane, local and indigenous varieties began their comeback.

Rediscovery and rescue: saving indigenous varieties

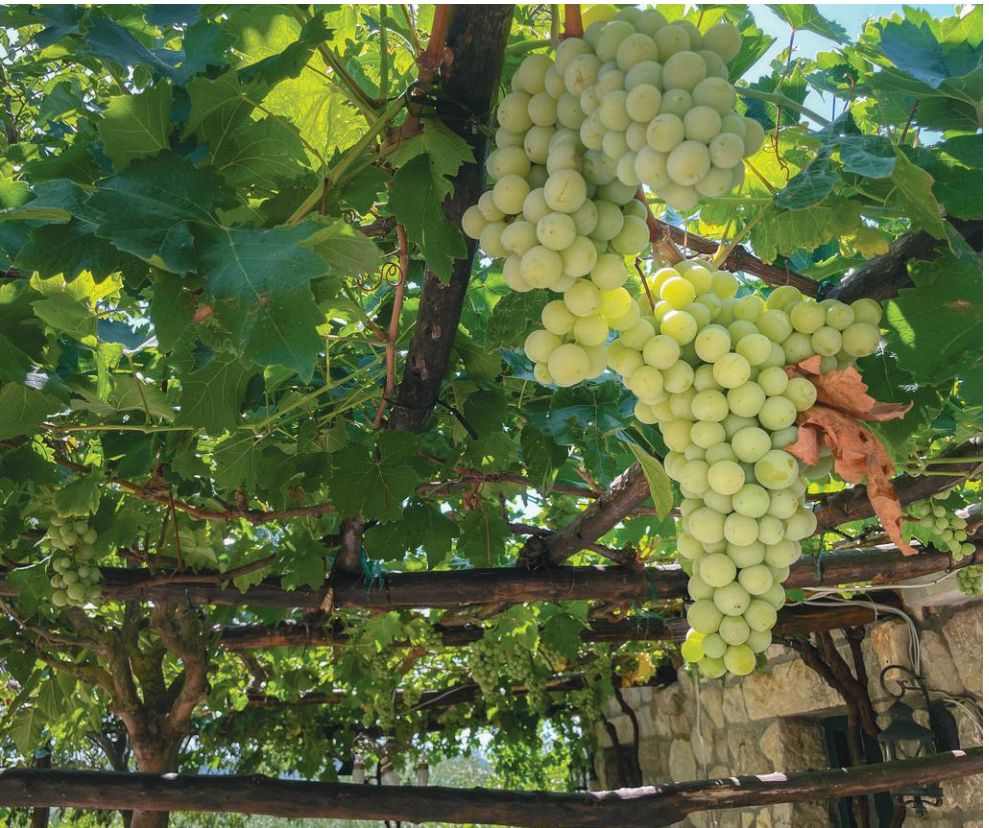
The development of DNA testing of plants was a watershed in terms of scientists' ability to definitively identify grapevines. The first grapevine DNA analysis in the world took place in 1993. Previously, ampelography—the study of vine leaves, shoots and fruit, as well as the behavior of the plant—was the only way to identify vines.

In 1998, after a successful earlier collaboration that confirmed the Dalmatian origins of the Zinfandel grape (page 90), scientists at the University of Zagreb began to classify Croatia's grapevine varieties using DNA testing. This work resulted in the Croatian Native Grapevine Varieties Collection, in which representative samples of more than 130 varieties are planted in a research vineyard at the University of Zagreb. A similar planted archive of Dalmatian varieties exists in Split, at the Institute for Adriatic Crops and Karst Reclamation.

"It's a gene bank," says Dr. Ana Domagoja Mucalo, that includes sample vines of almost-lost varieties such as Palaruša and Zadarka, which were once part of mixed plantings.

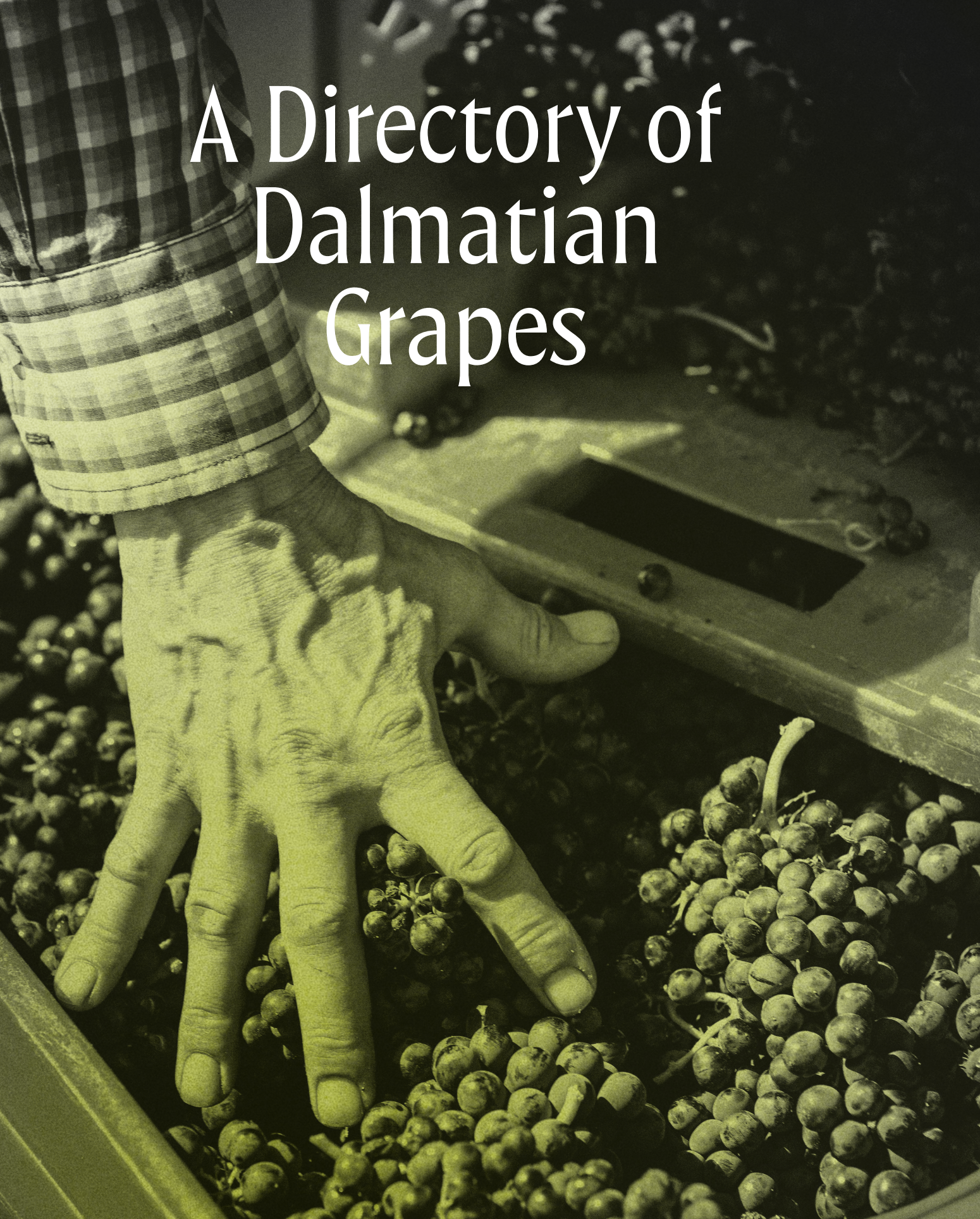
Rescuing a variety can be a years-long process of breeding, test plantings and quality studies. At the end, vine stock is made available for commercial planting. In the meantime, however, indigenous varieties are safeguarded by local growers and in Croatia's vineyard archives. The revival of Svrdlovina and other varieties speaks to our increasing awareness of their benefits, not only to biodiversity but also to Croatian culture: they are a glimpse of Dalmatia's old ways, but also a way forward to the future of gastronomy, tourism and viticulture under climate change. ◊

Beyond the benefits to consumers and sommeliers looking for something new, biodiversity is the chief advantage of indigenous varieties.



←
Old varieties have been rediscovered growing in domestic gardens.

→
A living archive of indigenous varieties maintained by the Institute for Adriatic Crops and Karst Reclamation, Split



A Directory of Dalmatian Grapes

Of Dalmatia's more than 130 indigenous grape varieties, a handful have remained strong across the centuries. A glance at any wine list in Dalmatia will reveal the two dominant grape varieties here: Plavac Mali (red) and Pošip (white). Both are indigenous and planted widely—different regions, vineyard aspects and soils result in a variety of styles and flavor profiles in these wines. These two varieties have survived and thrived over the past century-plus in part because they adapt easily to different terrains.

Other indigenous varieties are regional favorites, such as Bogdanuša on Hvar island and Kujundžuša in Imotski, that have adapted readily to quality wine making.

Dozens of other indigenous grapes are in danger of being lost. Some survive under the label "old sorts" in the few mixed plantings that remain (page 19). A fortunate few of these have been nurtured back to viable production. Other minor varieties are still used only in blends.

The following texts describe Dalmatia's main indigenous varieties—those whose names are regularly seen on the bottle label—in alphabetical order. International varieties are also planted here, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Syrah. There is more information about these in the texts on the four Dalmatian counties.

The color of the grape is indicated by the color of its name in the following text.
Planting figures: APPRRR 2022

03

BABIĆ (BAH–*bitch*) | 287 hectares

Babić is often held up as having great potential among red grape varieties in Dalmatia as an elegant and versatile alternative to the full-bodied, tannic Plavac Mali. Babić is a relative of Plavac, but has higher acidity and significantly lighter tannin than its kin.

It is most plentiful in the coastal Primošten and Rogoznica areas, but also appears in vineyards around Zadar and Šibenik, in Kaštela and even farther south in Dalmatia. Babić's strength as a variety is also its weakness: it performs best on rocky, parched ground with little soil. On one hand, this results in small yields of concentrated fruit with excellent structure and flavor. On the other, this land is extremely difficult to work—all must be done by hand—with only a small amount of fruit to show for it. This and the rise of land prices means it is difficult to increase the amount of quality Babić planted in classic growing areas (which are also attractive for tourism). Developing vineyards on rocky soil away from the coast may be the best way forward.

WINE STYLES

The style and quality of Babić depends greatly on the location of the vineyard. In the stony, stingy soils of Primošten, for example, Babić yields just a few bunches of ripe, intensely flavored grapes. The wines are spicy and cherry-rich, and respond well to oak aging. Fields with more soil and greater water retention yield fruit suitable for blending, rosé or everyday varietal wines. Varietal Babić may be light bodied or fuller, the latter well suited to oak and bottle aging.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: fresh tuna, artichokes with favas and peas (page 68)
INTERNATIONAL: duck, pheasant or quail; roasted root vegetables or mushrooms

BOGDANUŠA (*bog*-*dahn*-OOSH-*a*) | 42 hectares

On the island of Hvar, Bogdanuša vines still outnumber Pošip, the dominant white variety in the rest of Dalmatia. Bogdanuša is indigenous to Hvar, where it has grown since ancient times, including on the famous Stari Grad plain. It fell out of favor under the state-owned wineries (Trbljan/Kuč had a higher yield) but is now planted for its quality, in monovarietal vineyards. Varietal Bogdanuša has become Hvar's unique vinous calling card—indeed, its name means "given by God." The wine is particularly appealing in summer for its light body and alcohol and refreshing acidity.

Bogdanuša is considered to perform best on flat terrain; hillside vineyards produce a riper wine that is higher in alcohol and may lack acidity. No significant plantings exist off Hvar island, although this may begin to change as more winemakers experiment with varieties from outside their own regions.

WINE STYLES

In varietal wines, Bogdanuša is light to medium in body, light in alcohol, dry and fruity, with a fresh acidity. It is usually vinified in stainless steel, although some producers experiment with oak. It can still be found blended with other local white varieties, such as Trbljan and Prč. Traditionally it was used for making the sweet wine *prošek* (page 120), and recently it appears in the occasional easy-drinking sparkling wine.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: fish carpaccio (raw), shellfish risotto
INTERNATIONAL: sushi

CRLJENAK KAŠTELANSKI (*tsurl*-YEN-*ock kash*-*tell*-AHN-*ski*) See Tribidrag.

DEBIT (DEB-*it*) | 323 hectares

The story of Debit echoes the stories of many grape varieties in Dalmatia. In the 19th century and earlier, Debit was highly regarded, and produced award-winning sparkling wines as well as still, dry whites and traditional-style macerated (amber) wines. Debit had such a high reputation that, centuries ago, the government would accept wine from Debit in payment of taxes—thus, the grape name Debit refers to the meaning of the English word still used today.

Due to the undemanding growing practices adopted by many state wineries in Yugoslavia, Debit earned an image as a neutral wine mass-produced

for blending. Since about 2000, with the rebuilding of private vineyards and wineries in Dalmatia, better vineyard practices and a renewed focus on premium growing locations have resulted in higher quality. Varietal bottlings of this Debit are slowly returning the variety to its former high regard.

The fact that Debit is one of few Dalmatian white varieties that are truly high in acidity earns it a spot on restaurant wine lists. Historically, it was interplanted with about 20 percent Maraština. In this way, Maraština's lower acidity and ripe fruitiness would balance Debit's high acidity, light body and mineral flavors. In modern, monovarietal plantings, it is the selection of fruit from vineyards of different elevations, soils and aspects that give Debit its fine balance. It is indigenous to northern Dalmatia and found primarily in the Šibenik inland region around Skradin, Promina and Drniš.

WINE STYLES

Debit is most often seen in easy-drinking, light-bodied wines with character. Depending on site and yield, these can be fairly neutral, or can have mineral, earthy green apple and yellow plum flavors. In either case, Debit's low alcohol and brisk acidity set it apart. Some producers have revived the traditional practice of long maceration, resulting in deeply colored amber wines with light tannins.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: raw oysters, white fish
INTERNATIONAL: ceviche or Italian crudo, linguine with clams, fried calamari, fresh green salads

DOBRIČIĆ (DOE-*britch-itch*) | 10 hectares

Along with Tribidrag, Dobričić is one of the parent grapes of Plavac Mali. It is safe to say that the discovery of this relationship contributed to a minor revival of Dobričić, which is native to the island of Šolta. It is planted almost exclusively there, with just a smattering on the adjacent island of Čiovo and in old mixed plantings on the mainland.

In the past, Dobričić was virtually always part of a blend, added for its intense color. In fact, 19th-century trade records between Dalmatia and France suggest that many a prominent red wine was rouged up with a touch of Dobričić. Genetically, it would seem that it lends its rich color and intense tannins to its progeny, Plavac Mali.

WINE STYLES

Wines from Dobričić tend to be low in acidity but intensely colored and quite tannic. The wine is also lower in alcohol, unusual for a Dalmatian red. It is still used in blends, but a few varietal bottlings are now available.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: lamb *peka* (cooked under the dome)
INTERNATIONAL: cassoulet, shepherd's pie, moussaka

GRK (*gurk*) | 22 hectares

Grk is a Dalmatian white variety that should be much more widespread than it is. It resists disease well and produces fruit with high sugar content as well as excellent acidity. Wines from Grk are in high demand. There is only one problem: you could say that Grk has lost touch with its masculine side.

Unlike most grape flowers, which are effectively self-pollinating (with both male and female reproductive organs), in Grk the pollen is sterile—only the female organ functions. Because of this, Grk needs to be planted with another variety that flowers around the same time (Plavac Mali or Pošip, planted in every other or every third row) so the pollen can be shared. However, Grk's pollination is often uneven, resulting in unreliable yields, with normal and undersize berries on each bunch and a variable flavor profile based on the development of the berries. In the mid-20th century, when the easiest, most productive varieties were the most planted, Grk was easily ignored.

Grk means Greek in Croatian, but the name of the grape is thought to be derived from the Croatian word for bitter, due to the refreshing light bitterness on the finish of Grk wines. The variety's homeland is the sandy, sea-level vineyards of Lumbarda, on the island of Korčula. It is due to this sandy terroir that Grk survived phylloxera in the late 19th century, because the phylloxera louse cannot survive in sand. (Grk is now planted on American rootstock.)

Traditional plantings of Grk exist on other southern Dalmatian islands, including Mljet and Lastovo, and due to demand, Grk is now planted on the Pelješac peninsula, on the island of Šolta, and in small amounts as far north as Zadar county.

WINE STYLES

Grk produces high-quality dry wines that are generally full bodied, with an appealing fruit/mineral balance and a characteristic bitter finish. The occasional oaked or macerated (amber) Grk can be found, although most is made in stainless steel.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: fresh oysters, mussels in white wine, *gregada* (fish stew)
INTERNATIONAL: fish chowders and stews, fried fish, pasta with basil pesto

KUJUNDŽUŠA (koo-YUND-*zhoo-shuh*) | 172 hectares

Kujundžuša is all but exclusive to the Imotski region, where it is the most planted grape variety. It thrived there due to its exuberant yield, useful under state-run wine making. Now its yield is controlled through pruning or green harvest, and the wine is valued for its light body and alcohol. A tendency to low acidity is being addressed through clonal research, but winemakers still observe the historic remedy of 10 percent Okatica/Botun (another indigenous variety) in the blend for its acidity.

The majority of Kujundžuša is grown in the valley's vast field, on soils that retain sufficient water to avoid the threat of drought. On the karst hillsides, the fruit becomes riper and more complex, but the easy-drinking style of the valley is so far considered to suit the market.

WINE STYLES

Expect dry, low-alcohol, light-bodied whites from Kujundžuša, with a distinctive mineral note and light bitterness. This fresh style (rarely oaked) is a sought-after flavor of summer on the coast. The variety also works well in blends with locally grown international grapes, and it is now once again made in the traditional macerated style, for amber wines.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: *raštika* (stewed wild mustard with smoked meat), or *pivac i pura* (rooster with polenta) for macerated (amber) wines
INTERNATIONAL: roast chicken, white fish tacos, vegan Indian dishes

LASINA (*lah*-SEEN-*ah*) | 17 hectares

Lasina is a rare variety indigenous to the area around Drniš and Skradin, in Šibenik-Knin county. Plantings are concentrated there and farther north, in the Promina region. Relatively little is grown, but the variety is highly regarded for its quality and has been the focus of a few wineries in the region. In addition to varietal wines, it is used in blends and rosé wines.

Like most varieties, Lasina was part of the traditional mixed vineyard plantings in its area of Dalmatia. In particular, it was interplanted with Plavina, allowing the two to "correct" each other in blends. Lasina's contribution was its higher sugar and intense aroma. It might be more widely planted now, in monovarietal plantings, but for the fact that the vine produces vast quantities of leaves, requiring intensive vineyard work in spring.

The wine is sometimes referred to as the Pinot Noir of Dalmatia because of its light color, low tannins and elegance. Lasina has lower acidity than Pinot Noir, however, and its own flavor, often with a floral edge to it.

WINE STYLES

As a red wine that is light in body and tannin, Lasina is considered promising for the role of "light summer red" in Dalmatia, which otherwise offers plenty of rich, high-alcohol options (Plavac Mali and Tribidrag, primarily). Lasina is also lighter in color, making it appealing for use in rosés, sometimes blended with Plavina.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: Skradin risotto (made with veal)
INTERNATIONAL: salmon, pasta with fresh tomato sauce, mushroom pizza, risotto or soup

MALVASIJA DUBROVAČKA

(*mall*-VASS-*ee-ya du-bro*-VATCH-*ka*)
| 40 hectares

This is one of three Malvasijas in Croatia, each genetically different. The others are
- Malvazija Istarska, grown in Istria and spelled with a *z*
- Maraština or Rukatac (aka Malvasia Bianca Lunga), grown in Dalmatia (see below)

Grape varieties called Malvasia are well travelled due to their early distribution around the Mediterranean by the ancient Greeks and others. The variety common around Dubrovnik (Malvasija Dubrovačka) also appears on the Lipari island chain off the northeast coast of Sicily (where it is Malvasia di Lipari), on Sardinia (Malvasia di Sardegna), and the island of Madeira (Malmsey)—as well as a handful of other places (and names). Its starting point is unknown. It may not be indigenous to Croatia, but as it has developed distinct characteristics in the many hundreds of years it has grown here, it deserves attention.

It was mentioned in documents in the Dubrovnik archives from the 14th century, when it was grown in the gardens of the Dubrovnik nobility. Like some other indigenous varieties, it slowly fell out of cultivation because it is not trouble-free—it is susceptible to powdery mildew. By the mid-20th century, it was all but extinct, with only a few vines remaining. After the war in the 1990s in Croatia, enologist Niko Karaman of the Konavle region worked with members of the faculty of agriculture in Zagreb to revive Malvasija Dubrovačka from just three healthy vines.

Plantings are concentrated in Konavle, in Dalmatia's far south, although growers outside the region are now adopting it.

WINE STYLES

Dry wines from Malvasija Dubrovačka have intense peach/apricot and floral flavors and tend to be unoaked. The grape has an unusual amount of acidity for a southern variety, more than that of its relative, Maraština/Rukatac. Due to its acidity, it has been used recently to make sparkling wine. Historically, it was famous for sweet wines, which continue to be made today.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: *brudet* (seafood stew with tomato)
INTERNATIONAL: curries, Asian fish dishes with salmon or other rich fish

MARAŠTINA (*mara*-SHTEEN-*uh*)

| 303 hectares

Maraština is known by two names in coastal Croatia, the most common alternative being Rukatac, on the island of Korčula and to the south.
In the middle ages, Maraština from the area of Šibenik was particularly prized by the white-wine-drinking elite. The sweet *prošek* made from this variety was approved for sale as medicine, given generally to improve the immune system, to women to rebuild their strength after giving birth, and even mixed with a raw egg and given to sickly children. More recently, this sweet wine would be made at the birth of a child, and saved for that child's wedding day.

Maraština's quality depends greatly on where it is planted. Easy conditions, such as those favored during Yugoslavia, led to lackluster wines. Historically, it was useful for its aromatic character in blends with Debit, in northern Dalmatia, and the two were often planted together. With attention to vineyard sites, modern Maraština makes primarily dry white wines with easy-going appeal and fruity, floral flavors.

It is unclear whether the variety is native to coastal Croatia, but it has been grown widely here for centuries. It is genetically the same as Malvasia Bianca Lunga, in Tuscany, which grows under various names in central Italy, in Greece and here in Dalmatia. (In Istria, Malvazija Istarska is genetically slightly different from Malvasia Bianca Lunga and therefore from Maraština.)

WINE STYLES

Maraština reacts well to winery treatments such as light oak, lees stirring or maceration. It can also take bottle aging, although it is still unclear how much. Until the early 20th century, it was used to make many different wines, including the old style of macerated whites, now revived and called amber or orange wines. *Prošek* is still made from Maraština as well, but today it is used primarily for fresh

whites, either varietal or blends, as well as wines matured in oak or acacia and intended for aging.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS
CROATIAN: seafood risotto
INTERNATIONAL: falafel, fattoush, summer rolls with shrimp, vegetarian and vegan foods

PLAVAC MALI (PLAH-*vahts* MAHL-*ee*) | 1334 hectares

Plavac Mali is the most planted red grape variety in Croatia by a good margin, although it is grown only in Dalmatia. There is a reason for this: Plavac Mali is easy-going. It grows on rocks or in soil, on a cliffside or in a valley; its leaves can withstand harsh heat and wind; it can tolerate drought; and the grapes' thick skins resist disease. It is likely due to this ruggedness that, over the centuries, it has overtaken its once-dominant parent, Tribidrag (aka Zinfandel), in vineyard plantings.

The variety grows beautifully in pure stone and intense heat on the southern slopes of the Pelješac peninsula, the islands of Hvar, Brač and others. These are the locations of some of the most revered vineyards for Plavac: Dingač, Postup and Ponikve on the Pelješac; the south-facing Sveta Nedjelja and Ivan Dolac on Hvar; and the slopes above Murvica and Bol on Brač. In these and other steep, rocky vineyards, the bush vines sprawl on the rocks or may be attached to the walls of the terraces for support. The wines from these slopes are ripe, generally high in alcohol, with the concentrated flavors that come from harsh conditions. A similar style of Plavac is made on Vis island.

Plavac Mali is also planted in fields and valleys throughout Dalmatia, although primarily in the two hotter, southern counties. In this more fertile soil, the vine can be vigorous and produces fruit that is lower in potential alcohol and extract, suitable for everyday wines. Still, the potential of these sites for Plavac Mali may improve with the warming climate.

WINE STYLES

From steep, south-facing sites such as the classic growing areas listed above, Plavac Mali is rich in fruit, alcohol and tannins. These wines require oak maturation; bottle aging before drinking is highly recommended. Wines grown in the valleys are softer and more palate-friendly. They require less barrel aging, and due to this and the relative ease of farming flat land, are easily affordable.

Plavac is commonly used to make rosé (or *opolo*, Dalmatia's traditional rosé) and some wineries have adopted it for making the sweet wine *prošek* (page 120).

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS
CROATIAN: *pašticada* (a braised meat dish)
INTERNATIONAL: osso buco, lamb tagine, mild beef korma, rich meat stews

PLAVINA (*plah*-VEEN-*ah*) | 524 hectares

In spite of its rank as the second most planted red grape variety in Dalmatia, Plavina is a bit of an underdog. It stands in the shadow of its celebrity half-sibling, Plavac Mali. But it has caught the attention of some growers in northern Dalmatia—and others in the two southern counties, where it is called Plavka—who believe it has potential beyond the traditional blends.

Plavina is a cross between Tribidrag and a Puglian (Italy) variety called Verdeca, although it is unclear which side of the Adriatic produced the first Plavina vines. It is planted throughout Dalmatia and is not particular about terrain. In fertile valleys its yield is overabundant without careful management; in rocky soil it can achieve quality fruit with greater concentration of flavors. Still, very little varietal Plavina is made.

As a member of the old-style mixed vineyards, Plavina would have contributed brisk acidity and low sugars and alcohol, valuable traits in a region of often big, ripe, high-alcohol reds. It is still often used to lighten red wines made from the more muscular varieties. These same traits, as well as its light color, make Plavina a strong option for rosés. Its growing favor as an ingredient in rosé may boost its interest as a varietal red. Or perhaps Plavina's superpower is its ability to make a blend into more than the sum of its parts.

WINE STYLES

Most often seen in the form of rosé, Plavina is also occasionally found as a varietal red ideal for summer drinking: light in alcohol and color and high in refreshing acidity. More often than varietal wine, Plavina is used in blends for the freshness it can lend to Dalmatia's ripe, rich red grape varieties.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: sardines
INTERNATIONAL: sushi, especially tuna; bresaola, *frisée au lardons* and other fresh salads with protein

POŠIP (POE-*ship*) | 329 hectares

The most-planted white grape variety in Dalmatia, Pošip is indigenous to the Dalmatian island of Korčula, where its parent varieties have also been identified. It was discovered in Smokvica only toward the end of the 19th century by a farmer who went on to cultivate the unfamiliar vine. The variety came into its own in the early 20th century, when it was widely planted on Korčula for its aroma, high sugars and abundant yields. In 1967 it was the first Croatian white grape variety to gain protected status.

Today, Pošip is planted on most of the central and southern Dalmatian islands. On the mainland it is widespread, especially in the coastal areas but also inland, from Konavle, south of Dubrovnik, to the northern reaches around Zadar. Korčula remains a center of Pošip wine making, where Čara and Smokvica are designated growing regions.

Pošip is fairly adaptable to different terrains, but does not respond well to extremes such as drought. Its thin skins make it susceptible to sunburn, disease and rot. It ripens early and can easily overripen, leading to lower-than-ideal acidity levels and high alcohol in the finished wines. Modern viticultural methods and an earlier harvest help to avoid these problems.

WINE STYLES

For much of the 20th century, the taste for highly colored, high-alcohol wines established Pošip as full-bodied and ripely fruity, often with a touch of oxidation. In the early 21st century, tastes began to change. A precise definition of harvest date and a modern approach in wine making now produce an aromatic wine of more medium body and moderate alcohol, with tropical fruit notes.

Pošip offers a style of wine for everyone. Most winemakers make a stainless steel version; equally important are the richer *sur lie* and harmonious barrel-aged styles. Macerated (amber) Pošip is another choice. It is still used, as well, in blends with Korčula's other indigenous white varieties.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: fresh oysters or seafood salad (fresh Pošip), prawns in tomato *šalša* or *škampi na buzaru* (*sur lie* styles)
INTERNATIONAL: fajitas with chicken (fresh Pošip), shrimp étouffée, crab cakes (*sur lie*), game birds (amber)

RUKATAC (*roo*-KAH-*tots*) See Maraština.

TRIBIDRAG (TRIB-*ih-drahg*) | 73 hectares

After years of sleuthing by international wine scientists, Tribidrag (aka Crljenak Kaštelanski) is known to be the same grape as Primitivo in Puglia, southern Italy, as well as identical to the California grape Zinfandel. It is certain, too, that Dalmatia is the origin point of the variety (page 90 for the story).

Tribidrag's is a grape story of riches to rags to riches. From at least the 15th century in Dalmatia, Tribidrag was one of the top red varieties in terms of reputation and value. It was widely planted. But its offspring, Plavac Mali, was more robust than Tribidrag, which suffers in extreme heat and has thin skins that are susceptible to rot.

Given a dominant variety (Tribidrag) that was slightly tricky to grow, and an upstart variety (Plavac Mali) that seemed to love heat and thrive on pure stone, it is easy to imagine how Plavac Mali slowly replaced Tribidrag in Dalmatia's vineyards. After the mildew and phylloxera crises in Europe in the late 19th century, the less sensitive Plavac Mali once again won favor in the urgent need to restart wine making. By 2001, when Tribidrag was identified as Zinfandel, there were only 25 known vines left in Dalmatia.

Since 2001, Tribidrag's trajectory has only been upward. The fact that Zinfandel is one of California's most economically important varieties created a new opening for Tribidrag in Dalmatia, where there are today some 73 hectares of vines. Early on, vine stock for replanting was sourced in Puglia as well as in California. It is certain, however, that in these farflung locations the variety developed distinct characteristics. Now vines have been propagated from the original Dalmatian stock and are once again planted in their native territory. As Crljenak Kaštelanski, this is probably the most important variety in Kaštela, and Kaštela is one of the areas most dedicated to its wines.

In Croatia, the name Tribidrag, Crljenak Kaštelanski or Zinfandel may be stated as the grape variety on the bottle label.

WINE STYLES

Different regions and wine-making practices mean that California Zinfandel lovers may not immediately recognize their favorite in Dalmatia. The California style often seems fruitier, juicier, and may have matured in American oak barrels, known for their rich vanilla aromas. The Dalmatian version, while fruity, can also be spicy, with the resinous-herbal notes of *makija*, and a little more angular. It, too, is matured in oak, but often in a combination of barrels from France, Croatia or the US. Both have elevated alcohol—above 14 percent and sometimes over 15 percent.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: lamb on the spit or lamb *peka* (cooked under the dome)
INTERNATIONAL: Korean BBQ, other international barbecue with sweet (not spicy) sauce, grilled sausages, hamburgers

TRNJAK (TURNK–*yahk*) | 24 hectares

Trnjak is a red variety that has recently been selected for production as a varietal wine. Little is known about its origins, but it seems to be native to the inland Imotski region, including what is now Herzegovina.

In Imotski, Trnjak was traditionally planted with Vranac (a variety considered indigenous to the Balkans) in mixed vineyards. The blend was well balanced in the field: Vranac was the backbone, with intense color and good acidity and tannins; Trnjak brought lighter body, elegance and fruitiness to the wines.

The year 2011 was the first time Trnjak was vinified on its own, but now some 30 wineries make a varietal Trnjak in Croatia and Herzegovina. In Imotski, plantings of this variety are increasing. Its earlier decline is likely due to the fact that its growth form is chaotic—its shoots grow in every direction rather than simply up, leading to extra work in the vineyard that would not have been welcome in leaner times. Now it has spread to neighboring areas in Croatia, including Makarska and Vrgorac. It seems to be fairly adaptable and is considered to have good potential for additional plantings.

WINE STYLES

Trnjak makes dry red wines of usually light to medium body (although the trend is to fuller body in Herzegovina). Alcohol is in the medium range and tannins are gentle. Overall the wine is elegant and complex, often with a subtle smoky note outside of any oak influence. It is presumed to age well, but further evidence is necessary. It continues to be used in blends as well as for varietal wines.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: grilled Adriatic calamari
INTERNATIONAL: *magret de canard*, pastas with red sauce

VUGAVA (VOO-*gah-vah*) | 29 hectares

Vugava (or often Bugava) is one of Dalmatia's many varieties that are found nowhere else in the world. It is assumed to originate on Dalmatia's most remote inhabited island, Vis, because it still grows primarily there. It is thought that it may have arrived on Vis during the Greek settlement of the eastern Adriatic around the 4th century BCE, but this has not been proven. We do know that in the middle ages, white wines were the elite choice, and Vugava was especially prized.

Today, Vugava is the trademark variety of Vis island. In spite of its success there, it has not spread far—there is a significant vineyard on Brač, where records show a history of Vugava being grown, and a few smaller plantings elsewhere in Dalmatia.

This may be due to the close attention required for Vugava's success in the vineyard. It buds early in the season when shoots can easily be broken by the wind, and is susceptible to mildew. On Vis, the vast majority of Vugava grows on the stony red soils of Dračevo Polje, although a few growers are now achieving good results planting instead in sandy soil.

WINE STYLES

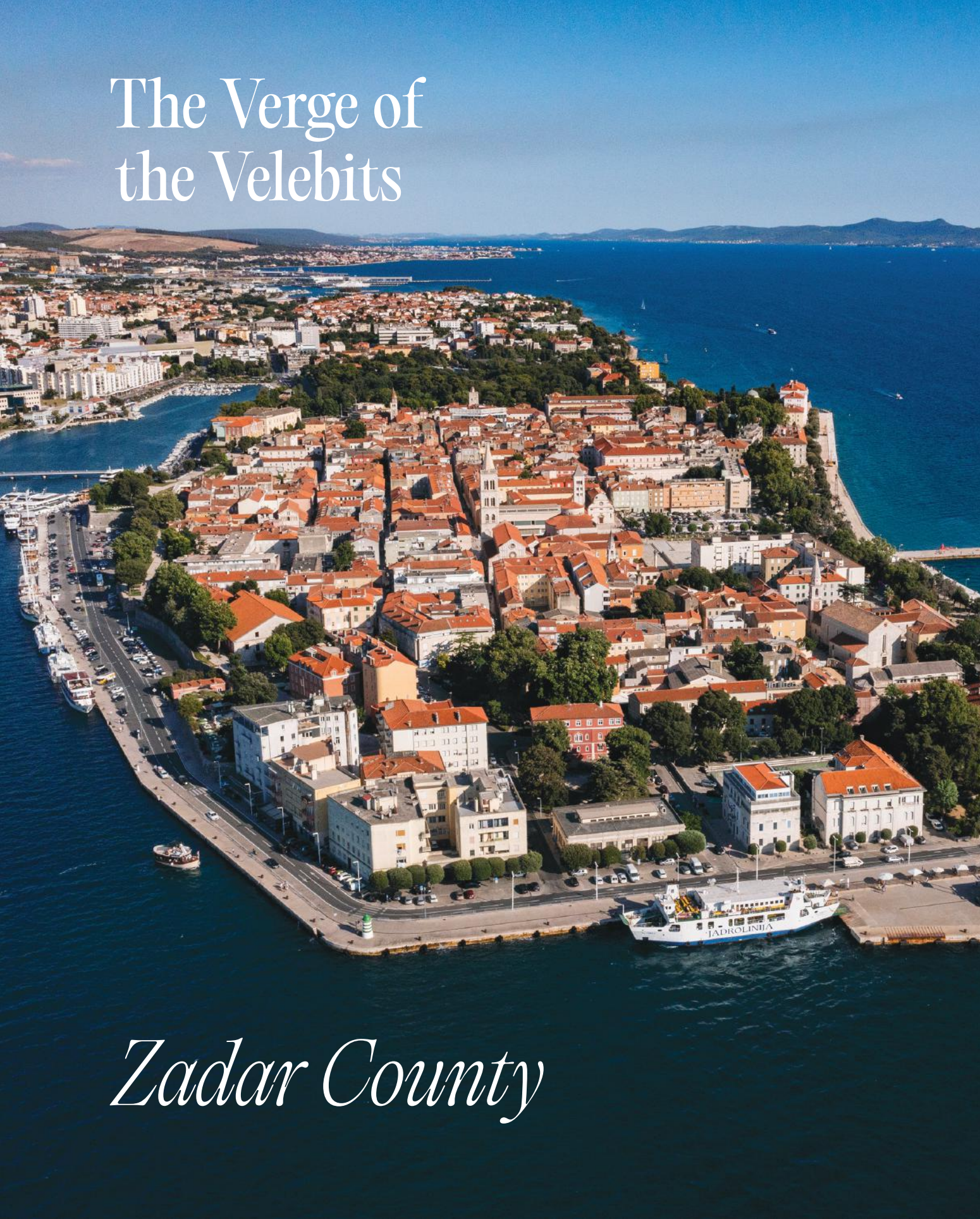
Vugava is aromatic, high in sugars and tends toward low acidity. Its wines are full bodied and often high in alcohol, with flavors of honeyed apricots. It is often compared to Viognier. Some winemakers use oak with Vugava, and experiments are underway to determine its ageability.

CHEF'S SUGGESTIONS

CROATIAN: *gregada* (fish stew), beef carpaccio
INTERNATIONAL: curries, especially chicken; pastas with cream sauce; lobster rolls ◊

A glance at any wine list in Dalmatia will reveal the two dominant grape varieties here: Plavac Mali and Pošip.

The Verge of the Velebits



Zadar County

04

If you were an ancient Liburnian sailing the coastline in the ninth century BCE, Zadar would appear to be the perfect location for a settlement. At that time it was a small island very close to the mainland, shielded from the broad Adriatic by the Ugljan and Pašman islands. Across the mainland, an imposing range of mountains would help protect the coastal area from incursions, with a broad swath of upland plains as a buffer in between.

Zadar has been continuously inhabited since at least that time. Over the centuries, the island was connected to the mainland by a moat, and then by the major defensive works undertaken during Venetian rule in the early 16th century that give the historic center of Zadar its current form.

Settlement slowly spread to the nearby mainland, creating the modern city. But it is the old town center that still enchants. Visit off-season or wake early in the morning and walk the narrow, quiet pedestrian streets paved with creamy limestone. At the center of town the streets open onto the site of the old Roman forum and an open-air lapidarium. Here, scores of large stones showing sculptures and architectural reliefs from the Roman settlement in Zadar lie as if in an ancient sculpture garden.

Across the square stands the ninth-century church of Saint Donatus, built on foundations of Roman stone litter. Being alone inside its sculpted void requires patience or strategy, but it is worth the trouble to stroll this space in peace.

Zadar's glorious, broad *riva* extends the length of the peninsula, and it is here that the evening promenade (and occasional swim) takes place. At the point, a crowd gathers to observe the sunset and listen to the breath of the sea, transformed into sound by the brilliant Sea Organ built into the seawall.

Regional talents foretell a bright future

When it comes to wine, Zadar county has certain strengths that, if they continue to hold the interest of regional winemakers, may hold the key to its future.

First, a groundswell of interest in organic has developed out of the traditional methods of small growers in the area. On a basic level, organic is simply the usual way of doing things. But an initiative in 2007 by a group of about 10 like-minded growers in and around Nadin made information and education available that has paid off in the large land area here that is farmed and/or certified organic.

The second of Zadar county's strengths is the number and area of international grape varieties planted—more than in other Dalmatian regions. Recent historic factors contributed to the rise of international varieties (more on this below), and their presence, combined with the region's indigenous varieties, gives winemakers here a wide variety of options.

The final point here—a flair for rosé—is common to all of Dalmatia (think sailing and warm-weather tourism). But the presence of Rhône grape varieties in Zadar county, plus the indigenous Plavina, allows a palette of flavors that is distinct from those of predominantly Plavac Mali and even Tribidrag (Zinfandel) to the south. Plavina (page 28) is the most widely planted native variety in Zadar county, and its prominent acidity and light color are a perfect formula for rosé blends. History has helped, says Manuela Plohl, a Zadar-based wine educator and columnist: the Benkovac state winery sold a popular rosé in Yugoslavia that created an association of rosé with this area, and fostered a core group of winemakers who were trained to make it.

Wake early and walk the narrow, quiet pedestrian streets paved with creamy limestone.

The lay of the land

Zadar county extends inland from the southern half of rocky Pag island and the famous salt pans of Nin, across the swath of low hills and plains collectively referred to as Ravni Kotari, to the foothills of the Velebit range. On the sea, it includes the coastal islands Ugljan and Pašman, and Dugi Otok farther out, then follows the coast south past Biograd na Moru, to the far end of Lake Vrana.

Here, where there are no coastal mountains, there are relatively small differences in growing areas. The land rises from sea level along the coastline to the foothills of the mountain range. The soil in some locations is poor—a foundation of well-draining limestone with scant surface soil, sometimes red in color due to a high iron content. But these rocky areas are interspersed with karst fields that have deeper soil, and because of this retain water slightly better. Soil types vary widely, even within a single field, which serves to create complexity in the fruit.

Wind, rain and sun

Zadar county vineyards are flooded with sunlight. The climate is Mediterranean, but this is Dalmatia's coolest region due to the influence of the Velebit range. The areas nearest the mountains feel the greatest effect. They are the last to warm in springtime, making spring frosts especially threatening to budding vines. The first area to wake in spring is the farthest south, and farthest from the mountains—the southern coastal area around Biograd and Lake Vrana. The warmth slowly creeps up the coast, and then inland.

Enter the wind, particularly the *bura* or *bora*, which scours the entire Croatian coastline and hinterland with cold, dry, howling gusts from its origins in the Dinaric Alps (of which the Velebit range is a part). The *bura* comes from the northeast, resulting from the clash of continental and Mediterranean climates that meet above the mountains. It is especially cooling in these northern Dalmatian vineyards.

Due to climate change, drought is increasingly an issue here, and brings the danger of wildfires as well. In summer, it is Velebit that forms a barrier between coastal and continental areas, stopping most rain clouds that approach from the east.

There are mitigating factors in these seemingly dire conditions. The northwestern part of the county is effectively a peninsula, due to the extensive waterways to the south and east of Pag island. The inland Novigrad Sea and the smaller Karin Sea, an extension of the channel between Pag and the mainland, bring slightly warmer, more humid conditions than would otherwise exist at the base of the mountain range. At the southern end of Zadar county, Lake Vrana likewise ameliorates conditions that are already slightly warmer than those to the north.

↓ *Zadar waterfront with the Velebit range beyond*

Indigenous varieties and international relations

Plavina may become a grape to watch in Zadar county, but many other local varieties grow here, and some are being discovered anew. In black varieties, Tribidrag (page 29) does well in the slightly cooler climate. Traditional varieties common across northern Dalmatia make up the balance, including Plavac Mali and Babić.

In white varieties, Maraština (page 27) is much planted, as it is all over Dalmatia. Pošip (page 29) is a rising star. Debit and other varieties from the former mixed plantings have been isolated for varietal wines or blending, and some growers are experimenting with varieties from elsewhere in Dalmatia.

The story of international varieties in Zadar county begins in the 1970s, when the dominance of large state-owned wineries began to change the way wine was farmed, made and sold. In contrast to the small plots farmed by local families, where indigenous varieties were already growing, the state wineries had huge vineyards.

This was the first time vineyards were actually planned, explained local winemaker Tomislav Glavić, and the varieties to grow were recommended by the university agronomists in Zagreb. These were largely Rhône varieties (Grenache Noir and Blanc, Carignan, Cinsaut, Ugni Blanc) as well as some Bordeaux grapes, which were less planted at the time, writes Dr. Edi Maletić of the University of Zagreb Department of Viticulture and Enology, in an email. Retired agronomist Miljenko Peričić says his team focused specifically on Châteauneuf-du-Pape varieties for the huge Zadar PK winery. International plantings followed in some family vineyards because virtually all fruit was sold to the state wineries at the time, and those wineries had themselves planted international varieties.

After the war in the 1990s, the state wineries began to fail. With payments to local growers becoming less and less reliable, the only solution was to stop selling their fruit and start making wine themselves. During this time of replanting, the Bordeaux varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc) that had been recommended previously were chosen because of their prestige. Zadar county remains a strong specialist in international varieties as well as local.

Reviving Svrdlovina

Sometimes a vine variety lives in stories among winemakers for being different from the rest. Mladen Anić, a winemaker in Smilčić, in the inland region, remembered hearing tales of Svrdlovina (SVUD-loave-ee-nah) as a child. As an adult, he went in search of it.

The vines Anić found were scattered in the inland vineyards of Zadar county. DNA analysis confirmed that Svrdlovina was a distinct variety, and a nursery began to raise vines for planting. Anić's winery, Figurica, now grows almost a hectare of Svrdlovina, and other area wineries together make up 2 or 3 more hectares. Five wineries make a varietal bottling of this grape.

It is too early yet to know Svrdlovina's typical flavor, or even its problems in the vineyard. But it is indigenous and different, and if it continues to pique the interest of regional winemakers, Svrdlovina will be an emissary for the creativity and breadth of wine making in the Zadar region and beyond.

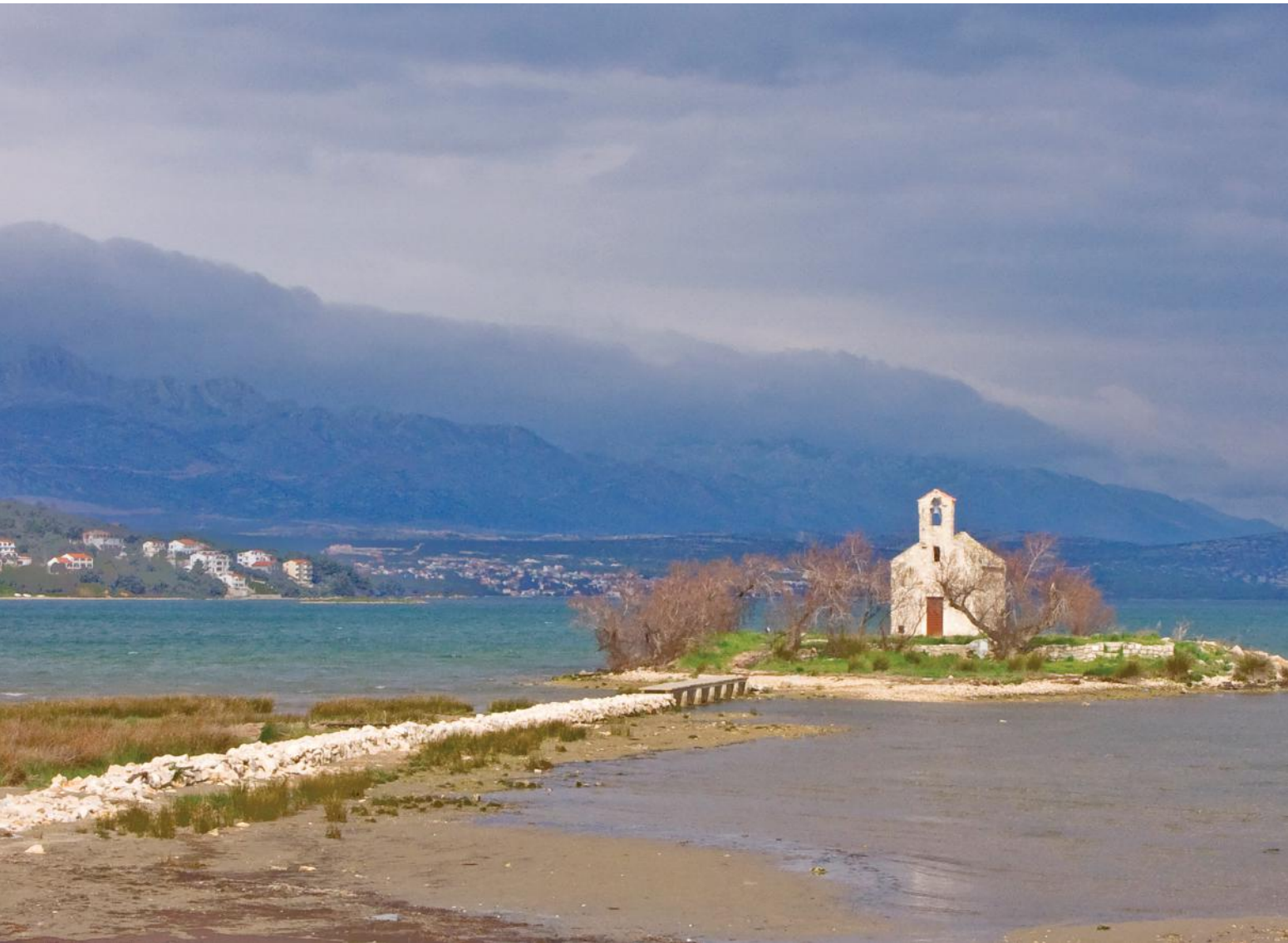
An organic opportunity

After the Nadin grape growers formed their group to investigate the possibilities of organic growing in 2007, organic farming slowly spread across the region. The original group was driven by curiousity—they wanted "to see if they could create a new niche in the market while maintaining clean soil," said Tomislav Glavić, one of the group.

Nadinsko blato ("Nadin mud"), a large field near Nadin village, is one center of organic growing. The Nadin field was owned by a state winery with some 3,000 hectares of vineyards, according to Glavić. The winery failed before the war in the 90s, and during the war the village of Nadin was incinerated. As families began to return and rebuild, the state offered a 100-year concession on the vineyard land, with a later option to buy. Virtually every winegrower in Nadin took advantage of this.

The vines were at first farmed traditionally, then, with slight adjustments, many farmers joined the local organic surge. Nadinsko blato is one example of how community will, combined with education and a healthy dose of tradition, can result in a reputation for high-quality, sought-after fruit. It is unclear whether organic has taken hold as a niche with consumers (who buy first by price), but as an indicator of quality, the commitment to organic has become source of pride for Zadar county. ◊

↓ *The Novigrad Sea moderates temperatures in northern wZadar county.*



The Winds of DALMATIA

Maestral, sirocco, zonda, papagayo, ponent, brickfielder. There are winds everywhere in the world, and everywhere in the world the winds are given names—evocative, often affectionate, hyperlocal. Dalmatia, too, has its winds, and they affect everyone from sailors to tourists to winegrowers. A gentle breeze is more than welcome on a summer's day, but when Dalmatia's winds are howling, sections of highways will close, ferries will turn back to port and the fetid *jugo*, the southeast wind, will turn Dalmatians themselves grumpy and fuddled.

Both sailors and grapevines know the dramatic effects of winds from every direction, in every season. In the vineyard, it is the source, timing and strength of winds that determine whether they are helpful or destructive. They are part of a complex formula of wet and dry, heat and cold, sun and shade that affect every year's harvest.

If you could build a perfect wind, it would be a constant, subtle, drying breeze year round.

05

A healthy breeze

Summer visitors to Dalmatia are given barely a taste of the region's rich wind rose. During summer, it is the gentle maestral that soothes pink skin in the afternoon, when rosé fills every glass and Dalmatia's *pršut* (famously dried by the winter *bura*) salts the tongue.

The maestral that rises most summer days is a cooling breeze generally from the northwest. It keeps vine leaves barely fluttering, circulating air among the ripening grape clusters and cooling the canopy microclimate. It is a benevolent breeze that removes lingering damp, which could invite disease, and moderates the harsh summer heat.

If you could build a perfect wind, it would be a constant, subtle, drying breeze year round. This breeze would keep frost from forming in low-lying areas during early spring nights, cool the canopy in summer, quickly dry the vines after summer and autumn showers, and chill the vines into a peaceful dormancy in winter. But such a breeze does not exist.

When the bura blows during growing season it is credited with cooling, drying and airing the vine canopy.

Dry winds and wet winds

"*Jugo* is the worst thing for winegrowers in Dalmatia," says Lucija Dominiković, who works in hospitality at Terra Madre winery in Komarna. "Everything we do, all of the sulfur and copper [treatments]," she says of their organic vineyards, "it's mostly for the *jugo*."

When the southeast *jugo* blows, it brings humidity and rain, often in spring and fall, critical times in the vineyard. A strong wind in May and June during flowering can reduce the number of flowers that turn into berries, which reduces yield. And if the vines spend as little as 10 hours wet, disease can set in. It is only because there is always wind blowing at Terra Madre that they are able to farm organically—even if the *jugo* brings damp to the vines, some other breeze will soon come along and dry them off.

Summer sailors in Dalmatia beware the *nevera*, a storm that arrives suddenly from any direction. It is short but violent, with lightning and lashing rain, and it is deceptive: the sea is completely calm before the storm. A *nevera* might be welcome in summer for the brief rain it brings, but it is often too little to benefit the vines, and high winds of any kind may damage their leaves and shoots.

The *bura* is a northeast wind that forms over the Dinaric Alps, strung along the border between Dalmatia and continental Croatia. It is a drying, usually winter wind that brings high pressure and crisp weather. In winter it often blows strong, sometimes for days—anyone who has experienced a strong *bura* has felt the chill right to their bones. When it blows during growing season it is credited with cooling, drying and airing the vine canopy.

In summer, a less benevolent wind has been causing trouble for Ljubo Jelavić, whose Kairos vineyard is on a hill above Trogir. "There is a newcomer during the summer," he wrote in an email, "the *levanat*. It was very, very uncommon to have this east wind until five or six years ago. But for the past few summers its presence was more significant, both in frequency and strength. This is definitely not welcome as the *levanat* is a dry wind, so it adds another burden to already water-deprived vines."

Summer wind is usually gentle, but the rare gusty wind that rises during wildfire season, when the land is parched, makes a dangerous situation much worse. The gusting wind sends fire in all directions and blows flaming vegetation off to start new fires. In 2021, unpredictable gusts brought wildfire perilously close to the Kairos vineyards more than once during a tense 24 hours. "Every time, though, firefighters managed to fight it off," wrote Jelavić.

Invite the good, reduce the bad

Winds are part of nature's plans for vineyards each year, but there are ways winegrowers can maximize the positive effects of the wind, and minimize the negative.

At the vineyard planning stages, rows of vines can be oriented to favor not only grape ripening but also winds that cool and dry the vines most effectively. During the growing season, removing leaves from the vines to optimize airflow helps. Protective measures may include planting windbreaks, siting vineyards on protected hillsides or in the stone boxes that are common in some Dalmatian regions (page 72), staking the vines for stability and using training systems such as gobelet/bush training that keep the vines huddled close to the ground.

Still, growers can only do so much. The winds—and the storms that come with them—are one of the conditions in the vineyard that go into a "good vintage," or sometimes cause heavier hearts. Dalmatia, caught between mountains and sea, gets the best and the worst that the winds can bring. ◊

Dalmatian Rosé Brings New Dimension to Croatian Cuisine

Kruno Filipović

06

Enough time has passed now to consider it water under the bridge, but one thing I heard while attending a masterclass on rosé wines way back has stuck with me all these years. I remember hearing about all the famous houses looking for a way to remain relevant after what some have described as the past-peak of your usual Provence style of rosé. Gastronomy plays a huge role in wine culture, and the idea was to come up with a more characterful style of rosé, a style you would be able to pair with food. We heard all sorts of ideas on aging rosés, moving away from Grenache, trying *sur lie*, and more. I remember thinking there must be another way of achieving this, and we Dalmatians may just be lucky enough to find ourselves ahead of a trend for once.

Rosé is very often too light to accompany serious cuisine. This is not to say that some will not find appeal in this very fact. That rosé is light and does not add any flavor to your food will be precisely what many enjoy.

Dalmatian rosé is different. It is an impressive rosé; it refuses to be ignored. Lucky circumstances came together to create a characterful and complex rosé in Croatia's warmest region. It's the poor karst soil, the intense sun, the heat, the scarcity, the limestone and powerful indigenous varieties that we hold in high regard in Dalmatia that have paved the way for such a specific wine.

Some still use the word *opolo*, the historic term for rosé wines in Dalmatia. It hints at the old traditional wine-making techniques, but in most cases now it's nothing more than a name. Within the EU, the approved wine-making technique for rosé wines is the usual: rosé is short-skin-contact wine made exclusively from red varieties. This means that today, Dalmatian *opolo* is, indeed, a classic rosé. Yet, there are nuances . . .

How short is short skin contact?

This is where those lucky circumstances come into play. Longer skin contact does mean more color. Then again, so does more direct sunlight, as it is the sunlight that causes the color to develop in the berry in the first place. This means "short" is different in different parts of the world. And let me tell you, in such an intensely sunny region as Dalmatia, skin contact is among the shortest. The color intensity and flavors in the grapes are so pronounced that some winemakers will measure it in minutes. And yes, strange as it may sound, some will try to avoid it altogether. Some of our rosés are zero skin-contact. This is because some local red varieties, such as Plavac Mali and Tribidrag, are so intense in color that merely by crushing, the juice gets all the color it needs for rosé.

There's such joy in rosé and food pairings when the rosé is bold, gastronomic.

↓ *Chicken and octopus* peka *(cooked under the dome)*

There's more to rosé than color

Now apply these same ideas of color in rosé wine making to aromas and extracts. The majority of the aromas we find in wines come from the grape skins, so the same logic applies: the longer the skin contact, the more pronounced the aromas in the wines. When the goal is a short skin contact, another feature of the Dalmatia wine region comes into play. It is the wide variety of indigenous grape varieties that thrive here, many of which are quite robust, pungent, or one might even call them tangy. In a nutshell, these grape varieties are so pronounced in aromas that Dalmatia is destined to make characterful rosés. It's when the region sets the style.

Even the lightest of Dalmatia's rosés will showcase some of the strength and robustness of the variety it comes from together with the usual strawberry, raspberry and floral aromas. These are often mineral, herbal aroma-driven rosés with wild red berry fruit aromas rather than their domesticated relatives. The palate is usually more pronounced and powerful than in average rosés and often boasts some of that wild yeast texture, like extra creaminess and oiliness, giving it a natural appeal.

There's such joy to be discovered in rosé and food pairings when the rosé is bold, gastronomic. It's sheer alchemy what Dalmatian rosé does to homemade fish pâté, prawn risotto, grilled calamari, tuna carpaccio, grilled red mullet, shellfish *buzara* (a simple one-pot shellfish stew) or *brudet na crveno* (thick fish stew with tomatoes). The signature combination of red fruit, light floral notes and garigue, herbal notes and minerality, brings out the hidden joys of Mediterranean food.

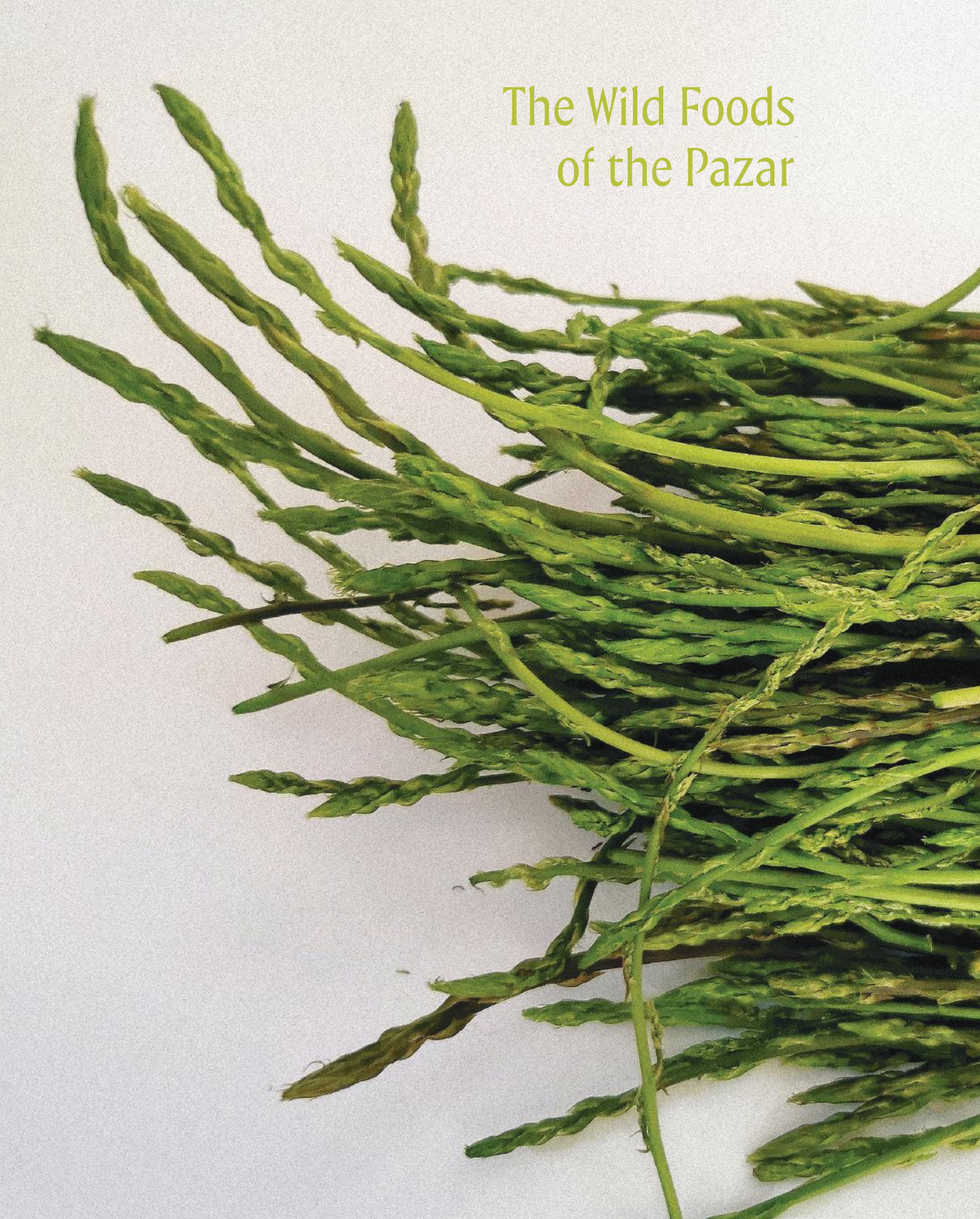
I'm one of those eager to see the story of Dalmatian rosé picking up, where rosé becomes the sort of summer powerhouse it is destined to be. There's a good business reason for that, too. Tourist season is our most valuable wine market. In light of the fact that Dalmatia is full of red varieties, it only makes sense to redirect a portion of those grapes into making summer wines, rather than overpowering, tannin-forward reds. ◊

Kruno Filipović is part of the Croatian WSET team and owns a small business set on promoting local wines. For the regional daily newspaper he gathers data on wines and tries to turn it into poetry while minimizing the damage from fleeting fads.

Opolo Past and Present

The Dalmatian term opolo *or* opol *comes from a traditional method of concentrating red wines by removing a percentage of the juice during maceration. The removed juice was dark pink in color and its wine a useful alternative to brawny reds. Some winemakers still prefer to use this term on the bottle label, although today's* opolo *is usually made using the modern rosé technique. Even in this modern style, since Dalmatian rosé is made from powerful varieties of intense color, it's usually darker, sometimes even approaching red.*

The Wild Foods of the Pazar



07

Seasoned travelers know that you can learn a lot about a region's cuisine by visiting the greenmarket. For an even deeper understanding of a people and their way of life, delve into the fields and byways for the edibles that, for centuries, have been gleaned for food, medicine, and of course, for spirits.

In Dalmatia, wild foods are still gathered, their properties still known to country people. We identified some of the most common wild foods through the seasons, and sought advice from the experts at the Split greenmarket, the *pazar* (called *pijaca* or *placa* elsewhere). If you look carefully, you can find many of these foraged goods on its tables.

Wild asparagus | April

Wild asparagus is thinner and more fibrous than the farmed variety, and may be green or purplish. It is foraged each spring in Dalmatia's fields and olive groves, where the ability to spot the thin stalks is a hard-won skill. Thick sheaves of it appear at the *pazar* during the season.

"It is used for many specialties—I like it with eggs," said Divna. Some use just the tips in scrambled eggs as an appetizer or lunch, saving the tougher ends for soup.

← *Wild asparagus*

Rock samphire | May to June

This spring green grows close to the sea coast over much of Europe, from salt-sprayed walls or rocky soil. Rock samphire has flat, waxy-looking leaves and is distinct from marsh samphire, which has tubular shoots and no apparent leaves. It has a strong, almost acrid flavor that is love-or-hate. Jars of pickled samphire can be found in Dalmatian specialty shops, for use as a garnish or in seafood salads. It can also be eaten fresh or sauteed, but you'll need to pick it yourself—it is not offered in greenmarkets. For milder flavor, avoid the new growth and pick mature stems.

Capers | May to September

Capers are the flower bud of a Mediterranean bush that settles in the rocky walls and cracks of coastal Dalmatia. The buds are picked by hand and salted or pickled as a condiment; the larger, seed-filled caper berries that follow the flowers are also edible this way.

Capers are used in every cuisine of the Mediterranean, in pasta sauces, virtually any seafood dish, chopped in fish pâtés, steak tartare and piquant sauces. The berries are often seen as a cocktail garnish.

Carob | September

This is the edible fruit—a flat brown bean pod—of a Mediterranean tree. Dried and sometimes toasted, the pods are ground into a flour that is used in baking, often as a substitute for cocoa (look for *rogač* flour in bags in Dalmatia's baking aisles). Children sometimes pick and chew on the sweet pods.

"It's healthy—it's sweet but it has no sugar," said Anđa, adding, "You can make *rakija* with them."

Jujubes | September

Also called Chinese dates, these can be eaten firm and green or softer and brown. When it is firm with green-and-brown mottled skin, it has a green apple flavor. With wrinkled brown skin, the fruit has a lightly sweet flavor with a hint of dates. Watch out for the hard pit.

Dried, jujubes are used to make a tea that calms anxiety and promotes digestion. Fresh, they can be sliced and used like apple in autumn salads or as a topping for hot cereals.

Sorb apple | October

The sorb looks like a tiny apple, but don't try to eat the pretty red ones! This type of fruit needs to be "bletted," which means it is softened by frost, turns brown and appears to be rotten. Only then can it be used for jelly, or dried to make fruit tea. Traditionally the flesh was pureed and added to bread or cakes.

"With the dried ones you can make a compote," said Anđa. "Drink the liquid, then eat the fruit."

Quince | November

The quince looks like a fuzzy, lumpy yellow apple or pear, but there the resemblance ends. It is perfumed when ripe but cannot be eaten raw—it is rock hard and puckery with tannin. When poached or otherwise cooked, its white flesh turns a pretty dark pink. "You use it to make liqueur and for jam," said Marica. It can also be combined with apples in apple pie or applesauce, and makes a fine chutney as well as quince paste (*kotonjata* in Dalmatia, *membrillo* in Spain), to be eaten with nuts and cheeses.

Tree strawberries | November to December

This beautiful tree may grow in gardens or in the wild, with both white flowers and ripening fruit showing at the same time. The soft, red-ripe fruits have an edible, nubby skin and yellow flesh. When ripe, the fruit contains a touch of alcohol, but also abundant vitamin C.

The fruit is eaten sparingly. "The leaves have three times more vitamin C than lemon," said Anđa. They are used to make a medicinal tea.

Mišanca (winter greens) | Winter and early spring

This mixture of often bitter, prickly-looking greens is foraged in fields and vineyards at a time of year when little else grows. It may include wild onion, fennel and mustard, chicory, purslane, dandelion, wild carrot and many other wild herbs. It can be substituted for bitter greens in most any recipe. "It is used the same as chard. Put in garlic, olive oil, a little potato and that's it," said Zoran, referring to the classic *blitva i krumpiri* (chard and potatoes) on every *konoba* menu.

Dalmatian Food and Wine Pairing

A Culinary Adventure

Nenad Trifunović

Have you ever stood in your kitchen, staring at a dish of food and bottle of wine, wondering if they would go together? Finding the perfect match to turn your dinner into an experience greater than the sum of its parts might be the very thing that captivated you about the wine world. Imagine being born in a culture with already tested and tasted perfect pairings proven over centuries.

Let's talk about pairing Dalmatian food and wine, a blend of flavors from Croatia's Adriatic coast. Dalmatian cuisine uses local ingredients like olives and fresh herbs to create dishes with deep roots in history. Here's how to pair iconic Dalmatian flavors with local wines, one dish at a time, with inspiration from some top chefs.

Authentic Dalmatian dishes to savor

These traditional dishes exist today in numerous modern interpretations, so the wine pairing in a restaurant might riff on a flavor twist added in the kitchen. However, the main ingredients are soulful as ever. Here are the classics to build on.

Imagine being born in a culture with perfect pairings proven over centuries.

← Mussels marinated in orange liqueur, M'arden

08

Janjetina ispod peke (slow-cooked lamb)

"Peka" takes lamb cooking to a new level: the meat is slow-cooked on the hearth beneath a bell-shaped cast iron lid piled with coals. This traditional method makes the lamb super tender as it is slowly cooked in its own natural juices. The preferred pairing calls for the magic of powerful Dalmatian reds: Plavac Mali, Tribidrag (aka Crljenak, Zinfandel) or certain Babić wines.

Experienced *peka* connoisseurs know there are also structured white wines in Dalmatia that elevate this experience, but experimenting with whites in this case is not recommended without supervision (wink!).

Orange mussels and domestic *pršut*

Growing up in a family-owned restaurant and running a wine bar in Dubrovnik today, Ana Bitanga is passionate about Croatian wine and unique Croatian ingredients. At M'arden, she frequently recommends mussels marinated in orange liqueur with cellar-aged Malvasija Dubrovačka.

Her comfort food is a pairing of domestic prosciutto with Babić or Plavac Mali. What makes this combination so hedonistic is the fat and protein blending perfectly with tannin. But the tannin should be in balance, as in Babić from Prgin winery or Plavac from Vicelić winery. Prgin Babić is soft and elegant, especially after a couple of years in the bottle, yet with the full aromatic richness of the variety. Vicelić Plavac is even more untypical, brighter and lighter than most Plavac wines, with cherry notes at the forefront and no wood aging influence whatsoever. Bitanga prefers it a bit chilled as an ideal companion to *pršut*.

Of course, the *pršut* is not just any kind. Bitanga means four-year-old *pršut* from a small home farm practice.

Pašticada (braised beef stew)

Pašticada is a distinctive beef stew, essential in the world of Dalmatian cuisine. Beef is marinated in vinegar, then simmered for hours with wine and vegetables, allowing intense flavors to blossom. It is often served over polenta or gnocchi.

Savoring *pašticada* with Plavac Mali reminds you of a flawless dance duo—each move is harmoniously synced. This dish works with other red Dalmatian varieties, but the dark richness of Plavac Mali ideally balances the *pašticada* aromas, and the wine's tannins refine the texture of the dish. Plavac Mali has been carefully crafted to suit this cuisine.

Srdele u savuru (marinated sardines)

Branimir Vukšić, sommelier of Šibenik's Pelegrini restaurant, a long-time holder of a Michelin star for fine dining, singled out one forgotten dish that the restaurant has brought back to the forefront. *Srdele u savuru* are a type of marinated sardines (or anchovies or red mullet) with minimal heat treatment, in a homemade vinegar and oil as well as several types of peppers and a few root vegetables. It is reminiscent of the traditions of preserving food from the old days, when there were no refrigerators. Back then, marinating with onions and parsley preserved the food that raised generations of Dalmatians: sardines.

With this dish, Vukšić would open a bottle of Maraština from Matela winery, known for its traditional vinification, or the *sur-lie* Malvasija Dubrovačka from Zoro winery. With its body and aroma, this well-rounded wine (where despite the *bâtonnage*, the minerality is highlighted) is an ideal match for *srdele u savuru*.

Buzara–style shrimp or Dalmatian mussels

Ščampi buzara mixes earthy shrimp and tangy tomato sauce in a special way. This matches exceptionally well with light reds from Plavina and Drnekuša or Dalmatia's hearty rosé wines. Most Dalmatian reds are overpowering in this scenario, but you can get all the Dalmatian flavors and spices in a wine, without heaviness. What makes Plavina and Drnekuša suitable for pairing with *ščampi buzara* is their leaner and more elegant posture. Light and fragrant red wines made from these varieties tend to bring a lot of indigenous

aromatics, to spice up the synergy with a red-sauce seafood dish.

If instead we are eating Dalmatian mussels prepared with white wine, garlic, olive oil and parsley, we are looking for a white wine match. Fresh-style Pošip or Vugava come to mind, but explorers should also check out Bogdanuša, Kujundžuša, and if that's too hard to pronounce, Malvasija Dubrovačka or Zlatarica with these gentle Mediterranean flavors. In this case it is hard to miss with any fresh (unaged) Dalmatian white, to turn a simple mussel dish into an extraordinary dining experience. Don't forget the home made bread for dipping.

Riba na gradele (grilled fish)

Riba na gradele is grilled over an open fire and acquires a unique umami taste, a combination of fresh fish, sea salt, olive oil, and smoke from the hearth. Dalmatians take great pride in the quality of their fish, and although this meal is quite common on the coast, great attention is given to the proper wine to accompany it.

Think Debit, if we're talking about white fish such as sea bass, with its white flesh, dry texture and subtle flavor. Debit, with its brisk acidity and light body, won't overpower the delicate flavors.

Many other Dalmatian white wine varieties are traditionally paired with grilled white fish. A sip of fresh-style Pošip, Vugava, Bogdanuša or Maraština (Rukatac) works as an ideal spice elevating this dish. Their aroma matches the traditional Mediterranean herbs used to season the fish, bringing out the mild flavors and making them intense.

To talk about dark-fleshed fish with wine, we'll visit the island of Murter. When seafood is in question, Konoba Boba is top of mind. The foundation of Boba's cuisine is ancient: authentic ingredients from the surrounding area. Owner and chef Vjeko Bašić likes to recall the foods of his carefree childhood. It's all about simplicity and a focus on ingredients, in his case grilled sardines.

In many other Mediterranean places, white wine would be served with such a meal. Bašić knows better. Dalmatia is home to another red variety—Plavina—which, unlike Plavac Mali, is more suited for easy, drinkable reds that can be enjoyed during the hottest summer days. Preferably slightly chilled.

Gregada (fish stew)

Gregada is not just any fish stew. It's a traditional Dalmatian dish made with fish, potatoes, and white wine. Think of it as the sea meeting the earth in a pot. The magic happens with Pošip, an indigenous treat.

Aromatic Pošip can be aged for this occasion. In fact, it's even better aged because it adds a special

touch to the stew, highlighting the flavors, and bringing some structure to avoid falling short when paired with hearty *gregada*.

Like all the best stuff, the beauty of *gregada* lies in its simplicity—and quality ingredients, of course. As you savor each spoonful, you'll need no explanation why this pairing works so well. The minerality of aged Pošip balances the rich flavors of *gregada* perfectly.

Soparnik

Once a humble meal, now a delicacy, this rediscovered staple of Dalmatian cuisine requires light and refreshing white wine, although there are many who appreciate light Dalmatian reds with it as well.

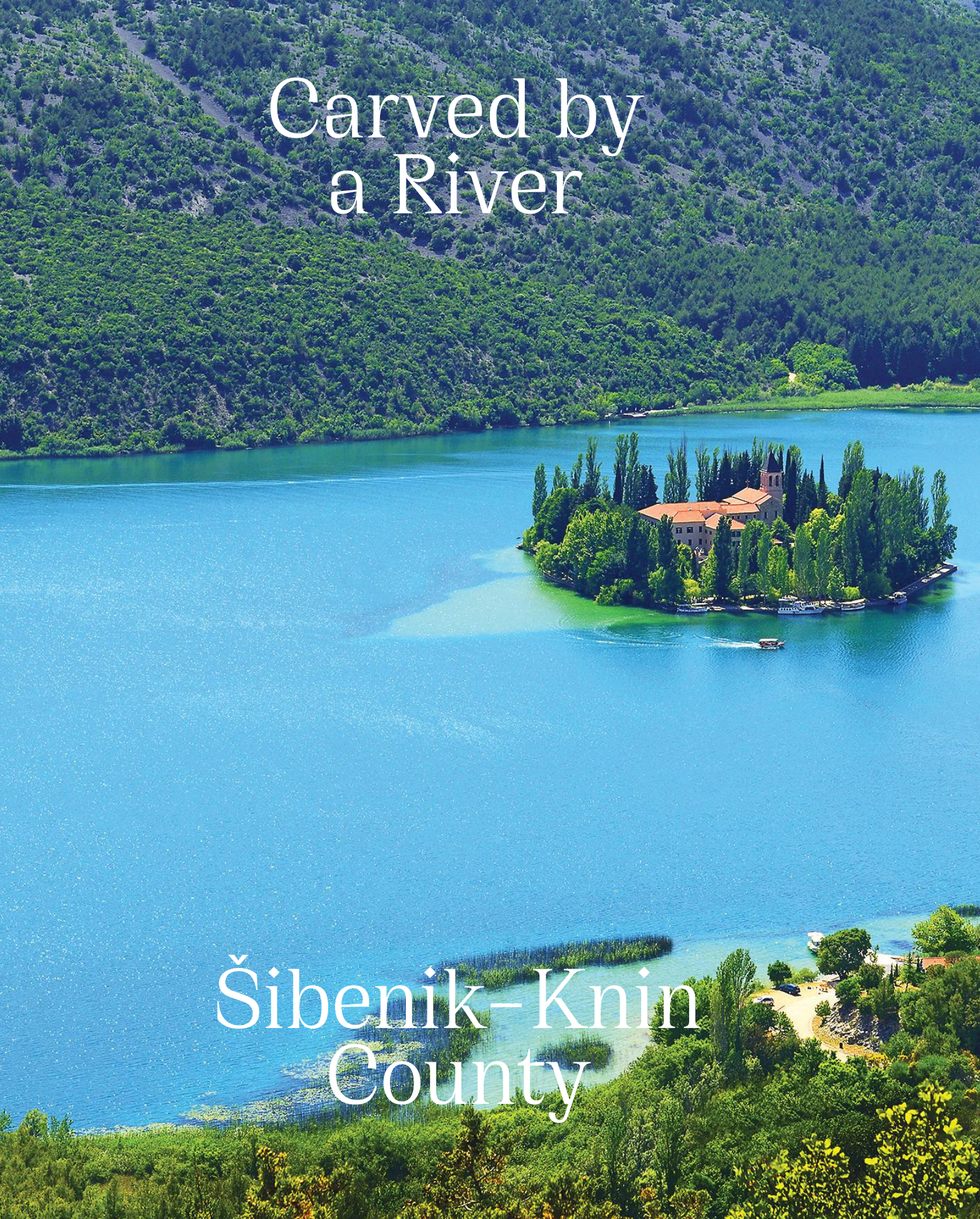
Soparnik consists of two layers of thin dough filled with chard, parsley and garlic, ingredients accessible (in Dalmatia) even to those of modest means. Yet, it holds the distinction of being the first Croatian dish to achieve cultural heritage status. Olive oil plays an important role here as well, and tradition dictates that *soparnik* be baked in a wood-fired oven.

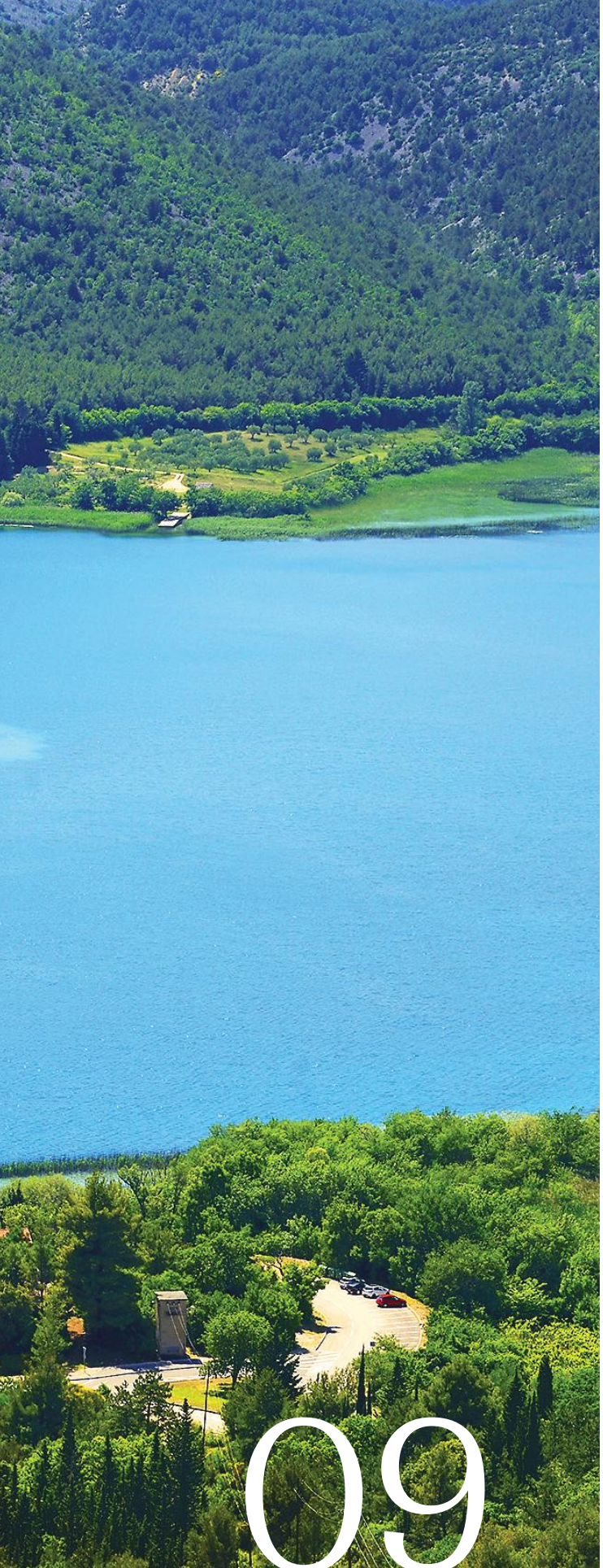
Virtually any fresh-style (unaged) Dalmatian white pairs beautifully with *soparnik*, but Debit and Maraština especially enhance the balance of flavors. Moreover, these wines contribute to highlighting the culinary tradition and sensory details that make *soparnik* a must-try dish for anyone seeking an authentic taste of Dalmatia. ◊

Nenad Trifunović is a renowned Croatian wine educator, workshop moderator and the creator of vinopija.com, one of Croatia's most respected wine blogs. With his keen palate and approachable style, he makes the world of wine more engaging and accessible to connoisseurs and casual drinkers alike.

↓ *Cutting* soparnik

Many tourists visiting Dalmatia comment on how Dalmatians know how to live. Perhaps this is true. Others may have forgotten about life's simple pleasures, while Dalmatians often take them for granted. Blending indigenous flavors with local wines can create such a rich culinary adventure from seemingly the simplest ingredients. Every meal without synergy of wine and food pairing is a lost chance at bliss!


Carved by
a River
Šibenik-Knin
County



09

Šibenik and Knin, the two key cities in this county, are tied together by the glorious river Krka, an azure ribbon across the green-brown land. Knin is a small city in a long field surrounded by mountain foothills in the northeast, Šibenik lies resplendent on a steep bank of the bay where the Krka filters into the sea. In between is a chain of waterfalls and lakes, forts, archaeological sites, churches and an island monastery, most inside Krka National Park.

The source of the Krka is at the base of Mount Dinara, Croatia's highest mountain, not far from Knin. The river widens as it passes Knin, and cuts a deep gorge through the limestone as it flows through the park, its waters crystal blue.

Each of the two cities is distinguished by well-preserved fortresses. Knin's historically important fortress and town complex stretch along a mountain ridge 100 meters above today's city. It was built by the Slavs as early as the 9th century and was the residence of Croatian kings. Šibenik, too, was founded by the Slavs from the continent rather than the Greeks or Illyrians who made other early settlements in Dalmatia. Two of its four fortresses are now open-air performance spaces.

If you tire of wandering Šibenik's narrow limestone footpaths and archways, immerse yourself in nature. Head upriver and into Krka National Park on a boat tour, or choose your own adventure on the park's hiking trails. Heading out to sea, you can motor through the 2-kilometer natural canal that connects Šibenik bay to the Adriatic and island-hop among the 109 dainty islands of Kornati National Park.

← *Visovac Lake with its island monastery*

A view across the Krka

The land does not recognize the lines we draw, doesn't distinguish by county or parish. The landforms typical of Zadar county—the foothills of the Velebits in the north and the rolling hills and broad fields of Ravni Kotari nearer to the coast—simply continue across the county boundary, toward the Krka.

Approaching the river, narrow folds between ridges contain slim valleys patchworked with fields and vineyards. On both sides of the river between Šibenik and Knin, there are also broad fields that, thousands of years ago, were lakes. Now, it is the Krka and its string of lakes that remain from that time.

On the Krka's east bank, coastal mountains begin to rise and move parallel to the sea as they proceed south to Split and beyond. This is the beginning of the Zagora, or hinterland, where there are different climate patterns and landforms from those in the coastal areas.

Looking to the coast southeast of Šibenik, a traditional and picturesque method of growing the native Babić variety remains. And a new position for grape growing has emerged, enabling organic farming for those who own land there.

A land of many forms

The land in Šibenik-Knin county has undergone many changes that are still in evidence today. Much of the land here was an ancient sea that deposited layers of limestone filled with the fossils of tiny creatures. As the sea receded, it left lakes in its depressions, which later drained as well. What remains of these waters is the river and its tributaries and connected lakes.

Now we see the river in its gorge, widening periodically into one of a series of lakes along its route. We see the karst landscape (page 72) of eroded limestone peaks and rounded hills. And between these elevations we see valleys and fields, some quite large, where the ancient lakes once lay. The mountains remain as ever, one range bordering the region to the north and the other beginning its coastal march to the south.

Traditionally in this region, fertile soil, such as that in the fields, was saved for crops. Vines were planted in the stony ground. This approach can still be seen in the coastal areas where stones prevail, especially around Primošten and Rogoznica. With today's science-based viticultural practices, the wide fields and plateaus on the banks of the Krka are now used for wine growing as well. Some of these are at Skradin and in the area of Drniš and Promina. Knin, too, lies in the north of a long field in the mountain foothills. As in the fields of Zadar county, these have widely variable soils that, when used in combination with aspect, can yield a versatile selection of grapes for blending a balanced wine. Some large vineyards remain from the old state-owned wineries, but in general even the large fields have hundreds of small owners.

In rocky soil, such as that at the coast and on many of the ridges farther inland, wine growing is more difficult. Water drains instantly through the rocks, labor-intensive terraces or stone boxes are often necessary to protect and secure the vines, and all work must be done by hand. Due to the harsh conditions, however, vines have fewer leaves and bunches, yields are smaller, and the berries themselves are riper, smaller and more concentrated, with complex flavors. This terroir, too, has its advantages.

Climatic variations

Looked at as a whole, the climate here is slightly warmer than that of Zadar county—no surprise as we proceed southeast along the coast. Viewed through a fine lens, however, Šibenik-Knin county shows stark differences depending on the aspect of a hillside or the proximity of a body of water. The moderating effects of the Krka are minimal deep in its gorge, except for where it broadens into lakes such as Visovac, with its island monastery. As it reaches the end of the park at Skradin and empties into the wide Prokljan Lake, its effects are more marked. The *bura* wind and its counterpart, the *jugo* (page 38), have their say here, too, where vineyards are exposed to them.

In coastal vineyards, the sea-effect cools the air in spring and summer and warms it in autumn. The brisk sea wind cools and dries vineyards planted on the edge of the land. Vines here may be enclosed in a tight gridwork of stone walls that form protective boxes, each home to a few low-sprawling vines. The craggy coastline provides inlets to moderate nearby temperatures, and the large, spring-fed Morinje Bay near Jadrtovac influences the relatively new area of vineyards above the town. Such are the differences in elevation and position that two weeks separate harvests in Jadrtovac and Plastovo, just 30 kilometers north.

The "Land Behind"

Visitors to Dalmatia rave about the sea and the islands. Inland Dalmatia is not to be missed, though. Not only are there many sights to see, but the wines of the "land behind" tell an important part of the Dalmatian wine story.

We're talking about the land behind the coastal mountains: the hinterland, or the Dalmatian Zagora. If you are standing in Rogoznica, Trogir, Kaštela or Split, travel over the mountains that follow the coastline and you will be in the original Zagora, a unique region of small villages that was traditionally dedicated to herding rather than the business of the sea.

Stand in Knin and follow the long alley that leads between the coastal range and the Dinaric Alps along the border, behind Split, through Imotski to Vrgorac—this is the modern notion of hinterland. The regions of this 150-kilometer stretch are quite distinct from one another. Nevertheless, they are connected by the Marmont Road, completed by the French in 1813, and share the distinction of "land behind."

The hinterland has a modified Mediterranean climate. The Dinaric Alps on the border of Bosnia and Herzegovina keep the rains of the continent at bay. At the same time, the coastal mountains isolate the sea-effect on the coast, making hot weather hotter and cold weather colder in the hinterland compared to regions with a view of the sea.

Reshaping native varieties: Babić, Debit and Lasina

Babić, Debit and Lasina: three grape varieties that were widespread across northern Dalmatia in the past, doing their part in the old mixed vineyards. Today, Babić (page 24) is virtually the only variety in the stony vineyards around Promošten and Rogoznica. It is also grown in the fields, but it performs best in the harsh heat and light of the coast, where most vineyards are composed of a gridwork of stone walls often referred to as "stone lace." These walls are the traditional way of planting on stony soil—they were built to clear a small area of soil to plant in, and they serve to protect the vines from the wind and cast cooling shadows. The stone boxes are the beauty of Babić, but also its limitation—they are labor intensive, and the promise of tourism on the coast limits the sale of land. It is almost impossible to expand Babić plantings here unless land is owned in the family.

The high volume of Debit (page 24) planted in this county (as well as to the north and south) is a legacy from the late 19th century. The variety sailed safely through the era of state-owned wineries due to its abundant yields, but its quality was decidedly lackluster. Now some wineries are directing Debit toward quality over quantity, with promising results.

Lasina (page 26) tells the opposite story—it is difficult to grow and fell out of favor until very recently, when just a small handful of wineries began bottling it on its own. New plantings at Jadrtovac will further this story as they come into production.

↓ *Babić in stone boxes near Primošten*

These varieties and other native grapes are grown across the county, with international varieties as well planted mostly inland around Drniš (Merlot) and Oklaj, where it is easier to expand.

Jadrtovac: planting new ideas

A relatively new position in the rolling hills above Jadrtovac, a tiny village on the edge of Morinje Bay, offers enough vineyard land for the wineries who grow there to expand expectations for this region. It started with two grape-growing brothers who sold their vineyards in 2017 to a Swedish investor.

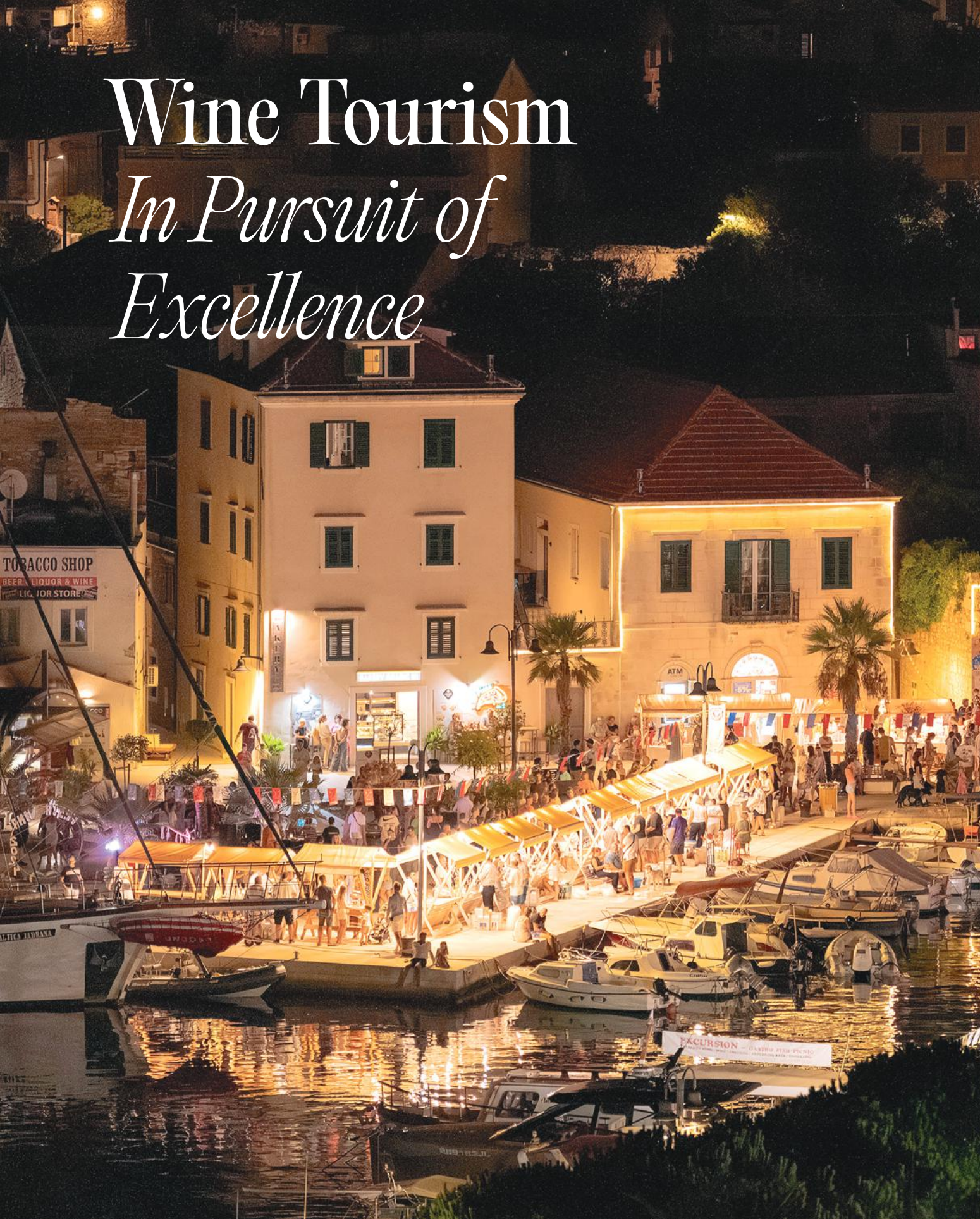
Those vineyards were the foundation of Testament Winery, which is now joined by two others farming a total of about 160 hectares of organic vineyards.

Usual varieties for this area would be Babić, Debit and Maraština, and Testament grows these. But they have also planted some nontraditional native varieties—Plavac Mali and Pošip, more common farther south, Tribidrag, whose plantings are increasing throughout Dalmatia—and made a big commitment to Lasina, the comeback variety. It is locations like this, where there is investment and space for expansion, that foster new expressions for Dalmatian tradition. ◊

The stone boxes are the beauty of Babić, but also its limitation.

↓ Inside the fortress at Knin

Wine Tourism
In Pursuit of Excellence



10

The work of a wine writer involves dozens of winery visits every year. It's nice to travel with company, but when my husband hears that I need to stop at a few wineries, he quickly finds something else to do. Visiting wineries comes with enjoyable benefits—wine! a view! local snacks!—and still he begs off. His reason? "All wineries are the same."

And I get it. To the normal visitor, most wineries do look and behave the same: vines, tanks, barrels, three to six tastes of wine, bread and cheese, a little chitchat and good-bye.

Regardless of a long family history, a nice view or even top-quality wine, the average winery tasting experience can be just that. Average. As wine tourism searches for ways to distinguish itself beyond the tasting room, individual wineries and wine organizations are looking for ways to offer something beyond the ordinary. Here are some ways they are succeeding.

Finding a difference, making it personal

Guests arrive at Kastel Sikuli winery, in Kaštel Novi, on a series of twisting paved and gravel roads that could just as easily land them in someone's orchard. But continuing up, after one last twist and a steep rise, they arrive at a magnificent view of the terra-cotta clutter of Kaštela, the mound of Split's Marjan park with the city behind it, and of course the azure sea. Pošip vines march down the slope in front of the winery, and the glass front of the winery restaurant is open to the view.

← *Jelsa Wine Festival*

"In this area there was no winery [with a full offer for tourists], and we had a really good location," said Ivan Kovačević, winemaker and proprietor, thinking back to 2018 and his first harvest here under the Sikuli brand. With his father, Ivica, who had retired as longtime director of the Brač winery Stina, and his cousin, chef Nina Mravak, he planned a modest restaurant on the site of the winery, a small, enclosed terrace next to a kitchen in a modified shipping container.

"Our first full year we had 1,000 guests in that 16-seat terrace," he said. Now, in a new dining room and kitchen attached to the winery, their seating has doubled.

Kastel Sikuli is currently the only winery in Kaštela to offer fine dining in its tasting room. Kovačević points out that tour outfits offering half-day tours to Trogir want a culinary experience nearby to enrich their itinerary. In fact, 35 percent of his reservations come through travel agents.

Being the only winery restaurant may guarantee a certain success, but a personal touch is what keeps visitors coming back. Ivan is winemaker and host—he meets guests at the door, serves their food and wine and explains the significance of local ingredients, including the indigenous grapes that go into his wines. ("I like to talk!") Nina is chef; Ivan's sister-in-law helps in the open kitchen; his father is on the grill. "My mother as well, my brother . . ." The result is a seamless experience and a story that is genuine, not marketing.

Including everyone

From the outside, the Fiolić Wine Garden looks like a romantic ruin, behind the 17th-century limestone façade that was once part of the Saint Roko church complex. Those who peek inside see an open-air courtyard centered around an ornately carved wellhead, lush with olive trees and flowers—an inviting place to while away an hour or two.

Romantic it may be, but the Wine Garden is the product of strategic thinking on the part of Ana Fiolić and her winemaker husband, Dario. A few years ago when Zadar became a favored stop for cruise ships, Ana and her colleagues in tourism noticed some patterns. Visitors were "just passing through the city," she said, with no time to spend anywhere but the historic center, and they would gather on the streets because the tiny local gourmet shops "don't have any place to invite them, where they can taste."

The solution was to open a place for visitors to relax and taste not only Fiolić wines but a wide variety of products from Zadar county. "We involved everybody," Ana said, seeking the support of the tourist board and the Zadar community, and they "invited all the Zadar winemakers, olive oil producers, producers of cheese, prosciutto and other local delicacies." From an organizational standpoint, she believes the Wine Garden solves the problem of "how to connect a lot of small subjects and how to work together."

And the visitor reaction? "It's like a hidden gem—the first reaction is always WOW," Ana said. "When they find out that it's really local—that they can't drink an Aperol Spritz—at first they are surprised, but then they are satisfied."

The advantage of including all local producers is clear, as this offers a wide range of products at a central location. Wine events such as the annual Jelsa Wine, Olive & Heritage Festival on Hvar work on a similar model: winemakers and other island producers gather in the coastal village, offering tastes to hundreds of festival-goers. The festival includes everyone among attendees as well, with music, crafts, sporting events and other activities for children and visitors with interests beyond wine tasting.

Going wide

When is a wine tasting not just a wine tasting? When it's also a music festival or a cooking class or a fun bike ride for all ages.

The annual Imota Bike & Wine, in Imotski, is a three-way collaboration between the local tourist board, bike team and winemakers' association. One day each June, hundreds of local and visiting cycle enthusiasts, including children and teens, follow a route of about 40 kilometers through the valley vineyards, the town of Imotski and four other towns in the region.

"We wanted to present a beautiful adventure story imbued with the flavors of tradition, connected with the incredible natural heritage of our area,"

wrote Luka Kolovrat, director of the Imota Tourist Board, in an email. On the way, riders can stop and sample local food and wine at six to eight participating wineries. They can even buy bottles of their favorites and pick them up at the finish line.

Creative thinkers have recently found ways to bring seemingly non-wine-related events into the vineyard and combine them with wine. Picnics or luncheons in the vineyard are a natural way to enjoy the land along with its products. Yoga and meditation classes or art in the vineyard (with wine!) are some of the more innovative ideas being offered by individual tour companies. These small tourism providers are competitive, which means the best of them are inventive—and they often provide an activity that their winery partners do not have the time or staff to offer themselves.

A winery can be much more than an in-and-out tasting. Planning experiences for broader categories of people creates new wine enthusiasts by relaxing the focus and removing the pressure to enjoy wine. The familiar social media maxim applies to providers and visitors alike: "You cannot live by wine alone. Add some chocolate/yoga/hiking/art/breadmaking/sport . . ." ◊

Can Wine Tourism Be Sustainable?

Much has been written about the problems with tourism-as-usual. Seeing solutions—to energy-intensive travel, to waste, to overdevelopment and empty commercialization—is much more difficult. Sustainability is about following practices that are lasting, rather than instant. It is a young movement, which means it is largely undefined. It also means that those engaged in tourism—as providers or consumers—have an opportunity right now to build what they want sustainable tourism to be. Wine travelers can look for a number of clues to options that are sustainable.

- *Sustainable wine making (which may include organic vineyards, biodiversity in the vineyard, recycling wastewater, using lighter bottles, supporting/educating workers and more)*
- *Growing indigenous grape varieties, where possible*
- *Collaborative venues or events: multiple wineries participating*
- *Wineries and events that provide activities for children*
- *Combination events: wine tastings with music, sport or other activities*
- *Out-of-season events*
- *Destinations connected to public transportation, where possible*
- *A deeper experience (such as a winery with a hotel, or one that offers vineyard picnics, hikes or bicycles for a more meaningful visit)*

No one can do it all, but wineries and organizations that do what they can toward sustainable tourism will make a positive difference—and create lasting memories.

Calendar of Wine Events in Dalmatia

The wine and tourism organizations of Dalmatia offer wine events for all interests. All events listed here take place in Dalmatia, include multiple wineries and are open to the public. See each website for description, dates, location and any cost of entry. A list of wine events for all of Croatia, with live links, can be found at cheerscroatiamagazine.com.

February

VINSKI PODRUM: FESTIVAL OF WINE & DELICACIES (Dubrovnik) *slobodnadalmacija.hr/vinski-podrum*
WINE VIP EVENT (Zadar, Split)
dantes.biz
ZADAR WINE FESTIVAL (Zadar)
zadarwinefestival.com

March

FESTIVAL VINO DALMACIJE (Split)
vinodalmacije.com/festival-vino-dalmacije/

April

HVAR WINE FEST (Hvar)
visithvar.hr/hvar-wine-fest/
TUNA, SUSHI AND WINE FESTIVAL (Zadar)
zadar.travel/news/tuna-sushi-wine-festival-returns-to-its-original-settings
VEČER CETINKE (Cetinka Evening) (Korčula)
On Facebook: search Društvo Prijatelja "Vino u tradiciji življenja"

May

GRAPESTON FESTIVAL OF NATURAL WINEGROWERS AND SPONTANEOUS WINES (Ston)
grapeston.com
TASTE LIKE DALMATIA DRNIŠ: DRNIŠ MERLOT FESTIVAL (Drniš) *dalmatiasibenik.hr (Events)*
VINSKI PODRUM: FESTIVAL OF WINE & DELICACIES (Split) *slobodnadalmacija.hr/vinski-podrum*

June

BABIĆ FEST (Primošten)
On Facebook/Visit Primosten: search event name
DANI DALMATINSKOG PRŠUTA I VINA (DAYS OF DALMATIAN PROSCIUTTO AND WINES) (Vrgorac) *daniprsutaivina.com*
IMOTA BIKE & WINE (Imotski)
visitimota.com/trip/imota-bike-wine/
JELSA WINE, OLIVE & HERITAGE FESTIVAL (Jelsa, Hvar)
visitjelsa.hr/en/dogadanja/wine-olive-heritage-festival/
PIDOĆA I DEBIT SE VOLE (MUSSELS AND DEBIT GO TOGETHER) (Šibenik)
On Facebook/Visit Šibenik: search event name

July

KORČULA ISLAND WINE FESTIVAL (Korčula)
On Facebook/Visit Korčula: search event name
PRIVLAKA WINE ENO GASTRO FESTIVAL (Privlaka)
www.privlaka-tz.hr/manifestacija/privlaka-wine-eno-gastro-festival/64

August

BABIĆ FEST (Rogoznica)
On Facebook/Rogoznica Tourist Board: search event name
CVIT RAZGOVORA WINE FESTIVAL (Imotski)
visitimota.com/trip/cvit-razgovora/
JELSA WINE FESTIVAL (Jelsa, Hvar)
visitjelsa.hr/en/dogadanja/the-wine-festival/
VINSKA NOĆ (WINE EVENING) (Korčula)
On Facebook: search Društvo Prijatelja "Vino u tradiciji življenja"

September

MARAŠTINA DAYS (Zadar)
zadar.travel/events
WINE & WALK FESTIVAL SPLIT UNDERGROUND (Split)
visitsplit.com/en/6905/wine-walk-festival-split-underground

November

ZINFEST (Kaštela)
On Facebook: search Kreativna Dalmacija (Events)

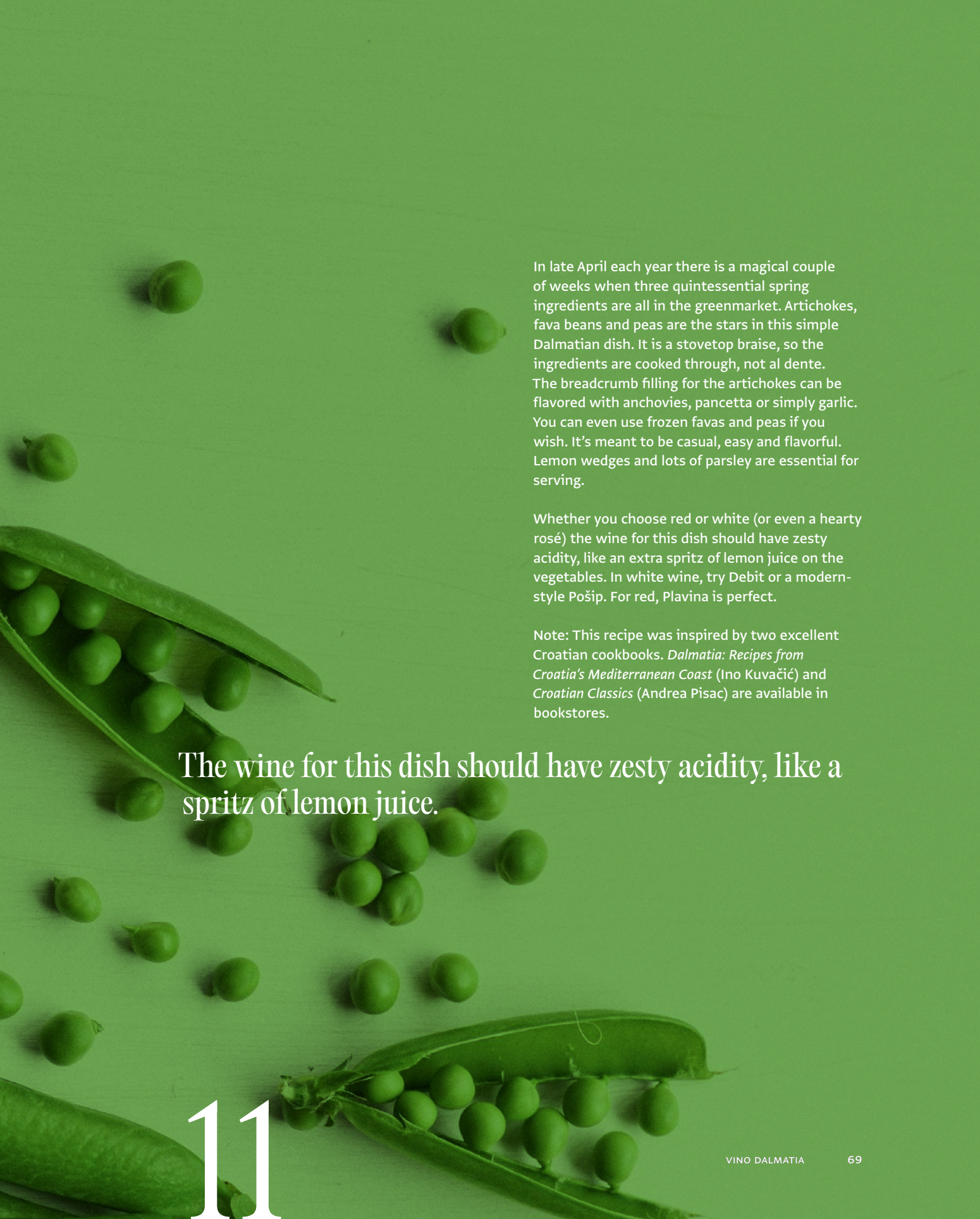
December

DANI OTVORENIH VRATA PELJEŠKIH PODRUMA (PELJEŠAC OPEN CELLAR DAYS) (Pelješac peninsula)
ston.hr (Events)

↑ *Fiolić Wine Garden, Zadar*

↓ *Imota Bike & Wine*

Dalmatian-style Artichokes with Favas and Peas



In late April each year there is a magical couple of weeks when three quintessential spring ingredients are all in the greenmarket. Artichokes, fava beans and peas are the stars in this simple Dalmatian dish. It is a stovetop braise, so the ingredients are cooked through, not al dente. The breadcrumb filling for the artichokes can be flavored with anchovies, pancetta or simply garlic. You can even use frozen favas and peas if you wish. It's meant to be casual, easy and flavorful. Lemon wedges and lots of parsley are essential for serving.

Whether you choose red or white (or even a hearty rosé) the wine for this dish should have zesty acidity, like an extra spritz of lemon juice on the vegetables. In white wine, try Debit or a modern-style Pošip. For red, Plavina is perfect.

Note: This recipe was inspired by two excellent Croatian cookbooks. *Dalmatia: Recipes from Croatia's Mediterranean Coast* (Ino Kuvačić) and *Croatian Classics* (Andrea Pisac) are available in bookstores.

The wine for this dish should have zesty acidity, like a spritz of lemon juice.

11

Recipe

Active time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: 40-50 minutes
Serves 4

4 medium artichokes
Juice of ½ lemon
200 grams (1⅓ cups) fresh or frozen green peas
200 grams (1⅓ cups) fresh or frozen fava beans
100 milliliters (⅓ cup) white wine
400 milliliters (1¾ cups) vegetable stock or water

For the stuffing
100 grams (¾ cup) dry breadcrumbs
4 cloves garlic, chopped fine
3 salt-cured anchovy fillets, chopped fine, or 30 grams (1 ounce) pancetta, chopped fine and sauteed (optional)
100 milliliters (⅓ cup) extra-virgin olive oil
Juice of ½ lemon
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Garnish
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
Finely grated zest of ½ lemon (optional)
Extra-virgin olive oil
Lemon wedges

1. Clean the artichokes: Prepare a bowl of cold water to hold the artichokes and add the lemon juice. Using a sharp knife, cut off the stem of the artichoke at the base. Use a vegetable peeler to peel the stem, then put the stem in the bowl of acidulated water. Slice about 1 centimeter from the bottom of the artichoke to make a flat base. Snap off two layers of the tough, mature leaves at the base. Use the knife to slice 1 to 2 centimeters from the top of the artichoke, removing all the spiny tips. Place the artichoke in the water and repeat with the remaining artichokes.

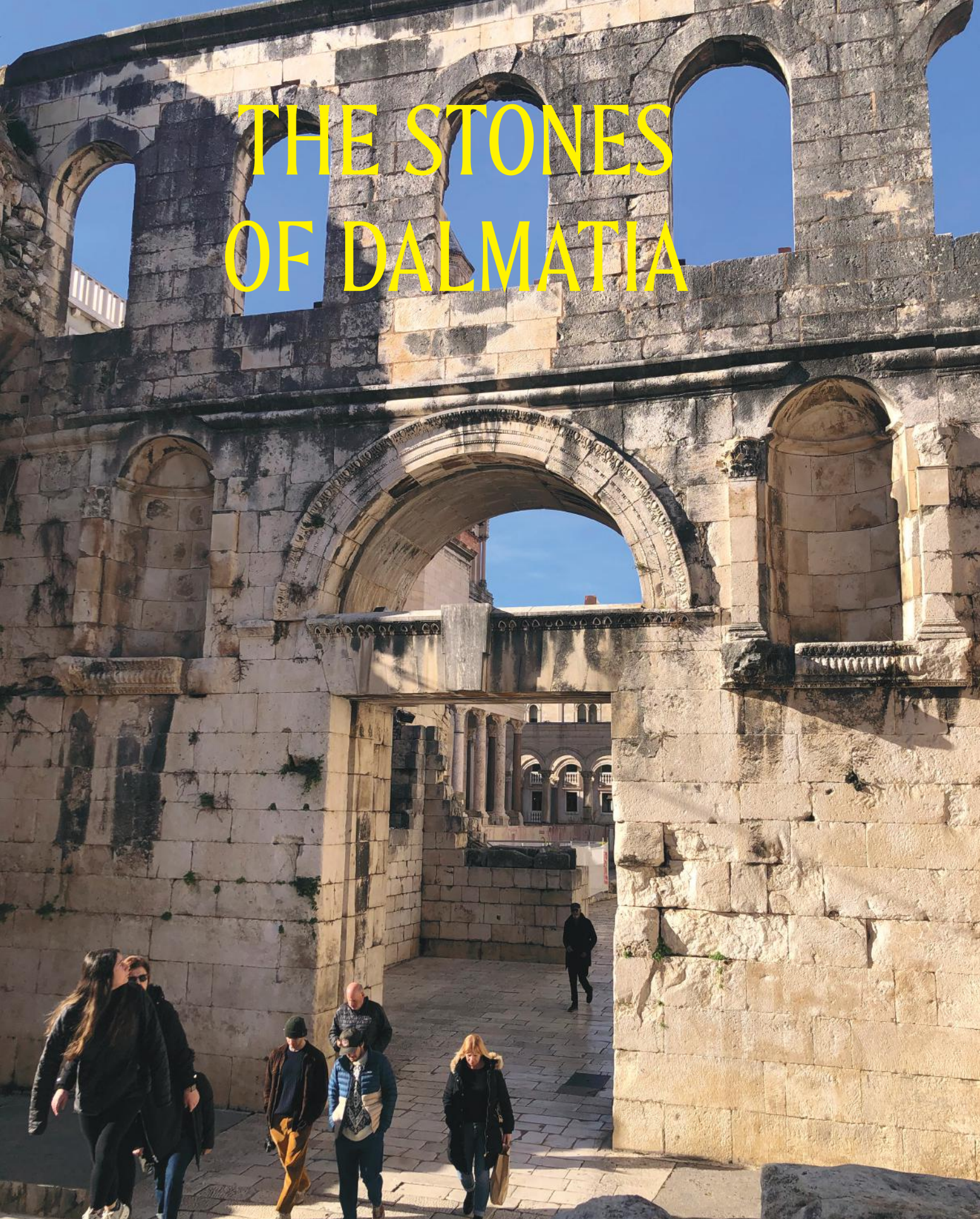
2. Make the stuffing: In a shallow bowl, combine all the stuffing ingredients and mix well.

3. Shake the water out of one artichoke and place it in the stuffing bowl. Use your fingers to separate the leaves of the artichoke and push about ¼ of the stuffing between the layers. (Do not overstuff the outer leaves or they will collapse during cooking.) Place the artichoke flat side down in a nonreactive saucepan (stainless steel, enamel or glass) that will accommodate all four. Repeat with the remaining artichokes. Sprinkle any remaining stuffing on top of each.

4. Cut any reserved artichoke stems into 2-centimeter segments. Scatter the stems, favas and peas around the base of the artichokes in the pan. Pour the wine and the stock or water around the base of the artichokes until the liquid is about halfway up the sides of the artichokes.

5. On the stove over medium-high heat, bring the artichokes just to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for 40 to 50 minutes. When done, a skewer pushed down through an artichoke will easily pierce through the bottom.

6. Serve the artichokes in shallow bowls with the favas and peas at the base. Add a little of the cooking liquid to the bowl if desired. Sprinkle with parsley and lemon zest, if using, plus a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil. Serve with lemon wedges.


THE STONES
OF DALMATIA

Take a walk along an old farm road in the Dalmatian countryside, and you are immediately surrounded by stone. The road surface is creamy crushed shards. Broad, endless stone walls border the road and veer off into the fields, where monstrous stone piles loom, thousands of them, made gray by the elements. Yet more stones appear to be growing from the scant soil between these monuments.

Stone may seem to be Dalmatia's greatest natural resource. And that is not far from the truth, if you consider the vast quarries where creamy multi-ton slabs are extracted, then sliced for use as paving or cladding for buildings. Dalmatia's historic cities—including Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik—as well as the older structures in every town and village, are constructed from blocks of this stone. Indeed, the stones for Diocletian's palace in Split were quarried by Roman slaves on the island of Brač starting about the year 295. Walk the paths of any historic center here and you are walking on Dalmatian stone.

This stone makes Dalmatia visually unique and provides many of the region's charms. But the geologic structure of Dalmatia is also one of the defining characteristics of Dalmatian viticulture and wine making.

Walk the paths of any historic center here and you are walking on Dalmatian stone.

12

A landscape called karst

The stone that underlies most all of Dalmatia is limestone and dolomite rock (these rocks are very similar, so we will refer simply to limestone hereafter). The structure and behavior of this rock determine much of Dalmatia's appearance, as well as the wild plants and cultivated crops that survive here.

Limestone is the product of Dalmatia's quarries, but left in the ground it is porous and dissolves easily. Water in the form of rain or groundwater carves sinkholes, and underground rivers, lakes and caves, as well as sculpted stone outcrops on the surface. This distinctive topography is called karst in English (*krš* in Croatian), and it occurs all over the world where the elements act on limestone.

One European karst region is well known to wine lovers: the Carso DOC on the eastern edge of Friuli, in Italy, connected to the Kras region just over the border in Slovenia. Both words mean karst, and it is this same karst that follows the Dinaric Alps south along the border of Dalmatia, all the way to North Macedonia.

Along the way, karst takes its common forms. Paklenica National Park, with its more than 100 caves; the waterfalls of Krka National Park and (just beyond Dalmatia's border) Plitvice Lakes National Park, cascading over limestone; the blue cave and green cave, popular tourist destinations on small islands near Vis; Imotski's Blue Lake and Red Lake, vast sinkholes likely resulting from the collapse of karst caves underground, now filled with water. Even Dalmatia's stony beaches are the result of the breakdown of limestone, which is not inclined to form sand.

↓ *Karst sinkholes, now lakes in Imotski*

↑ *Dry walls known as "stone lace," near Primošten*

The karst formations more important to viticulture are karst *ponikve*, valleys and fields.

Ponikve means sinkholes, but in this case they are open-sided, more like an amphitheater, where vines can be grown on steep, protected slopes. A renowned grape-growing location called Ponikve, at the base of the Pelješac peninsula just past Ston, was given EU protected status in 2021.

Valleys and fields are large, flat depressions between mountainous landforms, where erosion has caused an accumulation of sediment that now forms soil. These flat areas may flood during wet seasons, but are well drained during the growing season. It is this lack of water retention—surface water disappears virtually instantly—that most affects viticulture in the karst terrain.

Grapes from stones

Grapevines enjoy a hard time. Harsh climate, lack of soil and water, steep and rocky terrain—all these are likely to produce great grapes.

Many of the classic growing positions in Dalmatia's coastal regions are located on impossibly steep slopes suspended over the sea. Over hundreds of years, narrow terraces supported by (what else?) stone walls have been constructed and maintained against erosion, to provide the vines with a more secure hold on the earth, and humans with a slightly easier time tending them. The ground around the vines may be covered in rocks, but these serve to prevent the evaporation of what little dew may lie beneath.

Terraces may not be necessary in the old vineyards on level or rolling terrain, but here the stones have a different use. First, there is the historic problem common to all of coastal Dalmatia: how to clear enough stones to find a little patch of soil to plant in. This explains the dry stone walls (containing no mortar) that crisscross the Dalmatian islands and coastal regions. Removed from the ground, the stones are piled into walls that box the land newly exposed for planting olives or vines, or for grazing sheep.

In windy, exposed vineyards, these boxes are quite small, and may contain only two to four vines. The vines huddle against the earth, perhaps propped up by a rock, and the walls protect them from the raking wind. Seen from the air in the Primošten and Rogoznica regions, or on the island of Bavljenac near Šibenik, the intricate network of walls looks like lace—hence the expression "stone lace" for these patterns.

The modern alternative to piling stones to expose the earth relies on machines to dig up the entire surface and crush the stone to create a uniform terrain. Large rocks may be removed to improve the soil-to-rock ratio, and immovable bedrock may be cracked to provide drainage and access for vine roots. All other rock is crushed to a depth of up to 80 centimeters. The vines are planted in the crushed rock, but their roots eventually descend to the untouched soil and rock beneath, reaching down as far as 10 meters in a quest for moisture and nutrients.

The latest science tells us it is impossible to taste the soil in wine. Vine roots do not absorb minerals such that they can be smelled or tasted in the glass. But we still have the idea of terroir, that more nebulous translation of physical conditions into wine. And it is certain that the harsh stone of Dalmatia plays a leading role in the concentration and intensity of its wines, giving them the character born of struggle. ◊

↓ *Karst reclamation, the new way of planting vineyards on stone*

Gomile and *Bunje*: More Uses for Stones

On open land for grazing or olive groves, rather than making unnecessary walls, it is easier to put stones into vast piles generally formed of a carefully constructed perimeter for stability, and stone rubble within. These are called *gomile*, and so many of them crowd areas of the islands that they seem to have been deposited by aliens.

In addition to *gomile*, many fields have a *trim* or a *bunja*—a traditional round hut with an open door and a conical roof made only from stones. These were built to provide on-site storage for tools and shelter for workers. More conventional stone field huts with square walls and peaked roofs are also common.

For those interested in traditional drystone construction, there is a drystone wall festival (Dani Suhozida) on the island of Hvar in April.

DALMATIA'S NEW WAVE OF WINEMAKERS ARE FINE-TUNING TRADITION

Kruno Filipović

The generational shift in Dalmatian wine making is still recent, though it is in full swing now. There remain many of us who witnessed and who drank the wines of the past. We know what we had and what we have now. I hold dear the words of one friend, a wine publicist, who said *However good they may be now, we're yet to drink the best of our wines.*

In order to uncover the full potential of a given grape variety, you often need a new approach. Merely repeating the same old thing won't get you ahead. One of the most important resistances a variety should possess is the resistance to trends and fads. A variety susceptible to some disease will be replanted if the disease strikes, but if a variety falls out of favor with its audience for too long, it may be just too late to save it after the fad is forgotten.

This means the work the new generation is doing in Dalmatia benefits us in more ways than one. It is proving exactly how valuable and noble a certain variety is, while keeping the wines relevant on the world stage. A variety that can excel in a plethora of styles is often considered more valuable. The challenges young winemakers are setting for indigenous varieties keep us lean, on our toes and ready to compete.

Few would doubt that there was room for improvement, but this is a delicate subject. Improvement shouldn't go against the recognizable regional style. Improvement is not about making a completely different wine; it's about refining what constitutes the identity of a region. You strive for the best the region, the variety and the winemaker can give.

← FROM TOP LEFT
Future winemakers at Marlais; Martina Jakas (Tomić); Ante Grabovac with sons Milan and Nikola; Nikola Birin

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Spotlighting native varieties in the north

Lasina was once a mere softener for the blends in those vintages when abundant sunshine and warmth would yield high tannins, alcohol and color. Today Lasina is a small wonder of northern Dalmatia. Often dubbed the Dalmatian Pinot Noir, the modern version the young winemaker Ante Sladić had in mind is one of the most elegant reds in this hot and sunny region. It is low in tannins, light and ready to drink, with sour and sweet cherry aromas combined with some darker ones reminiscent of blackberry. It is also the basis for a much loved rosé from Ante Sladić Vino.

It is hard to overstate what Nikola Birin, Ante Sladić and Marko Sladić have done for the appeal of Maraština, another coastal favorite. Thanks to them and others, this variety is quickly rising to challenge other varieties for second place (after Pošip) among Dalmatia's most-drunk whites. Whether it's a crisp, elegant summer wine from Vinarija Birin, fine lees-aged white from Ante Sladić or the luscious sweet wine from Marko Sladić, Maraština is becoming a staple white.

Three eras of Pošip

Pošip has a rich history. It is the number-one drinking white in all of Dalmatia and a good example of how a grapevine adapts to times. Our grandparents drank Pošip, our parents drank Pošip and, however different it may be, we drink Pošip.

It used to be an overpowering white, more often than not reaching alcohols above 14 percent, full-bodied and sunburnt. When the Pošip variety was first discovered on Korčula in the late 1800s, high sugar content resulting in high alcohol was much appreciated, and Pošip delivered. A century later, when lower alcohol content, fruit-forward style and some complexity were all the hype, again Pošip delivered, thanks to the efforts of Luka Krajančić, the late Janko Jovanov of Pošip Čara, the late Miljenko Mike Grgich and others.

But even today, with our youngest generation of winemakers who look for refinement, delicate structure and good acidity with Pošip's notable roundness, this variety still delivers. This delicate, elegant yet varietally recognizable Pošip came about with the new generation of winemakers, starting on its island of birth, with Igor Radovanović, Nikola Mirošević for Black Island Winery, Frano Baničević for Toreta Winery and later Ivana Krajančić. But Pošip thrives elsewhere in Dalmatia just as well, most notably on the island of Brač with Rikard Petrić for Stina, the island of Hvar with Davor Mitrović for Hvar Hills, the Pelješac peninsula with Antonija Car-Antunović at Saints Hills, and Mato Antunović, Josip Volarević working for Deak Wines in Komarna, and in Zadar county with Nikolina Paleka at Bora.

Precision of style for Babić and Plavac Mali

Dalmatia is truly exciting at the moment. You can almost sense the fervor in the air. With young talents pushing the limits of what was considered possible, old varieties are making a comeback, and the popular ones are trying all sorts of new and attractive attires.

Put Babić, one of Dalmatia's more notable reds, in the hands of Juraj Sladić at Testament Winery or Ivona Jeličić, the skilled winemaker creating wonders for Markus Fine Wines, and the sky is the limit. "I don't believe faults and impurities, however minute they may be, determine the original wine style of a region," Jeličić said. "In my opinion, varietal characteristics and the precision of style determines the wines of a region. In order for a variety to fully express itself, purity and precision are non-negotiable. That's what I want to see the new generation bring to regional wine making."

And finally, there's Plavac Mali, our number-one drinking red, almost synonymous with Dalmatia. There's no Dalmatia without Plavac Mali. Planted all over this region, it was historically appreciated for rich, luscious, full-bodied reds.

Our grandparents drank Pošip, our parents drank Pošip and, however different it may be, we drink Pošip.

There are two very important trends to notice among younger winemakers when it comes to Plavac Mali. The first is completely new and specific to our times. It is the light, elegant style of younger Plavac Mali along the lines of what Marina Jakas makes for Vina Tomić on Hvar.

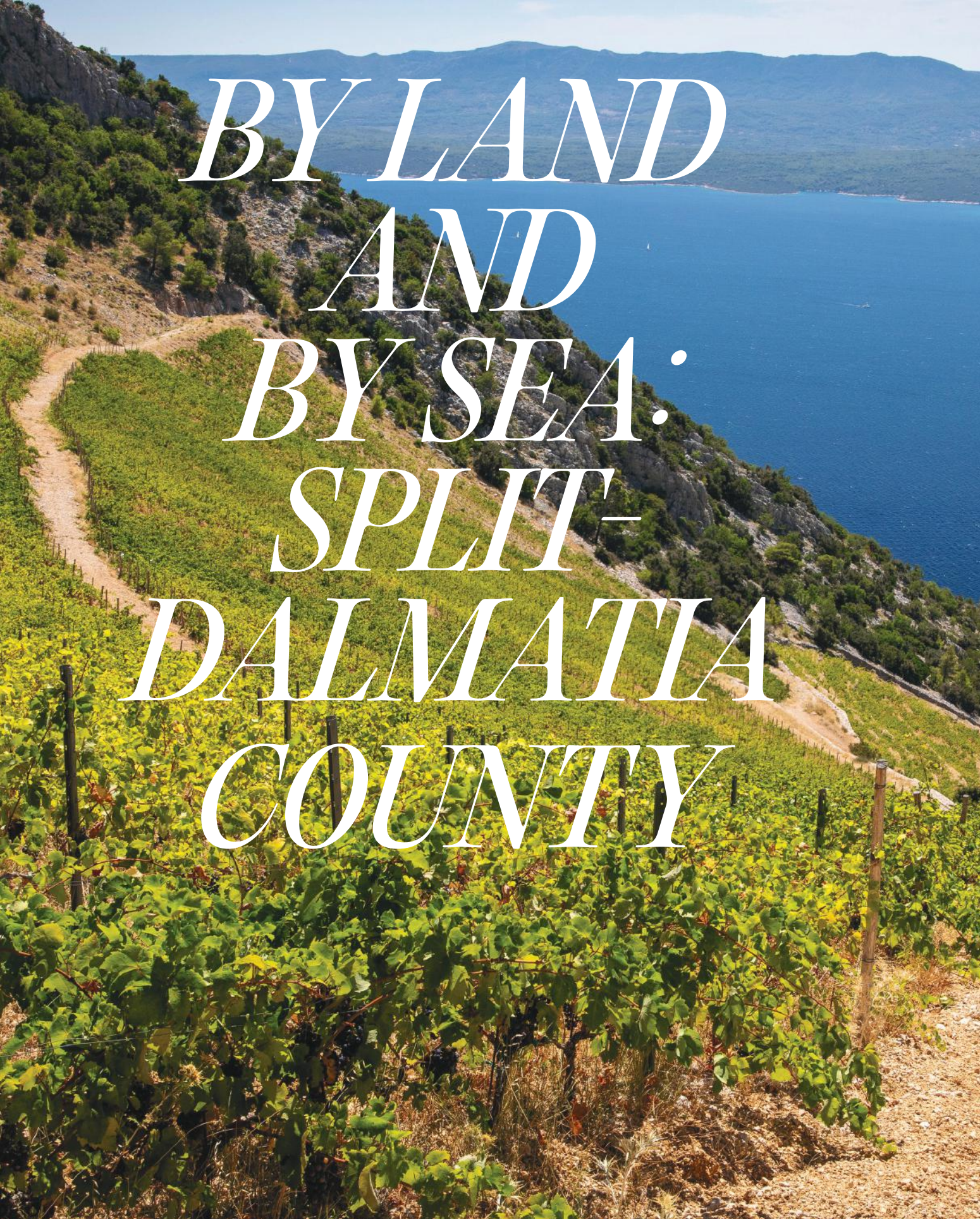
The second, possibly even more important trend is the fine tuning of our rustic, traditional, ancient style of Plavac Mali. One may use technology in all sorts of ways, and these winemakers decided to use it to create aged reds that are more pure, clean and precise, and yet recognizably traditional. For Ante Marlais, on the Pelješac peninsula, this means attention to Plavac Mali's formidable tannins. "We devote much of our time and expertise to shape and soften tannins of our traditional full-bodied reds. Tannins need to be there, but they need to be properly molded. This implies prolonged oak aging which in turn asks for much attention and know-how. A sort of oak management which is mindful of varieties' recognizability and purity," said Marlais. Other notable examples are from Ivan Vučković, upcoming star of the Grgić Winery, or Davor Šestanović of Zlatan Otok.

It is the work of Dalmatia's new wave that makes this simple truth resonate. *However good they may be now, we're yet to drink the best of our wines!* ◊

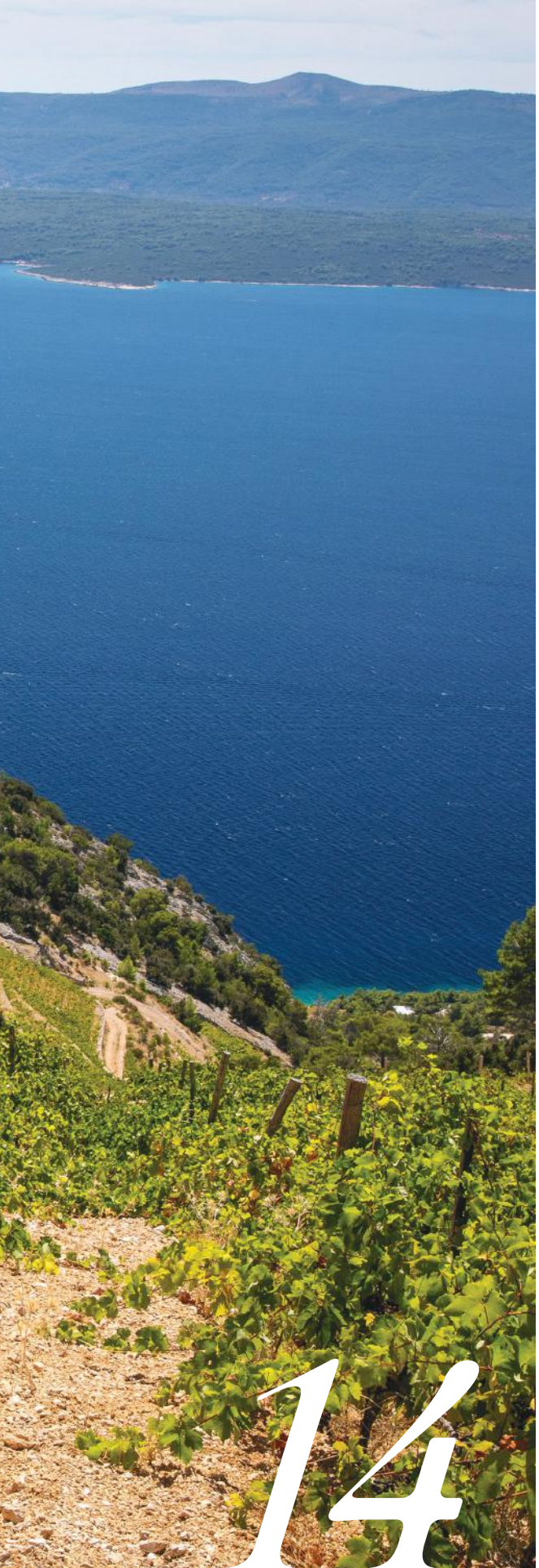
Kruno Filipović is part of the Croatian WSET team and owns a small business set on promoting local wines. For the regional daily newspaper he gathers data on wines and tries to turn it into poetry while minimizing the damage from fleeting fads.

With young talents pushing the limits of what was considered possible, old varieties are making a comeback.

↓ *Ivona and Slaven Jeličić (Markus Fine Wines)*



BY LAND AND BY SEA: SPLIT-DALMATIA COUNTY



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Croatia's second city, Split, sits nestled in an amphitheater of mountains, facing the sea. Along its gentle curve is a string of cultural wonders going back to before the arrival of the ancient Greeks, and touching on every local civilization since then.

As the coastal mountains begin to rise near the border of Šibenik-Knin county to the north, they first embrace Trogir, an ancient city whose well-preserved Venetian-era architecture gives it UNESCO World Heritage status.

Following the curve of the coastline, the next major city is Kaštela—actually seven sub-settlements, each formed around a historic *kaštel* (castle), and each with Kaštel in its name. Anchoring the eastern end of the Kaštelas is Salona (today Solin), the ancient Roman capital of Dalmatia, where the Roman emperor Diocletian was born.

Next, on a peninsula pointing back toward Trogir, is the sprawling city of Split. Here, another UNESCO site, Diocletian's palace, built at the end of his life, forms the historic core. To the south of Split, the mountains begin to crowd against the sea, with a chain of picturesque towns at their base.

For visitors, the ancient history and modern bustle of Split exert a seemingly equal magnetic force to that of the sea and islands. The larger islands facing Split—Brač, Šolta, Hvar and Vis—are small worlds unto themselves, the islanders' tenacity and resilience in the face of historic isolation and hardship a large part of the character of each. They are a paradise for sailors (and more practically, ferry riders) who come for a different version of the "island lifestyle," one that includes not only beaches and nightlife but also exploring history, harvesting lavender or olives, and walking the lanes of tiny stone villages.

← Plavac Mali on Brač's south side, with a view to Hvar

Diversity of geographies, diversity of wines

Split-Dalmatia's geography is as varied as its many centuries of civilizations and occupiers. It is the mountains that follow along the coastline so near to the sea that create two loosely defined zones—the coastal mainland and the hinterland—while the islands form a third. While the coast and islands share certain characteristics, conditions in the inland region behind the mountains are notably different. The same grape varieties produce quite distinct styles of wine in these different locations.

The islands are self-contained, each with its own vibe. Their historic isolation helped preserve local grape varieties through the ages and promoted certain of them to favor. It is common now for vines to be planted experimentally in new positions, but some varieties are still considered special to single islands, and wine lovers have learned to look for them there. This extends to isolated areas of the mainland as well.

Three zones, one karst landscape

Like much of the rest of Dalmatia, Split-Dalmatia county has all the features of a classic karst landscape (page 72): eroded surface limestone, virtually instant drainage, rocky soil with poor nutrition, karst fields and valleys with somewhat richer soil, and underground caves, rivers and lakes.

The coastal mountains of the mainland rise quite near the sea. In only a few locations, such as Kaštela and Makarska, is there enough sloping, stony soil between mountains and sea to support vineyards. Where the land rises more steeply, vineyards are instead terraced onto the mountainside.

In the Zagora, or hinterland (page 59) beyond the coastal mountains, broad karst fields and narrower valleys offer deeper, often richer soil than on the coast. Vineyard labor is slightly easier in the fields, but many growers also have vineyards on the rocky slopes on their perimeter. The variety of planting sites is advantageous, especially around the largest fields, Imotski field and Vrgorac field (part of which is in Dubrovnik-Neretva county). These are exceptions to the fast-draining character of karst—their deeper topsoil and high groundwater levels result in periodic flooding in winter.

Each of the islands is different, but they share some basic characteristics. In general, dry karst fields and valleys lie between mountainous ridges where a little soil has settled over the ages. Vines were traditionally planted both in the valleys and on terraces on steeper land. On the south sides of Brač and Hvar are vertiginous terraced slopes that offer prestigious positions for planting, particularly for heat-loving Plavac Mali. On all four islands, some new planting positions have been created recently as well, through karst reclamation.

Feeling the heat

The pure Mediterranean climate common to much of Dalmatia becomes more challenging as we move father south. High summer daytime temperatures are less effectively moderated by nighttime cooling, leading to elevated sugars in the grapes. Water shortages are often severe. And unpredictable weather events, such as spring frosts or wild storms, are more more common under climate change.

Winegrowers here use the same tactics as in hot wine regions around the world. Strategically planting different varieties on the north or south side of a slope or an island allows wines to retain as much acidity as possible (north side) or to achieve the ripe fruit flavors, rounded tannins and often robust alcohol that come from constant sun exposure (south side). Planting at higher elevations is another way to protect vines from excess heat. Irrigation is increasingly used for young vines, until their roots can adjust to the constant search for water.

THE LARGER ISLANDS FACING SPLIT—BRAČ, ŠOLTA, HVAR AND VIS—ARE SMALL WORLDS UNTO THEMSELVES.

On the most renowned south-facing slopes, such as on the south sides of Brač and Hvar, sun-loving varieties (primarily Plavac Mali) famously benefit from the triple-insolation effect. On these steep slopes right above the sea, sunlight comes from three sources: from the sun itself, reflected off the sea, and reflected off the carpet of white limestone beneath the vines. Not only on the islands but all along the coast, the effect of the Adriatic is important, as cooling breezes in summer offset the sun's intensity. As elsewhere in Dalmatia, the winds play their part, cooling and drying (*bura*) or warming and humidifying (*jugo*)—and everything in between.

In the modified Mediterranean climate of the hinterland, summer is often very hot, as the sea breezes are blocked by the coastal mountains. At the southern end of the hinterland, Vrgorac and to some extent Imotski receive moist heat that travels up the alley of the hinterland from the Neretva delta, in Dubrovnik-Neretva county to the south. At night, these valleys benefit from cool air descending from the mountains on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and pooling in the low areas. This diurnal temperature variation helps maintain freshness in the grapes in spite of the intense daytime heat. Water stress is less serious here, as well. Moving into the northern hinterland, above the area of Trilj, commercial wine growing becomes marginal—for now—due to the cold.

A viticultural mosaic

While some Plavac Mali is grown in Zadar and Šibenik-Knin counties to the north, it comes into its own in the intense heat of Split-Dalmatia county and south. Tribidrag is also widespread here, although attention must be paid to site—it can't take heat stress like Plavac can. Pošip is the white variety in this trio of strong performers. But many of the growing areas and islands have their own specialties, varieties that have grown in isolation for many centuries and now form a part of the vinous heritage of each place. Here are seven pieces of this wine-growing patchwork.

Coastal **Kaštela** is one of two locations where Tribidrag (or Crljenak Kaštelanski in these parts) was found in 2001 (page 90). This variety is now re-embraced as part of Kaštela's future, but there are other rare, indigenous varieties in the old fields that remain. Among the producers of Pošip, Plavac Mali and Crljenak, Ivan Kovač of the winery Matela is one of few still making wine from Vlaška, Ninčuša, Babica and others. The construction of villas to support tourism threatens the agriculture that once sustained this area, in spite of the opening of a few prominent new wineries.

Among the islands, **Brač** and **Šolta**, closest to Split, have the fewest commercial wineries. Brač is the largest Dalmatian island and was once covered in vines—the first co-operative winery in Dalmatia was founded in Bol in 1903 and produced a massive volume of wine until the arrival of phylloxera. Now only two wineries on the island bottle wine. As in the past, the island's most revered vineyards are the south-facing, stony slopes 250 to 500 meters above Murvica, planted with Plavac Mali. Šolta is known as the home of the Dobričić variety (page 25), recently revived as one of the parent grapes of Plavac Mali. Some Dobričić is bottled on Šolta, but the island's promise lies in 20 hectares of new vineyards where planting of various Dalmatian varieties has begun.

SOME VARIETIES ARE STILL CONSIDERED SPECIAL TO SINGLE ISLANDS.

↑ *Hvar*
Split →

Hvar is the most significant wine producer of the islands in this group. The white variety Bogdanuša (page 24) is special to Hvar, where it is still cultivated on the Stari Grad plain and other locations on the island's north side. Stari Grad plain has been under cultivation with grapes and olives under the ancient Greek system of land division since the 4th century BCE, and thus has UNESCO World Heritage status. Both red and white varieties (now including Tribidrag and Pošip) are grown in the island's central vineyards, around Vrisnik and Svirče, but the finest slopes for Plavac Mali have always been those on the island's steep south side, the largest of which are Sveta Nedjelja and Ivan Dolac. These vineyards stretch from sea level to 500 meters in altitude, on slopes up to 45 degrees, and produce massive wines that benefit from a few years of bottle aging.

Vis is mountainous along the northern and southern coasts of the island, with fields in the middle. Seven or eight winemakers bottle wine here. The indigenous white grape variety Vugava (page 30) is Vis's calling card. The vast majority of it is planted in the red, stony soil of Dračevo polje, the island's largest vineyard field, near Komiža. A few growers, however, are recently finding success planting it on sand, where traditionally red varieties were grown. In particular, the red variety Plavac Mali produces distinctive, powerful wines on Vis.

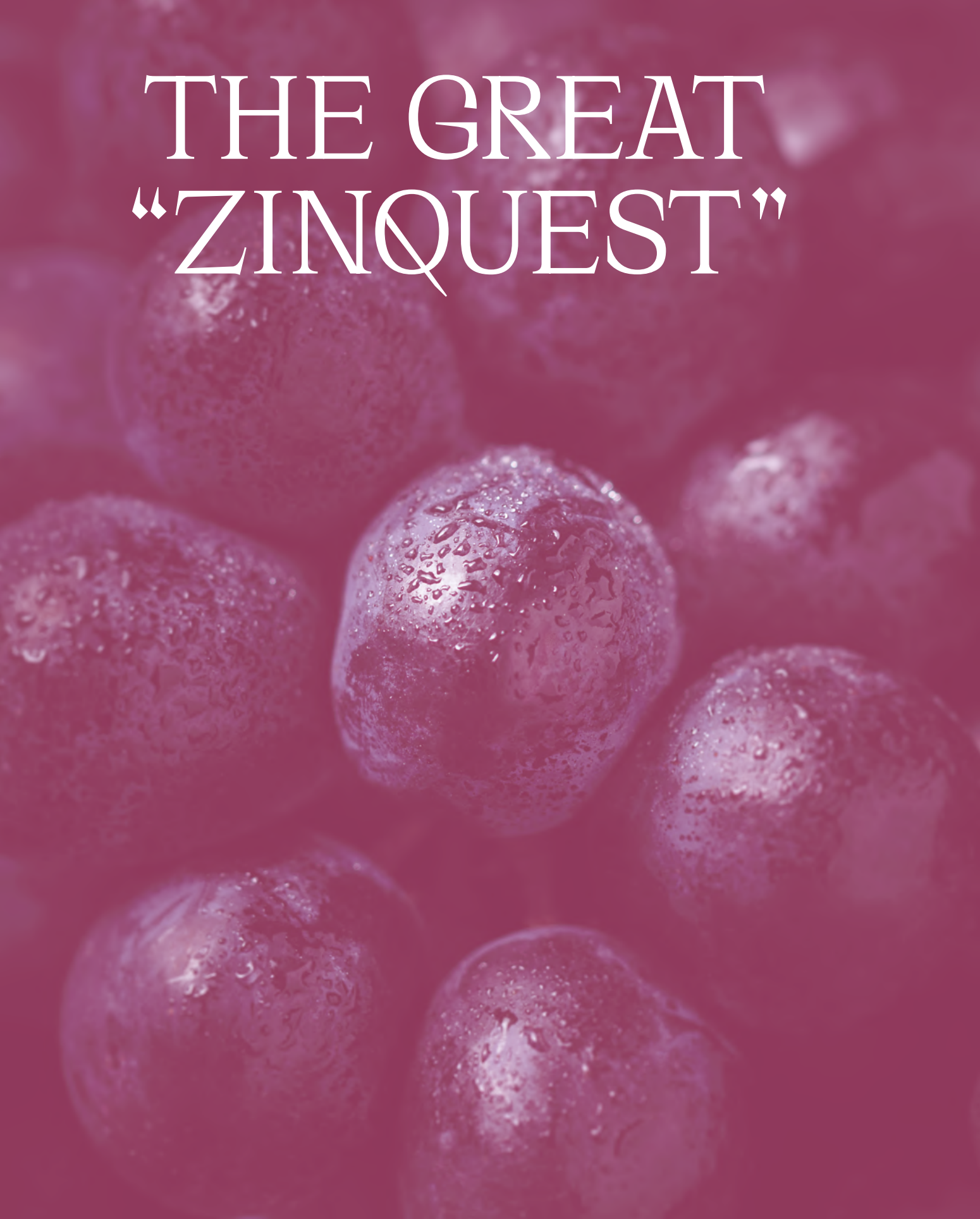
Behind the Biokovo range, in the hinterland, the **Imotski** field is almost an island in itself. With the city of Imotski at its north end, it extends into Herzegovina to the south. The varieties planted here are shared, without regard for political boundaries. Kujundžuša (page 26) is indigenous in the Imotski area, and is the most planted white variety, both in the valley and the hillside vineyards. Pošip has been planted more recently. In red varieties Trnjak (page 30) is native, as well as Vranac in the broader area. International varieties are widely planted here, too.

Farther south in the hinterland, **Vrgorac** field is a vast karst field, a former lake of some 3,000 hectares, of which about 2,500 hectares is vineyards—the largest vineyard area in Croatia (divided between two Dalmatian counties). The dominant variety here is Trebbiano Toscano (Ugni Blanc) but the higher-quality Pošip has begun to be planted. In red varieties, the local Plavka (aka Plavina, page 28) is making interesting wines, alongside international varieties. ◊

Winegrowers here use the same tactics as in hot wine regions around the world.

↑ Famous — and famously steep — positions for Plavac Mali on Hvar's south side

THE GREAT "ZINQUEST"



If Croatia's most famous grape story was a Hollywood movie, it would open in California, perhaps in Sonoma County or the Sierra Foothills. Then it would cut to the stony coast of Dalmatia. There, the protagonist is slowly dying, all but forgotten . . . and has one last chance to change history.

This wine-world mystery involves no spies or reclusive billionaires. It revolves around the Zinfandel grape variety. Scientists and growers in California had long wondered about the origins of Zinfandel, which, with some 38,000 acres planted, is one of the state's most economically important grape varieties. They knew that virtually all California wine grapes originated in Europe, because their species, *vinifera*, is not native to the Americas. Other California wine grapes had been traced back to their European countries of origin—but no one knew where Zinfandel had come from.

In 1967, plant pathologist Austin Goheen happened to taste a very similar wine made from the Primitivo grape while on a trip to Puglia, in southern Italy. By 1975, further research had proven that Primitivo and Zinfandel were the same variety. But Primitivo was not indigenous to Puglia. Where, then, had Primitivo come from?

DNA doesn't lie

Around that same time, researchers with knowledge of the Dalmatian grape Plavac Mali suggested that this could be the original Zinfandel. Although early comparisons suggested the varieties were not the same, the idea caught on. As DNA testing began to be used to determine grapevine lineage in the 1990s, Dr. Carole Meredith of the University of California at Davis took up the challenge, working closely with the famed Croatian-American winemaker Mike Grgich.

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In 1998, Meredith collaborated with Edi Maletić and Ivan Pejić at the Univeristy of Zagreb to collect 150 samples of Plavac Mali from 40 vineyards around Dalmatia. But DNA testing found no match with Zinfandel. It did, however, provide a crucial clue: that Zinfandel and Plavac Mali had a parent-offspring relationship. Plavac Mali was not the same as Zinfandel, but there must be some other Dalmatian grape that was.

The search continued, as possible matches from Dalmatian vineyards were sent to California for analysis. Nothing . . . until late 2001, when one sample was a match! It came from an old vineyard in Kaštel Novi, near Split—an old variety referred to as Crljenak Kaštelanski ("black from Kaštela"). In 2002, another match was found in an elderly lady's garden near Omiš, south of Split. In that area, the variety was historically known as Pribidrag.

Historical records from the early 1500s refer to the variety as Tribidrag (with a T), and in the case of multiple names, the oldest name is usually adopted. In Kaštela, however, growers prefer their local name. And the word Zinfandel can legally be used on Croatian wine labels as well.

This wine-world mystery involves no spies or reclusive billionaires.

Saving Tribidrag

It is clear that Tribidrag was, from the 1500s, Dalmatia's most revered red grape variety. According to the book *Plavac Mali*, by Edi Maletić et al, "At the time, [Tribidrag] was grown mostly on the islands of Hvar and Vis, and much of the wine was exported to Venice." But by the time of its rediscovery in 2001, Tribidrag was almost extinct—between the two discovery locations, only 25 vines were found. Tribidrag's offspring, Plavac Mali, had long ago become the dominant red grape in Dalmatia.

The story ends well for Tribidrag: Its association with California Zinfandel prompted growers to recognize its value. Plantings soared from 25 known vines in 2002 to 73 hectares of vineyards in 2022. Interest also revived in Plavac Mali's other parent, the Dobričić variety, native to the Dalmatian island of Šolta. It is now known that Tribidrag is a parent of other Dalmatian varieties as well, including the white variety Grk and the red variety Plavina.

The discovery has helped California Zinfandel as well. Knowledge of the European roots of Zinfandel has garnered more respect for the variety. At their Napa Valley winery, Lagier Meredith, Carole Meredith and Steve Lagier label their Zinfandel as Tribidrag. In an email, Meredith wrote, "I think it's important to inform . . . people (consumers and producers alike) that this is an ancient European

↓ Ivan Pejić, Carole Meredith and Edi Maletić examining old grapevines on the island of Šolta in 2002

↑ *Edi Maletić, Carole Meredith and Ivan Pejić in the greenhouse with virus-free Tribidrag vines, 2002*

grape that deserves their attention to the same degree as other noble wine grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot noir, Riesling, Sangiovese, etc."

In addition, experiments are underway to increase the genetic diversity of Zinfandel in California by planting vines from Dalmatia. In each of its three locations—Dalmatia, Puglia and California—Zinfandel has developed slightly different characteristics. "Every grape variety diverges genetically given enough time. It's simply a numbers game," wrote Meredith. Diversified plantings, whether in California or Dalmatia, can help ameliorate problems experienced in a given vintage by one of the origin-vines. It can also contribute to a more complex wine. And that's something Zinfandel lovers can get behind! ◊

In addition to the book referenced in the text above, the "Tribidrag" entry in Wine Grapes, *by Jancis Robinson et al, was used as a source for this story.*

By the time of its rediscovery in 2001, Tribidrag was almost extinct.

Hvar, Heritage and Trends

The Wisdom of Andro Tomić

Hvar island native Andro Tomić is a legend of Dalmatian wine making, part of a small group of enologists and growers who began to modernize wine production in the 1980s and 90s. After studying enology and working at the University of Zagreb, Tomić moved to the Institute of Adriatic Culture in Split. Back on Hvar, he was chief enologist for the Badel company at their Svirče winery, and then an enology consultant for all Badel wineries in central Dalmatia. He created his own label in 1991 and started his company, Bastijana, in 1993.

Today, Vina Tomić in Jelsa makes some 130,000 bottles of wine a year from their own 10 hectares of vineyards plus fruit contracted from about 50 local growers. The Tomić tasting room is popular not only for its wines but also for its vaulted travertine cellars, modeled on the cellars of Diocletian's palace in Split. Tomić's son, Sebastijan, is the company director, and Marina Jakas is enologist.

We asked Tomić about the changes he has seen in Dalmatian wine making, and his observations on wine culture. His responses were written by Marina Jakas.

"Wine is the most healthful . . . of beverages."

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← A young Andro Tomić in Cognac

You were one of a group of 20 enology students who studied in France for seven months in 1978, at wineries across the country. Would you share some of the ideas or methods you learned on that trip that were different from the way things were done in Dalmatia at the time?

At the beginning of the seventies, a great technological advance took place in France: stainless steel tanks and controlled fermentation appeared. White wines have become fresher and [more] drinkable. Later, an agglomerated cork was used for the first time in Champagne for the sparkling wines, which [then] spread to still wines as well. It was all fascinating to me at the time and very inspiring. Croatia was far behind in terms of such technology.

What French wineries, specific wines or wine styles made the biggest impression on you on that trip? Why?

In a period of seven months, we visited 50 of the most prestigious French wineries and saw everything that we did not know or see in Croatia.

Of the white wines, I was most delighted by the wineries of Alsace, both in terms of the production method and organoleptically. Bright color [and] pronounced fruitiness are something that we did not have in Dalmatia at that time. I learned a lot about must sedimentation and reducing the impact of oxygen on must. In the domain of red wines, tasting wines from the Bordeaux region left the biggest impression on me. I have applied the technology of Bordeaux wine processing, fermentation and storage to Plavac Mali, which in my opinion has greatly refined our red wines.

In setting up your own winery and starting to make wine, what were some of the challenges or problems you had to overcome?

Along with all the other usual problems of starting your own business, for me the fundamental problem was how to make Plavac Mali's large amount of tannin more drinkable, following the example of many great world wines. Great care had to be taken to ensure that the wines were stable enough to be bottled, which was a big problem at the time due to the lack of adequate resources.

What has been Hvar's greatest accomplishment in wine in your lifetime? What is the island's greatest strength?

Today, the island of Hvar, with relatively small wine production, has nevertheless created dozens of good winemakers whose [wines] can stand alongside the best European wines. This is recognized by the elite tourism that exists on Hvar [and] is confirmed by the high prices of certain wines. Today we can say that you can make a living from wine production. Our greatest strength and our biggest ambassadors are our indigenous varieties. They allow Croatia to stand out in the global wine market with products that are truly unique.

You have spoken about the need to follow the trends of the wine world. How is this affecting the wines you make today?

Understanding wine trends is crucial to meet consumer demand and navigate the wine market effectively. Today's wine market is characterized by sustainability, authenticity and quality over price. White wines have experienced a rise in popularity, with their production surpassing that of red wines. [The] market is experiencing growing demand for sparkling wines, signifying a preference for lighter wine varieties. While the wine industry must remain aware of shifting tastes and trends, wine's value lies in its connection to place, tradition and craftsmanship. It's important not to lose focus or your brand identity.

[Speaking of] trends, in a few months our first sparkling wine made using [the] traditional method will hit the market. Stay tuned.

Two trends at the moment are the tendency 1) to drink less alcohol or none at all (especially in the younger generations), and 2) the desire for lighter wines, which seems to be favoring white and rosé wines over reds. What are your thoughts about these?

The reason for [the] light wines trend may not be hard to recognize. White wines tend to be less expensive than red wines. This is in part because most white wines, which today are made in a fresh style, do not require expensive new oak or several years of aging. Perhaps the trend toward white wine is just a response to the high price of reds.

↑ *Andro Tomić*

Of course, the price may not be the only reason consumers are interested in white wines. One important factor might be our changing tastes in food. Red wines pair well with traditional dishes, which are mostly meat dishes. They pair less well with spicy Asian dishes, lighter dishes or vegetable dishes. White wine is often the better choice for diets that source from global cuisines.

A growing trend of nonalcoholic wines is related to healthy lifestyle choices, especially among the younger generation. But this does not have to mean giving up the pleasure of tasting a glass of wine. Wine exists because of fermentation, because of the alcohol; it made wine safe to drink in the several thousand years before industrialization and modern food preservation methods like pasteurization. It's possible to drink real wine, get low alcohol, and enjoy what you're drinking. "Like fashion, wine trends come and go."

Hvar Plavac Mali from top positions is legendary for its ripeness, richness and often high alcohol. Do you foresee any changes to the way Plavac Mali is traditionally grown and made? Or should Plavac remain unchanged?

I have been noticing [that] younger drinkers find the tannins of more robust red wines like Plavac Mali "a little harsh." The thing is that Plavac Mali is heavily influenced by the terroir it is grown in, and the climate that it experiences as it grows. When grown in top positions like Ivan Dolac, Sveta Nedjelja and Jagodna, Plavac Mali yields ripe red wines of deep color, full bodied and tannic. We should respect those wines as they are given by god. Connoisseurs know how to appreciate such wines and pair them with food. Some new technological tools [such as better choice of barrels and toasting, fermentation in new wood, optimal use of sulfur] enable winemakers to maintain the balance between tradition and modernity, preserving the character of their wines while increasing quality.

[On the] north side of the island, [the] terroir offers conditions for the production of Plavac for lighter red wines, rosé and sparkling wines. You will get a delicate wine that does not really resemble traditional Plavac. Time will tell if this is the future.

You recently created two new wines based on the Bogdanuša variety. What do you think of the promise of this variety among whites for Hvar? What are the benefits of Bogdanuša? Why should people try it?

Croatia has a remarkable number of native varieties and they are expressions of Croatian wine heritage. They contribute to biodiversity and so perfectly express the land and conditions where they grow. Happily, there is an international trend now among sommeliers and wine lovers for native grapes, and more winemakers are interested in making wine from them. Their revival also allows Croatia to stand out in the global wine market with products that are truly unique.

Bogdanuša, named by merging the words "God-given" because it was drunk only on special occasions and holidays, is highly respected by locals and winemakers. As a variety it shows itself [to be] great in Hvar's terroir in its excellent resistance to drought, and by retaining tartaric acid in the grapes, which later results in freshness in the wine. Its elegant varietal aromas and fresh taste with nicely balanced, lively acids and moderate alcohol will give everyone perfect refreshment on warm summer days.

"Drink by the hour, not by the liter."

Many people in the wine world are worrying about wine drinking slowly losing importance in our culture. Do you think this is the case in Dalmatia? What message would you give to younger generations about enjoying wine or the value of wine in a person's life?

I would say this is not the case in Dalmatia. In fact, wine is regaining its old popularity with the rise of quality-focused winemakers in the past decade. Historically, wine was always part of Dalmatian culture.

Unlike previous generations, younger generations have less attachment to tradition. For them, wine does not carry the same cultural or social weight that it did for their parents or grandparents. Attracting young consumers to wine involves smart adaptation to their new expectations. As an industry we need to continue to find ways to engage with these new consumers to secure our future.

My message to those generations would be: Wine is not just an alcoholic drink, it is heritage and tradition [and] there are so many different options for every occasion. When consumed moderately, it does no harm—quite the opposite, in fact.

You are famous for saying "Pije se na ure, ne na litre" (Drink by the hour, not by the liter). What does this mean to your own enjoyment of wine?

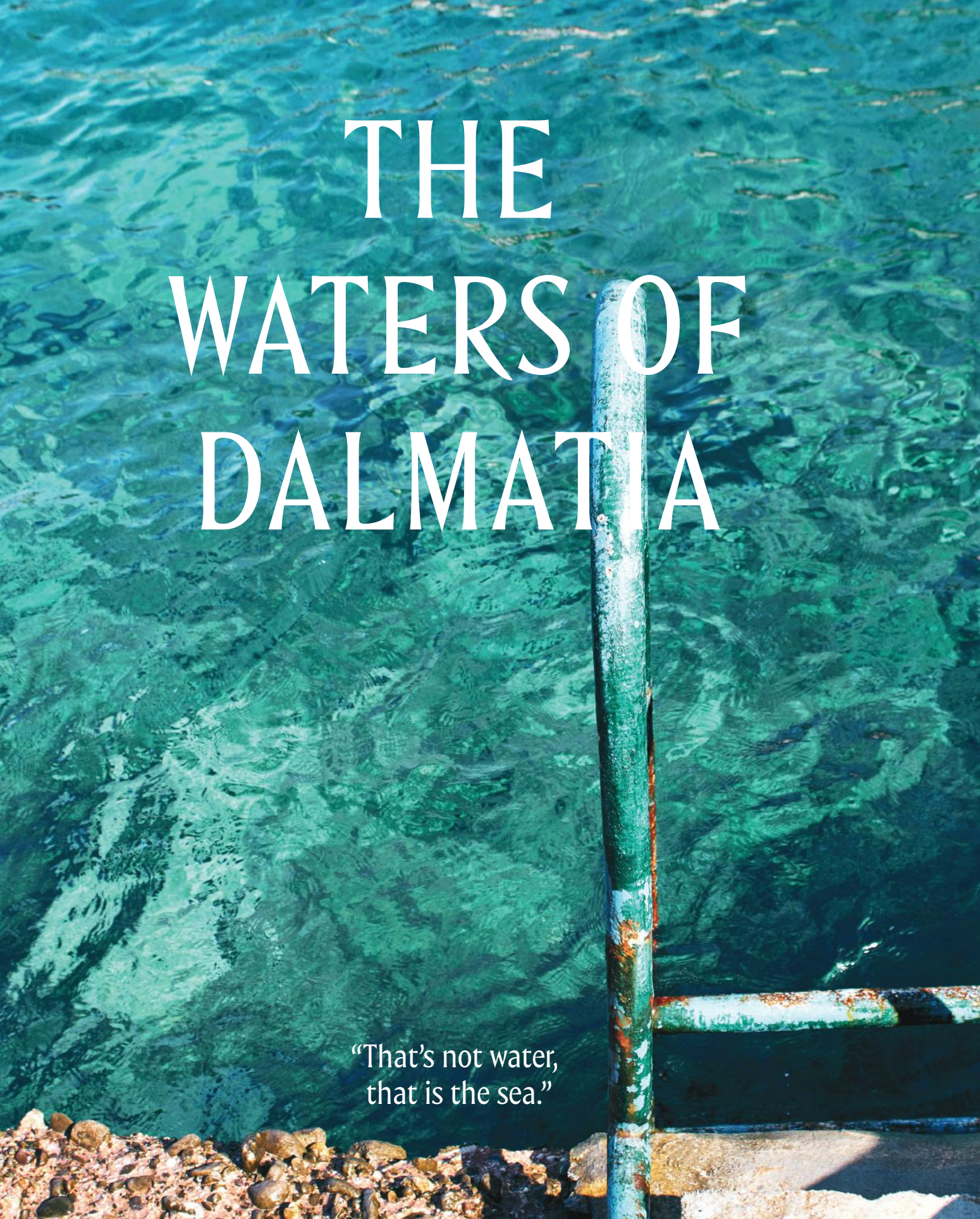
Wine is the perfect accompaniment to great company and good conversation, a delight to be enjoyed over time, without hurrying. Wine is something magical and you have to truly enjoy it.

Is there anything else that you would like to say?

Fashions are always changing and trends are just trends. Wine is never going to disappear, but neither can we expect people to go back to drinking 90 liters a year. When that was happening there wasn't the competition there is today. Winemakers need to be confident, believe in our product and show that, as Pasteur said, "Wine is the most healthful . . . of beverages." ◊

↑ *Harvest above Jelsa*

↓ *Jelsa harbor*


THE
WATERS OF
DALMATIA
"That's not water,
that is the sea."

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Dalmatia is bounded by the crystal-clear, aquamarine waters beloved of bathers, sailors and snorkelers. But as Dalmatians will insist, "That's not water, that is the sea." Water is fresh, life-sustaining—the sea is more complex, it has its moods and is worthy of its own name.

Whether fresh or salt, Dalmatia's waters are remarkably clean. For millennia, people have drunk the waters of Dalmatia's four major rivers, the Zrmanja, Krka, Cetina and Neretva, as well as the various tributaries and minor rivers. Now they are also the sites for rafting, kayaking and kite boarding, but these rivers, as well as springs and wells, still provide drinking water for virtually all of Dalmatia.

Neither humans nor grapevines can drink seawater, but the sea makes important contributions to vineyards in the coastal areas. For sustaining the life of the vines, there is rain. As in other areas of the world, however, it is often a question of too little or too much.

The subtle effects of the sea

Early summer bathers in Dalmatia are often surprised: the sun many be blistering, but the sea is icy. By early fall, Dalmatians know the season is perfect for a dip—the sea has been warming all summer and is now the perfect temperature, often into November.

This annual warming has an effect on coastal vineyards, too. Especially where the sea is shallow or enclosed, such as inlets along Dalmatia's craggy coastline or half-saline inland seas such as Novigrad Sea in Zadar county, the sea's temperature affects that on land. Breezes passing over these waters will cool vineyards in spring (delaying early growth until there is less danger of frost) and warm them in fall (extending the growing season).

The sea has another useful trick: it plays one part in the triple-insolation effect. This phenomenon occurs on steep, south-facing vineyard slopes that meet the sea, many of them planted with sun-loving Plavac Mali. The most famous are on the south sides of Brač and Hvar islands, the south side of the Pelješac peninsula and on some parts of the mainland coast. The fruit on these steep slopes receives triple ripening power from the sun: direct light from the sun, light reflected off the sea and light reflected off the white limestone rocks beneath the vines. Sunlight promotes photosynthesis in the vine leaves, giving the grapes an edge as they develop sugars, flavors and deep color.

The fruit on these steep slopes receives triple ripening power from the sun.

Not enough water

Dalmatia's stony coastal areas enjoy the various benefits of the sea, but when it comes to freshwater in these areas, climate and terrain often collaborate to leave living things with a shortage. In the Mediterranean climate, rain falls in early spring and late autumn—and barely at all during the hot growing season. When it does rain, the karst terrain (page 72) drains instantly. In summer, the sun desiccates any visible earth.

People have adapted by harnessing rivers and springs for public drinking water, or digging wells to access deep groundwater. Historically, they also collected rainwater runoff in stone or concrete cisterns, which are still commonly seen, especially on the islands. Large, flat, concrete or stone-paved platforms with low walls were constructed to collect the rainwater and direct it into the cistern below. Public water catchments still perch above many island towns. In isolated areas, human and animal drinking water was rainwater well into the 1970s.

Bevanda: Hydration with Benefits

In the not-so-distant past, most Dalmatians worked the land, whether as shepherds or farmers. The days were hot and people worked hard for their food. Water drawn from a spring or rainwater from the cistern provided hydration—but often tasted funky and could cause stomach problems. The solution was red wine. Mixing water and wine improved various aspects of field work. The wine masked the flavor of the water and the alcohol neutralized low-level bacteria. Bonus benefits were a little extra caloric energy and perhaps a slightly better mood.

Today, older Dalmatians still drink *bevanda*, but it's no longer a case of wine "correcting" water. Now water is doing a favor for red wine, reducing its alcohol and boosting hydration for summer drinkers—whether in the field or at lunch on the terrace. And now, no rainwater is necessary . . . just turn the tap.

Traditionally in Mediterranean regions, vines have been left to their own devices. The majority of Dalmatian vineyards remain without irrigation. The theory was that the more the vines struggled, the more concentrated and complex the grapes (and the resulting wine) would be. The farther the vine roots descended through the stone in search of water, the better the vines would come through periodic drought—and local varieties were well suited to this. Irrigation was condoned only for young, unestablished vines and in cases of severe drought. Too much water, and the vines would celebrate by producing an abundance of lackluster fruit.

But deep vine roots may not be enough anymore. There is a fine line between a healthy struggle and damaging "water stress." Many winegrowers planting new vineyards are building drip irrigation into their plans, especially when the vineyards are to be planted on reclaimed karst, such as in Komarna.

Damir Štimac, CEO of Rizman winery, points out that old vines are often planted on terraces, which have at least some water-retaining soil, and the bush form of the vines makes them more resistant to drought. The younger vineyards in Komarna are not terraced, and the vines are trained on posts and wires. When the signs of water stress begin to show, the vines can be given an infusion. But this can't be done regularly. As Štimac wrote in a message, "We use irrigation exclusively to maintain normal grape ripening without water stress."

Too much water

The word *blato* is often used in place names in Dalmatia. It means mud, and it suggests a place with natural springs or high groundwater that made for marshy ground, at least when the place was named. Some of these places have now been drained, such as Nadin field (Nadinsko blato), an important source of wine grapes in Zadar county.

↓ *Neretva river delta*

On Korčula, Blato is a town located at a karst field with high groundwater levels in winter. This caused an area of almost 180 hectares to flood almost every year until 1912, when a drainage tunnel was finished. Lower Blato field still furnishes drinking water for the western half of the island.

The local name for Vrgorac field, in the hinterland at the border between Dalmatia's two southernmost counties, is *polje jezero* (lake field), although until 1938 it was virtually 100 percent lake. In that year, a drainage tunnel was dug to direct excess water into actual lakes at the southeast end of the field, and from there to the sea. Now Vrgorac field is the largest vineyard area in Croatia, where wine and table grapes share some 2,500 hectares with nectarines, peaches and strawberries. It is also home to the largest winery, Delmati, which works 200 hectares of vineyards.

Every year, however, history repeats itself in *polje jezero*. The northeast end of the valley still floods as early as October and slowly drains by April. Winemaker Dario Gašpar stood in his Plavka vineyard on April 7 and raised one hand to eye level. "Three days ago it was like this . . . water to here. Now we are standing here." The ground is dry, last year's short grass coated in silt. The vines, which come to knee level, spend up to 90 days completely under water each year. They have mossy beards hanging from their bends, and bark like lichen on their trunks, but each year under Gašpar's care they produce top-quality Plavka.

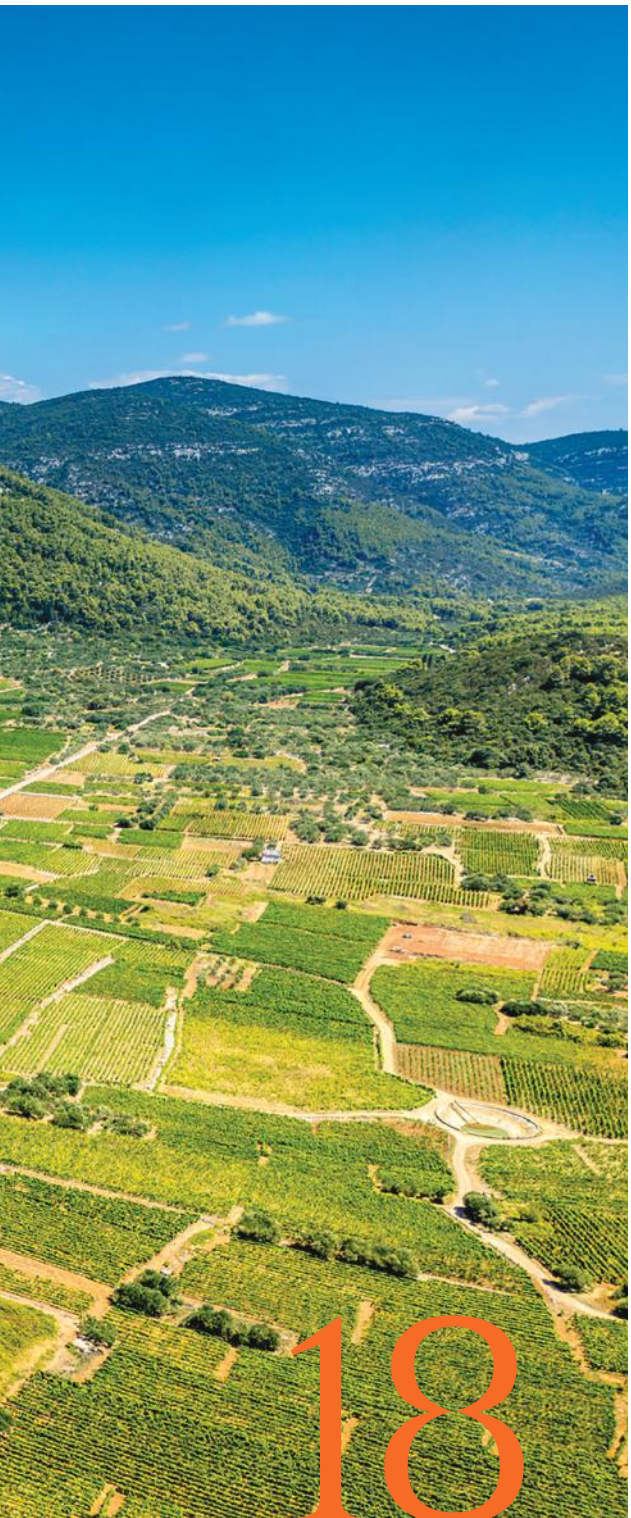
Just a little farther south, the Neretva river delta is a different story. The river originates in Bosnia and Herzegovina and only 22 kilometers of it are in Croatia, where its delta covers 12,000 hectares as the river drains into the sea. Its original 12 branches were ultimately redirected into three as marshy land was reclaimed for agriculture—but land and water maintain a cautious compromise. The result is a remarkably beautiful agrarian Venice, where narrow channels of water divide strips of land planted with the fruits—particularly citrus—that are famous in the region.

Winemaker Vjekoslav Prović makes wine on the delta with his father and sister. He explains that the problem isn't so much the water in the soil, as you might expect, but the morning dew that coats the vines. Thankfully, the western maestral wind is particularly strong here—perfect for drying vine leaves, and for the kiteboarders who paint the mouth of the Neretva with their colors. ◊

↓ *The source of the Cetina river, in the hinterland east of Knin*

In parts of Vrgorac field, the vines spend up to 90 days completely under water each year.

NARROWING IN: DUBROVNIK-NERETVA COUNTY



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For visitors who have plenty of time, the old state road D8, also known as the Adriatic Highway or the *magistrala*, is the perfect way to see local Dalmatia. It winds its way from Rijeka all the way down the Croatian coast. It is narrow and twisting in places—and there is the danger of getting stuck behind a slow truck or an ancient Renault—but many Dalmatians still take this road instead of the newer highway. And in Dalmatia's southernmost county, the *magistrala* is all there is. It is lined with houses and restaurants, small businesses and farms, all interspersed with fantastic views of mountains, sea and islands.

Dubrovnik-Neretva county begins at the lower end of Vrgorac field. As drivers emerge from the mountains near Ploče, the vast Neretva delta spreads its tesselation of canals and arable strips jeweled with mandarines, pomegranates, grapes and other crops. The delta is good for paddling treks, bird lovers and adventurous eaters (eels and frogs are local specialties).

The mountain ascent on the far side of the delta affords a stunning view back before opening into a new one ahead: impossibly steep rows of grapevines on the ridges of Komarna, with the tourmaline sea, the Pelješac bridge and the peninsula rising in the background.

Bypassing the old Bosnia and Herzegovina crossing in this way brings road trippers to the base of the Pelješac and the salt pans and monumental fortification wall at Ston. Then comes a pleasant hour of weaving along the edges of mountains with the sea shining to starboard. Slowing through villages, stopping for a snack or a swim, it's a leisurely way to pass half a day before traversing the narrow, precipitous track high above Dubrovnik. Forward into the countryside, more wine country awaits.

← *Čara valley, Korčula*

Revered reds and a focus on freshness

Dubrovnik-Neretva county, like Split-Dalmatia county to the north, is a collection of seemingly disparate landforms. There are mainland peaks descending to the sea, a mountainous peninsula and a few stony islands, one particularly famous for wine. It is heat and harsh sun that unite these growing areas of the south. And it is heat and harsh sun that contribute to the fame of certain south-facing positions on the Pelješac peninsula, where Plavac Mali is grown. Dingač and Postup were Croatia's first officially protected growing positions (protected designations of origin or PDOs) and are place names commonly seen on bottle labels for Plavac Mali. The latest PDO for Plavac is Ponikve, also on the Pelješac peninsula.

It is heat and harsh sun that unite these growing areas of the south.

In all hot wine regions, the potential for overwhelming ripeness calls for balance in wine growing and making. In this southern county it has promoted certain local grape varieties that offer good acidity to higher status, and prompted a new dedication to rescuing others almost lost. Those working with Pošip, the famous white variety of Korčula, have adapted vineyard and winery practices away from the nectar-y, full-bodied style of the past to offer elegance, finesse—and refreshment.

A palette of slopes and valleys

The classic ingredients of Dalmatia's wine landscape—karst slopes and valleys—are present, too, in Dubrovnik-Neretva county. The terrain has narrowed; the hinterland that sheltered behind the coastal mountains farther north is no longer present. After the flat, fertile Neretva delta, the mainland mountains that resume in Komarna descend straight to the sea. Close along the land side is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which claims its stretch of coastline in the crook of the Pelješac peninsula. The mountains continue their march south past Dubrovnik, where the land broadens at Cavtat into the Konavle wine region, sandwiched between the primary range and a lower ridge at the sea.

↑ *The slopes of Dingač, on the Pelješac peninsula*

Mountains structure the Pelješac peninsula as well. Here, two roughly parallel ridges contain two important wine-growing valleys. One is on the southeast mass of the peninsula, ending at Ston, where the peninsula joins the mainland. The other is on the northwest mass, which overlaps the end of Korčula island.

But for a narrow strait, Korčula might have been part of the peninsula itself. It is the largest island in this county and the most important for wine growing, with its own high ridge cradling crucial wine valleys.

Slopes and valleys are the county's primary growing landscapes. Steep limestone slopes are here in two main variations: the historic, terraced slopes of positions such as the south side of the Pelješac peninsula and the south side of Korčula; and relatively new vineyards made using karst reclamation, without terraces, such as in Komarna, or the Defora position on Korčula. Karst valleys with deeper soil and often a water source include the famous Čara and Smokvica valleys on Korčula, the valley at Potomje on the Pelješac and that of Konavle at the southern end of the county.

How to beat the heat

The Dalmatian sun is relentless in summer, when cloudy days are few and rainy ones almost unknown. For grapevines on southern hillsides, there is precious little relief—the angle of the slope and the southern aspect ensure constant sunlight. Those growing on south-facing slopes over the sea benefit from triple insolation: sunlight from the sun, sunlight reflected from the sea, and that small amount reflected from the stones beneath the vines. But while sunlight is essential for ripening, it comes with extreme heat and evaporation. With little irrigation in use on the historic slopes, there is the danger of heat and water stress, which damages vines and ultimately prevents ripening.

The harsh conditions are survivable through a combination of factors that add up to . . . just enough. The choice of grape variety is essential, of course—Plavac Mali, the heat magnet, thrives here, whereas Tribidrag, for one, prefers a cooler spot. Old vines are more acclimated to the conditions, their roots having descended through cracks in the rocks in search of moisture. The form of the vine is important, too. The bush vines (or gobelet) common on the slopes huddle low on the ground, offering shade

to the fruit and creating individual microclimates beneath their leaves. Terraces hold soil along with the rocks, which retains moisture better than rocks alone. Stones on the surface of the soil help to preserve any drop of moisture from instant evaporation, while cooling breezes flutter the leaves, keeping disease at bay. In newer vineyards on manmade terrain, or those with young vines, irrigation may be necessary but is reserved for emergencies.

Vines planted on north slopes see a very different life, with less direct sunlight and heat. Blending from both sources can give wine makers more options for a well-balanced wine.

In the valleys, sunshine may be mitigated by the surrounding mountains and the flat vineyards, where vine rows, generally trained on posts and wires, shade one another at different times of day.

The heat, however, tends to pool in the valleys, making daytime conditions very hot. If everything works as it should, the pooled heat is moved up and out by cooler air each night. This diurnal temperature variation is crucial in hot wine-growing regions.

In the far southern region of Konavle, growing conditions are similar to those in other valleys, but winds and precipitation are heavily influenced by the geography of Montenegro, just to the south.

The regional balancing act

Dalmatia's two most planted varieties, Pošip and Plavac Mali, are well suited to the Mediterranean climate. Pošip (page 29) was discovered growing on Korčula in the late 19th century and has since come to dominate plantings on the island. The valleys in front of the villages of Čara and Smokvica are the classic positions for Pošip, still filled with small plots farmed by individual owners, many of whom sell their fruit to the well-regarded Čara co-operative or other producers. Blato is another wine-growing center on the island. As elsewhere in central and southern Dalmatia, Pošip is carefully managed to avoid sunburn and overripeness and to maintain optimal acidity. Earlier harvest dates, blending from field and hillside positions and temperature control in the winery have all contributed to a more aromatic, crisper style of wine.

Korčula's other star grape variety, Grk (page 25), is now being planted more widely off the island due to its excellent structure and flavor. The village of Lumbarda on Korčula is the original epicenter of Grk, where the sandy soil in vineyards barely above sea level break the pattern of karst stones seen in most other growing areas. Korčula is also known for Rukatac (aka Maraština, page 27), the white Cetinka variety and some Plavac Mali as well. Similar varieties are grown on the island of Lastovo, beyond Korčula.

The Pelješac peninsula is practically synonymous with Plavac Mali due to the fame of the Dingač and Postup appellations, but other varieties thrive on hillsides or in valleys. Noted wine valleys are that centered on Potomje village, where a narrow tunnel leads through the coastal mountains to Dingač,

← *Dubrovnik*

Dingač and Postup, Trstenik and Ponikve: Roasted Slopes on the Pelješac

Peer into the one-lane tunnel that leads from Potomje through the mountain to make sure no one is coming through from the other end. After the short journey through the rock, the landscape has tilted, with the sea at the bottom and the mountain above. This is Dingač.

All the requirements for top-quality Plavac Mali are present: south- or southwest-facing slopes at up to 45-degree gradients; sunlight from three sources (from the sun, reflected off the water, and off the stones beneath the vines); the proximity of the sea to moderate the climate; mountains to protect against cold winds from the north; ideal soil for good drainage but slight water retention. Similar features make all four of these sites on the Pelješac classic slopes for Plavac.

Over the past 500 years and longer, the Plavac Mali from Dingač earned a significantly higher price than other red grapes. This led to imitators from outside Dingač. Thus it was that in 1961 Dingač (80 hectares) became the first protected designation in Croatia—only the now-defunct Dingač co-operative was allowed to label with the name (as only state wineries were allowed to bottle wine for sale under socialism).

The slopes of Postup (50 hectares), closer to the town of Orebić, are similar in structure and features to those of Dingač in their upper part; the lower vineyards are on soil with more water-retentive clay. Still, in the past if the supply of Dingač fell short, it was said that Postup made up the difference—labeled as Dingač. In 1967, Postup became the second protected designation of origin in Croatia. Both Postup and Dingač are now produced by numerous private wineries.

The slopes of Trstenik are located next to Dingač near the port village of the same name, historically important for wine shipping. Ponikve was granted an EU PDO in 2021, and is located in a chain of small valleys and karst hillsides at the base of the Pelješac, northwest of Ston. Both are known for Plavac Mali and, like Dingač and Postup, stand for intensive dry farming and centuries of tradition.

and in the central peninsula around the villages of Janjina, Kuna and Putniković. Rosé from Plavac Mali is a popular product of the valleys. Rukatac/Maraština is the main white variety on the Pelješac, but there is also Grk and Pošip.

Malvasija Dubrovačka (page 27) is a native variety valued for its good acidity in a region where freshness is a challenge. Plantings are still small and primarily focused in Konavle, where it was recently rescued from obscurity, although it is showing up on the Pelješac, the Neretva and elsewhere.

Whereas native grapes have an advantage in being well adapted over the centuries to their growing conditions, international varieties have a history here as well. The seven wineries (six of them organic) of the relatively recently established Komarna region are known for the Plavac Mali and Pošip from their reclaimed karst vineyards, but Syrah is also grown here. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay are other varieties commonly seen in the wider region. ◊

↑ *Terraced vineyards of Ponikve*

GRAPES OF CHANGE: CROATIAN WINE MAKING FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE

Nenad Trifunović

As damaging climate events become increasingly severe and frequent, the wine industry faces a pressing question: How can it adapt to a changing climate while continuing to produce high-quality wines?

Agriculture has always been one of the first industries to feel the effects of climate change, and in the past decades, the impact of droughts, wildfires, and expanding desertification has been more visible than ever. While these and other natural phenomena of climate change have existed for centuries, their frequency and intensity have risen dramatically in recent decades. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the duration and number of droughts worldwide have increased by 29 percent since 2000, compared with that figure in the 1980s and 90s.

For the wine industry, these changes are particularly disruptive. Shifting weather patterns alter the timing of harvest, affect grape ripening and transform the taste of the wine itself.

One significant issue is early budding due to warm days very early in spring, which exposes vines to a higher risk of spring frost damage. Later, summer heatwaves can cause grapes to stop ripening evenly, leading to unbalanced harvests. And harvest has begun earlier year after year. An early harvest makes a difference in the chemical composition of grapes, reducing their aromatic complexity, altering the types of acidity and tannin present and affecting other distinctive qualities prized by winemakers.

RE-EVALUATING ACCEPTED VINEYARD PRACTICES IS ONE WAY TO TWEAK TRADITION TO ACHIEVE NEW RESULTS.

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Additionally, prolonged droughts and wildfires have wreaked havoc on vineyards worldwide, introducing a phenomenon known as smoke taint. This occurs when volatile compounds from wildfire smoke are absorbed by the grapes, imparting an unpleasant flavor to the wine. The United States, Australia and other countries with frequent enormous summer fires are already investing in research to help producers identify and mitigate smoke taint, highlighting the scale of the problem.

The question remains: Can the wine industry innovate quickly enough to thrive in this era of climatic uncertainty?

shade for the grapes, or removed early to acclimate the fruit to stronger sunlight? Is it better to allow grass to grow between rows to cool the soil and promote biodiversity, or keep the ground clear to maximize water absorption?

Re-evaluating accepted vineyard practices is one way to tweak tradition to achieve new results. But long-term adaptation may require more transformative solutions. Should winemakers expand the range of grape varieties they cultivate, introducing types better suited to hotter, drier climates? Or should they experiment with cross-breeding to create new, hardier varieties?

CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT JUST ABOUT HEAT; IT'S ABOUT ERRATIC WEATHER PATTERNS.

New answers to old questions

Adapting to the new realities of rising temperatures, shortened growing seasons and water shortage is no small task, especially in an industry deeply rooted in tradition. Yet, climate change has made it essential for winemakers to rethink long-established practices. Creativity and innovation are becoming as important as tradition in ensuring the resilience of the industry.

One approach involves planting vineyards on cooler, north-facing slopes. However, sometimes even this may not suffice to protect vines from the increasing heat. In some cases, winemakers have resorted to reorienting vineyard rows. Changing the orientation of the rows is no small feat, but it has proven to be a lifesaver in some cases. One such example is Particella 928, one of the most famous vineyards for the Fiano variety in Campania, Italy, which was transplanted back in 2001 to a new layout and east-west row orientation to allow the 2,800 vines to receive the sun energy more evenly.

Irrigation, once reserved for less prestigious vineyards, has now become a necessity, with advanced drop-by-drop systems being implemented even for the finest plots. Other techniques previously dismissed by enologists are being reconsidered, with every detail—such as leaf management—becoming crucial. Should the leaves be left to provide

While the challenges seem unprecedented, there is hope that innovation and collaboration will preserve the art of wine making. These efforts may even lead to the discovery of new grape varieties and blends, offering exciting possibilities for the future of wine.

Grapes under pressure – from fire to frost

Summer of 2024 was a rough time for Bibich Winery, in northern Dalmatia. Wildfires spread throughout the region, and one reached the very winery, in the village of Plastovo.

There was nothing they could do, explains Filip Bibić. "Several plots in the Plastovo area were affected by fire." The fire caused no permanent damage to the inner rows, but Bibić says "the outer rows were severely affected because of the trees and bushes outside of the vineyard."

But climate change is not just about heat; it's about erratic weather patterns. While a rapid temperature increase can cause grapes to ripen too quickly, altering the wine's flavor, a sudden drop in temperature can wreak havoc on vineyards—damaging buds, reducing yields and even killing vines.

"Red indigenous varieties generally tolerate conditions the best and you can see their adaptability," said Bibić. "However, [last year] frost disrupted Lasin during flowering, which resulted in uneven ripening in the later stages, and therefore increased green notes, but not the positive ones."

The right approach is to somehow make it work for you. Bibić concludes: "We have the opportunity to learn from microlocations, and look for optimal planting sites. Just a few hundred meters, at the same altitude, has a great impact on maintaining the acids that are crucial for the balance of our wines."

"Even the oldest of vineyards are struggling with an abundance of heat and lack of rain," said Ivan Kovač of the winery Matela in Kaštela, central Dalmatia. "In 2024, Plavac Mali grown in the field was better than from the traditionally most noble positions. It is becoming necessary during the harvest to select and pick only those grapes that have managed to complete their natural cycle."

Like his neighbor Filip Bibić, Ante Sladić is highly attuned to microlocations within his vineyards in northern Dalmatia, but it is also crucial to manage the microclimate among the vines. Climate pressures have changed the approach to canopy management. "We remove sprouts, as our ancestors did," said Sladić, "but we've had to adapt to today's conditions. It's important not to remove too much foliage, as the leaves provide shade for the grapes and are vital for the vine's metabolism and health, which directly affects the quality of the grapes. In short—if you don't have leaves, you won't have good grapes."

For Ljubomir Makjanić, enologist at Carić winery on the island of Hvar, the problem becomes one of harvest management. "It has become increasingly common for varieties that did not ripen at the same time to ripen together," he said. "As a consequence it is close to impossible to organize the harvest. We regret that we did not start the 2024 harvest earlier because we were even late in a few positions. It was not possible to go through everything in such a short time."

↓ *Wildfires near vineyards late in the growing season create a risk of smoke contamination.*

One man's loss is another man's gain

Every winemaker on the planet has witnessed significant climate changes, but not all are for the worse. Shifting rainfall patterns, earlier springs, and increasing droughts are gradually pushing wine production farther toward the poles, benefitting regions that have not traditionally produced wine. Vineyards now stretch as far north as Norway, while countries like England are witnessing a boom in wine production as warming temperatures transform Europe's climate.

For some classic producers, rising temperatures have brought short-term benefits. In climates that were formerly borderline cool for wine growing, rising temperatures are helping to ensure ripening and produce better wines. But this is not the case in hot Dalmatia, where instead winemakers are starting to see the advantages of heritage varieties they have always grown.

VINEYARDS NOW STRETCH AS FAR NORTH AS NORWAY.

Ivan Miloš, on the Pelješac peninsula, explains the particular qualities of Dalmatia's indigenous red variety Plavac Mali. "In our location, the otherwise worrying diurnal temperatures are not a problem. We could almost say that the overall circumstances of climate change do not bother Plavac as much as some introduced varieties in our climate. Plavac can withstand extreme drought. And some consequences of climate change are even conditionally desirable. For example, the harvest time in August is more favorable due to the lower risk of rain than in the autumn period."

Ante Sladić feels the same about his local varieties. "Our varieties—like Debit, Plavina and Lasina—cope quite well with climate changes. For example, Plavina achieves ideal parameters even in drought, retaining freshness without sugar levels rising too high. Likewise, Babić, though grown in rocky terrain, even under extreme heat stays green and preserves higher natural acidity."

It is no different wherever international varieties grow alongside indigenous ones. In Bordeaux, one of the region's iconic grape varieties, Merlot, is at risk due to the increasingly warm climate and harvest seasons that have shifted earlier since the 1980s. Faced with these challenges, Bordeaux winemakers are adapting by exploring new grape varieties from warmer regions, including indigenous varieties from Portugal.

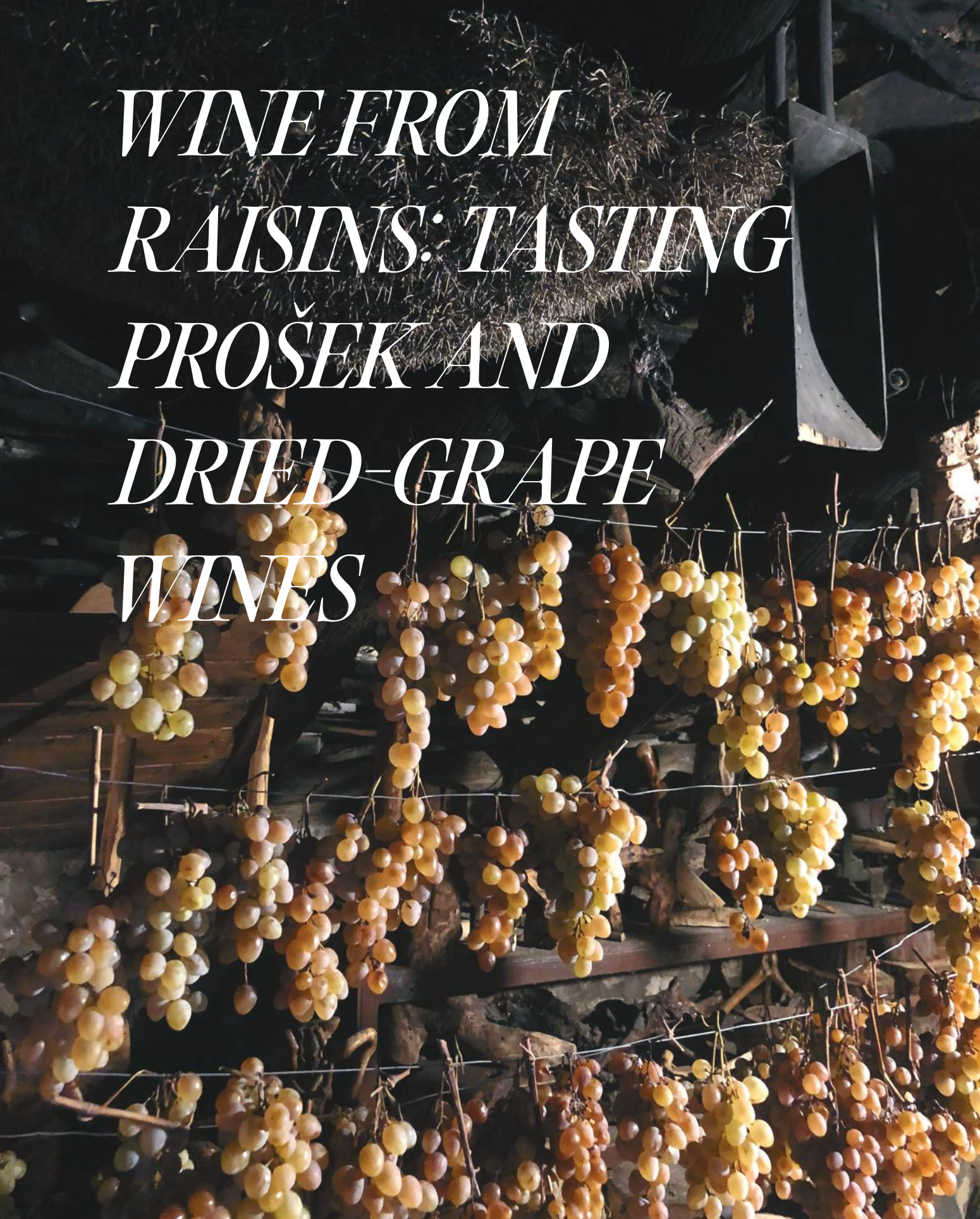
Ivan Rapuzzi, of the Ronchi di Cialla winery in Friuli, sums up: "International varieties were hyper-selected 30 to 50 years ago to thrive under environmental conditions that are no longer relevant. Indigenous varieties, on the other hand, are less selectively bred and carry genetic traits that ensure much greater adaptability. This is evident in the wines made from native grapes, which are often more balanced and less alcoholic."

In the end, still other factors work in favor of Dalmatian winemakers. Most are small family producers who have long understood that change is the only constant, and continue to adapt in the best possible ways. Large industrial producers are less agile. By adapting on a small scale, Dalmatian winemakers preserve the identity of their wine culture, ensuring that the unique character of their wines will continue to be recognized and cherished by true connoisseurs for generations to come. ◊

Nenad Trifunović is a renowned Croatian wine educator, workshop moderator and the creator of vinopija.com, one of Croatia's most respected wine blogs. With his keen palate and approachable style, he makes the world of wine more engaging and accessible to connoisseurs and casual drinkers alike.

→
Field positions may prove more versatile than the traditionally noble positions in some vintages.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION ARE BECOMING AS IMPORTANT AS TRADITION IN ENSURING THE RESILIENCE OF THE WINE INDUSTRY.



WINE FROM RAISINS: TASTING PROŠEK AND DRIED-GRAPE WINES

20

Sweet wines did not come from our world, awash with sugar. It is difficult to understand their importance, or even to appreciate tasting them, surrounded as we are by cheap, sugary things.

In ancient Greece and Rome, when we know sweet wines were made, they were revered. At a time when the only sweets were fresh or dried fruit and honey, imagine tasting this clarion liquid sugar and, layered on top, the complex flavors of sweetness—figs, dates, pineapple, ginger. It would be sublime.

This is what sweet wines have to offer. Not the manufactured, single dimension of cola or gummy worms, but a symphonic rendition of what sweet was supposed to be.

One way to make sweet wines is to dry the grapes, which concentrates their sugars. Often the grapes are late-harvested, after hanging a little longer to develop higher sugar levels and intensely ripe flavors. Once picked, they are laid out on wooden trays, or on mats of reed or plastic mesh, in sun or shade—or in a dehydrator. Air circulation is important to avoid rot. Whole, undamaged fruit is important to avoid wasps. Heat is essential, but shade may be chosen to avoid baked flavors from sun-drying.

After weeks, a month, or longer, when the grapes are ready, they are crushed and fermented. Faced with such high sugar and rising alcohol, the yeast eventually can do no more, leaving abundant sweetness in the wine.

Prošek (**pro**-shek) has, for centuries, been the Dalmatian term for dried-grape sweet wine. All *prošek* is dried-grape wine, but not all dried-grape wine is *prošek*. Under current rules, *prošek* must be made from indigenous grape varieties, aged in oak barrels for at least two years, and have certain minimum levels of sweetness and alcohol, among other points. But registering the term *prošek* and

its rules under the EU has proven challenging. The Prosecco producers of Italy have objected to the similarity of the term, with the result that "prošek" may not be used on labels, except within Croatia. Discussions have been underway for some years, and in the meantime some producers have stopped using the term. Others prefer to make their own version of dried-grape wine.

For this tasting, we opened 12 dried-grape wines, some labeled *prošek* and others not. Major points of difference are grape variety and color, sweetness and alcohol level, and the vessel used for aging. These wines are virtually impossible to find outside Croatia, so pick up your favorite while you're here. ◊

WHITE WINES

BIRIN MARAŠĆINA SLATKO BIJELO VINO 2019
Maraština, Šibenik
—
A pleasingly delicate wine, given its 16% alcohol. It has light body and a muted sweetness cut by a streak of vibrant acidity that lingers on the finish and contributes to a sense of freshness and elegance. Flavors are of dried apricot, baked orange, orange zest, slight roasted almond and a touch of oxidation from acacia-wood aging that resonates nicely behind the fruit. Enchanting.

BURA RUŽA DALMATINSKA PASSUM 2020
Ruhatac, Pelješac
—
A sweeter style, with a lovely, smooth texture and balancing acidity. The flavors of dates, dried apricot, orange zest and a touch of honey are bright and pure due to stainless steel aging instead of oak. The low alcohol may please some, but it's the clarity of flavors and the everlasting finish that make this wine a treat.

BLEUŠ DESERTNO BIJELO VINO 2018
Chardonnay, Smokvica
—
Made from a non-traditional grape variety, this nonetheless shows the characteristics of *prošek*. It is the most oxidized of the white wines here (aged in barrel and glass demijohn), with sherry notes and roasted almond aromas, dusky dried apricots and date-molasses. Mid-range in body and sweetness in this lineup, with an excellent long finish.

DALMATIAN EGO 2022
Pošip, Jadrtovac
—
This wine was made from dried grapes, but it is quite different from the others here. It has much lower alcohol (11.5%) and almost twice the sugar of the other whites. It was aged in used oak barrels, but shows no signs of this in flavor or color. Just vibrantly pure honeysuckle and dried pineapple flavors, and a rich, velvety mouthfeel that is aaalmost syrupy. Organic.

DEAK PROŠEK 2022
Pošip, Komarna
—
A lighter-bodied, less-sweet example with tantalizing flavors of beeswax, baking spices like ginger powder and slight aniseed, ground cherries and light pineapple. Aged two years in oak, but the flavors are fresh and bright, with little oak flavor or oxidative influence. It's the only white wine here to call itself *prošek*, and a nice example of the style.

A symphonic rendition of what sweet was supposed to be

RED WINES

BLEUŠ DESERTNO CRNO VINO 2018
Plavac Mali, Smokvica
—
The Bleuš gives one of the sweetest impressions of the red wines tasted, and also the fruitiest, with soft cherry-vanilla flavors, a dash of espresso and balsamic, and a touch of something animal. Its almost-full body, noticeable tannins and tangy acidity give it texture. The wine-making family associate the elephant with the *prošek* tradition: wisdom, longevity and strength.

PZ JANJINA PROŠEK 2019
Plavac Mali, Pelješac
—
A lovely ruby-hued *prošek* made from grapes dried on the winery roof. Perfect for the *prošek* novice, it is smooth without being syrupy, and rewardingly sweet, with a bit of texture from light tannins. The flavor is pure brandied cherry that persists pleasantly on the finish.

GRACIN PROŠEK 2018
Babić, Primošten
—
A classic *prošek* with complex, spicy aromas and flavors: lightly floral, with pomegranate, dried fig and slight date flavors, tamarind, a touch of coffee, burnt sugar and a pleasantly bitter cocoa note. With hearty acidity and uphere alcohol, this wine means business, but its broad spectrum of flavors and lengthy finish are pure pleasure.

MRGUDIĆ MOSKAR DESERTNO VINO 2023
Plavac Mali, Postup
—
An earthy Plavac without the oxidative notes of classic *prošek* as it was aged in steel. One of the sweeter impressions here but balanced by hearty acidity, and grainy tannins add textural interest. Flavors of dried figs, dates, straw and a lightly vegetal note like boiled barley or oats.

PROVIĆ EROS PROŠEK 2022
Plavac Mali, Postup
—
The lighter body and lower tannin of this wine will appeal to those who want a classic dessert sip without stickiness. Flavors of maple syrup, cider and date strike clearly like notes on a piano. Its unusual, tangy acidity gives the wine a brightness and complexity that are appealing.

STINA EXPROŠEK 2017
Plavac Mali and Pošip, Brač
—
This wine-formerly-known-as-*prošek* offers restrained sweetness with a lot of complex flavors: think of sticky toffee pudding, walnut, bright black cherry, pomegranate, vanilla, oak and an intriguing bitter note. With at least five years of aging in barrels, this is one of the oakier wines here. It is also one of the most generous, with a long-lasting finish.

TESTAMENT PROŠEK 2018
Babić, Jadrtovac
—
The grapes for this wine were dried for 60 days on the vine, the oldest and riskiest method. With two years in new French and American oak, this is also oak-positive, but it comes across very pleasantly in aromas of toast and smoke, caramel and a touch of bitter cocoa on top of the black-cherry fruit. Light in body and very even in tone, with a lasting finish. Organic.

→
Plavac Mali on mats for drying

Dubrovačka Rožata

This medieval custard comes from the same tradition as French crème caramel, Spanish flan and many other such desserts. Historically, people of all levels of society made custards because the ingredients were common—which explains why so many recipes have lasted to today.

The Dubrovnik element (and the name *rozata* or *rožata*) comes from the addition of the rose liqueur traditionally made in Dubrovnik. Called *rozolin*, *rozulin*, *rozalina* and other names, it is made from the abundant petals of an old variety of rose once common in the region. The original *rožata* did not have caramel (a French addition); it would have been decorated with whipped cream and candied almonds.

Serve *rožata* with any of Dalmatia's sweet wines, but ideally a *prošek*-style dried-grape wine (page 120) from white grape varieties.

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Recipe

Active time: 45 minutes
Cooling: 5 hours
Serves 6

For the caramel
200 grams (1 cup) sugar

For the custard
500 milliliters (2 cups) whole milk
85 grams (6 tablespoons) sugar
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
2 teaspoons rose liqueur, plus additional for sprinkling
6 large eggs, lightly whisked

1. Set up a water bath in the oven: Select a straight-sided round ceramic ramekin or aluminum baking pan of 15 to 20 centimeters (6 to 8 inches) in diameter and at least 5 centimeters (2 inches) deep, in which you will bake the custard. Place it inside a larger, equally deep baking pan or roasting pan. Pushing down on the inner pan to prevent it from floating, fill the outer pan with 3 to 4 centimeters (about 1½ inches) water. Remove the inner pan and set it aside. Place the water-filled outer pan in the oven and preheat the oven to 150°C (300°F).

2. Make the caramel: Combine the sugar with 75 milliliters (about ⅓ cup) water in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Let the sugar melt without stirring. After the sugar melts, let the syrup boil without stirring for about 10 minutes. (Heat the milk, step 4, while the syrup boils.) Watch the syrup carefully once the edges begin to turn amber in color.

3. When the syrup is uniformly golden brown (if it reaches coffee color, it is burnt!), remove it from the heat and immediately pour it into the round baking pan. Tilt the baking pan, if necessary, to distribute the caramel over the bottom. Set the pan aside to allow the caramel to set.

4. Make the custard: Combine the milk and sugar in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Bring the milk almost to a boil—when the surface is foamy and just starting to swell, remove the mixture from the heat and allow it to cool.

5. When the milk mixture has cooled for about 5 minutes, add the lemon zest, vanilla and rose liqueur and stir to combine. When the mixture is room temperature or barely warm, add the eggs and use a wire whisk to combine, just until the color is uniform.

6. Check that the caramel in the baking pan is solid, then use a fine-mesh strainer to strain the egg mixture into a medium bowl. Pour the strained mixture slowly into the pan, over the caramel. (You can skip the straining if you wish. It is intended to remove bubbles and large egg fibers, for a silky-textured custard.)

7. Place the filled pan into the water bath in the oven. Bake for 45 minutes, until the custard is just firm and the center jiggles only slightly when you tap it with a finger.

8. Carefully remove the custard from the water bath. Let the custard cool to room temperature, then cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or overnight.

9. When ready to serve, loosen the custard by running a thin knife around the inside edge of the pan. Invert a serving dish that will accommodate the liquid caramel over the pan. Then quickly invert both together, so the custard unmolds onto the serving dish. Some caramel may remain stuck to the baking pan, but this is expected.

10. Sprinkle a few drops of rose liqueur onto the surface of the custard, if desired, for a brighter rose flavor. Cut the *rožata* into wedges and serve it chilled. Any unused portion can be covered and refrigerated for up to 2 days.

The original *rožata* would have been decorated with whipped cream and candied almonds.

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