

Fiano, Campania's Rising Star

Winemakers in Italy's Campania have always focused on their native varieties. But it's time for Fiano, the grape behind the region's aromatic white wines, to shine.

BY KERIN O'KEEFE



Photos courtesy of Villa Raiano

In southern Italy's Campania region, native grapes produce terroir-driven wines loaded with personality. The Aglianico grape, which produces the full-bodied Taurasi red wine, and Greco, of Greco di Tufo fame, garner most of the praise, but the Fiano variety is quickly catching up in performance and prestige. Some boast ageworthy structures that evolve and gain complexity for a decade or more. Fiano turns out white wines with freshness, fragrance and finesse that should be on everyone's radar.

The Campania Contradiction

The freshness of Campania's whites may come as a surprise. Many assume that wines from the country's deep south, known for its warm Mediterranean climate and constant sunshine, would be big and flabby, with overripe fruit, high alcohol and low acidity.

Winemakers in Campania, though, have always focused on their native varieties. These have had thousands of years to adapt to their growing zones, which can be quite cool in the mountainous inland areas. The combination of the region's indigenous grapes, unique terroir, premium vineyards, precise harvesting and the use of less invasive cellar techniques, have led to some of the brightest, most balanced whites in Italy. The best boast the enticing minerality and depth usually associated with cool climate whites.

As alcohol by volume (abv) levels rise and acidity lessens in many white wines from northern Italy, including those from Friuli and Trentino, those from Campania remain crisp and maintain restrained abv percentages.

“These days, it’s hard to find whites from northern Italy with as much fresh acidity as we have in Campania’s whites,” says Pierpaolo Sirch, agronomist and enologist at Feudi di San Gregorio in Sorbo Serpico. While Fiano’s acidity levels aren’t as high as the pronounced acidic backbone of Greco, they’re still prominent, especially when grown in high-altitude vineyards.



Villa Raiano

Fiano Focus

Fiano produces structured whites that range from medium- to full-bodied and sport intense floral aromas. Their rich orchard fruit flavors are often accented with compelling, smoky mineral sensations, aromatic herb and crisp acidity. It’s also common to find a hazelnut note on the finish. The best have great energy as well as intriguing complexity. To maintain freshness and aromas, Fiano producers most often vinify exclusively in steel tanks.

Fiano di Avellino

While Fiano has spread to other areas, including Sicily, where it generally produces rounder, riper expressions, the hilly district of Irpinia, the ancient name for the inland geographic area that comprises the Apennine Mountains around the town of Avellino, is the grape’s spiritual home.

The town even lends its name to the grape’s most important denomination, Fiano di Avellino. Here, Fiano produces more mineral-driven versions that possess good aging potential.

“Fiano excels in this environment, thanks to the high amount of rainfall, marked differences between day and night temperatures, volcanic soil and clay deposits,” says Sirch. He’s a pioneer in choosing the best vineyard sites for Fiano, and its Pietracalda bottling, a selection of the best grapes, is a quintessential Fiano di Avellino. The firm also makes a tiny amount of single-vineyard bottlings under its FeudiStudi line.

“Probably the most important aspect of Irpinia’s growing area is its diversity: many different types of soils, altitudes that range from 250 to 600 meters [820 to 1,968 feet] above sea level, and microclimates that include mountain growing conditions with cold winters and mild summers,” says Brunella Basso, part of the family that owns [Villa Raiano](#) and the firm’s marketing manager.

She says that Fiano’s small, loose bunches and tough skins allow for those adaptations. “Not only does Fiano adapt to diverse growing conditions, but the differences are carried over and perfectly expressed in the wines.”

With the knowledge that Fiano grown in different sites possessed their own unique characters, Villa Raiano began to make two single-vineyard bottlings in 2009, and it plans to release a third Fiano from a distinct vineyard. Its Alimata bottling is all about finesse and complexity, while Ventidue offers more richness and power. Vinified and aged in the same way, both demonstrate the uniqueness of their respective terroirs.

Cellar-worthy

With aging, Fiano di Avellino can take on more honeyed mineral notes. “Fiano di Avellino’s potential to develop even more complexity with aging sets it apart from most of the world’s white wines,” says Fortunato Sebastiano, a consulting enologist in Campania who works with Villa Raiano. “Even with simple steel aging, Fiano cultivated in Irpinia raises to a superior level. In good years, it can easily age 10 years, guaranteed.”

Recommended Wines

[Villa Raiano 2015 Alimata \(Fiano di Avellino\)](#); \$35, 95 points. Enticing scents of smoke, Spanish broom, acacia, chopped herb and ripe stone fruit slowly take shape on this elegant, compelling white. Savory, structured yet understated, the palate is all about extreme finesse, delivering nectarine, wild herb, tangerine zest and honey alongside bright acidity. A vein of flinty smoky mineral throughout adds depth while toasted hazelnut accents the lingering finish. Wonderful now but will age and evolve for years. Drink through 2025. **Editors’ Choice.**

[Feudi di San Gregorio 2015 Studi Arianello \(Fiano di Avellino\)](#); \$60, 94 points. Citrus, wild herb and yellow field-flower aromas delicately rise from the glass. Elegant, savory and enveloping, the palate boasts understated finesse, delivering golden apple, lemon zest and a hint of honeyed almond alongside tangy acidity. A flinty note wraps up the finish. Drink through 2025. **Cellar Selection.**

[Cantine di Marzo 2016 Fiano di Avellino](#); \$27, 92 points. Toasted pistachio nut, acacia honey and ripe orchard fruit aromas follow over to the savory, enveloping palate along with juicy tangerine and creamy pear. A smoky mineral note lingers on the finish.

[Mastroberardino 2016 Radici \(Fiano di Avellino\)](#); \$28, 92 points. Smoke, ripe orchard fruit, acacia and honey are just some of the enticing scents you’ll find on this stunning mineral-driven white. The elegant palate is equally compelling, offering mature yellow apple, dried herb, citrus zest and hazelnut alongside fresh acidity. Drink through 2025. **Editors’ Choice.**

[Villa Matilde 2017 Tenute di Altavilla \(Fiano di Avellino\)](#); \$21, 89 points. This opens with heady aromas of honeysuckle, jasmine and tropical fruit. On the bright elegant palate, fresh acidity lifts yellow pear, grapefruit and a hint of honey while a hazelnut note closes the finish.



About the Author

KERIN O'KEEFE

@kerinokeefe

Italian Editor

Reviews wines from Italy

Italian Editor Kerin O'Keefe reviews all Italian wines for Wine Enthusiast. Previously she wrote regularly on Italian wine for Wine News, World of Fine Wine and Decanter. She is the author of *Franco Biondi Santi: The Gentleman of Brunello* (2005), *Brunello di Montalcino: Understanding and Appreciating One of Italy's Greatest Wines* (2012) and *Barolo and Barbaresco: The King and Queen of Italian Wine* (2014).

Email: kokeefe@wineenthusiast.net.