



# primavera

— S E L E C T I O N S —

## SANDROfAY

**LOCALITY:** Valgella,  
Valtellina

**WINEMAKER:** Marco Fay

[vinifay.it](http://vinifay.it)

### SANDRO FAY

Very much a small, family-run affair, Sandro Fay began producing wines commercially in 1973. In more recent times, son Marco has assumed responsibility for the winemaking side of the business, while daughter Elena manages sales and marketing. All the fruit comes from the family's own vineyards. The winery is situated in the Valgella district, the most easterly of the Superiore zones. Here, removed from the subtle moderating effect of Lake Como at the western edge of the region, it's challenging, borderline viticulture. The vineyards sit on rock with a little sand. Although blessed with perfect drainage, the vines can "do it tough", to quote Marco Fay.



LOMBARDY



Michele, Sandro, Marco and Elena (L to R)

It's worth noting at this point some significant differences between this region and the Langhe with which it is inevitably compared. The clay and limestone of the Langhe is barely found here. Instead, primary rock, gravel and sand predominate. The vineyards sit at significantly higher altitudes (400–850 metres) and the climate is distinctly more alpine with less humidity. The resulting wines tend to be finer and more minerally, the fruit perhaps lighter but aromatic, fresh and vibrant. Valtellina expresses Nebbiolo in its own unique and beguiling way

## THE REGION

Valtellina is a long, narrow alpine valley in the province of Sondrio at the far north of the Lombardy region along the Swiss-Italian border. The valley, which is about 60 miles north-east of Milan, runs along a 132 mile east-west axis (following the course of the Adda River) from the village of Berbenno to the village of Tirano.



The Valtellina Superiore DOCG is divided into five different sub-districts. From west to east these sub-districts are Maroggia, Sassella, Grumello, Inferno and Valgella.

The wine producing region, however, is only about 30 miles in length, 15 miles on either side, roughly, of the town of Sondrio along the right bank of the river. Tiny vineyard plots, averaging only 0.65 acre in size, are spread out along the south-facing slopes of the mountains at altitudes of 420–850 metres above sea level. The total area under cultivation is around 2,100 acres.

This is the largest terraced wine region in Italy, a stunning vineyard landscape as spectacular as any in Europe. If they were connected end to end, the stone retaining walls of the terraces, called 'muretti' (little walls), would form a wall 1,500 miles long. It has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site – it's quite breathtaking. Only grapes planted on the south-facing terraces, preferably with a western aspect, have any chance of ripening here.



The soils in the valley are sandy and gravelly, well-drained, alluvial soils rich in silica. Large stones on the surface absorb heat during the day (akin to Châteauneuf-du-Pape), and release it at night. Much of the sand and gravel soils in the terraces were painstakingly hauled up the steep slopes in baskets from the valley bottom.

Warm, dry summers with long days of sunshine help to maximise sugar levels in the grapes. The Rhaetian Alps on the north side of the valley block the cold northern winds,

while the Orobie Alps on the south side of the valley block winds from that direction.

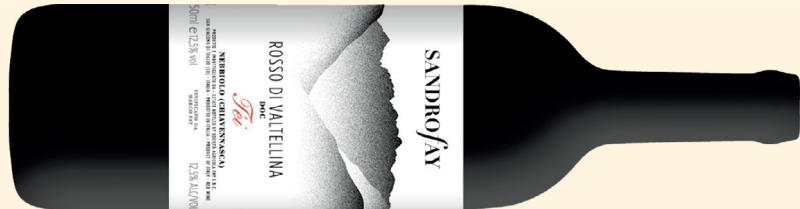
The Nebbiolo grown in the Valtellina, an ancient clone of the modern Nebbiolo grown in Piedmont, is called Chiavennasca. The name's origin is variously described as a connection to the town of Chiavenna, or an adaptation from the local dialect: 'ciu venasca', meaning 'more winey'. Over time, Chiavennasca came to replace the other indigenous grape varieties and today it represents 90% of the grapes cultivated in the region. Other local grape varieties include Brugnola (a distant cousin of Nebbiolo), Rossola and Pignola. 'International' varieties grown here include Merlot and Syrah.

The Rosso di Valtellina DOC is the foundation of the quality pyramid in the Valtellina. This wine can be produced throughout the valley of the Adda. The Valtellina Superiore is a designated DOCG.

Superiore wines are limited to a maximum yield of approximately 3.3 tons/acre. The wine must consist of at least 90% Chiavennasca produced from vineyards with a planting density of at least 1,600 plants per acre. The wine must be aged for a minimum of 24 months, of which at least 12 months must be in wooden casks of any size. The alcohol level must be at least 12%.

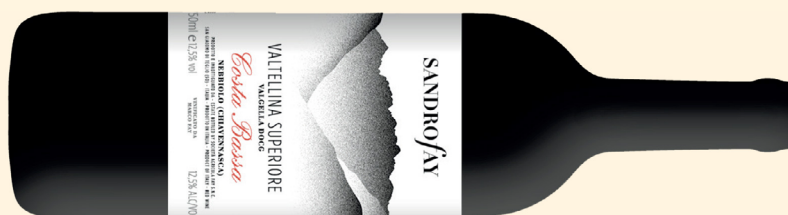
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## THE WINES



### 2016 'Tei' Rosso di Valtellina DOC

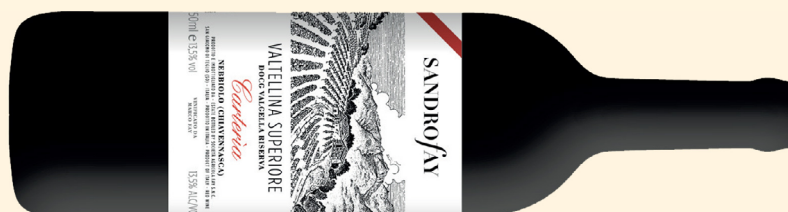
Tei is local dialect for Teglio, a nearby town. This is the entry-level wine, and a great introduction to Sandro Fay and Valtellina. Chiavennasca comprises 95% of the blend, with the balance Pignola, Rossola and Brugnola; some of the fruit is sourced from family vineyards nearer Sondrio. Around 2 weeks for fermentation/maceration and no oak seen at all. Light and bright; slightly sappy cherry fruit with a saline, minerally tang, notes of alpine herbs, and gently persistent tannins.



### 2015 'Costa Bassa' Valtellina Superiore DOCG

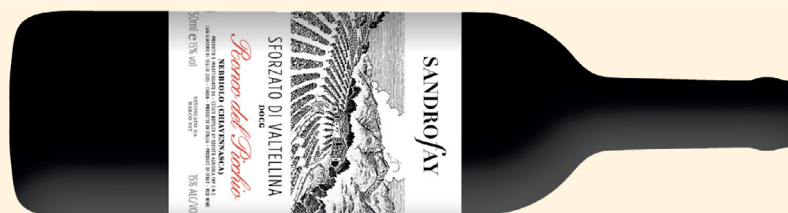
(375ml bottles available)

Costa Bassa means 'lower slopes'. In this case, between 400–500 metres, with the fruit (100% Chiavennasca) all sourced from the Valgella sub-zone. Similar ferment/maceration time to the 'Tei', then 12 months in large-format oak (45 hectolitre Slavonian). More juicy and fragrant than the Rosso, with hints of wild strawberry, liquorice and dark berries; great structure, precise acidity, savoury tannin and the distinct minerality that characterises these wines.



### 2013 'Carteria' Valtellina Superiore Riserva DOCG

Sitting at approximately 550 metres, Carteria is recognised as one of the best single sites in the Valgella sub-zone and one highly regarded in Valtellina generally. (Marco Fay considers 500–600 metres the 'sweet spot' for Chiavennasca at their end of the valley.) This is their top wine and certainly needs more time to really blossom. Shows more classic Chiavennasca/Neббиolo characteristics in the denser, chewy tannins, balsamic and liquorice root flavours and more 'earthy' feel. This is the one for the cellar.



### 2013 'Roncho del Picchio' Sforzato di Valtellina DOCG

Coming from their highest vineyards, this is a perfect example of how appassimento (rack-drying) performs this far north, and at this altitude. At 800 metres, you would struggle to produce a conventional table wine, as grapes simply won't ripen at this height, but with on average 10–11 weeks appassimento, Marco Fay manages to achieve a wonderful power and balance in this wine – a much more structured, leaner version than what you would find with an Amarone in the Veneto. Though it seems counter-intuitive given the ripening constraints to keep the acid high, Marco picks the fruit around 5 days earlier than for his Chiavennasca from lower altitudes.