

TORCHIATO DI FREGONA

Italy has countless fine wines, red and white, and we all know at least some of their names: Barolo, Chianti, Soave, Valpolicella, to name but a few. Torchiato di Fregona, however, probably does not feature on so many lists. That's a pity, because it is a beautiful and very distinct wine, made only in and around Fregona, a small town close to Vittorio Veneto. Powerful and intense, but delicate and sweet at the same time, Torchiato di Fregona is ideal for accompanying various types of dish, or for just sipping it on its own. It's a type of wine known as a passito, which translates as raisin.

According to local legend, around the beginning of the 17th century, an enterprising farmer found a way to ripen the grapes that adverse weather conditions had prevented

from maturing in the vineyard. He did this by hanging the grapes from beams inside his barn.

During the winter, the grapes wilted and their juice became more concentrated and sweet. In the spring, the farmer put them through his wine press – the 'torchio' – and put the juice in small barrels to finish fermenting. Torchiato di Fregona was born.

From that time on, the wine has been produced by numerous families in the community of Fregona, with the highly unusual production technique that produces its special flavour being handed down from generation to generation. Every year, the families proudly present their wine at a special exhibition that takes place in the final week of April.

The technique sounds pretty basic, but there are some important and precise rules to follow to ensure a high quality wine. One bunch at a time, the grapes are removed from the vine and placed gently in a single layer (traditionally, a job done by the women) in wooden crates (in a concession to modernity, plastic crates are also used today), each containing no more than 3.5 kg of fresh grapes. This way, the individual grapes do not get crushed and break. After careful selection, only 60% of the grapes are picked for drying.

In the entire production process, no additional chemicals are used, with everything happening according to the seasons, the particular microclimate of the area of Fregona, and the experience of the wine maker who, more often than not, with caution



and wisdom acquired from his ancestors, predicts the evolution of wine rather than reacts to any deviations from the process. In this sense, there are very few wines that merit the title of a "natural" product more than Torchiato di Fregona, which now has the DOCG quality assurance label attached to it. (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, or Con-

trolled and Guaranteed Designation of Origin). You don't drink Torchiato di Fregona, so much as sip it and savour it. But first, you look at it, and admire its bright, clear, deep yellow colour – gold or amber really; then you breathe it in, and appreciate the complex perfumes: apricots and peaches, a touch of citrus fruits and the strong hint of ho-

ney, possibly vanilla too. Only then do you take a taste. There is a full and round sweetness to this wine, smooth, velvety, intense and fragrant, with accents of almonds and raisins, with a long final and fresh fruit note.

Drink it with a fine paté, a mature cheese, or sweet biscuits and pastries. Or simply meditate with it. Just remember to take it slow.