Croatian wines
Writing about Croatian wines today is a pure and unadulterated pleasure. First and foremost, because Croatian wines are becoming ever better and ever more competitive with the serious foreign wines, and also since the directions of further successful development of the Croatian wine industry are becoming ever clearer. In a nutshell, Croatian wine production is a business that is doing eminently well. In mid-2003, when the author was writing his first book about wines, the situation was somewhat different. It is only in the last few years that the Croatian wine industry has experienced its finest moments, a result, no doubt, of years of investment, of seeking the right methods and of the struggle for economic survival on the part of leading Croatian wine producers.

Secondly, writing about wines necessarily involves hedonism, particularly in a land such as Croatia, where enjoyment of wine is linked to a whole plethora of other factors which make for a more pleasant life, and which are, after all, one of the root causes of Croatia’s growing attraction as the leading tourist destination in the Mediterranean.

Wine is an immanent part of Croatia’s attraction as a tourist destination, and one which needs to be made still more prominent. And thirdly, Croatian wines are relatively easy to present thanks to the efforts of those people who have devoted a major part of their careers to providing descriptions of grape wine and wine. This review would, for instance, be incomplete indeed without the monumental Ampelographic Atlas by Professor Nikola Mirošević, without the superbly informative guides of Croatia wines by esteemed colleague Srećka Mirošević, without the excellent book that tells of the oneness of the anonymous kaštelanski crljenac (red wine of Kaštela) and the famous Zinfandel of California, by the scientists Dr. Edi Maletić and Jasenka Piljac.

The French and Italian media have agreed, not without a small dose of barely concealed regret, that in many respects Croatia overtook both the Côte d’Azur and Costa Smeralda in 2005. This is amply confirmed by the increasing number of international celebrities to be found vacationing on the islands of Hvar and Brac and in Dubrovnik, many of whom had never previously visited the Adriatic. Needless to say, wine is an immanent part of Croatia’s attraction as a tourist destination, and one which needs to be made still more prominent.

— Davor Budić
Global success of Croatian wines

The year 2004 proved to be the most successful for Croatian wines. This was the year in which Croatian wines made their first serious appearances on the world stage. First, at the end of 2003, in his Pocket Wine Guide that is sold in huge numbers the renowned British publicist Hugh Johnson devoted the same amount of space to Croatian wines as he did to the long-established Slovenian wines. And he gave some of our wines exceptionally good ratings.

In the spring of 2004 the Croatian Embassy in Paris organized a wine tasting of certain Croatian wines for the influential French magazine La Revue du Vin de France. The results of that event were excellent reviews for the 1999 Plavac marinque and for the Hectenichov prosecco produced by Andro Tomić, a wine maker of the island of Hvar, and good reviews for Plavac Murvica produced by Hrvoje Baković of Brač. Tomić's wines made the front cover of the May issue of La Revue du Vin de France.

And finally, in the summer of 2004 it became known that Ivan Enjingi, a Slavonian wine producer, was declared the absolute world champion producer, was declared the absolute world champion, was declared the absolute world champion producer, was declared the absolute world champion producer, was declared the absolute world champion producer, was declared the absolute world champion producer, was declared the absolute world champion producer. And he gave some of our wines exceptionally good ratings.

The Croatian wine industry could in the near future and to be recognized for its wines. After all, the country has excellent natural potentials to attain such a position.

Selection and criteria of assessment

This review of Croatian wines includes those producers and wines which are already utilizing the aforementioned natural potentials to the satisfaction of domestic and foreign lovers of the Croatian wine scene.

The system of assessment of individual wineries and wines relied upon in this text has been taken from the authoritative wine guide by Hugh Johnson, the Pocket Wine Book, an annual publication and which to date has sold over 7 million copies. Johnson is one of the most highly respected British writers about wine.

The system involves four stars: insignificant wines or poor wines are awarded no star at all. Only superb wines and quite exceptional wines are awarded four stars. Here, it needs to be pointed out that a rating of an individual winery need not necessarily mean that all the wines it produces are deserving of the same rating; in short, the rating of a winery is not necessarily identical to the ratings awarded to its individual wines.

For instance, the Slavonia in Croatia is one of the most important in Croatia. Krauthaker is investing a great deal of effort into the establishment of new production standards both in vineyards and in wine cellars and has had significant influence on other private wine producers. He is experimenting with new varieties, which might ultimately result in the revival of the production of red wines in the continental part of the country. All this ensures that Krauthaker is a prominent figure in the field of Croatian wine production. That, however, does not mean that all of his wines are equally good; some are of premium quality while others are no more than mediocre. In other words, winery ratings do not relate only to the quality of their overall production palette but also to the role and importance they have in the development of the Croatian wine industry. Another characteristic example in addition to Vlado Krauthaker is Mario Mendek. His winery, located near Dubrovnik, is probably the most important in Dalmatia. He is endeavouring to attain new, and in Croatia, still unrecognized criteria for the production of great red wines. For his achievements in raising the standard of production and for the quality of his prestigious wine (Selekcija Mendek) deserves four stars. But his wines of lower quality, particularly Enigma, do not as yet even approach the quality of Selekcija, and consequently his winery is rated with from two to four stars.

All the more prominent and better wines within the palate of individual wineries are, of course, specially marked with stars.

This land has two wonderful indigenous varieties: Mali plavac, which can give great and expensive wines, and Istrian Malvoisie, which became an inseparable part of the tourist offer of this peninsula.
Famous wine makers of Croatian origin

As elsewhere in the Mediterranean, wine has been produced in Croatian lands since the times of Antiquity. There is a whole range of Greek and Roman quotations connected with wines from the Dalmatian islands. But the fact that in the last 100 years Croatian wine makers have had an exceptionally significant impact on the world wine stage is not so well known.

When, at the end of the 19th century, phylloxera, commonly known as wine pest, struck the Istrian and Dalmatian vineyards literally decimating local wine production, a mass exodus of Croats from those parts of the land to overseas countries resulted.

And so it was Croats who were among those who established the wine industry in New Zealand, where the houses of Nobilo and Babich are now running very successful businesses and are enjoying the benefits of a serious international reputation. Another New Zealand Croat is Jim Vuletic, author of the very expensive and almost unattainable cult red wine, Providence, which is justifiably ranked among the very top of the world wines from the New World.

The most famous of the Croatian wine producers in the world is undoubtedly Miljenko Mike Grgić who, following his brilliant career in California, built a winery in Trstenik, near Dubrovnik, in the mid-1990s. Mike Grgić, a short-statured, elderly and exceedingly self-confident gentleman who speaks slowly but energetically, began his career as a winemaker for the great Robert Mondavi, the man who created the modern-day wine industry of California, and whose empire has been expanding for over thirty years. Having left Mondavi, Grgić began producing wines for Château Montelena, another very prestigious producer from the Napa Valley in California. In 1976, on the 200th anniversary of the American Revolution, a tasting competition of the best French and California wines was organized in Paris. The winner in the category of white wines was the 1973 Château Montelena chardonnay, thus beating the immensely more expensive Montiferrand, and on their own home ground. Thus, Mike Grgić earned his place in history.

Subsequently, Grgić founded “Grgić Hills Winery” in the Napa Valley which he manages in tandem with his daughter. For years now this has been where, with standard reliability, elegant and restrained wines are produced, stylistically very different from until recently the trendy Californian production with high alcohol content. In addition to Grgić Hills there is Dobra zemlja, another winery in California founded by a couple from Croatia. The man who created the modern-day wine industry in California, Robert Mondavi, also has a winery in California called “Grgić Hills”. It is thus clear from the second half of the last decade.

In South America, in Chile, many years ago the late Androniko Lukić, a multi-billionaire originating from Croatia, bought the large, successful and highly rated San Pedro winery.

World success is achieved by wine makers of Croatian origin. The second is Istria, which already sells most of its wine through tourism, and whose wine boom in the last ten years has also been based on an indigenous variety: Istrian Malvasia. And then there is Slavonia, which is blessed with ideal climatic conditions and superb soils; wine production from international varieties, as is so aptly confirmed by Enjingi’s and Krauthaker’s successes. To summarise, the regions which are definitely the most important for the Croatian wine offer are Central and Southern Dalmatia, Istria and Slavonia.

Definitely the most important for the Croatian wine offer are Central and Southern Dalmatia, Istria and Slavonia. The wine-growing regions in Croatia

Wine-growing in Croatia is divided into two main regions: coastal Croatia and continental Croatia.

Wine-growing in Italy is subdivided into the sub-regions of Isera, Croatian Littoral, Northern Dalmatia, Dalmatian Zagora, Central and Southern Dalmatia.

Continental Croatia is divided into a number of sub-regions: from the Danube Basin, through Slavonia, Modavina, the areas in the vicinity of Zagreb, to Medimurje and Zagorje.

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Within those regions attention needs to be drawn to specific wine-growing locations such as, for instance, the Kurjevo area in Slavonia, or Pelješac and Hvar in Dalmatia, from which some of the best Croatian wines come. Furthermore, within those locations themselves are unique localities, such as Dingač on the Pelješac peninsula, which has for over 100 years been regarded as the most exclusive vineyard for the cultivation of Mali Plavac. Unfortunately, the disaster currently prevailing in land registers makes it impossible to say with any certainty how many hectares in total are today planted with grapevine in Croatia. In the older literature a figure of over 50,000 hectares is mentioned, but many experts now believe that this figure is significantly lower, and that despite the intensive programme of raising new vineyards, which has been under implementation over the last few years.
The most important varieties in Croatia’s wine industry

Listed below are indigenous and international varieties, arranged exclusively according to their significance to the Croatian wine industry.

1. Babić - indigenous red grape of Central Dalmatia, which gives the homonymous, sometimes premium wine.
2. Bogdaranska - indigenous white grape, probably originating from the island of Hvar, used in the blend for Prosecco.
3. Cabernet Sauvignon - the best, world-wide known red variety yielding relatively decent results in Istria.
4. Cabernet Franc - red-wine grape variety, used almost exclusively in Istria.
5. Chardonnay - one of the most popular white grape varieties yielding excellent Istrian and Slavonian wines.
6. Crljenak - indigenous red Dalmatian grape variety no longer grown in Croatia, but which is world famous; this is in fact the California Zinfandel that arrived in America from Dalmatia.
7. Debina - white grape variety found in Central Dalmatia, originating from Italy.
8. Graševina - or Welschriesling, white grape variety which is the basis of the contemporary wine industry in Slavonia.
9. Grk - indigenous white grape variety from the island of Korčula which could yield truly great wines; for the time being the only producer devoting himself to this variety to any serious degree is Branimir Cebalo of Lumbarda.
10. Hrvatska, or Croatina - despite its name this red grape variety is also widely found in Italy; at one time a very popular, homonymous rosé was produced from this variety in Uniso.
11. Istrian Malvoisie - the most important indigenous white grape variety in Istria which the great English author on wines, Julia Robinson, described in her classic book. Vines, grapes and wines, singled out as being different from other Malvoisies, raising the question of whether this particular variety is a Malvoisie at all.
12. Maraština - a white grape variety which has been cultivated in Istria for many years with mostly average results. Time will tell what Mr. Krauthaker of Slavonia achieves with his own Merlot.
13. Merlot - a black grape variety which has been cultivated in Istria for many years with mostly average results. Time will tell what Mr. Krauthaker of Slavonia achieves with his own Merlot.
14. Muscat of Monjari - the muscat grown in Western Istria is, supposedly, the white muscat or Muscat 3 Petits Grains, the most highly regarded grape from the vast family of muscats. The Muscat of Monjari yields splendid dessert wines.
15. Pinot Blanc - white grape variety relatively well represented in Istria where, blending it with chardonnay, Matešević produces his excellent yet inexpensive Ausi.
16. PinotGris - a grape variety with a greyish-to-pinkish skin colour; successfully grown in Istria and Slavonia. Enjingi’s is quite something else.
17. Pinot Noir - a red grape variety long cultivated in Slavonia but with no spectacular results. Vlado Krauthaker could be the one in Croatia to produce from this, the best red wine in the world, a decent wine.
18. Plavac Mala - the most important red grape variety in Croatia and the most important variety in Dalmatia. This is an indigenous Dalmatian variety which can yield truly great wines, but it should not be confused with a quite inferior variety of Veliki plavac.
19. Pošip - an indigenous white grape variety from the island of Korčula, which once produced premium wines.
20. Riesling - in Croatia (and Slovenia) the attribute Rhine is added to Riesling in order to differentiate it from Graševina. The only significant producer of wines from this majestic white grape variety is Ivan Enjingi and PPK Karuđevi.
21. Rizvanac - Croatian name for Thunpau-Müller; a high yielding but not too impressive cross between Riesling and Sylvaner.
22. Sauvignon Blanc - excellent white grape variety cultivated in Slavonia and Medimurje. In a few years time we shall be able to see its potential in Istria where, in 2003, vinesyards were planted by Ivica Matešević.
23. Šibenički /Šibenička - an indigenous white grape variety from Medimurje which is becoming rather fashionable on a local level.
24. Teran - the most important black variety grape in Istria, internationally known as Refosco; although some experts and wine makers insist that there are differences between teran and refosco.
25. Traminer - or Traminer: a white grape variety which could yield excellent wines in Slavonia, where it is widely cultivated.
26. Vugava - a fine, aromatic white grape variety from the island of Vis which could, with serious investment, yield excellent wines.
27. Zelenac - a red grape variety rescued from oblivion by Vlado Krauthaker.
28. Zweigelt/Zweigeltrebe - a red grape variety, a cross between the St. Laurent and the Blaufränkischer varieties. Enjingi’s Zweigelt is one of the few good red wines in continental Croatia.
29. Zizhina - an indigenous white grape variety in the Croatian Littoral which gave rise to the growth of the wine industry on the island of Krk.
In the 1990s the Istrian political and economic elite decide to create a new image for this lovely parcel of Croatia. Instead of being a massive tourist zone, which Istria indeed was in the 1970s and 1980s, it was planned that this, the largest Croatian peninsula, was to attract foreign visitors with its hedonistic lifestyle offer, of which wine is one of the main constituents. That this concept was more than justified has been proved by the flourishing of vineyards and wine making in Istria. Consequently, in a relatively small area with a population not exceeding 200,000 there are more than 80 active wineries, with new ones being established on a regular basis.

Over 50% of the wine produced in Istria is sold through direct sale to tourists: in local restaurants, hotels, bars and shops, while a part is sold in the wine cellars themselves. However, despite this boom over the past 10 years Istria is still not producing sufficient quantities of its most popular wines and so, sad to say, there are times when stocks of Kozlović’s and Matošević’ Malvoisie are exhausted.

It has to be pointed out that in the last five years the quality of Istrian wines has increased significantly. Since 2000, Istria has produced several wines of real world class (Kozlović’s 2002 Santa Lucia, Coronica’s 2002 Gran Malvoisie, Matošević’s Chardonnay Anima of 1999 and 2000). We believe that this trend will continue, bearing in mind that Istrian wine growers are investing hugely in vineyards and wine cellars, as well as in marketing.

The most important Istrian grape variety is, of course, the Istrian Malvoisie, but there are others the names of which absolutely must be mentioned, like white Muscat: in Istria known as the Muscat of Croatia, the first thing that one sees – apart from the truly impressive landscape – is a vast billboard bearing the message: “Istria, the land of fine wine.”
Istria

Monjul, and which is known to yield magnifi-
cent dessert wines, and the extremely successful Chardonnay.

In this review we shall restrict ourselves only to the most successful and the most important Istrian producers. Due to shortage of space we have to omit some very good wine makers, such as Radovan and Ferleti, but we believe that they will soon join the leading Istrian wine stars. The Istrian wine sub-region forms part of the coastal region of Croatia, comprising western, central and eastern Istrian wine-growing areas.

**Malvoisie**

Malvasia Istriana is actually a political-cum-economic project which has been materialized in the shape of several premium wines and a whole range of very good quality wines. In the mid-1990s young Istrian politicians assessed that Istrian tourism could, once the war had been left behind them, live, indeed thrive on wine, truffles and olive groves, and not just from the sea and the sun. The outcome was that the County of Istria began to systemati-
cally stimulate the planting of vineyards and olive groves and to market Istrian wines.

Istrian Malvoisie was the only grape variety which Istrian politicians and the new Istrian wine makers had to hand and which could yield a great amount of good wine. Its cultivation in Istria dates back a long way. And so, through joint efforts by Istrian politicians, marketing experts, tourist workers, wine makers, restaur-

ant owners and pop and rock stars – all of whom did everything in their power to ensure the success of the project – Istrian Malvoisie was finally turned into a first class media-cum-political sensation, and rightly so. In addition to the aforesaid symbolic and excellent economic results, Istrian Malvoisie became a distinguishing symbolic element of Istria, and a significant part of its identity.

The ambitious Istrians decided to expand the project of winning recognition for their Malvoisie literally throughout the world. It was on those lines that the World Congresus held in Rovinj in the spring of 2005, after which the ever hyperactive Matošević was the first to introduce the barrique as standard for individual wines. Nor does it collide with sushi and sashimi. He consistently implemented cold fermentation...

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Istrian Malvoisies, such as Kozlović’s Santa Lucia, have attained a standard of truly world-class wines.

**Winemakers and wines**

**Matošević**

Thirty-nine-year-old Ivica Matošević is not only the man who revived the Istrian wine industry but also the one able to make it commercially viable in European terms. And this is not a question only of his wines, but of an approach to both the production and the culture of wines which is totally new to Istria. Matošević is the innovator of the actual wine production in this area: he was the first to introdu-
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The most important aspect, however, is that Matošević was the first to realize that on a market becoming increasingly competitive the only way a wine could be sold success-

The Matošević Winery produces between 40,000 and 50,000 bottles of wine each year, with the standard Malvoisie, not aged in barriques, accounting for fifty percent of that quantity.
The 2001 Santa Lucia Malvoisie, of which only a few thousand bottles were produced, is one of the rare, truly great Croatian white wines. The combination of its fragrance (apricots, peaches, yellow flowers, peaches) and by its structure, it was closer to a premium Condrieu than it was to a Malvoisie. And it demonstrated that Kozlović is able to deliver a very high quality indeed, providing that the vintage is at least decent.

Kozlović, who is of the same generation as Matošević, is the largest private producer of Malvoisie in Istria. His picturesque winery, with a lovely view towards the forests of Istria, which he inherited from his father and went on to radically transform, is located close to Buje, a small town in the interior of Istria, close to the Croatian-Slovene border.

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Arman’s dessert wine Muškatel was awarded a medal at a wine fair in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The author’s personal favourite from Arman’s palette is Chardonnay Zima vula: an elegant, gentle, restrained, floral wine, quite unusual as far as Istrian and Croatian Chardonnays are concerned. It goes well with cooked or uncooked seafood, with white wine sauces (without heavy sauces), or with cooked grouper. Arman’s Zima vula was one of the more pleasant surprises during weeks of wine tasting carried out for the benefit of this publication.

Istrian Malvoisies, such as Kozlović’s Santa Lucia, have attained a standard of truly worldclass wines.

Marko Markežić is the owner of a restaurant of the same name, in the village of Kremenje, at the foot of Momjan in Western Istria. The Marino restaurant is a Mecca for lovers of truffles: from the chief producer of sparkling wines. The example of Markežić offers not only wines from the chief Istrian producers, but also his own Teran and Malvoisie.

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The wine industry on that island experienced a boom some ten years ago when the whole country literally went mad for Žlahtina, the indigenous grape variety which yields light, relatively refreshing wines of low alcohol content and which are successful thirst quenchers. Suddenly, five or six producers of Žlahtina appeared on the market and in restaurants, both at the seaside and in Zagreb, the country's capital, sold more Žlahtina than any other bottled wine. Over time, Žlahtina lost some of its popularity, but some of the major producers, such as PZ (Agricultural Cooperative) Vrbnik, Katunar and Tolićanić, are still doing quite a successful business. Žlahtina is a must on the tourist offer of the island of Krk.

Another island worthy of mention in the littoral area, alongside Krk, is Susak. Some 50 years ago, of the island's total area of 375 hectares 288 hectares were under vineyards, and going still further back to the beginning of the last century over 300 hectares (87% of the island) was covered with vineyards. Today, the Italian winery Cosulich is cultivating Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, white Muscat and Cabernet Sauvignon on some 14 hectares.

Frajona is a company located on the island of Krk, although most of its vineyards are in Western Istria. On the island the company produces one of the numerous local Žlahtinas, and a sparkling wine based on Žlahtina. Of the Istrian varieties, Frajona vinifies Malvasia and a relatively interesting Merlot which is allowed to undergo malolactic fermentation, matures in barriques and while young it has a raspberry aroma. This is one of the more drinkable red wines from that part of Croatia.

This is a relatively large producer (over 60 hectares), offering a stable level of quality in the lower spectrum of the market at low prices.

Katunar family were among the first private producers to appear on the island of Krk. They capitalized on the once great demand for Žlahtina, a most definitely thirst quenching wine, and have built a modern winery and restaurant and tasting bar in Vrbnik. Katunar's Žlahtinas are typical wines that Krk has been producing over the past ten years.

The Vrbnik Agricultural Cooperative is one of the largest producers of Žlahtina. At the time when this wine was still very fashionable, Zlatna Žlahtina produced by PZ Vrbnik was the best-selling wine in the restaurants of Zagreb. It is light, reasonably refreshing and easy going.
hose vineyards of the Babić variety are a protected world monument of culture: planted on small terraces of red soil, fenced with step-like walls which, viewed from a distance, give the impression (as Professor Sokolić wrote in his Golden Book on Wines) of an orderly chess board. Sadly, the vineyards of Primošten, which once covered about 200 hectares, have been in decline for years, but they still remain undoubtedly the most attractive wine location on the whole stretch of coast between Zadar and Trogir.

But Northern Dalmatia, particularly the hinterland of Zadar, also possesses great potentials for wine production. There was a time when Maraština, a quality white grape variety, was widely cultivated in the area of Benkovac and around Zadar and Biograd. It is interesting to note that it was around Benkovac that, in the 1980s, the first serious attempts were made to plant vineyards of Grenache and Syrah/Shiraz in Croatia, from which wines of the same names were produced and bottled.

The Homeland War hit Zadar and Šibenik hard, as well as their hinterlands, effectively halting the development of wine growing and the wine industry in that region. Nowadays however, bearing in mind a tourist industry which is growing from strength to strength, it is realistic to expect a revival and an advance in the wine industry in those two cities and in the areas close to them. Šibenik already has a large wine producing company (Vinoplod) which, in addition to producing a premium Babić, has the capacity to process over 100,000 litres of wine per year. In the spring of 2005, Badel, a Zagreb based wine industry, began a grapevine planting campaign involving an area of over 400 hectares in the Zadar hinterland, the area known as Ravni kotari.
Northern Dalmatia and the Dalmatian hinterland. Bibić riserva (two stars) is vinified from Babić grapes, from the less known local varieties Lasina and Plavina, and from the international varieties Grenache and Syrah. Bibić riserva is allowed to mature in barriques for 12 months. This is a smooth, light, quite charming and correctly produced red wine which could go well with grilled or salt pickled sardines, prosciutto, or with pasta served with tomato-based sauces. It is one of the rare Dalmatian wines which can be drunk as a thirst quencher. Regrettably, in the last few years we did happen across several bottles of very poor quality.

In addition to Bibiće, Alen Bibić also bottles several types of Debit and a red, non-barriqued Bibiće produced from grapes harvested from his three-hectare vineyards and from grapes procured from the areas of Promine and Benkovac.

Babić is unarguably the greatest wine attraction of Central Dalmatia, as much for its famous vineyards as for the true potential of this indigenous black variety. The largest producer is Vinoplod, the Šibenik winery, which also bottles a whole range of other wines: red, white and rosé.

Barrique aged Babić, a wine with a high alcohol, is the only Dalmatian wine which can be compared with wine produced from Plavac mali. Babić is also bottled in one-litre bottles, but such wine is totally inferior to premium Babić, a wine with a high alcohol content which can, at times, be not only rich but sumptuous too.

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Revitalization of vineyards in Northern Dalmatia

Specifically, in the hinterland of Zadar Badel has initiated the planting of vineyards on an area extending to 400 hectares, which is probably the most ambitious campaign for vineyard revival in Croatia, the grapes in question being mostly of red international varieties.

It will take five to six years for us to see whether Northern Dalmatia, and in particular the areas around Zadar, does have a potential for the production of serious red wines. Whatever the case may be it is quite clear that wines from Northern Dalmatia will not be able to compare favourably with wines from Hvar and Pelješac for a long time, either in prestige or in price; in other words wines from the Zadar hinterland will play second fiddle within the range of red Dalmatian wines for some time to come. Realistically speaking, the only (and very important) objective at this point in time is to plant vineyards and to establish reasonably modern and clean vinification. Anything of a more ambitious nature is of secondary importance. And so we stress once more: Badel’s investment in vineyards in Dalmatia is possibly the most ambitious project of its kind in Dalmatia and deserves unconditional praise.
It is there that on hard, poor, stone based soils, but in ideal climatic conditions, Plavac mali is grown. This is the most precious of all Croatia’s indigenous varieties, which yields wines that can become a prestigious Croatian export product. As luck would have it, those very locations, on which some of the best Croatian wines are being produced, are at the same time the most attractive parts of this land touristically speaking. Notably, for several successive years now Hvar and Dubrovnik have been the champions of Croatian tourism and the most favoured Croatian destinations for the world’s jet set.

Private wine production in Central and Southern Dalmatia has been witnessing a serious impetus only in the last seven to eight years, but already very good results are being achieved. Apart from the ever more varied range of Plavac wines on offer, with those from Hvar, Brač and Pelješac being by far the best, this part of Dalmatia also produces several premium white wines, mostly from Pošip, yet another indigenous variety. Two other indigenous varieties, Grik and Vugava, also possess great potentials. Prosecco is a special dessert wine from Dalmatia produced from dried raisins and/or cooked must, and can be absolutely fascinating.

With further investment in vineyards and related technologies and with continuing raising of standards, Central and Southern Dalmatia could become wine destinations of world significance.

**Prošek**

Honey sweet, sumptuously rich Prošek with high alcohol content is possibly the most valu-
able Croatian contribution to the world's wine industry. How original a wine Prošek is and how great it can be is borne witness to by an almost ecstatic review given to Tomić's Hectorovich, one of the best Prošeks, by La Revue du Vin de France. And that to a wine which, according to Tomić himself, has not been produced in accordance with the highest standards for such wine. If a Prošek that is made to be less than the highest standards was able to delight French wine critics and sommeliers, we can only imagine what reaction an ideally produced Prošek would cause.

What, in fact, is Prošek? Well, it is a dessert wine which, in ideal circumstances, should be vinified from dried grapes, mostly a combination of white varieties such as Malvazina, Glik and Vajgara, but also from lesser known indigenous varieties. It contains between 15 and 17 vol. alcohol and over 100g of unfermented sugar. Prošek can also be produced from Plavac, as Zlatan Planković is proving with no small success. In practice, however, there are precious few producing Prošek from dried raisins only. Even Andre Tomić makes his Hectorovich with 30% of cooked must. He does however say that he is soon to begin the vinification of Prošek exclusively from dried grapes, and goes on to suggest that there should be two categories of Prošek: a more expensive version, made completely naturally, and a less expensive version to which cooked must could be added.

Whatever the case, Prošek, this great sweet wine of Dalmatia, which blends ideally with a range of cakes containing walnuts, almonds and dried figs, could become almost as important in the Croatian export product since they are truly unique both in aromas and in their structures. Owing to Plavac mali a significant wine stage emerged in Central and Southern Dalmatia, dominated by producers such as Hvar and Pelješac. While the Plavac wines from Hvar are less aggressive, more fruity and round-bodied, those from Pelješac have a higher alcohol content, are more robust, with stronger, more pronounced tannins. There are, of course, exceptions, but generally speaking this division, also based on the type of soil, stands. An exception here is Mario Mendek, a Zagreb vintner recently turned wine-maker, who is now producing what is to date the most unusual French-style Plavac from Pelješac-grown grapes. Mendek’s wines are still too new and are generally unavailable, which is why we have not included them in the review of wines and wines producers.

The second important fact concerning Plavac mali is that it yields premium wines only on steeply sloping locations. Plavac mali grown in the lowlands yields significantly inferior wines. The superior Plavac mali does indeed possess the character of Dalmatia: it is hot, temperamental, sumptuous, tart, somewhat rustic and, quite simply, unique.

DINGAČ

Dingač of Pelješac is the best known wine-growing location in Croatia and there are mentions of it in foreign literature before WWI. There was a time when some 1200 hectares of the peninsula were under vineyards with red grape varieties accounting for 90% of the area. Today it is not possible to say with any degree of exactness how much of the Pelješac peninsula is under vineyards, since a significant number of wine producers have shifted to whites and to export wines. However, the remainders of Dingač have been labeled as Dingač AOC, which guarantees a minimum alcohol content of 12% and the typical earthy aromas of that variety, offering good value for money.
Zlatan Plenković, a wine maker and wine professional on the Dalmatian islands alongside oenologist Andro Tomić, the most prominent wine maker on the Dalmatian islands alongside Zlatan Plenković, produces around 400,000 bottles of wine per year, which even this is unable to meet an ever growing demand. We sincerely hope that market demands will not have a negative impact on the truly high quality standards of Zlatan plavac.

In describing Hectorovich Prošek (four stars), named after Petar Hektorović of Hvar, a well known Croatian poet of the Renaissance period, La Revue du Vin de France used only superlatives in reference to its richness and thickness. Hectorovich is produced to the majority of other Prošeks, which are based on a blend of white varieties, his is produced from Plavac mali. From about eighty hectares of vineyards the Zlatan Plenković Winery, founded in the early 1990s (one of its founders was oenologist Andro Tomić, the most prominent wine maker on the Dalmatian islands alongside Zlatan Plenković), produces around 400,000 bottles of wine per year, which even this is unable to meet an ever growing demand. We sincerely hope that market demands will not have a negative impact on the truly high quality standards of Zlatan plavac.

Pošip and Plavac produced by Miljenko Gržič rate between three and four stars.

La Revue du Vin de France also gave very favourable reviews to Tomić’s 1999 Plavac barrique, which differs from other wines produced from Plavac mali in its velvetly elegance, mellow and integrated tannins, lower alcohol content (c. 13.5% vol.) and a somewhat less obvious, characteristic varietal aroma of Plavac mali. This is a wine produced almost in the style of a Supertuscan. At the time of writing the 2003 and 2004 vintages can be found on the market.

Regrettably, Tomić produces both his Prošek and his Plavac barrique in small quantities (less than 10,000 bottles each) and so they can be found only in top-of-the range restaurants and in several leading wine boutiques.

In his Bastijana Winery Andro Tomić, formerly the leading oenologist in Dalmatia for the Zagreb-based Bidelj barrique company and who spent six months in the wine cellars of France, also produces a dessert wine, Hektor, which in its method of production (addition of strong alcohol which arrests fermentation) and its aroma is a kind of Croatian Porto. His range of products includes several Plavac wines of lesser significance. Of late he has begun experimenting with Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, which he grows on a small (total of 1.5 hectare) vineyard situated in the small, picturesque isles of Pakleni otoci, near the island of Hvar.

It is, in better years, one of the best Croatian wines generally speaking, but is particularly applicable to the 1999 vintage which has a great potential for maturing but can, sadly, still be found only in the Sveta Nedjelja winery. Later harvests (as we write, the 2003 and 2004 vintages are on the market) were more than satisfactory: these wines are exceptionally rich, expressive, slightly hard but already quite smooth, especially with red meats and hard cheeses like, for example, Pag cheese.

And finally, Zlatan plavac Gran Cru (four stars) with a white label which comes from the best selected locations above Sveta Nedjelja. Its vinification began only recently. This is an incredibly intense wine with high alcohol volume (over 15%), bottled in minimal quantities and one which should be allowed to age for at least three to four years before it is capable of showing its full potential. But bearing in mind that Zlatan plavac Gran Cru is a totally original, unique and undoubtedly precious wine, one should taste it wherever its can be found.

Zlatan Plenković, a wine maker and wine grower on the island of Hvar, also produces two white wines: Zlatan otok and Zavala and Zlatan plavac rosé, but neither of these is worthy of, in better years, one of the truly high quality standards of Zlatan plavac.

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Wines of Andro Tomić received positive reviews in the highly regarded French professional journal La Revue du Vin de France. Andro Tomić of Hvar is the first Croatian wine maker whose wines received positive reviews in the highly regarded French professional journal La Revue du Vin de France. At a wine tasting held in the spring of 2004, French wine critics and sommeliers ranked two of Tomić’s wines among the best 150 wines outside France, and both found their way onto the front cover of the May, 2004 issue of the journal.

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Opening within the Plenković Winery is the Jidro Restaurant.
both the development of the Croatian wine industry and on the recognisability of Croatian wines on international markets. One innovation introduced by Grgić was his introduction of a system of the rigorous selection of grapes which local wine producers had not dared to implement. His popularity was certainly unaffected by his habit of turning away individual grape supplies literally from the doors of his winery if he considered their grapes not in a good enough condition. That is also among the reasons why his Polips are vastly better that those produced by any other Dalmatian wine maker from this same indigenous Croatian variety. In the late 1990s, before the new wave of young Istrlian wine makers had won recognition and before Enajnji and Krauthaker raised their standards to their present level, Grgić’s Polip was the only Croatian dry white wine truly relevant in world terms.

The Plavac produced by this famous Californian Croat Grgić has shown great potential for maturing. Grgić produces some 20,000 bottles each of barrique-matured Pošip and Plavac. Exported to the USA, they still achieve rather good grades in American wine publications.

In the summer of 2002 the prestigious Bronstein wine boutique in Zagreb organized a vertical tasting of Stagnum. Up until that point in time no other Croatian wine had either the honour or the opportunity to pass through the test of time and changes obligatory for all the great wines of France, Italy or California. This wine tasting was also attended by the then Norwegian Ambassador in Croatia, a passionate collector of great and expensive Vega Sicilia Spanish wines; in other words a man who really knows wines. He was extremely impressed by the 1993 Stagnum, one of the very rare Croatian red dry wines to show a potential for maturing and which is therefore worth buying as an investment. Frano Miloš, an amateur wine maker who until recently was of the opinion that tannins from a barrique only enhance the naturally high tannins in Plavac mali, is the author of this wine which, alongside Pločnik’s Gran Cru, is probably the most original of all Croatian dry wines. Stagnum (four stars from 1992 to this day) is a wild, utterly inegalant but simply unbelievable rich and complex wine whose virtues more than compensate for its deficiencies. This is a wine to be savoured with heavy, hard old cheeses, for game, lamb chops and large, really, really rare steaks.

For this wine Frano Miloš commands the highest price of all Dalmatian dry red wines. Stagnum is a wine that once tasted is long remembered; a wine which provokes either distinctly positive or distinctly negative reactions, but it is also a wine which most definitely belongs to the few Croatian wine treasures of world relevance. It is produced from grapes grown in an impressive vineyard located on rock-based terrain above the village of Fonikve, on the Pelješac peninsula. In addition to the dry version Stagnum is occasionally vinified in a variety of semi-sweet or sweet wines (three to four stars).

Frano Miloš who, in the late 1990s was producing wines literally in his garage in Ponikve, thus quite unconsciously anticipated the trend of ultra expensive “garage” wines of the Bordeaux style. Miloš also produces Fatiga (two stars), an ordinary Plavac, quite light and inexpensive, as well as Nadahnuće [Inspiration], an unusual white wine, a very heavy, rustic blend of the indigenous Dalmatian varieties, Pošip and Maranića.

Fatiga, an ordinary Plavac, quite light wine from Pelješac.

Stagnum is a wild, utterly inelegant, but simply unbelievably rich and complex wine.
Ivan Dolac is both the name of probably the best
vineyard on the island of Hvar and of the
brand owned by the Svirče Winery.

Baković is a long established name
for a Plavac mali wine from the
island of Brač, received very good reviews from
the French experts. Murvica (three stars) is
a concentrated, warm and thick wine with
an easily recognizable aroma. Regrettably, the
small quantities in which it is produced make it
relatively difficult to find.

Faros is a brand owned by the Svirče Winery operating within Dalmacijavino,
a large company in Split. Faros, for which grapes are grown in the
locality of Hvar, is produced in a barrique (red label, two to three stars), and a non-
barrique version (white label, two stars). Both wines are typically of medium high alcohol
volume (13.5 - 14 vol.). They have the strong aromas of Plavac and produce a relatively
sweet aftertaste.

The barrique version is somewhat richer,
more rounded and ages well.

It is still possible to find on the market the 1999
vintage, one of the best ever in Dalmatia, and
the Faros of that year was, at the time this text
was written (spring of 2006) in a rather decent
form. It is a very good representative of Plavac
wines from islands which are, generally speaking,
soft wines that go well with grilled red meat
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with cigars. And with all due respect to Roki’s originality, for a wine like Matadur a barrique is practically essential. In any event, it is going to be intriguing, not to say educational, to observe the progress of Matadur over the next three to four years.

Ivo Skaramuša of the village of Kuna on Pelješac is one of the first more important private producers of Dingač. He was also a member of the association of private wine makers founded in the first half of the 1990s, and which also included Ivan Enjingi, Davor Zdjelarević and Vlado Krauthaker, although the association was short lived.

Skaramuša owns four hectares of vineyards, some of which are in the Dingač area. His Dingač, which he makes both from his own grapes and from those procured from other growers, is typically aggressive, rough and strong, just like the rock-bound land on which Plavac mali grows on the best locations on Pelješac.

The Agricultural Cooperative of Čara on the island of Korčula is one of the two main producers of Pošip, a superb indigenous variety. The other producer is the Jedinstvo Agricultural Cooperative of Smokvica. The prestigious wine from Čara, where the local winery procures grapes from members of the Cooperative, is Marko Polo Pošip which, in 2002, possessed over 14 vol. alcohol. Although Čara Pošip wines are inferior to those produced by Gržetić, they are still fine, modern wines, rather full bodied but relatively fresh, which tell a detailed story of the variety from which they are made and the area from which they come. We believe that Marko Polo which, like other wines from PZ Čara, are distributed by Dalmacijavino, has a very good future, particularly in the direct tourist sale and particularly if one bears in mind that Korčula is one of the places central to the future of Croatian tourism. And Pošip wines from Čara do make a perfect companion to lobsters, the larger fish and scampi.

Mario Mendek, a Zagreb vintner, could bring about a total change in the production of wine in Dalmatia. Born in 1962 in Zagreb, Mendek is both a “naturschik” and a perfectionist. He possesses no formal oenological education but through his catering and trading career this absolute wine fanatic, owner of the “Kult Dioniza” (Cult of Dionysus) Wine Boutique, familiarized himself with the finest wines in the world by visiting the wine cellars of great winemakers such as Domaine de Romanée-Conti, while at the same time trading in slightly inferior products such as Frijona’s Žlahtina. In the course of his, in the field, research of the world of great
In September 2002 Mario Mendek brought with him to Pula, Croatia, the great Angelo Gaja, the most prominent producer from Piemonte. During a meeting in Vazlabbon, Gaja was seated between Mendek and myself. At one point in the proceedings Gaja said that he would like to produce wines at Pelješac, from either Plavac or from a blend of Plavac and Cabernet Sauvignon. Mario later told me how he and Gaja (Mendek has been importing Gaja’s ultra-expensive wines into Croatia for a considerable period of time) had long dreamed of establishing a joint winery on Pelješac and planting new vineyards. Regrettably, that plan—which, considering Gaja’s incomparable reputation, would have ensured the launching of Croatia’s wines to the very centre of the world’s wine stage—never came to fruition. But only two years elapsed from that hedonistic wines dinner in Pula to when Mario Mendek released his own first wines onto the market.

These are Enigma, Mozaik (two to three stars) and Selekcija (four stars). Grapes for these wines are picked at Dingač and Postup, in other words from the best positions on Pelješac. The wines were made by Roberto Cipresso, one of Italy’s leading winemakers. Among other things Cipresso was the author of some of the great Tuscany (La Fiorita from Brunello di Montalcino) and Argentinean wines. Cipresso belongs to that group of winemakers which is ever determined to emphasize the values of a particular area and micro-climate, i.e. the goût de terroir of, in this case, Pelješac. And he certainly achieved admirable results with Selekcija, Mendek’s prestigious wine.

While Mendek’s Mozaik is just another of the better quality Plavac wines and which compares with Planković’s standard Zlatan, Selekcija, with its prominent, but still unfinalized and quite unappealing black label, or perhaps despite it, truly is a wine which has altered standards in the Croatian wine industry. Although the 2003 Selekcija was released onto the market too early, it has still outclassed the ever increasing competition. It is an elegant and strong wine with a very complicated bouquet and almost velvety in texture, one which completely alters the preconception of a Plavac mali wine as being necessarily rustic and aggressive. Furthermore, Selekcija has clearly shown that a premium Mali plavac wine need not be produced in miniature quantities. Quite to the contrary, the 2003 harvest produced 20,000 bottles, while the 2004 vintage (which, to judge from what I have tasted from the barrel, is even more impressive than the very good 2003) could give at least 30,000 bottles.

Mario Mendek’s winery is located in a large warehouse of the former tourist complex “Vrtovi sunca” [Gardens of the Sun] some 15 minutes’ drive from Dubrovnik in the direction of Pelješac, extends for as much as 6000 m2 and is a combination of a factory hall and a pharmacy (cleanliness being one of the crucial criteria in wine production). Particularly impressive are the lines of altogether 140 barriques in which the 2004 Selekcija is aging.

Southern Dalmatia could become an attractive wine destination in the world terms. This winery is without any argument the most advanced and the most modern enterprise ever undertaken within the wine industry in Dalmatia. If only some of the more ambitious Dalmatian winemakers were to adopt Mendek’s working methods (which include hand selection of grapes on tables in the winery) Southern Dalmatia could become an attractive wine destination in world terms. For now it is a pleasure to state that Mendek’s Selekcija is one of only two or three Croatian red wines which could, without any complexes, compete on the international level in the high categories.
The amount of wine produced in the vicinity of Zagreb is relatively unambitious, or is based on poorer varieties such as Kraljevina and Portugieser which can be good for a spritzer (or, as they say in and around Zagreb, a “gemisht”) or as a thirst quencher, but it cannot compare with the main wines from other Croatian wine regions. However, there are several dedicated winemakers and wine growers around Zagreb listed in this review whose examples show that hills surrounding Croatia’s capital city can indeed produce premium wines. For instance, the Chardonnay produced by Korak and by Tomič, or the sparkling wine Šenpjen, can become a tourist trademark of Zagreb. It is to be hoped that many more winemakers will opt for producing ambitiously serious wines, which the soils around Zagreb make possible.

Winemakers and wines

ŠENPJEN

The story of Šenpjen, one of the first Croatian sparkling wines, is unique, exciting, even tragic, but with the possibility of having a happy end.

In the early 1990s, Ivan Turk, an electronics expert of Zagreb, began producing sparkling wines as a hobby in his vineyard hut above Šenkovec, towards the Slovene border. Having travelled through France, Turk became an admirer of Krug. Using the grapes from his small vineyard, where over ten different varieties are still being grown,
and with the help of the Slovene oenologist Janez Vołovec, after whom he had named his first Croatian sparkling wine. But one cold winter day at the end of the 1990s, Ivan Turk slipped and fell in his vineyard and died instantly. But despite this tragedy Šenpjen did not disappear. The business was taken over by Turk’s daughter, Lidija Volovec, after whom he had named his first sparkling wine.

Of late the quality of Šenpjen has fallen dramatically in comparison to that produced in the early and mid-1990s. However, the wine that the author of these lines tasted this summer, having purchased haphazardly off a shelf in one of the local supermarkets, was a very pleasant surprise. After Peršurić’s unparalleled Mladić, Šenpjen is today certainly the second-best Croatian sparkling wine, having a solid body, typical Champagne aromatic compounds (yeast, brioche, a tinge of citrus) and fine effervescence.

Šenpjen is produced from a whole range of varieties, including Graševina, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon, Rîne Riesling, Traminac, Pinot Noir and Frankovka. From a vineyard less than one hectare in area, eight to ten tonnes of grapes are picked every year, sufficient for some 9,000 bottles of Šenpjen. It remains a relatively expensive wine but its quality is coming ever closer to justifying its price.

KORAK Velimir Korak is a quite untypical Zagreb winemaker. Notably, the majority of wines produced in the hills around Zagreb have high acidity, thin body and negligible aromatic compounds and are mostly used for “spirits”, and those that can be unreveredly recommended with a clear conscience are few and far between.

Korak’s wines are at the very top of that short list, part of which is Šenpjen. His barrel-aged Chardonnay (three, possibly four stars) is a classic Californian, and not a Zagreb or even a Croatian wine, with unusually dominant traits of butter and butterscotch. Big, heavy, unctuous, uncompromising, it goes very well with cholesterol-rich creamy sauces and with veal in versions like Saltimbocca Romana. After two hours of breathing it acquires a fragrance, even the gently oxidised taste of a fine sherry.

Korak’s Sauvignon Blanc (two to three stars) is an example of a success story from the wine growing hills around Zagreb.

The area produces relatively large quantities of wines, which is why winemakers of the County of Zagreb sometimes claim to be the leading wine producers in the country.
t the time, Štrigova in Međimurje was renowned for being one of the most important wine centres in continental Croatia. The wine growing country in Međimurje still provides several premium wines, primarily by the Bobnjar family and which are akin to Slovene wines from the far bank of the Mura River (fruity, high level of acidity, moderate alcohol content). However, economically well developed Međimurje is still awaiting the arrival of its first great wine ‘guru’ to inspire local winemakers to modernize production and to more efficient exploitation of what are unquestionably very good natural potentials.

Winemakers and wines

BOBNJAR The Bobnjar family is numbered among the pioneers of private wine production in Croatia. Their wines are in fact a Croatian-Slovene family joint venture: their vineyards are on the location of Globočki vrh, in Međimurje, Croatia, while the cellars are across the border in Slovenia. Bobnjar wines regularly win...
Augšt and Albina Bobnjar have for a long time been the producers of the best Croatian Sauvignon (three stars), full of distinct fragrances of grass and green currants, markedly fresh, crisp and crystal clear. Their Chardonnay (three stars) and Graševina (two stars) are also reliable wines with a characteristically light body, high acidity level and certain elegance.

The Bobnjars own three hectares of vineyards and their wines are readily available in supermarkets and in the majority of Zagreb restaurants. Their Sauvignon makes a perfect companion to almost all summer salads, but especially with oysters and mussels. More is the pity that they are not attempting to produce more complicated wines but have preferred instead to stick with one and the same standard vinification of simple, clean and refreshing wines for fifteen years, albeit successful ones.

To reiterated, Bobnjar’s wines are very good and readily recognizable but it would be interesting to see what their grapes could do in different stylistic expressions.

In 2001 the 1999 vintage Sauvignon (two to three stars) produced by the Belović family of Štrigova won the title of champion at the Zagreb Vinovita, when this national exhibition of wines enjoyed a greater reputation than is the case today. That same year their 1999 Traminac was awarded the gold medal. Their victory at Vinovita ensured a place on the wine lists of the better Zagreb restaurants for Belović Sauvignon: a distinctly aromatic, grassy, very full bodied wine which needs to be drunk as young as possible.

In addition to the Sauvignon and Traminar varieties grown on the six hectares of vineyards in Međimurje (of which the locations of Businčak and Železna gora are considered particularly valuable) Belović also cultivates Riesling, Sylvaner, Graševina and Chardonnay, with a yield of around 7 to 10 tonnes per year. Production is about 15,000 bottles, 6,500 bottles being Sauvignon and 4,000 Traminac.

The family expects a great deal from the 2004 harvest which, they point out, produced grapes of excellent condition and with an optimum ratio of sugars to acids.

Professor Franjo Lovrec is one of the originators of private wine making in Međimurje. In the first half of the 1990s his wines were a must on the wine lists of the majority of the better Zagreb restaurants and hotels. On six hectares of vineyards he grows Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Riesling, Graševina and Traminar. The Lovrec wines are simple, light and refreshing.
uring Communist Yugoslavia, Slavonia was used as a source of grapes for Slovene producers. For instance, Vinag of Maribor was using Graševina from Baranja, and Riesling from Baranja and Srđjenski to make vintage wines, some of which are still (now fifty years old) being sold at local auctions.

After all, Slavonia is the birthplace of Croatian private wine production. It was Ivo Enjingi, the man who in 2004, on September 15, was presented with a gold medal as the absolute champion in his category for his 1998 wine, Venje, and who was the first Croatian private producer to be given the right to add to the label of his late harvest Graševina the designation of premium wine. That was back in 1988.

Slavonia does indeed have excellent potentials for the production of large quantities of superb wines, particularly white wines. One is presented with a difficult decision as to which of her vineyards are of better quality and more challenging: Srijem and Baranja in the Danube basin, Đakovo in Eastern Slavonia, or Kutjevo in Central Slavonia.

The epicentre of Slavonian wine making is the area around Kutjevo. Ejningi, Krauthaker and PPK Kutjevo are the most important Slavonian producers, while Enjingi’s and Krauthaker’s ongoing experiments with new varieties are definitely divorcing modern-day Slavonia from its image of a mono-cultural Graševina, i.e. Welcherriesling, as it seemed six or seven years ago.

Together with Dalmatia, Slavonia could become the second great Croatian exporter of wines, but not indigenous as is the case in Dalmatia (because there are in fact no indigenous varieties in Slavonia) but produced from international varieties.
GRAŞEVINA

The majority of professional literature on wines regards Grasevina as a mediocre variety without specific varietal characteristics, one which cannot yield premium wine. In practice, there are numerous examples to the contrary, and the most important world advocate of Grasevina is the great Austrian winemaker Alois Kracher, whose Grasevina is consistently awarded between 95 and 100 points in the Wine Spectator and is commanding prices of 50-100 Euro for a small bottle. However, Kracher’s Grasevina is sweet and botrytised, whereas the Croatian product is dry or semi-dry.

Slavonian winemakers have used this ostensibly mediocre variety and have shaped it into their main means of survival, earnings and investment. It can be said that without any doubt Grasevina has created the new wine industry of Slavonia. All prominent winemakers, Ivan Enjingi, Vlado Krauthaker and Davor Zdijarević, earned their first serious money with Grasevinas, and it was only later that they moved on to more pretentious wines. Of them all only Ivan Enjingi remained completely loyal to Grasevina; his late harvest Grasevina are constantly the best such wines produced in Croatia. The 2002 harvest received an award at the Decanter’s Global Wine Tasting, which lasted almost a year.

A whole range of smaller Slavonian producers continue to base a large part of their production on Grasevina. Only time will tell whether their loyalty to that variety which, incidentally, originates from France (although its alternative name is Laski, i.e. Italian Riesling) is a restrictive factor in the development of the Slavonian wine industry of accumulation of capital, when his Grasevina became a brand so prevelent among wines in Croatia (as is Ožujsko among Croatian beers) and a period of improvement in quality, setting of new standards, experimentation and production of premium wines.

The story of Ivan Enjingi is paradigmatic for the development of the Croatian private wine industry. When he appeared on the market towards the end of the 1980s, Enjingi gave us a hint of his ability to take advantage of superb wines growing area of Slavonia. Some of his first wines were simply excellent, although many ended up being merely mediocre. But having established relatively large-scale production Enjingi managed to accrue a certain amount of funds which he invested in improvements of both the vineyards and the wine production.

Today, Enjingi produces a relatively wide range of wines, outstanding among which is an unusual Traminac, with a very high alcohol content, vinified in the Alsace style (three stars), and Zweigelt from barrique (three stars), one of the rare red continental wines of Croatia to deserve attention.

Enjingi owns 47 hectares of vineyards, which is an exceptionally large area for a private producer in Croatia. His vineyards include some of the best locations in the Velo Aurora (Golden Valley) around Kutjevo, such as Hrnjevac, Mittrovac and Venje, after which Decanter’s world champion was named.

KRAUTHAKER

Vlado Krauthaker is arguably the most important and most ambitious winemaker in present-day Croatia. Just like Enjingi’s career, Krauthaker’s can also be divided into two distinct periods: a period of accumulation of capital, when his Croatian wines receive a silver medal at the World Championship of Chardonnays in France and which really is one of the best Croatian whites produced lately. In addition to the brilliant Chardonnays bearing the names of those two vineyards (four stars) Krauthaker’s standard Chardonnay marked as unfiltered (three stars) also deserves complimenting, while his Sauvignons, also unfiltered and with a strong barrel aroma (three to four stars) requires no small amount of understanding and patience; it is an unusual, original wine produced without year in small, oak kegs.

Krauthaker’s best locations are Rosenberg and Mittrovac, which is where he also grows the Chardonnay variety which, a few years ago, won him a silver medal at the World Championship of Chardonnays. His vineyards include some of the best locations in the Velo Aurora (Golden Valley) around Kutjevo, such as Hrnjevac, Mittrovac and Venje, after which Decanter’s world champion was named.

Today, Krauthaker obtains his grapes from over 50 hectares of vineyards around Kutjevo and is producing between 250,000 and 350,000 bottles per year. Some of the white wines are fermenting and aging in barriques while the reds are first fermented in large barrels built from Slavonian oak (which Krauthaker refers to as “butadž”) and which, after fermentation, are stored for up to a year in small, oak kegs.

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A few years ago, Krauthaker won a silver medal at the World championship of Chardonnays.

A few years ago, Krauthaker won a silver medal at the World championship of Chardonnays.
Kutjevo, the epicentre of Slavonian wine making.

Until some ten years ago Kutjevo was among the first to begin picking green grapes, which should further enhance the structure, aromas and taste of Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs, and most certainly enrich the standard Grasevina. He has also planted a whole string of varieties which have so far not been commercially cultivated in Croatia, including Syrah and Viognier. It is to be hoped that Krauthaker will soon achieve at least some success with his wines as he managed to do with his main white wines.

For decades Đakovačka biskupija has been known for its champion at a fair in Ljubljana. They also produce Riesling, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon and Pinot Noir.

A DŽIĆ Željko Adžić, one-time player for the Zagreb soccer club Dinamo, is one of the citizens of Kutjevo who profited from the growing demand for Slavonian Grasevina some ten years ago. His Grasevina (two stars) is a reliable, smooth, daily wine, and its quality changes from harvest to harvest. It is often found in restaurants and coffee bars. In addition to Grasevina Adžić also produces Pinot Oto, Riesling and Pinot Noir on a total of eight hectares of vineyards.

ZDJELAŔEVIĆ Drovo Zdjelarević i Brodski Sutpnik is one of the first dedicated Croatian and Slavonian private winemakers. Although just like other Slavonians he earned his first serious money from Grasevina (two stars) his most successful wines are Chardonnays, which won him two silver medals at the French competition, Chardonnay de Mond. His wines are full bodied, clean, with fine acidity and at times resembling a standard Chablis in style.

Together with Dalmatia, Slavonia could become the second great Croatian exporter of wine.
International successes achieved by Ivan Jeniš and Andro Tomić, and the excellent reviews given to Vlado Krauthaker and Ivo Matušić by Hugh Johnson, demonstrate quite clearly which way the Croatian wine industry should be going.

We are, of course, talking of constant improvement in quality. 

Croatia can become an important and highly regarded wine country only if it dedicates itself to the production of wines of uncompromisingly good quality, preferably from indigenous varieties (which is why Dalmatia, with its Plavac Mali and Litaria with its Malvazija, have a certain advantage over Slavonia). For several years now the trend on the world markets has been a growing demand for indigenous varieties, particularly with regard to the smaller wine producing countries.

Responsibility for a continual rise in quality rests primarily with the producers themselves. Just as the Istrian wine makers have set certain quality standards for Malvazija through the annual fair Vinistra, so should Dalmatian producers set up a competition for Plavac, or an association which would continuously monitor the quality of individual Plavac wines and which would categorize wines not only based on their geographic origin but also on the basis of regular annual wine tasting. This system has been implemented in Austria over the past 15 years and in that very same period the country has experienced a veritable wine renaissance.

Furthermore, procedures for the production of individual wines should be clearly defined. Andro Tomić, author of the exquisite Hektorovčak Prošek, has proposed that production methods for several types of Prošek, one of the more important Croatian wines, and the qualitative differences between them, be defined by law.

In addition to constant insistence for higher criteria and continual tasting, control and assessment of wines, the second main direction of development for the Croatian wine industry must be urgent privatization of the remaining large estates owned by wine producers. There is no denying the fact that the best Croatian wines are produced by private winemakers. In 2004 Kutjevski prdučma, a large and important company, has been privatized, but there are thousands of hectares of excellent vineyards in Slavonia which are still state-owned, and they could be providing grapes for some of the best wines in this part of Europe.

Finally, one of the essential directions in which the Croatian wine industry must develop is a closer cooperation with restaurateurs, gastronomy and wine production are businesses that naturally go together. Considerably more must be done to ensure that restaurant owners know which Croatian wine to offer with a particular style of cuisine, and what it is that makes these very wines specific. Restaurants and hotels should, just as they are in Champagne or Tuscany, become permanent exhibition-come-information points for the Croatian wine industry.

The leading Croatian winemakers, particularly those from distinctly tourist-oriented areas such as Litaria and Dalmatia, are facing a complex task: not to give in to the challenge of hyper-commercialism and in that very same period the country has a growing demand for indigenous varieties, particularly with regard to the smaller wine producing countries. 

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Besides ensuring sufficient quantities, which in future can be ensured only through the planting of new vineyards, the second most crucial issue is the introduction of quality standards. With the exception of several Istrian Malvaziences and Plenković’s Zlatan plavac, Croatia does not have reliable brands in its tourist areas which, if rectified, would achieve at least a similar quality every year and which would ensure that such wines would be widely available. Quality standardization is a precondition for recognizability and long-term market success of Croatian wines, especially those of medium level, which are mostly served in restaurants.

And thirdly, Croatian winemakers, with the exception of those from Istri, are not as yet investing enough in the promotion and marketing of their wines. So far, the Croatian wine industry cannot claim to have implemented systematic marketing methods, or to have achieved individual marketing successes which could be used as a general model of promotion. It is to be hoped that this brief wine guide will constitute a contribution towards a positive breakthrough that will serve to change the current situation.

In order to ensure still better sales of Croatian wines through the tourist offer, in other words through restaurants, hotels, bars, wine boutiques, and also through direct sales from wine cellars along the wine roads and to ensure their successful promotion on world markets, it is necessary to overcome several obvious structural problems that exist in the Croatian wine industry. This relates primarily to the accessibility of certain wines.

As we have already said (and as the Slovene example demonstrated), quantity is not the main precondition for good export results in the sphere of premium wines. However, notwithstanding a desirable penetration into Western markets, where wine could play a great role in promoting Croatian tourism, the Croatian wine industry does base itself on domestic consumption, which increases significantly during the tourist season.

We cannot stress strongly enough that Croatian wines must be a part of Croatia’s image as an increasingly popular tourist destination, and that they must become an integral part of the Croatian tourist product. In order to achieve this, the main Croatian wine brands must be relatively widely available which, however, must not reflect negatively on already achieved standards of quality.

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## Croatian Wines

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Croatian wines

26 JUNE - Anti-Fascist Resistance Day
29 JUNE - Statehood Day
5 AUGUST - Victory Day and National Thanksgiving Day
23 AUGUST - Assumption Day
8 OCTOBER - Independence Day
14 SANTO I - Christian Holiday
25-26 DECEMBER - Christmas Holidays

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS
• International country code for Croatia: +385
• Police: 05
• Fire Brigade: 93
• Ambulance: 112
• Roadside vehicle assistance: 0871-8671644 (when calling from abroad or by mobile phone, call +385 1 997)
• National Search and Rescue Centre: 9155
• A single worldwide number for all emergency situations: 112

CROATIAN ANGELS: a single telephone number throughout Croatia from which tourist information can be obtained: 082 900 900 900. From outside Croatia: 00 385 62 900 900 900. Service is available in Croatian, English, German and Italian.

CROATIAN NATIONAL TOURIST BOARD

IMPRESSUM

Publisher: Croatian National Tourist Board

For the publisher: NIK BILIC, M.Sc.

Editors: VJANO VUKLIC, DAVOR BUKOVIC, MIRJANA BAJER, VELIČKO OSTOJIC

Language editing: DARIO JAKOVIC

Design: MEGA CONCEPT

Cover design: KOLME KREATIVA FARA

Photography: STP ZAGREB, DINO HRUSKA, MILANEC KLEPAĆ, ANIKA MIZA