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## Italian Expert Recommends Grape Varieties for California

Dr. Vittorino Novello tours Sierra Nevada foothills, recommends several varieties that could flourish

by Ted Rieger



*Lynne Wunderlich, UC extension advisor for the Central Sierra, and Dr. Vittorino Novello.*

*Plymouth, Calif.* —After touring Sierra Nevada foothills vineyards in El Dorado and Amador Counties and sharing information with growers on viticultural practices for Italian winegrape varieties, Professor Vittorino Novello of the University of Turin, Italy, suggested seven Italian varieties for growers to try that he believes offer potential for quality production in California

Novello visited the Foothills the first week in August for a tour organized by University of California Cooperative Extension Central Sierra farm advisor Lynn Wunderlich. Novello was hosted as part of an educational program organized by the Amador County Wine Grape Growers Association, the Amador Vintners Association, the El Dorado Wine Grape Growers Association and the El Dorado Winery Association.

Novello, professor in the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Science at the University of Turin, is a well-respected viticulturist in Italy and worldwide. He has visited and studied winegrape growing regions throughout the world and lectured at many international conferences. In addition to expertise on Italian winegrape varieties, he is knowledgeable about high altitude and hillside viticulture. He lectured in 2007 at “The Elevation of Wine” conference presented by the Lake County Winegrape Commission, and in 2010 at the Unified Symposium in Sacramento, Calif., where he delivered a presentation on “Wine Growing on the Edge.”

Novello concluded his visit with an evening lecture and reception hosted by Terra D’Oro Winery in Amador County. At this event, Wunderlich recapped the two days of vineyard tours that included stops at four vineyards each day to meet with the vineyard owners and vineyard managers,

discuss viticultural challenges and management at each site, and hear comments by winemakers producing wines from each site.

In El Dorado County, varieties seen and vineyards visited included: Aglianico at Arrastra Vineyards, white varieties Fiano and Arneis at Camino Alto Vineyard, Nebbiolo produced at Suma Kaw Vineyard for Madrona Vineyards, and Barbera and Dolcetto grown at Naylor Vineyards in Fairplay.

In Amador County, varieties seen and vineyards visited included: the white variety Vermentino at Casino Mine Vineyard; Barbera at Cooper Vineyards; Sangiovese and Barbera at Vino Noceto Winery; and Primitivo, Barbera, and Greco di Tufo grown at Shake Ridge Vineyards.

Overall, Novello said he was impressed with the growers' knowledge of viticulture and their experience in producing these varieties. In some locations, given the vigorous nature of some Italian varieties, he thought the grapevine canopies were too small in relation to the yields being sought and obtained. In Italy, a rule of thumb is to have a vine canopy with 1 square meter of leaf area for every 1 kilogram of grape yield at harvest.

In his talk, Novello said, "A primary objective in growing Italian winegrape varieties is to emphasize the varietal characteristics of the wines." He showed slides from Italy of hillside and terraced vineyards at different altitudes and different orientations, and vineyards in different climate zones that provide a wide range of growing conditions for Italian winegrape production.

Novello said in Italy, Barbera historically has been considered a lower quality, under-appreciated variety, grown for tonnage to produce lower priced wines and red blends, but there is a movement to improve its quality and reputation. He was impressed that Sierra Foothills growers had focused on Barbera as a premium varietal, and he was somewhat surprised that many growers were producing Barbera on head-trained vines rather than a trellis.

Novello presented a list of five red varieties and two white varieties that he thinks could be well suited to California growing conditions. Some of these currently grow well in warm and dry climates in Italy, and some he selected because they are increasing in importance in Italy. (Common synonyms or alternate spellings appear in parentheses.)

### **Albarossa**

A cross developed in 1938 originally meant to combine Barbera and Nebbiolo, but DNA profiling in 2009 revealed the Nebbiolo parent was actually Chatus, an obscure variety associated with the Ardeche region of the Rhône Valley in France. Albarossa is growing in importance and popularity in Italy, planted in the Piedmont (Piemonte) region. It grows with medium vigor, has medium to

small clusters, and produces higher and consistent yields. It needs good exposure and is commonly grown on hillsides. It produces wines with good alcohol and acidity, and is valued for its high anthocyanin (color) content, but with less tannin (lower bitterness and astringency) than Nebbiolo.

### **Montepulciano**

A medium to high vigor red variety that is increasing in interest and in plantings across several regions in Italy. It has good yield potential of 10-15 tons/hectare with medium clusters. Produces wines with good alcohol, good acidity and good phenolic content and can be made in a range of styles—rosé, lighter-bodied red wine, or full-bodied red wine for aging. (Montepulciano has been grown in California in recent years with 108 acres planted statewide based on the National Agricultural Statistics Service 2015 California Grape Acreage Report. Small production lots of Montepulciano varietal wine is being produced from vineyards in the Sierra Foothills, Lodi, Mendocino County and other locations.)

### **Negroamaro (Negro Amaro)**

The main grape of the Apulia (Puglia) region, it tends to have vigorous growth with medium compact clusters. Older vineyards are on head-trained vines and newer vineyards are planted on vertical trellises. It can produce 12-13 tons/hectare, and it does well in warm, arid climates. Produces wines with good alcohol and acidity, low pH and high phenolic content. Can be made in a range of styles--dry rosé, medium-bodied dry wine, and full-bodied wine suitable for aging.

### **Nero d'Avola (Calabrese)**

Novello called it “the king of Sicily” where it grows well in warm, arid locations and is becoming very popular with increased plantings. Five different “biotypes” or selections are grown that display variability in cluster shapes and berry size. Vine growth is vigorous with medium clusters. It can be grown head-trained and spur-pruned, and can also be vertically trellised and spur-pruned. Produces well-balanced wines with good alcohol and acidity and good phenolic content. Can be used for rosé, or full-bodied wines for aging.

### **Nero di Troia (Uva di Troia)**

Grown in Puglia and is increasing in popularity. Vines have good vigor producing medium clusters and medium yields. It needs good exposure and is commonly planted on hillsides. Produces red wines with good alcohol, medium acidity, and good phenolic content with good anthocyanins but less tannin.

## **Inzolia** (Ansonica)

One of the oldest white grapes grown in Sicily. Vines have high vigor and high yields. It has lower acidity and is often used in white wine blends to provide its characteristic perfume aroma, elegance, and golden yellow color.

## **Zibibbo** (Muscat of Alexandria)

A white variety grown in Sicily that belongs to the Muscat family. Grown in a number of countries as Muscat of Alexandria, it has a wide range of uses for still, sparkling and dessert wines, and as a table and raisin grape variety. Vines have medium vigor, medium productivity and the variety is slightly resistant to mildew. In Italy its grapes are commonly dried after harvest and used to make “Passito” dessert wine.

Currently, selections of Montepulciano, Negro Amaro, and Nero d’Avola are registered at the University of California, Davis Foundation Plant Services (FPS) and available from several American grapevine nurseries. Muscat of Alexandria selections are registered at FPS and available from several nurseries. FPS has a selection of Ansonica that is being cleaned up to become a registered selection. Albarossa and Nero di Troia are not currently registered at FPS. Novello said additional information about Italian varieties can be found on the Italian Vitis Database at [www.vitisdb.it/](http://www.vitisdb.it/)

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<b>Total U.S. Wine Sales »</b>	<b>Month</b>		<b>12 Months</b>	
July 2016	\$2,963 mil		\$39,137 mil	
July 2015	\$2,869 mil	3%	\$37,800 mil	4%
<b>Off-Premise Sales IRI Channels »</b>	<b>Month</b>		<b>12 Months</b>	
July 2016	\$628 mil		\$8,475 mil	
July 2015	\$595 mil	6%	\$8,012 mil	6%
<b>Direct-to-Consumer Shipments »</b>	<b>Month</b>		<b>12 Months</b>	

July 2016	\$82 mil		\$2,136 mil	
July 2015	\$66 mil	23%	\$1,906 mil	12%

**Winery Job Index »**

	<b>Month</b>		<b>12 Months</b>	
July 2016	332		282	
July 2015	321	3%	260	8%

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