

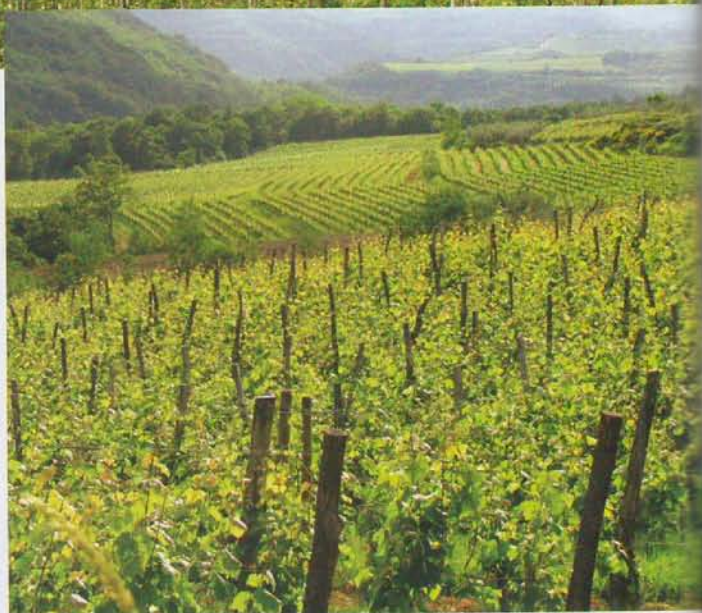


## Istria

The Istrian peninsula juts south into the Adriatic from where the borders of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia effectively bleed into one another. As with much of the region, Istria's history is rife with social upheaval through war and forced migration. In recent years, however, the borders have opened and something of a viticultural renaissance is taking place, stimulated in part by revitalized wine industries in both Slovenia and Croatia. Istria itself, in fact, is divided between the two countries, with a seemingly arbitrary political line that separates the Croatian and Slovenian sides.

Joe Bastianich, who makes wine at his family's estate in Friuli, has ties to the Croatian side of Istria—his mother, Lidia, was born there. Bastianich has noticed a lot of Italians snooping around Istria for land—"All the big names from Friuli," he says. But the opportunities to buy it, as of yet, are slim. After the tumultuous events in the Balkans during the 20th century, ownership of some potential vineyard sites remains in dispute, complicating real estate deals almost to the point of impossibility. Yet the promise of an exciting terroir and local varieties like malvasia Istriana remains too tempting to ignore.

Things are different across the border on the Slovenian side of Istria, where there's already a lot of activity in the vineyards, thanks to an influx of European Union funding. Wineries such as Santomas, a 50-acre estate near Izola, on Istria's Adriatic coast, are now putting out impressive whites like malvasia Istriana, and hearty, age-worthy reds made from refosco, cabernet



sauvignon and merlot. "The terroir is almost perfect for vine growing," says Tamara Glavina, who helps run the winery with her father, Ludvik. "We have a mild sub-Mediterranean climate and flysch [soil], and local, old varieties." With wineries like these leading the way, Istria is an exciting region to watch.

—WOLFGANG M. WEBER

**Planted:** Ancient times

**Location:** The coastal foothills of the Istrian peninsula, near the borders of Slovenia and Croatia, close to the Adriatic

**Soil:** Varied, including carbonate with calcium, sedimentary rocks and sand (flysch) on marl-slate base

**Owners:** Multiple

**Vines:** Refosco, malvasia Istriana, cabernet sauvignon, merlot

**Top Wines:** Refosco Antonius Sergaše and Malvazija Istriana from Santomas in Slovenia; Malvazija Istriana from Koslovic in Croatia