

Located in the Molise region, which is bordered by the regions of Puglia, Campania, Lazio, Abruzzo, and the Adriatic Sea, Cantine Cipressi is directed by its young founder, Claudio [Cipressi](#). Molise is Italy's second smallest region, and almost surely it's most unspoiled. It is a region that is deliciously isolated, which has allowed it to retain a nearly pre-industrial character and a strong connection to its ancient traditions. In a country where many wonderful and unique places have become a bit tarnished by mass tourism, Molise is refreshingly rustic and authentic. As you will see from the responses below, Claudio is a passionate advocate for his native land, and is untiringly driven to improve and promote his work. Let's be clear here, Molise, certainly on the world wine scene, is decidedly NOT sexy. But what it is is authentic and unpretentious. It's a place to discover a unique slice of an Italy unencumbered by much of the dross of modern life. It was a great pleasure to interview Claudio, and an even greater pleasure to drink his wines, particularly with the background he provides to perfectly contextualize his work. Give these wines a try. They're both great "stand alone" wines without the outline of their history and philosophy, but with a little understanding about Molise's culture and ambitions, they come into an even greater focus. Enjoy!

TOM CIOCCO



Describe in brief your winemaking “philosophy”.

Producing wine is not only a passion, but an art that involves everything from vine pruning to marketing the product, which creates a deep feeling of protection from the passage of time or the attacks of the seasons of the year. There arises therefore a sort of devotion with respect to the “Earth” that with man’s continual attention to it, transforms, and makes us capable of doing great things. I would say that my philosophy of making wine would be very well defined as a dedication to process.

Cantina Cipressi is located in Molise. Talk a little bit about the region, its viticultural history, and its future.

I see Molise as a closed treasure chest that has yet to be discovered. It is one of Italy’s smallest regions, but in such a few square kilometers there is the sea, beautiful mountains, and many gastronomic products from the local culture – from truffles to superb caciocavallo cheeses to salamis that are still produced in most towns, and some, like “ventricina” (*a pork sausage made from ground meat as well as lard and innards - TC*) which is only produced in some of our villages. Molise has also not forgotten its other artisanal traditions such as bell-making in the town of Agnone or the hand weavers textiles

that have resisted the pressures of modern production. Viticulture has been practiced in Molise since the time of the Samnites (*the pre-Roman people of Molise - TC*). The interior of the region was more intensely cultivated during the Roman era, and this trend continued until about the middle of the 1900s. From this point, there began a trend to mass production much to the detriment of old, high quality, but low-yielding varieties like Tintilia. Fortunately, over the last few years, Molisan viticulture is in great foment, with the birth of new concerns such as our own that have a prime interest in quality, and as well as the recovery of ancient vines like Tintilia. If it continues in this way, Molise will begin to produce excellent quality wines that will serve to validate the production of the entire region.

If you were able to make wine in any other place in the world, where would it be? Why?

If I wanted to make wine just to make money, I certainly would have chosen one of the more “annointed” regions, but for me making wine has become more of a passion and at the same time a challenge; there is no better place to be than that.

Cantine Cipressi cultivates Tintilia vines from which it produces a 100% Tintilia wine. Talk a little about this variety. Does it indeed have its origins in Spain? How important is the cultivation of Tintilia for the future of winemaking in Molise?

The idea of forming a winery for me was born directly from Tintilia’s re-discovery. Let’s be clear on the fact that but for a few small scattered vineyards, Tintilia had almost completely disappeared. After some years of research on the land, and then some trial vinifications, I was able to select a clone of Tintilia that most closely approached my expectations, and then in 1999, I finally planted my first vineyards. We vinify Tintilia without any blending to accentuate its natural characteristics, as well as not to produce a wine too similar to so many others. The idea that Tintilia has Spanish origins is due mostly to its name [“*Tinto*” or “*tinta*” is the word for red wine in Spanish - TC] but this assertion seems without any concrete foundation, since studies done some years ago by the University of Molise proved no relation with the Sardinian variety Bovale Sardo [*Tintilia was long thought to be identical with Bovale Sardo, a variety which almost surely does come from Spain - TC*] The genetic research in fact found the vine to be a unique and fairly rustic variety with multiple clones of its own that are well adapted to the hills of Molise. In light of all this, I feel that Tintilia has been cultivated in Molise since the time of the Samnites. This coupled with the

fact that Tintilia has not been found growing anywhere else in the world, leads me to believe that the vine was brought here in the Greek era, and became isolated amongst our hills. I believe that Tintilia can be the driving force in the re-birth of Molisan winemaking.

Are there other strictly Molisan varieties? For example there is one extremely rare white variety called "Morese" that unfortunately is headed toward extinction. For you, is there any future in saving and possibly eventual success with these types of vines?

Besides Tintilia, in the past in Molise various other types of grape varieties were cultivated, among them one white-skinned variety called MORESE about which we know very little, but at the time, many varieties changed names from town to town, and now, the traces of a vine with this name remains in certain areas, but little else is known about it.

How would you define "success" for Cantine Cipressi? What are your objectives?

Our objectives are to develop a presence for Molisan wines on an international stage, and in such a way that Molise truly "turns the corner". For us this would be success.

Speak for a moment about the history and the future of the Montepulciano d'Abruzzo grape variety as it relates to Molise.

Up until the late 50s, Abruzzo and Molise were one region and therefore also had many products in common, like Montepulciano. With the division of the two regions the name remained associated with Abruzzo, and the variety continued to be cultivated in Molise, slowly supplanting other less productive varieties. It eventually became the most widely planted variety in the region. And because of its high yields and excellent quality, it will continue to be highly valued in the future.

What about Aglianico? I had read that this was the most traditional red-berried variety in Molise. Do you work with this variety?

There is very little evidence that Aglianico has a long history of being cultivated in Molise. It was introduced fairly recently on the strength of the success of the variety in other regions, so whoever wrote that Aglianico is Molise's most traditional red variety was misinformed. But, we have planted nearly 10,000 square meters of various clones of the vine in various zones, and we are now carefully watching their development.

The concept of an “identity” to me seems to be very important for a viticultural region, but at present, Molise does not have a very strong identity. For you, what should Molise’s viticultural identity be.

As I expressed before, this is a region with ancient traditions, but it has never had in the past a strong and precise viticultural identity due as much to a series of bureaucratic factors as well as the type of land which is mostly mountainous, which in turn only permits small-scale cultivation. The rest of the region is either too swampy to support viticulture, or has been reserved as grazing land. Again around the middle of the last century, many of these parcels were reclaimed and replanted with vines, but many of the farmers focused on producing quantity above all else. In recent years, there has been a clear reversal of this trend, with a new focus on quality and the validation of native vine varieties like Tintilia. If we continue to work in this direction, Molise’s viticultural identity will soon show itself clearly.

Up until now, we’ve been discussing red-berried varieties. For you, which white grape varieties are best suited to Molise’s soils and climate.

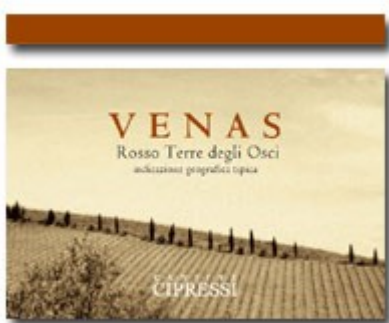
In our region, Trebbiano Toscano can be very expressive, but it’s not the only variety that gives good results – other varieties such as Chardonnay and Falanghina are also highly valued.

Aside from the world of wine, what are your other passions? If you weren’t making wine, what else might you be doing?

My passions are travelling and Nature...if I weren’t making wine, what else would I be doing...great question...Let me preface my statement that I don’t like boredom. Before dedicating myself to the world of wine I had two other activities that I pursued with great passion, and they helped in my formation, but I knew that these endeavours were not what I was looking for, so I sought something that would stimulate me every day, and with wine I found this...every day is a new challenge, with a new type of work, and there is always with something else to learn. I don’t think that this will ever happen, but the moment that I realize that the world of wine is beginning to go a bit “flat” for me is the day that I would start to think about doing something else.

Interview and translation by Tom Ciocco

Cantine Cipressi Terre degli Osci "Venas" 2004 WL# 7239 \$10.99 on sale



Nose of clean spiced plum, berry jam, dark flowers, black licorice, and grated chocolate. The palate is fresh and juicy and a bit peppery, with an admirable balance and length. An honest and very versatile food wine. Needs a bit of air to really shine. An excellent value! Mostly Montepulciano.

Cantine Cipressi Molise Tintilia "Macchiarossa" 2003 WL# 4205 \$25.99 on sale



Vibrant purple-red color. The nose opens with spicy plum and berry notes underlaid with a slight perfumey base, later joined by aromas of black pepper, dark earth, herbs and pine bark. In the mouth, the wine is full-bodied and rich but still well balanced, juicy, and fresh with soft but firm tannins. The structure carries flavors of Indian tea, raspberry and strawberry through a lovely, long finish. 100% Tintilia.