



primavera

– S E L E C T I O N S –



SCHIOPETTO

CAPRIVA DEL FRIULI
- ITALIA -

LOCALITY: Capriva,
Friuli-Venezia Giulia

WINEMAKER: Giorgio
Schiopetto and Mauro
Simeoni

schiopetto.it

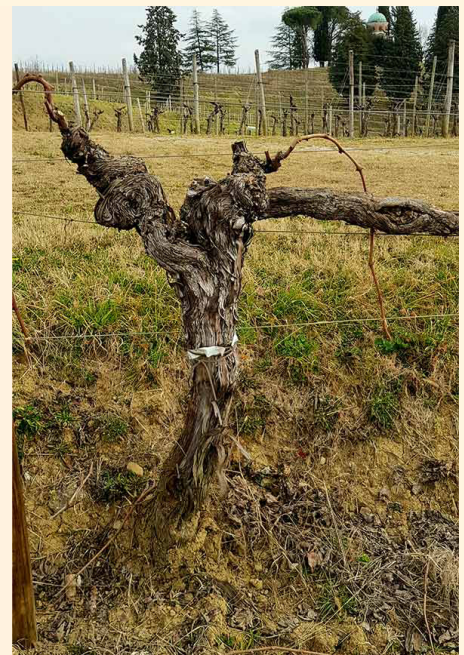


FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

SCHIOPETTO

We have always admired the wines of Friuli. They are so diverse when compared to most other Italian wine regions, which generally show a more consistent theme. This pocket tucked up in the far north-east corner of Italy shares borders with Austria to the north and Slovenia to the east, and provides a fascinating melting pot of cultures that is reflected in the food and wine produced, as well as the people of the area.

Earlier this year, in March, we set off to Friuli from Alto Adige – a fascinating but at times treacherous (due to the huge amount of snow) 5 hour drive. Hugging the Austrian border, we drove down into Capriva in the Province of Gorizia to visit the estate of Schiopetto. We were met by Dr Emilio Rotolo outside the house that was originally owned by Mario Schiopetto, and, as per most visits, were quickly reminded of the impressive history, not only of the winery and the region but perhaps most importantly of Mario Schiopetto.



L: View from the highest vineyard back down to the winery, R: 68 y. Friulano vines

In April 2003, Decanter reported the passing of Mario Schiopetto, a giant of Italian wine. They referred to him as, "the man responsible for Friuli's fame as a white wine producing area".

Back then, the appreciation and extent of this fame was still confined to a relatively small, discerning and mainly European audience. Mario Schiopetto's focus was to get his little zone recognised on the world stage for fresh, lively, textured and complex whites. He achieved this firstly through a devotion to the vineyards and the wines themselves, but also by being regarded in the same company as the other emerging big hitters of the Italian wine scene who, like him, were busy trying new things to perfect their craft. His major influence on the region in the 1970s was the pioneering of preservation techniques in the winemaking process, something lacking in the region. He brought in cold and anti-oxidative handling, epitomised by the German approach to Riesling, but balanced this with the more 'French' techniques of elevating wines in a careful, more oxidative, texture-building manner. He also played a large role in producing some of the first, but now very common, white field blends, and secondly the introduction of high-density planting. These things changed the viticultural landscape of Friuli for the better.



At the front gate

Today, the common thread of the Schiopetto wines is restraint, with definition, layered aromatics and notable texture, including a touch of phenolic grip – all underpinned by extensive and vigorous structure, along with much-prized savoury elements.

They are headlined by a powerful rendition of Pinot Grigio, with elements of smokiness, iced pear and minerals, then the heady apricot and musky wildflowers of the Ribolla Gialla, but arguably the highlight is their standout white-flowered, nutty Friulano. Most of the fruit for the whites is sourced from the commune of Collio Gorizia from the Capriva and Pradis Crus (this is also where the winery is based). Here you will find the classic 'ponca' soils (sandstone marl of Eocene origin with a high mineral content), which are free draining and ideal for growing white grapes.

The majority of the red varieties are sourced from the commune of Colli Orientali, sitting to the north of Gorizia. Here the soils are a little more clay based and subsequently perfect for reds. Like most of the vineyards in the famous part of Friuli, the vineyards sit between 50–200 metres. Although low in altitude, these sites are so far inland that they still enjoy good diurnal temperature ranges. The resulting reds are deep and juicy, with a classy gloss about them, though they're still lively. 'Blumeri' is a bend of the indigenous refosco with Merlot, while 'Rivarossa' is a Bordeaux blend of Merlot and Cabernet.

THE WINES



2019 Ribolla Gialla

Ribolla Gialla is one of the traditional and original varieties of Friuli, which shows its best when cultivated in the poor marl soil from Collio Gorizia to Brda in Slovenia. There is still much talk about Ribolla's history (thought to possibly originate from Greece), but recent DNA evidence has shown its birthplace is from around the zones mentioned above. Like many varieties, phylloxera very nearly wiped Ribolla out.

On the winemaking front, this is usually the last white grape to be harvested, towards the end of September. It is picked by hand and fermented at low temperatures in

steel to maintain the delicate and floral aromas. Post ferment, the wine is racked into steel and left on its gross lees for 5–6 months with occasional stirring. Supported by refreshing acidity, this is packed with varying citrus flavours, such as tangerine, orange peel and lemon, with just a touch of phenolics on the palate.

2018 Pinot Bianco

The Pinot Bianco has specifically been planted in a hilly, well-ventilated area where the soil is mainly marl (clay and limestone), producing compact bunches with the grapes golden in colour at harvest time. Harvest is by hand, followed by a soft pressing and fermentation in stainless steel tanks at a controlled temperature. The wine is then racked and left on the lees for 8 months in steel to build texture and weight. This is one of the best Pinot Biancos we've seen in recent years.

2018 Friulano

Friulano is the most important white variety at Schiopetto, accounting for 25% of total production and 35% of land under vine. It is grown in a natural amphitheatre around the winery in the commune of Capriva, at an average elevation of just 45–50 metres up to a high of 100 metres. Harvest usually occurs around the end of August to the beginning of September.

The soils are mostly sandy with pockets of clay from the Pliocene era 1.5 million years ago. This clay of marine origin is known locally as 'ponca'. With an average vine age of 45 years, Friulano sees the same protective winemaking techniques employed – a brief cold soak, followed by a low temperature fermentation, again lasting 10–12 days, followed by 7–8 months on fine lees in stainless steel and a minimum of 5 months in bottle before release.

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Aromas of sesame leaves, lemon zest, coriander, white pepper and paprika. Full-bodied, dense and, at the same time agile. Hints of olive oil and green olives. Citrus fruit, too.

95 points — James Suckling, jamesuckling.com

2018 Pinot Grigio

Pinot Grigio is generally the first variety to be harvested at Schiopetto, with the grapes hand-picked in the second or third week of August. The winemaking here mirrors that of Friulano – gentle pressing followed by a 3–4 day cold soak, then controlled temperature fermentation in stainless steel. It is rich, generous and powerful but still with structure due to a touch of phenolic grip.

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'So much spice here – cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, white pepper and other spices. Limes and other citrus fruit. Star fruit, too. Full-bodied and minerally, showing stone and slate. Some olives, too. A pinot grigio masterpiece.'

96 points — James Suckling, jamesuckling.com

2016 'Riverossa' Merlot/Cabernet (limited)

An historic blend for Schiopetto, drawing clear inspiration from Mario's time spent in Bordeaux, 'Rivarossa' is comprised of 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon from the red soils of the Cru Oleis in Colli Orientali.

Both varieties are handpicked around the 4th week of September, de-stemmed, then fermented separately with a total maceration period of 30 days in large open wooden vats. Ageing follows malolactic fermentation in oak for a period of 14–15 months, primarily tonneaux with a small portion of barrique, all second use. 'Rivarossa' rests in bottle for a period of 12 months prior to release.

2016 'Blumeri' Merlot/Refosco (limited)

'Blumeri' is a blend of Merlot and Refosco del Peduncolo Rosso in equal proportions, which arose from a project beginning in 2000 to evaluate the climactic and soil characteristics of the single site Dei Blumeri in Colli Orientali.

After handpicking in mid-late September, the grapes are destemmed prior to fermentation/maceration in large open wooden vats, once again for a period of 30 days. Tonneaux and barrique, 25% of which are new, are employed for ageing for a period of 15 months prior to resting in bottle for a minimum of 18 months before release.

In his early years, Mario Schiopetto spent some time in Bordeaux and both reds, to some degree, reflect this influence.