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CONTE VISTARINO: OLTREPÒ PAVESE COULD BECOME THE NEW BURGUNDY

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The wine region of Oltrepò Pavese in Lombardy, north-west Italy, has the potential to rival the greatest terroirs of the Cote d'Or, according to one of the region's largest producers.

View of the small town of Fortunago, in the hills of Oltrepo' Pavese (Photo: Roberto Lo Savio/iStock)

At a recent tasting of Conte Vistarino wines, winery director Ottavia Giorgi di Vistarino said that a combination of cool climate and calcareous soils ensured that Pinot Noir "thrived" in the region.

"Northern Italy is such a great terroir for Pinot Noir, because of the cool climate," said di Vistarino.

"Yet Pinot Noir is not new in Oltrepò, we have a very long history. However, its reputation was until recently largely unknown. But, thanks to the new generation's aim for quality, we are gradually being discovered as a new terroir with a very important past and a probable good future. "

Oltrepò Pavese is situated in the Italian province of Pavia, south of the river Po. The Vistarino family planted Pinot Noir in 1850 – today they cultivate over 200 hectares of vineyards, including 140 of Pinot Noir. According to di Vistarino there are approximately 3000 hectares planted with Pinot Noir in Oltrepò, which also produces a traditional method sparkling.

"The diurnal temperature variation is our secret weapon; here it is cold in the night and warm during the day, meaning a big thermal excursion occurs preserving the grapes' skin. Our soil is calcareous and rich in clay, and we rarely have high yields.

"Obviously there can be several minor differences between each parcel of land, which translate into various fabulous Pinot Noir wines, with sundry organoleptic characteristics. Pinot Noir is a delicate variety and it's amazing to see how it changes in each parcel."

The jewel in the estate's crown is the Pernice 'cru wine', grown in a vineyard which lies at 350 metres' elevation and is south-southeast-facing. It is currently entitled to an IGT designation, although di Vistarino said he hoped proximity to Milan would help spread the region's reputation for Pinot Noir – but will UK consumers get on board?

Jeroboam's Wine Director Peter Mitchell MW agreed that northern Italian Pinot Noir was deserving of more consumer recognition, although he felt it was coming slowly.

"I think northern Italy is making some of the best value quality examples on the market," said Mitchell MW.

"I have also had some excellent Pinot from Alto Adige, mostly in a very pure and fruit driven example, but with excellent freshness and not too much alcohol and we have also recently started shipping a remarkably good value example from Colli Bericci (near Vicenza), which is a bit richer in style."

A growing number of producers in Burgundy are buying land in other regions, citing unsustainable prices in the Cote d'Or, amongst others.

"As land prices in Burgundy have reached astronomical levels, producers are, of course, searching for new opportunities in emerging regions like Oregon," said Laurent Delaunay, president of Badet Clement.

"Burgundy is too small and Burgundy producers simply don't have enough wine. Everybody is looking for other places to grow Pinot Noir. Albert Bichot, for example, has recently invested in the Limoux region, in the Languedoc."