

Monastero Suore Cistercensi



Fate can have lovely consequences. Our fortuitous encounter with the Bea family of Umbria of course led to the unearthing of one of the great domains of Italy. But, we have been additionally blessed as we marched together with Giampiero Bea as he made the acquaintance of the Sisters of the Cistercian order living and working at their monastery in Vitorchiano, ninety minutes or so north of Rome in the Lazio district. Here at this quiet religious outpost eighty women of this religious order work vineyards and orchards and gardens organically.

Led by Adriana and Fabiola (pictured left), this convent of 70 Cistercian nuns has been organically farming their five hectares of vines in Vitorchiano, Lazio, since the early nineties, but it wasn't until Bea began advising them in the early 2000's that their wines gained a larger audience. Today, a ravenous US audience eagerly awaits each new release of "the nun wine," and we at Rosenthal Wine Merchant cannot even come close to satisfying the huge demand. Even before Giampiero began helping them gently refine their approach and commercialize their wines—only to the US and Japan, it should be noted—he was struck by the frankness of a white wine produced with almost no technology. In a region rife with highly controlled, highly sulfured concoctions, here was a wine of real character, an unadorned expression of healthy grapes grown in a fascinating volcanic-soiled terroir. Each time we visit with the sisters, we are amazed by their warmth of spirit, their serene energy, and the shockingly spartan nature of their operation. The "winery" is nothing more than a toolshed packed to the gills with old steel tanks, fiberglass containers of various sizes, and glass demijohns tucked here and there—proving yet again that it takes the barest minimum to produce a wine of character and truth.

Viticulture:

- **Farming:** Certified organic by the Associazione Suolo e Salute since 1993
- **Treatments:** Copper-sulfate only
- **Ploughing:** Annual ploughing to maintain vineyard health
- **Soils:** Volcanic
- **Vines:** Trained in Cordon, oldest vines date to 1963.
- **Yields:** Controlled through severe winter pruning, debudding, and green harvesting
- **Harvest:** Entirely manual, usually late September
- **Purchasing:** Entirely estate fruit



Vinification:

- **Fermentation:** Following total destemming, wines ferment spontaneously in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Extraction:** Wines see pumpovers during fermentation.
- **Chaptalization and Acidification:** None
- **Pressing:** Hydraulic press
- **Malolactic Fermentation:** Spontaneous, in tank following alcoholic fermentation

Aging:

- **Élevage:** 12 months in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Lees:** Wines remain on their lees until assemblage prior to bottling.
- **Fining and Filtration:** Unfined, plate filtered if necessary
- **Sulfur:** Applied at harvest and at bottling, with 80-90 mg/l total sulfur

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Coenobium



At a Glance:

- **Appellation:** IGP Lazio
- **Uvaggio:** Trebbiano (45%), Malvasia (35%), Verdicchio (20%)
- **Average Annual Production:** 14,000
- **Average Alcohol by Volume:** 12%
- **Average Residual Sugar:** < 5 g/l
- **Average Total Acidity:**

In The Vineyard:

- **Parcel Names, Slopes, and Locations:** From 5 ha of gently sloping parcels surrounding the commune of Vitorchiano
- **Soil Types and Compositions:** Volcanic
- **Vine Age, Training, and Density:** Trained in Cordon, oldest vines date to 1963.
- **Average Yields:** Controlled through severe winter pruning, debudding, and green harvesting, yields average 45 hl/ha
- **Average Harvest Date and Type:** Manual, usually in late September-early October

In The Cellar:

- **Fermentation:** Following total destemming, wine ferments spontaneously in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Pressing:** Hydraulic press
- **Time on Lees:** Wine remains on lees until assemblage prior to bottling
- **Malolactic Fermentation:** Spontaneous, in tank following alcoholic fermentation
- **Élevage:** 12 months in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Press Wine:** Blended after malolactic
- **Fining and Filtration:** Unfined, plate filtered if necessary
- **Sulfur:** Applied at harvest and at bottling, with 80-90 mg/l total sulfur

In The Glass:

The wine's co-harvested and co-fermented Trebbiano, Verdicchio, and Malvasia translate the power of Vitorchiano's volcanic soils with a sombre interplay of smoke and iron with green apple, fennel frond, and honey. Coenobium displays notable breadth—yet it is muscular and chiseled rather than corpulent.

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Ruscum



At a Glance:

- **Appellation:** IGP Lazio
- **Uvaggio:** Trebbiano (45%), Malvasia (35%), Verdicchio (20%)
- **Average Annual Production:** 4,000
- **Average Alcohol by Volume:** 12%
- **Average Residual Sugar:** < 5 g/l
- **Average Total Acidity:**

In The Vineyard:

- **Parcel Names, Slopes, and Locations:** From 5 ha of gently sloping parcels surrounding the commune of Vitorchiano
- **Soil Types and Compositions:** Volcanic
- **Vine Age, Training, and Density:** Trained in Cordon, oldest vines date to 1963.
- **Average Yields:** Controlled through severe winter pruning, debudding, and green harvesting, yields average 45 hl/ha
- **Average Harvest Date and Type:** Manual, usually in late September-early October

In The Cellar:

- **Fermentation:** Following total destemming, wine ferments spontaneously on its skins for c. 14 days in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Pressing:** Hydraulic press
- **Time on Lees:** Wine remains on lees until assemblage prior to bottling
- **Malolactic Fermentation:** Spontaneous, in tank following alcoholic fermentation
- **Élevage:** 12 months in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Press Wine:** Blended after malolactic
- **Fining and Filtration:** Unfined, plate filtered if necessary
- **Sulfur:** Applied at harvest and at bottling, with 80-90 mg/l total sulfur

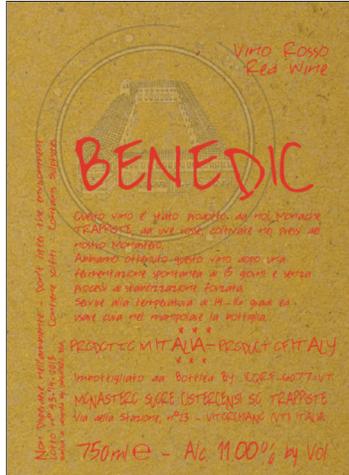
In The Glass:

An alternate lens into the nuns' terroir, Ruscum comes from the same vineyards and the same harvest as Coenobium, but its juice spends in excess of two weeks in contact with the skins. If Coenobium is a wine of autumn, then Ruscum is its winter sibling—always richer and more substantial. Notes of apricot jam, white pepper, grapefruit rind, and gunflint frame a concentrated, almost oily-textured palate, and a zesty acidity contributes to the wine's overarching sense of friendliness.

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Benedic



At a Glance:

- **Appellation:** IGP Lazio
- **Uvaggio:** Sangiovese (45%), Ciliegiolo (45%), Merlot (10%)
- **Average Annual Production:** 4,000
- **Average Alcohol by Volume:** 12%
- **Average Residual Sugar:** < 5 g/l
- **Average Total Acidity:**

In The Vineyard:

- **Parcel Names, Slopes, and Locations:** From 3.5 ha of gently sloping parcels surrounding the commune of Vitorchiano
- **Soil Types and Compositions:** Volcanic
- **Vine Age, Training, and Density:** Trained in Cordon, oldest vines date to 1963.
- **Average Yields:** Controlled through severe winter pruning, debudding, and green harvesting, yields average 45 hl/ha
- **Average Harvest Date and Type:** Manual, usually in late September-early October

In The Cellar:

- **Fermentation:** Following total destemming, wine ferments spontaneously on its skins for c. 14 days in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Pressing:** Hydraulic press
- **Time on Lees:** Wine remains on lees until assemblage prior to bottling
- **Malolactic Fermentation:** Spontaneous, in tank following alcoholic fermentation
- **Élevage:** 12 months in stainless-steel and fiberglass tanks
- **Press Wine:** Blended after malolactic
- **Fining and Filtration:** Unfined, plate filtered if necessary
- **Sulfur:** Applied at harvest and at bottling, with 80-90 mg/l total sulfur

In The Glass:

The sisters produce a very small amount of red wine: a blend of roughly equal parts Sangiovese and Ciliegiolo, augmented for the first time in 2018 with a splash of Merlot from a newly planted site near their historical holdings. Despite a two-week maceration, Benedic is always a pale-colored, translucent wine that more than makes up for in charm what it lacks in power. An appealing hint of balsamic on the nose underlines the link between the nuns and Bea and speaks to the wine's lack of manipulation.