

Tree Huggers: The Tale Behind Italy's Hot New White

A rustic Umbrian grape is reborn—and it could be Montefalco's next wine hope



Photo by Robert Camuto

A row of Trebbiano Spoletino vines "married" to maple trees

Camuto from Europe

[About Me](#) [My Main Blog Page](#) [Archive](#)

[See Also](#)

[Featured Blogs](#) [Complete Blog Index](#)

Posted: Jan 22, 2018 11:08am ET

278



[Join WineSpectator.com!](#)

Something is happening around Montefalco.

And it's not just the rising quality of hefty and Sagrantino, the signature wine of this town in Central Italy's Umbria region.

A quirky heirloom white grape variety called Trebbiano Spoletino has been rediscovered in recent years by winemakers who have brought it out of local family farms and into international distribution.

In the past dozen years, the number of producers of Trebbiano Spoletino has grown from a handful to more than 30, making examples that are deliciously bright and complex, layering fruit, minerals and salinity.

You may have heard that Trebbiano is one of the most planted grapes in Italy. But the Trebbiano name is actually shared by widely varied grapes in different regions, such as Trebbiano Toscano, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo or the Veneto's Trebbiano di Soave, most of which likely aren't even genetically related, according to DNA studies.

Trebbiano Spoletino is an Umbrian grape found in the flatlands below the hilltop-perched town of Spoleto. It was traditionally planted at the edge of family farms, grown in a system that defies modern vineyard-management techniques. The vines were planted *maritate*—literally "married" to maple or elm trees—with the canes climbing up to the high branches and using them for support. To give the vines even more room to grow, farmers strung wires between the trees.

In other words, these vines are monsters, each of which can produce hundreds of pounds of grapes. They are so productive that the wines made from them, by conventional wisdom, should be awful.

Not necessarily so. In Wine Spectator blind tastings of vintages from the past decade, Trebbiano Spoletino wines, including several from *maritate* vines, scored 84 to 93 points, or good to outstanding, on Wine Spectator's 100-point scale. Not a bad start.

A couple of Montefalco producers who have been part of Trebbiano Spoletino's new wave—Tabanini and Paolo Bea—were both inspired by the white wines traditionally made by their families.