



Location: Capriva del Friuli,
Province of Gorizia, Region of Friuli



mention that Villa Russiz general manager and enologist, Gianni Menotti (above), was Italy's Winemaker of the Year 2006!

Secondly, the property itself is lovely: 235 acres in the heart of Collio, 99 of which under vine. Third bonus in a near-endless list: the intriguing variety of Villa Russiz history. The estate was founded in 1869 by a French-born count, Théodore de la Tour. That's the sepia-colored gentleman above, right. Notice his posture, the calm authority in the way he holds his arms: an exact 19th-century counterpart of Gianni Menotti's confident stance in the other photo. The two men are not related, but their wines are. Wanting and getting the best makes you pretty self-assured.

Count de la Tour was so determined to create an outstanding range, he brought to the region the finest clones he could find in his native country, and selected the most suitable for Collio's extraordinary terroir. His vineyards were the first under authentic French rootstock, on some of the best hillside marls in the entire appellation.

Collio is a borderland region, therefore particularly prone to diversity both in the vineyard and in general: an ethnic, linguistic and varietal melting pot exemplified by de la Tour's estate. In 1869, Collio was Austrian... and so was the count's Vienna-born wife. Her native language was obviously German, which explains labels like *Graf de la Tour* ("Graf" means "Count" in German) and *Gräfin* ("Countess") *de la Tour*.

We do have a weakness for this particular winery, for many reasons. First and foremost, the wines are amazingly good – so much so that Gambero Rosso awarded them its top score of Three Glasses 21 times in the famous review's 23 yearly issues; not to



Times and frontiers changed. In 1894, de la Tour died and his Viennese widow did her utmost to continue his winemaking ideals until World War I broke out: Austria was fighting Italy then, and at the end of the war, relinquished Collio to the victorious "enemy". *Gräfin* Elvine Ritter likewise relinquished the estate, which went into Italian hands until it was generously donated to the state by its last private owner, Adele Cerruti – with the proviso that it would be employed as an orphanage. Fortunately for the wine world, the existing vineyards were maintained and augmented, part of the profits going to benefit the children. Many vintages and generations later, this happy arrangement still applies.

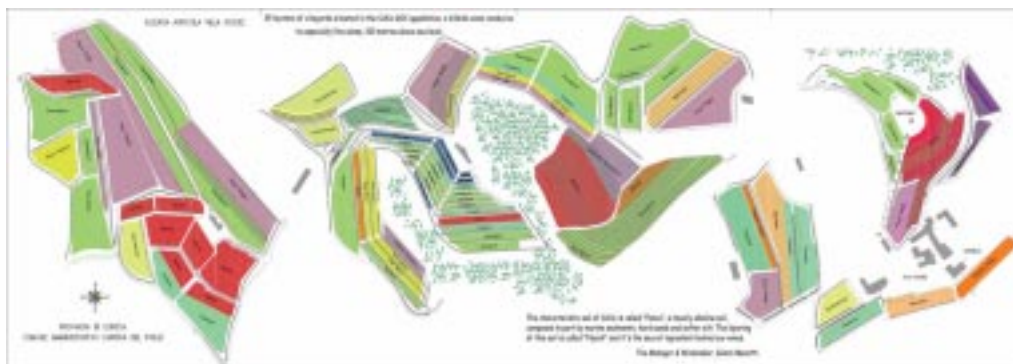
Gianni Menotti was born at harvest time, in mid-September 1955: it was obviously fate. We can only imagine the turmoil a harvest-time baby must have caused in a family that revolved around wine, even then: Edino Menotti, the proud papa, was the winemaker and GM of.. Villa

Russiz. Needless to say, Gianni followed his footsteps, graduating in enology at Padua University and taking over from his father in 1988.

Under his tutelage, the Villa Russiz quality tradition was maximized and critical and consumer attention have snowballed into whole-hearted accolades.

Gianni explains his success as "*translating* this unique terroir into wine as perfectly as possible. Most of the work belongs to the vineyard. What I look for in the wines – and in life – is balance. A well balanced wine has no rough edges; it is pleasing both to connoisseurs and to non-experts, who recognize harmony straightaway".





PINOT GRIGIO COLLIO DOC: Pure varietal from marlaceous hillside terrain, the wine sojourns on the lees for a minimum of 8 months and is bottled some 11 months after harvest. Straw yellow, exhibits great finesse and elegance and at the same time, structure and roundness. Rich, complex, intense nuances of apples and pears and a long, lingering finish. In time, it develops an ample bouquet of dry hay and toasted almonds. Yearly production: c. 58,000 bottles.

PINOT BIANCO COLLIO DOC: 100% PB from prevalently southerly-exposed hillside vineyards and marly soil, it is maintained sur lie for at least 8 months. Straw yellow in color; a delicate bouquet of floral/fruity nuances evolving towards bread crust, apples and almonds. On the palate, remarkable complexity and balance, superb depth, firm texture. 18,000 bottles per annum.

SAUVIGNON COLLIO DOC: Also pure varietal, like all Villa Russiz wines, from southern and southeast exposures. Straw yellow with greenish hues, a very delicate, aromatic nose reminiscent of yellow peppers, melon, sage leaf, peach and muskmelon. Elegant and silky-textured, with a good body. 60,000 bottles yearly.

FRIULANO COLLIO DOC: From prevalently south-exposed hillside vineyards and marly soil, it rests on the lees for a minimum of 8 months. Straw yellow, greenish reflections; very elegant, ample nose; full and round on the palate, with slightly less acidity than the other wines; soft, fresh, dry, powerful. Typical hint of almonds in bouquet and flavor, characteristic of the variety. 30,000 btl. p. a.

MALVASIA COLLIO DOC: Also from prevalently S-exposed hillside vineyards & marlaceous soil, this native varietal (a very limited release) is bottled 10-11 months from harvest, after at least 8 months on the lees. Straw yellow with verdant hues, ample, aromatic bouquet; dry yet mellow and rotund, with wonderful balance, character, and flavors reminiscent of apricots and peaches. 2,500 bottles yearly.

RIBOLLA GIALLA COLLIO DOC (not available for all markets): This intriguing native grape, also grown on marly soil and southerly-exposed vineyards, makes for a delightful white. On the lees min. 8 months. Very appealing bouquet recalls brushwood, acacia, oak and exotic fruit. 27,000 btl./yr.

SAUVIGNON COLLIO DE LA TOUR DOC: From a special selection of grapes and older vines on particularly favorable, marly soil, high on the hill facing the winery and southeasterly exposed. Matures sur lie min. 10 months. Bouquet of fennel, figs, green gooseberry, sage leaves, yellow pepper and peach, with intriguingly smoky notes that mesh into a palate of layered, melony, licorice-nuanced flavors sustained by great body and flair. 16,000 bottles per annum.

CHARDONNAY COLLIO GRÄFIN DE LA TOUR DOC: From a single vineyard with 20-year-old vines and southern exposure. Barrique-aged for about one year and bottle-aged a further 12 months, this is a structured, extract-fraught Chardonnay with a cellar life of 8 to 9 years. Light golden yellow with greenish reflections, its bouquet jumps out of the glass with well integrated aromas of ripe apple, vanilla and citrus fruit; complexity and balance linger on the palate. The 2000 vintage was designated as best Italian white in 2003. 7,000 btl./yr.

MERLOT COLLIO DOC: From southerly-exposed vineyards on marly and marlaceous-clayey soil, it matures 12-15 months in oak barriques. Structured, mellow, complex, well balanced. 12,000 bottles per annum.

MERLOT COLLIO GRAF DE LA TOUR DOC: This blockbuster red from 30-year-old, southerly exposed vines is barrique-aged for 2 years and bottle-aged for c. 10 months. Released in top vintages and tiny quantities, it is dark ruby in color, with a bouquet of red fruit and jammy, chocolatey cherry introducing the ripe, round, supple, mellow, multi-dimensional palate. 6,500 btl./yr.

