

Via Alpina/Dalia Maris

Friuli, Italy

(Washington DC, Maryland & Virginia sales only)



Giampaolo Venica is a fourth-generation Venica to have a role in managing the venerable Friuli estate of Venica & Venica, but it's the wine he makes under his own labels that allow this searching man to fully explore his native land. Friuli occupies the far northeast of Italy, a sea-to-plain-to-mountain corner bordering Slovenia and Austria, and one of Italy's prime white wine regions (an honor shared with Trentino and Campania). Giampaolo's wish is to showcase Friuli through his medium of wine.

He has two labels. Via Alpina, referring to Alpine Trail; and Dalia Maris, a name inspired by his grandmother Dalia and the Latin *Stella Maris*, which refers both to the Virgin Mary and (more relevantly) to the north star and its importance to navigation.

Via Alpina comes from small organic vineyards in the cooler sites of the Colli Orientali appellation, i.e., the uplands and the foothills of the Julian Pre-Alps that sprout up from the Adriatic plain north of the city of Udine. Be it Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio, or Ribolla, these are fresh and delicious examples of Friuli at remarkable everyday prices.

Dalia Maris is the more serious range and owes much of its inspiration to the Hermitage blanc made by Jean-Louis Chave. Giampaolo worked three harvests chez Chave and came away convinced that Jean-Louis' white wine has a singularly profound terroir expression. This made him consider Friuli's indigenous varieties of Tocai Friulano and Ribolla Gialla (and later that well established outsider, Sauvignon Blanc), and how specific virtuoso vineyards might best express Friuli's terroir of flysch soils buttressed by significant diurnal shifts. Searching for such vineyards, his criteria were simple: trustworthy farmers, old vines in excellent sites, farmed organically or biodynamically.

Given that Friulano is a powerful varietal like Marsanne and Roussanne, Giampaolo raises his Friulano in barrels he gets from Jean-Louis. He hand-harvests when the grapes are fully mature, and aims to have the saline minerality of the old vine fruit offset the lower acidity, similar to the structure of Chave's white Hermitage.

In the cellar, the grapes are pressed very slowly, be they de-stemmed or whole cluster; ferments are spontaneous; and, of course, SO2 additions are minimal.