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Italian Appellation System



The first attempts to make laws to legally promote the production of quality wines in Italy and to safeguard the viticultural areas were conducted at the beginning of the 1900. The first real quality system that set rules to guarantee the quality of wines and their place of origin, was introduced in 1963.

The law n° 930 dated 12 February 1963 introduced for the first time in Italy an appellation of controlled origin and set a difference between “table wines” and quality wines. With this law Italy also introduced and recognized the EEC acronym VQPRD (*Vino di Qualità Prodotto in Regione Determinata, Quality Wine Produced in Determined Region*)

The current Italian quality system is ruled by law 192 of the 1992 that fully replaced the precedent law of the 1963.

The system primarily defines the geographic area of the appellation, grapes and proportions admitted for a specific wine production, the maximum yield per hectare, minimum percentage of alcohol by volume, the styles and types of wines recognized by the appellation system, the minimum time of aging before the wine can be sold, chemical and physical characteristics as well as organoleptic qualities.

The quality system is made of appellation categories defining distinct quality classes ideally structured in a **“pyramid of quality”** where the apex represents the highest quality level possible. The categories defined by the system, starting from the lowest quality level to the highest, are defined as follows:

- **Vino da Tavola** (*Table Wine*)
- **IGT** (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica, Typical Geographic Indication*)
- **DOC** (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata, Appellation of Controlled Origin*)
- **DOCG** (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, Appellation of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin*)

Some appellation laws also allow optional use of special types, usually used for special wines made by particular production techniques and they must be written in the label with the following terms:

- **Classico** (*Classic*) - is a wine produced in the most typical and renowned area of the appellation, for example *Orvieto Classico*
- **Superiore** (*Superior*) - is a wine having a percentage of alcohol by volume higher than the normal requirement for the appellation, for example *Bardolino Superiore*
- **Riserva** (*Reserve*) - is a wine that went through a longer aging process than the normal requirement for the appellation, for example *Aglianico del Vulture Riserva*

The "**Vino da Tavola**" category, defined as the lowest quality level of the system, represent a paradox because there are some good and excellent wines belonging to it, they sometimes are even better than some DOCG wines. The reason of this paradox is because some producers do not agree with the quality criteria set by the Italian system and decide to make wine according their own quality criteria and standards and as they are not recognized by any of the levels of the system, the only quality appellation they can be entitled to is the lowest one.

The Italian quality system, although being rigid about some aspects, does not actually guarantee the real quality of wines belonging to specific categories: the highest guarantee offered by the system is concerned to the area of origin of the wine. In theory, a wine producer located inside of an appellation area and whose wines have the minimum requirements set by the quality law for that area, has the full right to legally classify his or her wines according the legal system and therefore recognized as quality wines. Despite the Italian Government organize regular and legal tasting commissions in order to evaluate and entitle a specific product the rank of "quality wine", it is too obvious that quality of a specific appellation of controlled origin area greatly varies from a producer to another. This aspect does not help the promotion of the area's real quality as well as not helping those producers who believe in quality and make quality wines and prefer, for traditional reasons or because of strategic decisions, to have their wines entitled as DOC or DOCG. This surely is a drawback for the credibility of the appellation for a specific area.

The IGT category, (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica, Typical Geographic Indication*) defines wide production areas, they usually comprise a whole region, and allow the production of wine with grapes admitted and recommended in the area, usually a wide possibility of choices, set less restrictions and therefore gives more freedom to producers to make his or her own decisions about production methods. This category, although represents the first real level of the quality system legally recognized, actually include a good quantity of wines having a very good quality and it is rich of nice surprises. This category should be carefully considered by consumers because, recently, producers of quality wines prefer to have their wines on this categories and set their own quality standards.

The DOC category (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata, Appellation of*

Controlled Origin) defines an area, usually narrower than an IGT, having more rigid production criteria if compared to the preceding level.

The last quality category, considered as the highest quality level of the system, **the DOCG, (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, Appellation of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin)** defines very limited and narrow production areas and having production criteria and evaluation more rigid and strict when compared to the others. Wine bottles belonging to this category must have a seal on the neck in order to guarantee the content of the bottle and to prevent any fraud or adulteration. These seals are numbered and show the name of the appellation and are issued by the Italian Government. (See figure)

Government seals have different colors according to the type of the DOCG wine: light pink is for sparkling wines, light green is used for white wines whereas magenta identifies red wines.

The appellation system also admit, where applicable, the indication of the name of a sub zone, such as a specific vineyard, farm or estate, or the name of the place of origin, in order to narrow and safeguard even more the quality a specific area having superior quality in respect to the rest of the appellation. This actually is an adaptation of the *cru* concept used in France.

The Italian system also allow the usage of particular acronyms to be written in the labels of special quality wines, such as sparkling wines ("*spumante*" in Italian) or fortified wines. These indications all derive from the acronym VQPRD (*Vino di Qualità Prodotto in Regione Determinata, Quality Wine Produced in Determined Region*) introduced by the EEC laws to designate quality wines. The acronym VQPRD, scarcely used in Italy, should be written in every bottle of DOC and DOCG wine.

The special acronyms used for special wines are:

- VSQPRD - (*Vino Spumante di Qualità Prodotto in Regione Determinata, Quality Sparkling Wine Produced in Determined Region*) is a quality sparkling wine produced in a determined appellation of controlled origin area
 - VLQPRD - (*Vino Liquoroso di Qualità Prodotto in Regione Determinata, Quality Fortified Wine Produced in Determined Region*) is a quality fortified wine produced in a determined appellation of controlled origin area
 - VFQPRD - (*Vino Frizzante di Qualità Prodotto in Regione Determinata, Quality Slightly Sparkling Wine Produced in Determined Region*) is a quality slightly sparkling wine produced in a determined appellation of controlled origin area
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