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Decanter

Intriguing Italy

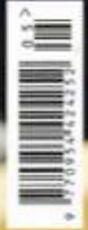
235 wines from top to toe



EXPERT RATINGS
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PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Ruché

A Piedmontese secret

If someone in Castagnole Monferrato offers you Ruché, it's because he wants to spend time with you": the sign at the town's entrance is an invitation for wine lovers to visit the places in the area in search of this rare grape. The Castagnole locals will welcome you with their greatest treasure, the wine which was traditionally drunk at festivals and special occasions. The red that, besides the flavours and aromas, and beyond drinking for drinking's sake, reveals their very soul. It is no coincidence that a country priest was the first to make wine purely from this grape, then bottle, sell and promote it.

Castagnole Monferrato, the home of Ruché, is in the deep countryside of Piedmont, a region famous for its internationally-famous wines. We are in Monferrato, a world heritage wine-growing landscape since 2011. Perched on a ridge about 230 metres high, the town is surrounded by an amphitheatre of lush hills. All the most beautiful Alpine peaks can be seen from here: Monviso, Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn, and Mont Blanc. The town's name recalls the once abundant chestnut forests (Castagna = chestnut) of the area, now replaced by vineyards.

This is a place where time has stood still, where nature dictates life's rhythms. An area brimming with biodiversity where woods, arable land, meadows, vineyards and farmsteads dot the gentle hills. Besides Castagnole, there are six other villages that produce Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato DOCG: Grana, Montemagno, Portacomaro, Refrancore, Scurzolengo and Viarigi. Each municipality has its own peculiarities in terms of soil, history and culture. All have a castle and church; contrasting temporal and ecclesiastical powers.

The seven municipalities form a small



"Ruché was the area's redemption... it has brought the world to discover the Monferrato Astigiano region."

wine-producing district within the Monferrato Astigiano zone on the left bank of the Tanaro river. The hill slopes are rocky. The deep soils of low permeability, are originally alluvial with fossil deposits (the area was once covered by sea). Generally speaking, the soil composition is predominantly loam with sand and clays. The subsoil has a chalk vein (and in fact, one of Italy's largest chalk quarries is located in this area).

Local differences in soil and style

At Castagnole Monferrato, the soil structure is silty-loam with calcium carbonate, the earth is almost white >



Ruché di Castagnole DOCG in numbers

Vine-planted area: 148 hectares
Production: about 870,000 bottles
Producers: 26
Export: 35%





Ruché - style and food-pairing

Ruché produces red grapes with a mid to early ripening. They accumulate sugars well and, despite the low acidity, retain a good share of malic acid that gives the wine freshness. The main characteristic of the grapes is the wealth of polyphenolic substances, mainly tannins, that generate the wine's structure.

Semi-aromatic, it has good alcoholic potential. The taste is unique and particular, averagely structured and generous. The olfactory notes are of faded rose, violet and spices and the taste is reminiscent of blackberry, raspberry and ripe plums, with hints of

spice, such as black pepper. Although a 10% blend with Brachetto and/or Barbera grapes is legally allowed, the wine produced is usually pure Ruché.

The wine is an ideal companion for mature or blue cheeses and suitable for local Piedmontese dishes such as agnolotti (ravioli-type filled pasta), finanzia (an offal-based dish) and main courses featuring game. Succulence, softness and olfactory depth make it easy to combine with highly aromatic and spicy foods such as ginger. It therefore goes well with oriental cuisine and piquant dishes. Its versatility makes it a cosmopolitan wine.



PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

The grape

Little is known about the Ruché vine and its origins. It appears to have been cultivated on the Monferrato hills, particularly around Castagnole, its area of choice, since the Middle Ages. The Ruché origins and its name are veiled in mystery: some hypothesize that the name comes from the vineyards' vicinity to a now non-existent Benedictine monastery dedicated to Saint Roch. Or that its roots derive from the Italian verb *arroccarsi* which describes how the vines cling to the steep landscape. Or even that the vine was imported during the 12th century by Cistercian monks from Burgundy, but this theory was proved wrong by a study of the Ruché's DNA in 2016 which closely relates it to two typically northern Italian vines, Croatina and the now extinct *Malvasia Aromatica* from Parma.

and produces wines with fragrant aromas (Ruché grapes smell of roses) and good structural balance. Saint Euphemia hill, an authentic natural spectacle, is a must-see. In terms of soil composition, Scurzolengo is quite similar to Castagnole Monferrato, while going towards Portacomaro, it becomes looser, producing extremely aromatic but less structured wines.

Heading towards Montemagno and Grana, there is more clay and the soil becomes brown. The wines here are stronger and more structured both in colour and tannins and take longer to refine and express their fragrances. At Refrancore we find red clay soils interspersed among Asti sands producing tendentially smaller, more concentrated and less aromatic grapes. The guyot-trained vineyards are at altitudes ranging from approximately 230 to 280 metres.

History - priestly beginnings

Ruché was once used for celebrations and probably also during mass, but it was beginning to disappear. Its modern history began in 1964 with the arrival of Don Giacomo Cauda as the parish priest in Castagnole Monferrato. He found some rows of Ruché among the parish vineyards and decided to bottle wine made purely from Ruché grapes. He designed the "Ruché del Parroco" label depicting an angel with open wings. For years Ruché continued to go under that name and label. With the help of Lidia Bianco, the Mayor of Castagnole Monferrato, this priest-cum-wine producer brought fame and fortune to the territory.

In the '80s, the Ruché phenomenon started to pick up: other producers cultivated it and it became popular on the market. It



