

Wines from Simčič, Slovenia

Tom Cannavan, 03/07

Slovenia is a European republic that gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. It is bordered by Croatia, Hungary and Austria, and by northern Italy to the west. Here, Slovenia's most important vineyard area runs seamlessly into the Italian hills of Collio.



The most famous name of the region is probably Josko Gravner, whose extraordinary amphora-fermented wines hold iconic status amongst connoisseurs. But Gravner's wines are icons of Italy, not Slovenia, because whilst Gravner - an Italian of Slovenian heritage - farms vineyards on either side of the border, his winery is in Friuli on the Italian side.

The wineries of Slovenia are far less well-known, even though the soils and climates are near identical, and the grapes grown include indigenous varieties like Ribolla, Tocai Friulano and Refosco that are shared with Friuli. More recently, both areas have also found success with Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and other more international varieties.

Slovenia has been a member of the European community since 2004, and the nation is shaking off a recent troubled past to establish a clearer identity in the world. It appears that the winemakers of Slovenia are doing the same, with the fine raw materials at their disposal being supplemented by better viticulture and winemaking, to produce wines with international appeal.

I am off to Slovenia in May on a fact finding mission, when I will visit nine of Slovenia's most interesting estates and will, of course, compile a report for wine-pages. One of the estates I am visiting is Vina Simčič, a leading player in Slovenian wines.

Since taking over the family estate in 1988, Marijan Simčič (top) has built new cellars, reduced yields in the vineyards and is picking much later than would have been typical for the region. His father Salko (bottom of picture) is still in charge of the vineyards.



Now, the wines of Simčič are being imported into the UK for the first time by [H&H Bancroft](#), and a recent tasting of three from the range suggests there is wonderful potential here for purist white wines that are both strikingly modern in their freshness and vivid fruitiness, yet tell a story of something quite different from mass-market commercial wines of the world.

These wines are not cheap, but the quality here is extremely high.

the wines

Simčič (Slovenia) Pinot Grigio 2005

A Pinot Grigio made in a style that is more arguably 'Pinot Gris', with purity and freshness, but also weight and complexity. Gentle smoky and herbal, straw-like notes, with a dry apple fruitiness. On the palate this has clean, pure, very precise apple and pear fruit flavours, but with a hint of honeyed richness and touch of spice. Good balance here, in a fairly serious but fruity style. £9.95, H&H Bancroft.



Simčič (Slovenia) Sauvignon Blanc Reserve 2004

The nose has some really honeyed, ripe and buttery notes, suggesting a touch of barrique perhaps? There's a touch of mint and herb-tinged, crunchy white fruit. On the palate there is freshness and plenty of bite here, with a waxy lemon weight of fruit, a powerful spicy background and those complex creamy, straw-like and vanillin note emerging in the finish again. Powerful stuff, but very impressive. £15.50 H&H Bancroft.



Simčič (Slovenia) Teodor Reserve 2003

A blend of Ribolla, Pinot Grigio and Tocai Friulano matured in a combination of large oak vats and barriques. Honey, minerality and a rounded apple fruit are joined by sweet vanillin notes and a certain toastiness. On the palate this is dry and quite tight, but that lemon, vanilla and honey note comes through again, with a pithy citrus dryness and a very nutty, waxy, tight finish. Lovely balance and layers of complexity here, in a very singular style that reminds me very much of the wines of Josko Gravner just across the border in Italy. £15.50 H&H Bancroft.



See these wines at [Bancroftwines.com](#).