

The Mysterious and Exciting Wine Regions of the Balkans

Wine tasting of Croatian, Serbian and North Macedonian wines

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Exclusively prepared for:

THE
WINETASTERS

CONTENTS



Matija Petrinjak

Hello! I'm Matija from Poreč, Croatia – home to many wonderful wines, some of which we hope to share with you. I work in financial regulation in London full time, and enjoy sharing my passion for wine in free time!



Pavle Avramovic

Hi! I'm Pavle from Belgrade, Serbia. I work in financial innovation in London and a big wine enthusiast. I'm working towards my L2 WSET qualification and looking forward to showing you the great wines of the Balkan region 😊.

- i** **Introduction**
Overview of wines and geographical area.
- ii** **Croatia**
History and geography of wine in Croatia.
- iii** **Serbia**
History and geography of wine in Serbia.
- iv** **North Macedonia**
History and geography of wine in North Macedonia.
- 01** **Malvazija Laguna**
Floral and fruity white wine from Istra, Croatia.
- 02** **Pošip**
Harmonious and fresh white wine from Korčula, Croatia.
- 03** **Mlavac Crveni**
Light and mineral red blend from Mlava, Serbia.
- 04** **Maurer Cuvée**
Ruby, rich and spiced red from Fruška Gora, Serbia.
- 05** **DiBonis CabSav**
Rich and strong red from Subotica, Serbia.
- 06** **Clemente**
Full-bodied red wine blend from Istra, Croatia.
- 07** **Dingač**
Truly special, rounded and harmonious wine from Croatia.
- 08** **Barovo**
Decanter award winning, temperamental rich red from North Macedonia.

Introduction

We will venture into the lands of Southeastern Europe, to explore the exciting countries of Croatia, Serbia and North Macedonia to find out more about the curious wines coming from these regions. Presented by Matija Petrinjak and Pavle Avramovic.



Croatia and Serbia are countries with rich wine histories, with wine being produced from 2,000 years B.C, to the expansion during Roman ages.

More recently, while both countries were a part of Yugoslavia, the country's industrialisation efforts resulted in Yugoslavia being the 8th largest wine producer in the world in the 1970s (although there is an argument that it was more about quantity than quality).

Post the break-up of Yugoslavia and the end of socialism, an intriguing narrative developed, with a large number of private wineries opening and both countries starting to develop high-quality wine. As the saying goes, Balkan is the crossroads of the East and West; here we have the same effect of both Old-World and New-World approaches being used to create some fantastic wines.

Join us in this unique exploration and find out why everyone believes that the Balkan region could be a wine hidden gem!



Croatia

History and geography of wine in Croatia

True beginning of grape cultivation and wine production in Croatia is related to the Ancient Greeks settlers, who arrived on the Croatian coast in the 5th century BC. Coins from this period have motifs related to grape cultivation and wine production, demonstrating the importance of wine in the economy at the time.

Under Roman empire, wine production grew, becoming more organised. To this day the Adriatic sea contains artefacts such as amphoras from sunken roman galleys. Free towns adopted legal standards since 13th century and statutes of some towns in Dalmatia (like Korcula) contain strict rules on protection of the vineyards.

Croatia had ongoing clash with the Ottoman Empire since late 15th century (including a 100-year war). This is important for history of wine in the region because under the Ottoman rule strict anti-alcohol laws were imposed. Fortunately, the Ottoman rule was tolerant of Christianity and thanks to the Catholic church many traditions of wine production were saved as priests and monks continued to produce wine for church services.

Ottomans were driven out by 18th century and Croatia came under control of the Habsburg Empire. Last important change in this period is related to phylloxera, as this hazardous wine pest started appearing in Europe in the late 19th century.

Interestingly, Croatia hasn't suffered from it and its exports even increased greatly to fill the demand (so much that French companies planted vines in Croatia seeing it as safe heaven). However, by the turn of 20th century Croatian vines also succumbed to phylloxera leading to destruction of the vineyards and many local economies.

Under the socialist system of Yugoslavia the production was centered in large cooperatives and private ownership of vineyards was discouraged. Quantity over quality was a focus. Since Croatian independence, wines have moved to small independent producers. New energy and ambition came to the Dalmatian coast when Mike Grgich returned in 1996 from his dazzling career as a founder of Grgich Hills in Napa Valley.

Grgich helped introduce Americans to the Croatian wine and played part in what became known as Zinquest – the search for Zinfandel's Croatian roots. In 1994 Dr. Carol Meredith (grape geneticist) discovered that Zinfandel is a parent to a grape (Tribidrag, red grape from Kaštela) that happens to be a parent of Plavac Mali. Los Angeles Times [article](#) and this [short documentary](#) cover the story in more detail.

Croatia has more than 300 geographically defined wine producing areas with a strict classification system to ensure quality and origin. The majority of Croatian wine is white (more than 60 percent), with most of the remaining being red, and only a small percentage is rosé wines.



Serbia

History and geography of wine in Serbia

The history of wine-making in Serbia dates back to prehistory. Viticulture was rich during the Roman period (18 Roman emperors born in territory of Serbia). Wine has been part of Serbian culture since the establishment of statehood.

Former Yugoslavia was among the top-ten world wine producing countries. At its peak in the 1970s, it produced over 6 million hectolitres annually. However, largely due to the constraints of the socialist state, emphasis was put on quantity rather than quality. The 1980s saw a sharp decline in production and exports, a development that continued in the 1990s with the Breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent breakdown of the Serbian economy.

But in the 2000s, Serbian winemaking started not only to recover, but to take a sharp and decisive turn towards quality and distinction. Numerous small and medium privately owned wineries entered the market, often run as family businesses, and with very high regard for standards of quality and taste.

Serbia is a sovereign state situated at the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe, covering the far southern edges of the Pannonian Plain and the central Balkans. It has a mix of continental climate in the north and Mediterranean climate in the south.

It lies between the northern latitudes of 41 and 47 degrees, placing it comfortably within the 'Wine Belt' – the latitudes within which quality viticulture is deemed practicable. In Western Europe this location corresponds to the area bounded by France's Loire valley in the north and Spain's Duero (home to Rueda and Ribera del Duero) in the south.

In terms of topography, the land is quite varied, rising from 600m to 2150m across the country. The greatest contrast is between Vojvodina province in the north, which lies entirely within the Central European Pannonian Plain, and the southernmost Carpathian Mountains in the east.

There are around 18,000 hectares with the majority of Serbian wines are produced in local wineries. The most planted wine grape here is [Smederevka](#), a local variety known for producing large quantities of white wine. [Riesling](#) (Rhine Riesling) and [Sauvignon Blanc](#) are among the more interesting white wines produced in Serbia, while the reds are based on the native [Prokupac](#), grown alongside increasing quantities of French 'international' varieties such as [Pinot Noir](#), [Gamay](#), [Cabernet Sauvignon](#) and [Merlot](#).

The most important Serbian vineyard areas are situated in the Timok Valley (East Serbia) from Belgrade), Nišava/South Morava region, on the slopes of Fruška Gora and in the Subotica area (North Serbia) and Šumadija (Central Serbia). The structure of the sector is heterogeneous, but the highest share in terms of production is held by small family agricultural households, with 350 wineries in operation. Wine is exported to mainly Russia, neighbouring countries (Bosnia & Herzegovina / Montenegro / Croatia) and the EU.



North Macedonia

History and geography of wine in North Macedonia

Similar to Serbia, a great history of wine making, throughout the Roman ages and through the Middle Ages. Fun fact, Mother Teresa was born in North Macedonia! In the 1980s, it accounted for around two-thirds of the Yugoslav wine production, a crucial contributor. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the wine production of the new country decreased dramatically, from 1.8 million hectolitres in the mid-1990s to 447,000 hl in 2002. Now, the industry is focussing on high-quality wine, with major wineries bringing in international expertise and smaller wineries producing interesting wines.

North Macedonia is a landlocked country and an important transport link that is geographically clearly defined by a central valley formed by the Vardar river and framed along its borders by mountain ranges. The terrain is mostly rugged, located between the Šar Mountains and Osogovo, which frame the valley of the Vardar river. It has three large lakes (including Ohrid, one of the oldest lakes in the world) and the area is interestingly seismically active with one active volcano Duvalo. Also falls within the 'Wine Belt' Latitudes of 41 and 47 degrees. The topography is hillier and higher than Serbia with several large mountain ranges. Continental climate with cold winters and hot summers with lots of sunshine.

There are around 33,000 hectares of vineyards in North Macedonia, with 15% of table wines and 80% of wines being red. North Macedonia has three wine-growing regions: Povardarie, in the valley of river Vardar, mostly around the towns of Negotino and Kavadarci. It is the most important region both in terms of quantity and wine quality.

Pčinja-Osogovo, to the east on the border with Bulgaria. Pelagonija-Polog, around Lake Ohrid, to the west on the border with Albania. The grape varieties common in cultivation includes a large proportion of indigenous varieties and varieties common to Central Europe and the Balkans, as well as some international varieties. Red varieties include Vranec (the most common variety of North Macedonia), Kratosija, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. White varieties include Smederevka, Welschriesling (usually referred to as Laški Rizling), Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc and Žilavka. The structure of the sector is heterogeneous, with several wineries owing a high share of production with 76 wineries in operation in total. Wine is exported mainly to neighbouring countries, the EU, China, and Russia.



01

Vina Laguna Winery Malvazija 2019



Vina Laguna hails from the Istrian Peninsular, opposite Venice at the northern end of the Adriatic sea. Grapes are drawn from a variety of soil types, dependant on grape variety and benefit both from the warm influences of a Mediterranean climate and the cooling breezes of the southern Alps.

Superb vineyard in Vižinada in an exceptional position on a hill at an altitude of 140-180m, north-northeast branch; white flysch typical of Istria, deep, fresh and rich in minerals with naturally limited yield potential. The location is perfect for Malvazija / Malvasia because it extracts the best characteristics from this variety: rich aroma, freshness, minerality and elegance.

Brilliant, yellow colour with green nuances, Malvazija Istarska has characteristic floral and fruity aromas with notes of stone fruit, apple and tropical fruit; fresh, balanced, elegant and flavourful with a medium-long and pleasant finish.

Best served chilled at 10-12 °C with light starters, pasta, risotto, truffles, white meat, fish or seafood. Can be purchased from [Lea and Sandeman](#) wine merchants.



02

Merga Victa Winery

Pošip 2018

Pošip is a delicate variety. The harvest for Merga Victa took place at the end of August and each day was completed before 8 o'clock in the morning. The handpicked grapes are cooled and undergo selection in the cellar. They are crushed with minimum pressure. Fermentation takes place during 3-4 weeks under strict temperature control at 15°C, which is followed by 2 months of stirring on the fine lees. The year 2018 was characterised by a hot summer with periodic rain.

Yearly, Merga Victa Winery produces 40.000 bottles of this delicious Pošip. Merga Victa Pošip is a white wine with floral aromas as well as citrus fruits, stone fruits and Mediterranean herbs. Harmonious and fresh on the palate. Best served chilled at 10-12 °C with light starters, pasta, risotto, truffles, white meat, fish or seafood. Available at the [Croatian Fine Wines website](#).

Pošip is the true Dalmatian white grape variety, originally discovered by a local farmer 150 years ago in the village Smokvica where the Merga Victa winery is located. For Merga Victa they carefully select the grapes from 25 local family farmers that have been growing grapes for generations. There are a total of 200 vineyards in Smokvica, between 40 and 160 meters above the sea level. Vines are at least 15 years old and the selected grapes come from three different soil types (red, sand and rocky) to achieve the right balance.



03

Virtus Winery

Mlavac Red 2016

Virtus Winery was founded at the end of 2010 and is located on the territory of the Mlava region – Požarevac wine-growing hills. The vineyards cover a 27.5 hectares land complex in Viteževo. The founders of the winery are a group of good friends, enthusiasts, who have been brought together by a shared love of wine.

The wine has an intense ruby red colour. The scent of gorgeous fruit aromas, slightly mineral and spicy, rounded by the fine elements of oak.

Best served with red meat and stronger dishes and hard cheeses or blue cheeses. Alc. 13.5 %vol. Can be purchased in [the Humble Grape](#) shop in Islington near Angel station.

The wine is a blend of Prokupac (60%), Cabernet Sauvignon (20%), Pinot Noir (10%) and Marselan (10%). Interestingly, Prokupac is an indigenous grape to former Yugoslavia. A grape growing in popularity, easy to grow and producing exciting results when blended. Aromas of strawberries and rose petals Fermented in large oak barrels and aged partially in stainless steel with the major part aged in Serbian oak barriques.

A poetic description of the wine is *“Prokupac is in charge of lightness and minerality, Marselan of fruitiness and fullness, Cabernet gave it the structure and vitality, and from Pinot Noir it inherited all the sophistication innate in this variety”*.



04

Maurer Winery Cuvée 2017

Owner Oszkàr Maurer cultivates 15 ha of land, working with horses in Fruška Gora and Subotica in Serbia. As a 4th generation winemaker, Oszkàr works with very old vines including an ungrafted 138 years old Kadarka, the oldest of this kind on the planet. Oszkàr doesn't use any chemicals on the vineyard or in his cellar, he only adds a touch of sulphur before bottling.

The essence of the wine region is the Fruska Gora Mountain. This 500-million-year-old formation is made up of volcanic bedrock and covered with marine sediment, resulting in wines with piercing acidity and astonishing minerality. This exciting organic wine is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (40%), Kadarka (30%) & Frankovka (Blau Frankisch) (30%). Kadarka (or Gamza) is a dark-skinned variety of grape used for red wine. It has a long history and is popular in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia. Frankovka is a dark-skinned variety of grape, known as the "Pinot Noir of the East" due to its interesting character.

The grapes are grown on old bush-vines. They are hand harvested and de-stemmed. Later, the juice ferments and ages in 350l old Hungarian oak barrels for 12 months.

Ruby colour, rich and spiced, with medium tannins and a silky-smooth feel. Best served with lamb, chicken and goat cheese. Alc. 13.5 %vol. Available on the [Majestic Wine](#) website



05

DiBonis Winery

Cabernet Sauvignon 2013

Founded in 2009, the winery and its vineyards are located in Subotica and Lake Palic. They plant mainly international varieties and use new oak to impart rich, creamy flavours in their wines. Even though this known vineyard area is best known for its different white wine selection, the owner Laslo Boni has decided to plant world known red vines such as Shiraz, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Pino Noir, using Subotica being one of the sunniest areas in Serbia and has had great success.

Best served with beef, pasta , roasted duck and Gouda or Comte. Alc. 13.5%vol. Available on the [Novel Wines website](#).

The wine is a Cabernet Sauvignon (100%) and is seen as a wine that will age well. As a fun fact, Cabernet Sauvignon is the most widely planted wine grape in the world. This wine has a deep, inky red colour with a rich taste and strong extracts. California-esque in style with a vivid taste of forest fruits, spice, desecrated coconut and vanilla. Oak is evident but well-balanced and adds layer after layer.



06

Damjanić Winery Clemente 2013



The family owned Damjanić winery is located in Fuškulin in western Istria, just inland from Poreč. Today it is headed by Istrian winemaker Ivan Damjanic. The 7 acres of vineyards are located between 30m - 70m above sea level, on primarily south westerly facing slopes looking towards the Adriatic Sea. The vines are grown on a mix of deep terra rossa soil and sporadic skeletal soils, which gives the wines it's special flavour.

Masterfully-made full bodied red wine blend with a rich bouquet of black cherries, tobacco and cocoa. Blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Teran and Borgonja from Istria, Croatia. The grapes are partially dried in the winery, just like in Amarone. The result is a red wine with packs of concentration. Will age gracefully or happily drink now and enjoy the finish of spice, vanilla and blackberries. For the best results, decant an hour before.

You'll like this if you like Pauillac-style Bordeaux red wines. Pairs beautifully with Sunday Roast, especially beef, also a great partner with BBQ lamb, burger and chips, rich stews or steak. Cheese pairing: Camembert or soft-ripened Saint Albary cheese. Available at the [Croatian Fine Wines](#) website.



07

Matuško Winery

Dingač

2016

The Matusko winery is one of the largest family owned wineries in Peljecac. Located in the small village of Potomje, in the central part of the Peninsula, (North of Dubrovnik and South of Split). 300m above sea level, it's surrounded by coastal views, Mediterranean climate, ancient history dating back to the 14th Century, and famed for its red wine and indigenous grape variety, the Plavac Mali. The Matusko Winery has an average production of 625,000 bottles.

Matuško Winery is a pioneer of the premium Dingac red wines made from Plavac Mali (a variety known locally as the "blood of the soil"). The winery produces a large selection of red and white wines ranging from the highest quality reds, Dingac and Postup, to the local white grape (Posip), rosés and sparkling wines. Their grapes are produced from different locations on the Islands and from inland.

The Dingač is truly special. Dark ruby red in colour; this varietal red is rich, rounded and harmonious with brooding black fruits, dark chocolate and a silky texture.

The famous Dingac and Postup vineyard sites slope upwards of 45 degrees toward the sea and often without the aid of terraces. In these high-end vineyards the soils are predominately limestone with layers of detritus and gravel and yields here are often less than 1 kilo per plant. Top-end Dingac and Postup red wines are then matured in new American oak, giving the wines a rich, intense vanilla note. Available at the [Croatian Fine Wines](#) website.



08

Tikveš Winery

Barovo

2016

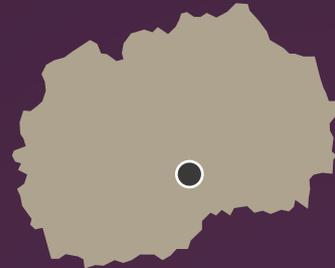


The story of Tikveš winery begins in the year of 1885. It has been crafting and aging premium Macedonian wines for almost 130 years. Since its establishment Tikveš has grown into the largest winery in South-East Europe and it has been selected as one of the top 30 most innovative wine brands in the world. It is a recipient of prestigious awards at regional and leading international wine competitions.

Barovo is a recipient of many awards and is the flagship wine of the region. It won the Decanter award in 2018 and 95 points from Robert Parker. The wine is a blend of Vranec (35%) and Kratošija (65%). Vranec is a variety of grapes and a red wine from Montenegro, Croatia, Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. One of the most important grape varieties in the region, its name means '*Dark Stallion*' hinting at its temperamental nature. That is where Kratošija, with its balanced and red berry flavours 'jumps in' and brings a perfect balance of flavour. Wine from a single vineyard 700 meters up in the mountain hills, presents perfect match of the powerful full bodied Vranec and soft tannin Kratošija.

Barovo is a full-bodied wine, with complex and elegant aromas of blackberries, plums and cherries combined with subtle hints of vanilla and toasty notes. Beautifully textured with a mouth-filling palate of ripe berried fruits against a mineral backdrop and a long-lasting finish

Best served with roast beef, lamb, prime ribs and Wyfe of Bath or Comte. Alc. 15.0 %vol. Available at [Tikveš London](#) website.





Thank you!

Contact details:

Matija Petrinjak
Petrinjak.Matija@gmail.com

Pavle Avramovic
pavleavramovic9@gmail.com