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## How To Recognize Vino Nobile Di Montepulciano DOCG



*Some Montepulciano wines from Alliance members in New York City*

Under the right circumstances it's easy, say six producers of the historic Tuscan wine-making zone who have [joined forces](#) to get their classic area better known today. The first obstacle to worldwide recognition was Vino Nobile di Montepulciano's name.

If you're a Tuscan wine with more famous siblings ([Chianti Classico](#) and [Brunello di Montalcino](#)) and the name of the town you're from is also (not coincidentally, we'll see below) the name of a [grape](#) from another Italian region, you might get lost in the shuffle. And so, turning to a term that's both easier to remember and pronounce in markets like the U.S. and of endearment, purpose and history overall, Alliance members are referring to their top wines simply as Nobile.

First the [Alliance](#) — formed by the owners of six Montepulciano houses ([La Braccessa](#), [Poliziano](#), [Cantine Dei](#), [Poderi Boscarelli](#), [Salcheto](#), and [Avignonesi](#)) — crafted a [manifesto](#) that calls for its members to “endeavour to make wines that are held to the highest standard,” and to “educate the public on how to identify Nobile's unique characteristics.” Then they backed up those sentiments with wine. From the 2015 harvest, each Alliance member produced a special cuvée to represent the best of Montepulciano. To that end, each of those six wines was made with only Prugnolo Gentile, the local variation of the Sangiovese grape. With a mobilizing cry

of “Diversity without disparity,” each winemaker’s style and terroir was called upon as well. Accordingly philosophies differed: some like Salcheto and Boscarelli relied on indigenous yeast, others like Avignonesi saw old vines planted in limestone- and clay-rich soils as most typical of Montepulciano’s top wines. As DOCG rules require that Vino Nobile age for at least two years after January 1 following harvest, the Alliance wines will be available in January 2018.

Of the three main ways to drink Tuscan Sangiovese, Nobile wines are, for now anyway, an astonishingly good value, priced far below Brunello and Chianti Classico. Vino Nobile is traditionally a blend, its components varying over the years since the DOCG was established in 1980, to say nothing of changes across the centuries that Montepulciano wine’s been being made, but Sangiovese has remained a constant. Current DOCG rules call for the wine to be made with at least 70% of it (up to 30% of Vino Nobile can be made up of red and white grapes that are authorized by the [consorzio](#), the local wine-governing body), but there is no maximum limit. Other native varieties like Colorino, Canaiolo e Mammolo can be included, as can international varieties Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, But to show off Nobile’s classic features, the Alliance decided to make 100%-Sangiovese wines — what Nobile Sangiovese tastes like, its members insist, is as unique to its terroir and culture as those other two renditions of the grape.

In 2017, Montepulciano is a mix of generations-owned estates (including Alliance members Poderi Boscarelli and Cantina Dei) and those tended by passionate newcomers (Belgian-born Virginie Saverys bought Avignonesi in 2009 and converted the land to organic and biodynamic practices). Alliance producers hold vineyards sized from 50 to 400 acres, across two main soil types (captured in [full detail](#) by vineyard-mapmaker Alessandro Masnaghetti): sandy for lighter-bodied, aromatic wines with berry and floral flavors, and clay for more fullness, structure and concentrated, earthy plum and tobacco aromas. There is a push toward sustainable, organic and even biodynamic farming. All six Alliance wines are made of single-vineyard grapes.

Earlier this month, The Alliance visited New York City to share their vision. The group considers itself more a call for change than a club, and so at this time there is no official joining process but there is criteria for inclusion: “The first is quality, undoubtedly. The second is that the management and the shareholders are very close. We think it’s difficult to join the Alliance if you are a winery owned by a large corporation somewhere. There must be a link between the family, or the shareholders, and the management. And then the third aspect is that whoever wants to join the Alliance must produce at least one cuvée, it doesn’t need to be a big one, which is Sangiovese.” And then they poured some wine.

To help with waiting for those bottles to arrive next year, below is some of what these producers had to say about Nobile.

### **Michele Manelli of [Salcheto](#) on why Montepulciano is also the name of a grape in Abruzzo**

It goes back to the 1600s when the Medici bought some land [in what is now Abruzzo] and started to explore the first quality winemaking there. At the time, Montepulciano was this great school of wine, so they were talking about the wine made in the style of Montepulciano. They dedicated their

grapes to the idea of quality-making in Montepulciano. Our first move was to try to underline something else from our name and personality, so we are calling out Nobile as the term that represents us most strongly.

### **Federico Carletti of [Poderi Poliziano](#) on Vino Nobile's land- and grape-based identity**

The terroir makes our wine elegant and very recognizable. I disagree that we lack identity. Of course, our disciplinary code started at 50% Sangiovese, maximum. Now we have maximum 100% of Sangiovese. It is very interesting that six wines at this moment are ready to go on the market with 100% Sangiovese. It means that during the past few years we have worked a lot on clones, on all the parts of our viticulture, and now we are able to make very good 100% Sangiovese.

Really it was a simplification in our disciplinary when, in 2011, we changed to 30% of red and also white grapes, and 10% more of Canaiolo, but the total Sangiovese was the same. As for the cultivation of international grapes in Montepulciano, there is also very, very good wine made with them, and there is also good wine with international grapes in [area] IGT wines. You have another expression of our territory [with international varieties].

### **Albiera Antinori of [La Braccessa](#) on working with other Alliance members**

That was the fun part in the sense that we found ourselves all together trying to understand and fine-tune what we really wanted from our wines and what was the idea behind the whole project. So we tried to understand, from our own vineyards and each producer, what was interesting and how each wine could fit with a general idea of how we could show the market, the consumers and even ourselves what a great Vino Nobile di Montepulciano can be. The winemakers tasting together was an experience because everyone was trying to understand what the other one was doing. Like many appellations, there is who is more traditional in his winemaking and who is modern, so we have six wines from the Alliance that will represent both where our vineyards are located and what each interpretation of 100% Sangiovese is. Whether a pure expression of Nobile should be 100% Sangiovese or also other varieties, this I can't answer, but I think for the moment we did need to work with and express well with Sangiovese.

### **Michele Manelli of [Salcheto](#) on the role of Prugnolo Gentile**

The only truth, let's say, is that since the 1966 disciplinary regulations of Vino Nobile, Prugnolo Gentile has been a nickname. It's [written clearly](#): It's made of Sangiovese, called Prugnolo Gentile in Montepulciano. And I think that this is something actually very nice to mention because Prugnolo Gentile is a description of the best grapes of our town, it's its terroir over time. It's just like Brunello [the variety of Sangiovese in Montalcino, Tuscany] or Morellino [Sangiovese in Scansano, Tuscany]; it is definitely the only truth that we have so far. But we don't have to hide, we have worked to isolate and look for variations that could be an innovation of this variety . . . what is real is that we want to call our Sangiovese this special name, just like winemakers in Montalcino want to, because as soon as it gets into such a unique terroir, what makes it special, our temperature, our

altitude, our influences that we have from the Apennines and not from the sea, this is in some way described by Prugnolo Gentile, nickname of Sangiovese.

**Virginie Saverys of [Avignonesi](#) on Montepulciano's movement toward organic and biodynamic viticulture and away from international grape varieties**

I think the organic and biodynamic in viticulture is becoming unavoidable in Europe, and in fact more and more wineries in Montepulciano and all over Tuscany have been converting to organic viticulture, For my part it was such an obvious choice: I could not imagine having my people work the vineyards while we were using chemical products. I've also done that because in my opinion it has a very favorable effect on the wine itself. I feel that difference when I taste all the vintages from Avignonesi before we were organic or even at the beginning of our organic and biodynamic conversion: we now have wines that have much fruitier characters, they have a greater drinkability, they never give you a headache, and the tannins are much softer than when we were working in a traditional way. So for me it's a win-win situation, for the environment, for the people who work at Avignonesi and for the consumer because in the end they have a wine that is much more pleasant to drink. And I'm glad that some of the people here are also converting to organics.

We also made this decision to go 100% Sangiovese, without knowing the entire background that Federico highlighted. When I traveled the market with my wines, when there were other varieties in it, I read what the press was writing all over the world and I saw that there was more call for wines made with autochthonous grapes, so our decision was an easy one. Of course we make our Desiderio with just Merlot with Cabernet Sauvignon, but still as far as I'm concerned, for Avignonesi I want to work more with local varieties than with French varieties.

**Luca de Ferrari of [Poderi Boscarelli](#) on Montepulciano's terroir: red clay and sand soils plus continental climate**

The soil is the most important part of the grapes, international or not. There are many different soils, but in general soil of alluvial origin is what you find in all parts of Montepulciano. The climate is continental, but it has the influence of the lake Trasimeno, which has the same influence the sea has for the coast, even if it's lighter. The sun is a little less strong, because it's more foggy, and this allows the grapes to ripen more slowly and more consistently.

We actually have a history of producing a single vineyard, the Nocio, which is our best vineyard on top of a hill that has three different soils. We started [back then] just to study [the terroirs]: not to create a wine to sell but just to learn for ourselves the difference that comes from different parts of this soil. [In the Nocio vineyard,] we have clay, and that gives the color as well as softness and power to the tannins, and the sandy soil, which gives more flavor and elegance to the wine. And we also have the red soil which has a more powerful effect, and gives acidity and deepness to the wine. [To study these effects], we started to ferment the grapes from each soil type separately and then to blend the wines from the three different soils. It was the same idea that we used for the Sangiovese of the Alliance, to express the soil that we have in Montepulciano.

**Caterina Dei of [Cantina Dei](#) on the details of quality wine-making in Montepulciano**

Our focus is on Sangiovese because it is such a great expression of the different terroirs and we have four different vineyards on our property. We operate in a totally sustainable way and in the past few years we've been focusing on the specific needs of each specific piece of land. The cost of land in Montepulciano is definitely not high, but the cost of production is.

It can be frustrating for me that [the wine is] an incredible buy. Sustainability means a lot of work in the vineyards. It takes a lot of hands to avoid pesticides and herbicides. We do green cover crops, so we plant different seeds according to the specific needs of each specific vineyard, which is an extra cost, and our yield per hectare is much lower than the DOCG regulations. But the cost of Vino Nobile on store shelves is not high, and I think this is the biggest issue for all of us. And I think that's why we're standing together today — because we have such a great passion, and we really believe in the importance and the richness and the extraordinary potential of our territory.

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