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Learning and loving more about the wines of Collio in the Italian Alps



The Friuli-Venezia Giulia region is about as close as you can get to Austria and still be in Italy. But few personalities could be further apart.

if national stereotypes like hugging in public and arriving on time for appointments are indications. But native Friulanos not only embrace this diversity, they turn it to their advantage: "When I'm an accountant,

I am Austrian," laughed a winemaker during my trip to the region, "but when I am in love, I'm Italian."

In fact, up until 1867, Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG) was the Austrian Empire's southernmost stronghold. Shielded by the Julian Alps in the north and warmed by the Adriatic Sea breeze from the east, FVG ripened fruits and vegetables ship to Vienna's markets and wines to Vienna's cafés.

Today, FVG reaches far beyond her Alpine neighbors, with worldwide recognition for producing Italy's finest white wines, especially those grown in the subregion, Collio. And last week, a virtual seminar conducted by the Consorzio Tutela Vini Collio reached wine lovers across the U.S., including me.

"We speak many languages," said journalist Matteo Bellotto, explaining Collio's brochure printed in Italian, English and German. "But our favorite is the language of our vineyards, which is wine."

The conversation begins with the name Collio, meaning hill. Collio is 100% hillsides, providing grapes with countless exposures to brilliant sunshine and a wide swing from hot days to cold nights. In addition, the slopes are comprised of ponca ("flysch" in German), stratified marl and sandstone created by an ancient sea's ebb and upsurge. As vine roots weave through the strata in search of water ("Down, down, deeper down," says Bellotto), grapes absorb a fascinating minerality, even salinity. Collio wines are concentrated, dry but ripe with fruit flavor and mouthfeel, distinctive minerality and robust acidity.

Collio offers unique grapes to express this unique soil. Of course, there's