

Book Reviews

Author, Title	Reviewer
Ian D'Agata <i>Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs</i>	Lawrence Coia
Nick Jackson, MW <i>Beyond Flavour: The Indispensable Handbook to Blind Wine Tasting</i>	Kenneth A. Fox
Jérôme Douzelet and Gilles-Eric Séralini <i>Le Goût des Pesticides dans le Vin</i> (<i>The Taste of Pesticides in Wine</i>)	Victor Ginsburgh
Victoria James <i>Wine Girl: The Obstacles, Humiliations, and Triumphs of America's Youngest Sommelier</i>	Neal D. Hulkower
Lawrence Coia and Daniel Ward <i>Wine Grape Varieties for New Jersey</i>	Orley Ashenfelter
Adeline Alonso Ugaglia, Jean-Marie Cardebat, and Alessandro Corsi (eds.) <i>The Palgrave Handbook of Wine Industry Economics</i>	James Fogarty

IAN D'AGATA: *Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs*. University of California Press, Oakland, 2019, 392 pp., ISBN 978-0-520-29075-4 (hardcover), \$50.

In this new book by Ian D'Agata, a sequel to his 2014 magnum opus *Native Wine Grapes of Italy* (D'Agata, 2014; see also my book review, Coia, 2015), the author describes how Italian varieties serve as interpreters of the terroir. Often descriptions of terroir vary, but generally, many authors emphasize factors such as climate, geology, viticulture, and winemaking practices. In this book, however, the emphasis is on the grape variety. This approach is quite reasonable since, absent shoddy winemaking practices that introduce major wine flaws, grape variety is the most important factor in determining wine taste. There is some overlap in variety descriptors in *Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs* compared to his prior book, but it should be considered an excellent companion book rather than a competing source of information.

Unlike his prior book, which introduces us to the native varieties and the importance of preserving such varieties, this book allows us to see how these varieties interact with the other elements of terroir. In doing so, the reader can develop a true sense of place for the variety and its terroir and understand why a wine of a given variety can taste so different depending on the terroir. Oddly, the author notes that while Italians have developed these variety/terroir relationships over centuries, many do not believe or recognize the terroir concept (which he calls the “Italian job”). This book should go far to help to rectify that lack of understanding for all readers.

The 371-page book has two parts. Part 1 is just 26 pages and provides a general understanding of terroir and its context in Italy. Part 2 consists of the grape varieties and their specific terroirs. The format for the second part includes a discussion of the specific grape variety, the specific terroirs where it is grown, and finally, benchmark wines of that variety and terroir. A three-star scoring system is used to rate the wines, and the abbreviation of PS (*prima scelta*) is used for top selections, much like the French use *hors classe*. The terroir descriptions are fascinating and demonstrate why D’Agata is among the world’s best wine writers and certainly one of the most knowledgeable among writers of Italian varieties.

His typical terroir analysis for each variety includes many factors and demonstrates his great depth of knowledge not only as a wine writer with years of experience but also as a physician and scientist. A brief list of some of the factors he presents in his analysis of terroir and variety includes:

- Maturity parameters usually achieved by the variety (Brix, acidity, tannins, etc.).
- Climatic considerations including measures of growing degree days (such as the Winkler and Hugleïn indices).
- Geographic and geologic factors such as location, site elevation, soil types, and soil drainage.
- Viticulture considerations such as pruning technique, timing of budbreak, vine vigor, productivity, and grape maturity at harvest.
- Winemaking techniques like air drying of grapes, fermentation time and temperature, maceration time, blending, and maturation time.
- Specific taste and odor descriptions and the molecules associated with them.
- Genetic issues are sometimes presented when they are distinguishing features for the variety and its terroir.

What does this book offer that his book on varieties does not? While his earlier book was a major achievement in describing native wine grape varieties of Italy and the great importance and need to preserve these varieties, this book goes a step further. It transports the reader to the ancestral homes of these varieties and affords an understanding of how important terroir is in determining wine taste. It is very difficult to separate the effect that various factors play in determining wine taste. Most wine enthusiasts understand that the taste of wine made from varieties like Riesling and Pinot Noir are highly terroir dependent. Here we gain an understanding that the wines of many Italian varieties,

for example, Grignolino or Nebbiolo, also are terroir linked. Where possible, D'Agata offers well-planned case studies of the grape variety and its wine grown and made in different locations, that attempt to examine the effects of terroir on wine taste (Nero d'Avola serves as an excellent example). He also indicates that while grape variety, and its underlying genetics, plays the most critical role in wine taste (you cannot have a deeply dark and tannic Sangiovese without blending or other manipulation), in some cases (e.g., Nebbiolo), terroir can play a more important role than the clone.

It will be a great pleasure for me on my next travel to Italy to have this book in hand as I visit a specific region and examine its wines. For example, I had the opportunity to spend a month in the Valpolicella region and developed an appreciation for its wine and terroir. D'Agata's section on the varieties of Valpolicella, like Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara, transported me back to the vineyards and villages that dot the region. Had I had this book with me then I would have had a much greater understanding of not just wine and grape varieties of Valpolicella, but also of the many other aspects of the terroir. I plan to return soon with this book as a companion; however, I will also bring maps of the area.

The book lacks any figures or maps, which significantly limits usefulness. Since each section starts with the name of the variety, it would have been nice if a locator term that indicates the region could have been used at the section's outset since it often is not until the several paragraphs into the variety description before the author informs of the location of the variety. I understand Italy's geography and can easily identify its 20 regions, however, despite D'Agata's excellent description of specific geographies, maps or figures would have been very helpful. I suspect maps were not included because the cost to print them would significantly increase the price of the book.

The book is just over half the number of pages of his prior book. The author apologizes early on in his book for the fact that some regions or varieties did not receive attention due to limitations in the size of the book. An index of varieties covered is included in the appendix. The major and most minor native Italian wine grape varieties are discussed in an elegant and well-researched fashion. If one is interested in a region of Italy and does not know the varieties grown there, a bit of work on the part of the reader is required. A helpful list of the terroirs covered in the book is included in the appendix. One region of interest for me is the Trentino-Alto Adige, and only one of its grape variety terroirs (Moscato Giallo) was briefly presented. This was a disappointment since varieties of that region such as Marzemino, Casetta, Teroldego, and Lagrein have gained some interest in the United States. (He does present these varieties in his prior book, but little on their terroirs.) Also included in the appendix is a table, which lists geologic times when specific Italian wine terroirs were formed, an extensive bibliography, and a general index.

D'Agata's experience as a wine taster and writer is not in question as he is known worldwide and has been the recipient of the Comitato Grand Cru, given to Italy's best wine journalist. I must admit that although I enjoy reading his descriptions of a wine's taste and aromas and even the molecules associated with them, I often

wonder if I am deficient in my sensing abilities or if D'Agata has not occasionally gotten a bit carried away in his descriptions because of his love of these wines. What does a bruised apple taste like? While he has great knowledge and appreciation for science, including biochemistry, he can make a mistake; for example, he states that tartaric acid is sweeter than malic acid. Tartaric acid is a stronger acid than malic acid, and no acid has sweetness!

The author's engaging writing style provides the reader a great pleasure delving in the complexities of Italian native wine grape terroirs. D'Agata even mentions that the more complex the subject, the more interesting it often is to Italians. This may be true, but I am left to wonder whether there are not also some broad distinguishing concepts that can be said about Italian wines. For example, recently, a well-known wine writer indicated that red Italian wines do share some degree of bitterness that makes one want to take another sip. I, personally, have noticed this as well. Perhaps this statement may seem trivial or banal and not worth considering to someone with D'Agata's experience, compelling insight, and ability to distinguish nuances in taste, but I do not think it is just a myth.

If you are an Italian wine enthusiast or are involved in the wine industry and want a comprehensive examination of Italian native wine grape terroirs, I highly recommend this book. I suggest not reading the book cover to cover but rather choose a grape variety (or region of interest although it will be a bit more difficult) and read that section of the book to best understand the complexities of terroir presented by the author. To accompany *Italy's Native Wine Grape Terroirs*, I suggest one should also have a map of Italy that includes the grape growing regions of interest. Another book, which should be of interest to Italian wine lovers, has been recently released entitled, *Sangiovese, Lambrusco and Other Vine Stories* by Attilio Scienza (2018). This famous Italian grape geneticist traces the lineage of many Italian grape varieties, often using DNA analysis. Like D'Agata's book, it is solidly based on knowledge and science and provides a delightful story. Both Scienza's and D'Agata's books are well researched and add much to the fun that is to be had in learning about Italian wine grape terroirs.

Lawrence Coia
Outer Coastal Plain Vineyard Association
njwineman@comcast.net
doi:10.1017/jwe.2020.7

References

- Coia, L. (2015). Book review of *Native Wine Grapes of Italy* by I. D'Agata. *Journal of Wine Economics*, 10(2), 228–232.
- D'Agata I. (2014). *Native Wine Grapes of Italy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scienza, A. (2018). *Sangiovese, Lambrusco and Other Vine Stories*. Verona, Italy: Positive Press.