

Ep 104: Livio Felluga: the man who reestablished the wine culture of this Italian region and the wine grapes of Friuli-Venezia Giulia with Laura Felluga (Part 2)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to part two with Laura Felluga the granddaughter of Livio Felluga the man who put Friulian viticulture back on the map. Now, if you haven't listened to last weeks, please go back. You're gonna hear about the history of this winery, but also the wine region. And you're gonna have your emotions evoked as Laura describes beautifully, the land, the area, the views. This episode, we are going to be going deeper into the specific wine grapes that grow in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. And we're also going to be talking about the misunderstood quality and style of Pinot Grigio or Pinot Gris as you may know it from other regions. Quickly, I just want to remind you again, that there is an opportunity to vote for this podcast. So please find the link in my show notes, or just go to www.podcastawards.com. This is for the people's choice podcast awards. And whilst you have lots of categories to choose from, you can vote for other podcasts there too. I am personally in the Arts category, so just find, "Eat Sleep Wine Repeat" and click save nomination. That's it. Voting is just for this month. So July, 2022, I only ask you to be so kind as to take a few minutes out to vote as this kind of support is gonna help keep the podcast running in the future. So, thank you to those of you who can go and vote. Now, pour yourself a glass and relax, and let's go across to Laura so she can teach us about Ribolla Gialla, Friulano, and of course, all the rest.

Janina Doyle 00:02:17 Can we talk about Friulano the grape variety, it's flavors. It's aromas. What should people expect if they pick up a bottle of Friulano? What does it give to the wine?

Laura Felluga 00:02:27 Yes, absolutely. So, this is what I think it's one of the most difficult things to speak about this, this grape varietal, because it's really eclectic. It's most of them, but especially Tokai. If you think about tasting, you have tasted these three wines, our single, single varietal Friulano, our Terre Alte, our Abbazia di Rosazzo. Their aromatic profile is basically drawn by Friulano yet how different these wines are. Um, if I had to generally speak about Friulano, I would say it's the most traditional varietal we have in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it was formerly called Tocai, but when Hungary came in the European union, there was a confusion around this term. To us, Tocai Friulano is spelled T O C A I, and it's the name of the grape. To them in a Hungary, Tokaji, uh, is spelled T O K A J I. And it's an geographical area where, where they do produce some lovely dessert wine based on grapes that are

called Furmint and other grapes, which I cannot pronounce properly, so I won't. So to us, it's a dry grape. It's a grape variety that we used to produce these beautifully dry wines, basically dry wines, um, that are very, I would say, uh, fruit forward. Uh, it's a grape that, you know, get ripens in the hills of Friuli after Sauvignon and Pinot Grigio. It's a grape that we must be very, very careful in picking if we want to maintain this nice mineral fresh side, because the acidity drops very, very quickly in the vineyard. Also, it's very, depending on when you pick it, it can really vary the style which you produce it, I would say, and this is very much up to the winemakers and the different plots. To us, we like to keep it fruity, but also very fresh. We like to keep it very elegant and, and tense, uh, yet, uh, thanks to the richness of the aromas and the minerality. It's still very complex wine. Traditionally, we say that Tocai as a grape has a kind of a long, uh, almond after taste.

Janina Doyle 00:04:44 Ah, I got that in the first one.

Laura Felluga 00:04:46 Yeah. So, and they, these allows it to be a very versatile, most of those are, but also Friulano is a very versatile varietal. In fact, in the tradition of Friuli when you go on an Osteria, which is the typical, you know, wine bar in the area, it's a very much related to the rural tradition. And you would ask for simply a glass of white wine, you would ask a Tai, which is a shorter version of Tokai of white, and they will automatically give you a glass of Friulano. And it's usually paired with the charcuterie that we have, that is very traditional in, in our region like Prosciutto san Daniele and all of the cheeses, uh, that we, we have in the rural tradition of the hills and of the, you know, rural Friuli.

Janina Doyle 00:05:32 Is your cheese typically a harder cheese, or do you do fresher cheese?

Laura Felluga 00:05:35 Even then, it's, they're very difficult to generalize because you, uh, you go up to the mountains and they have very different type of cheeses and you drive 20 kilometers away. And then it's, every, everything is very much based on the Venetian tradition and cuisine. So, it's very, very eclectic. We have both, honestly, on the hills, we kind of collect all of these influences. Uh, but it's generally the traditional cuisine from the hills is very, it's poor. It's more, um, the cuisine that used to be, uh, the agriculture cuisine. So we have dishes like pasta with beans or the Charcuterie because there's, uh, the salami, cheeses that are simple. Simple cheese like the Latteria from Cividale. But also for example, we have some blue cheese that we have with Picolit, which is our dessert wine, so cheese and charcuterie. Charcuterie are always been part of the, of the tradition of the hills. But going back to Friulano. So I was saying that that's it basically. So it's a very eclectic varietal that we traditionally grow vinified dry, and it's a very fruit forward, very eclectic, depending on the age of the vines, we are also very lucky to have very, very old vines vineyards of Friulano that really built in, like, we try to expand the range of what a generic Friulano could mean, because we, we are kind of collectors of vineyards of Friulano. And so we provide so many different identities of the same varietal.

Janina Doyle 00:07:03 I'm tasting right now, the Friulano single vineyard, 2021, and my gosh as well for the price point, because obviously in part one, we were tasting the Terra Alte, of course it's insanely good, but this wine retails you can get, I've seen Petersham Celler, they're selling the 2020 vintage for £27. So just under £30 and the elegance and the minerality for me that comes through. So on the nose, I get this like chalky, almost slightly flinty or white pepper note, but there's lovely, like melon coming in, giving freshness, and it stays very clean and pure, but there's this beautiful load of like white flowers, a real blossom edge to it. And then the pallet I'm surprised though, because it smells so clean and pure, but the body behind it is actually really full, very full body, but you've got this lovely, nice, like a creamy, slight brioche notes. A little bit, you say almonds, I'm getting maybe more hazelnut, in this, in this

specific wine, but beautiful freshness. It's quite directional rather than it feeling rounded in my mouth, even though this is full bodied and slightly creamy, it's really clean and directional. It's, it's, it's beautiful. And I haven't had this wine ever before, so I'm really enjoying this one.

Laura Felluga 00:08:31 I think you describe it beautifully. One of things also that I like sometimes I am leading you're right in the nose. It's this like fresh citrus aroma, like, and it's very fresh. And then when you sip it, it's kind of, it's very dry, but still sweeter in the nose, right? The, the fruits are more ripe. Uh, the feeling is fuller and this we achieve by even though the single varietals are vinified in neutral, uh, vessels, mainly stainless steel and some ceramics. Um, we do try to keep the wines over the lees as long as we can. And this really contributes to those aromas you were describing of, you know, Brioche and to the, you know, making definitely a fuller body wines. Also the single varietal are quite prone to aging. We also try to, to, you know, change this perception of white wines to be drunk in a hurry over their season. Because, you know, uh, when some, these varietals and I also will speak about Pinot Grigio, if are not overly produced. Uh, if the vineyard's a little bit older in their age, uh, if it's not mass produced and it really starts speaking about the territory, then these wines can really benefit from a couple of years in the bottle that will allow them to integrate their minerality and, you know, develop, start developing some of this mineral aromas that will contribute to the complexity. These wines are also because of the minerality and the, you know, the richness in aromas and you, as you were saying, the full bodied and the creaminess that they have, and this is true also for Pinot Grigio that will taste later on, are very, very easy to pair. So we mentioned they're very eclectic. We mentioned the traditional cuisine of the hills, but of course, in Friuli, we also have the coastal cuisine where there's a lot of, you know, fish dishes that are part of our tradition, but I lived everywhere in the world. And I can tell you with, with Chinese cuisine, Japanese cuisine, Thai cuisine, anything spicy, we also try to reverse the rules and try to invite to try to drink these wines, not only with fish dishes, but also to white, with white meats, anything charred, uh, these are very, very eclectic and we really invite to have fun with them.

Janina Doyle 00:10:48 I think as well, there is that slight herbaciousness on the palate. And with that, of course, when you start thinking about cuisine and foods and especially all of the different spices and herbs you get with Asian food, like you mentioned, I can totally understand how that would go and beautiful, fresh acidity going on with that texture. So, you know, I think people would, um, have a lot of fun with this wine. Yeah, absolutely. So I want to touch on Pinot Grigio. So, I've got a Pinot Grigio in front of me, uh, 2021? Yeah. 2021. And, you know, Pinot Grigio often, certainly in the UK, I don't know how it is seen in Italy, but it's like, oh, Pinot Grigio, this is your knock back wine. We buy it for five pound a bottle. And it's, uh, not that acidic. It's a little bit watery. It's a little bit citrusy. Yeah, whatever. It's just literally, you know, the easy, simple drinking wine. And then when people want something more complex, they look for typically something like Pinot Gris on the label, they might go to Alsace and it gets more honeyed and it gets more rich and it gets more weighty, but that's not fair to Italy. And it's certainly not fair to you guys because there's some fantastic examples of Pinot Grigio coming out of the Northeast of Italy. But can you just talk to me about your feelings on that, of what I've just said and maybe how the Italians see this whole Pinot Grigio, Pinot Gris issue?

Laura Felluga 00:12:21 Absolutely. So, I would say this has been one of my battles since I started working for the family also because I've been also very much traveling in the U.S. and some of the foreign markets where Pinot Grigio became super trendy. And after it became super trendy, of course, this also triggered, uh, some mass production, uh, of this grape that are more generic coming from the Northeast of Italy, but they don't really give a sense of place. They're more commercial. And, and this

really created a reputation for this, uh, grape varietal, which is not totally fair and true while some of these wines are like, you described them, this is not true for the grape itself. So first I'll take a step back. And I would like to speak about the difference between Pinot Grigio and Pinot Gris. Pinot Grigio and Pinot Gris are essentially the same grape, but Pinot Gris, uh, evokes the, the French tradition and the style of Alsace, where they usually produce wines that are sweeter. Some of them are off dry, whereas Pinot Grigio in the tradition of the Northeast of Italy that I think that starts with my grandfather. So before, uh, the trend of Pinot Grigio exploded, it's more of a dry wine. It's a dry wine. Pinot Grigio is actually a very noble grape varietal that belongs to a very noble family of varietals. And it's a wine that when you see it in the, in the vineyards, it's actually, it's called Pinot Gris because it's actually grey in its skins. And, uh, and this is why some of the Pinot Grigio with the longer contact with the skin become pink. And even the ones that do not have a large contact with the skins as the one, we, you are drink you're tasting now. If you compare it with the Friulano, you will still find a, a little hint of pink.

Janina Doyle 00:14:20 Pink, a really tiny pink tinge, you know, even though it is a pale lemon color. Yeah, yeah exactly.

Laura Felluga 00:14:26 So, you will easily be able to recognize it, even, even though it wouldn't have, it, didn't have a long contact with the skins. So, it's a very noble varietal very, uh, traditional to the hills of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. My grandfather was really bet on this varietal very early on in the fifties when he started, um, producing our wines. And so we're lucky to have been knowing, getting to knowing these varietal through the decades. We also believe that these vineyards are worth sustaining and maintaining. So we have, you know, with older vines brings greater complexity and really allows the potential of the grape to unlock, also the fact of course, being grown on a hillside land, uh, that is not very, very fertile, helps bringing, uh, you know, evoking and bringing out the potential of this grape varietal that he's a little compared to Friulano would say it's fuller and it's aromas. It's more, it's still very dry mineral, savory wine with a very long finish, but a little bit more fuller and, and ripe and than Friulano in its aromas, the way we produce it. I don't know if you would agree.

Janina Doyle 00:15:37 This is definite. Um, yeah, I'm just tasting it right now. There's it's is really full bodied in comparison to what people would expect from Pinot Grigio. But I like the there's a slight subtleness on the nose creamy, slight again, flinty, I guess it's, you know, this minerality that maybe, from the Ponca, from the Ponca soils, um, and a slight even white pepper note, I need to go back to the, to the Friulano because I kind of got a flinty white pepper note on that. So I, I need to definitely spend some more time with them, but there is this, this elegance, but I'm, the body and the weight and the slight creaminess in it's very, very beautiful. Even slightly just, just slightly honeyed but completely dry.

Laura Felluga 00:16:14 Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And then, you know, um, we are on the border with Austria. I'd like to make a comparison also for Pinot Grigio. And I was mentioning for Friulano these, even the single varietal white varietals, which are translation of our territory into the glass. So we try to keep them as pure as possible in their characteristic, uh, but we keep them on the lees to allow them these, you know, to build creaminess and, and, and complexity. And then this is why also they are, they very well react to bottle aging. Bottle aging for Pinot Grigio brings an integration of the flavors. And especially for Pinot Grigio, you really get an addition of layers of minerality that goes from being more flinty to becoming more, um, oily, I would say, you know, you know, some of those older Rieslings from Austria, the dry Rieslings.

Janina Doyle 00:17:13 Yes, absolutely.

Laura Felluga 00:17:14 Can really, really, it gets that kind of oily minerality and, and, and aromas that really could remind of some older Rieslings, but then go, and then you will get that hint of Friulian minerality and you will know you're not in Austria. So, it's very, very charming. And I would suggest, you know, keep a bottle for even 5, 6, 8 years. And so, you can see how these, these grape behaves over time. And it's very, very charming. Yeah.

Janina Doyle 00:17:40 Yeah, no, it's absolutely delicious. And I think it's absolutely anything away from what people might think as a Pinot Grigio. And in fact, for me, I get much more of this yellow apple and this peachiness, um, not a little bit of lemon and fresh and light and knock back it's it's not like anything that certainly we would expect, um, as a Pinot Grigio in the UK, but at the same time, this is about 26, 27 pounds. You can get the 2020 vintage at thedrinkshop.com. So, the point is you are gonna expect with that lees aging, with the quality, I'm sure with much lower yields, everything that you are doing with this wine, the intensity, the elegance, the power of the fruit behind it is, is very, very different to what people expect from Pinot Grigio. So they should definitely, I think anyone who is into texture is gonna love this wine. The Pinot Grigio, both actually the Friuliano and the Pinot Grigio, because the textures amongst them both were, were beautiful.

Laura Felluga 00:18:40 Thank you. Janina.

Janina Doyle 00:18:41 Now, how does Pinot Grigio and Friuliano compare to Ribolla Gialla? So Ribolla Gialla is also one of your main white grape varieties that grows in this region. Um, and that obviously you do produce, and you put in some of your blends as well. Could you just let everyone know? So they understand the, the grape varieties of the region, what they should expect from that.

Laura Felluga 00:19:05 Absolutely. So I have to say Ribolla Giallo from what I know, um, you remember, I was mentioning how we have these two DOCs Friuli Colli Orientali and the Collio. In the latest years, it became very much, you know, connected to the Collio and some of the producers in the Collio that do macerated and produce orange wines. So, uh, but Ribolla Gialla is actually more ancient than that. It's very much related also to the Friuli Colli Orientali. And on as a grape varietal it's actually a grape that is quite simple. It's not one of the grapes we grow the most over the over our estate that we, we have a bit of, a little addition of it in the Abbazia di Rosazzo. We produce a small, small batch, uh, which I'm not sure if we have in the U.S. as a single varietal. Um, it's more of a simple varietal, very citrusy, very fresh, and, uh, and so very, very prone after vinification to become a very pleasant, easy wine, to be appreciated with more of the, you know, coastal dishes and seaside dishes. So this is Ribolla Giallo very, very much linked in the, in the tradition of the region. It's one of, with Friuliano one of the ??? varietals and it's, um, I would say a very easy grape, very easy wine.

Janina Doyle 00:20:25 Okay. And then, and then the other one. Picolit, and I love Picolit, because although it's typically sweet wine, it can be used in blends. Can't it? And am I right thinking, cos I remembered drinking an Italian blend once that had some Picolit and it just gives this peachy little bit more aromatics to it. Right. Am I right?

Laura Felluga 00:20:44 So a Picolit lit it's oh my goodness. It's one also iconic it's really made for the glory, It's also a wine, so it could remind for people that are wine lovers in the, in the UK and you have a really great connection with French wine. It's our version of Sauternes, but we don't have, but we only, sometimes it happens to have noble rot, but is this beautiful dessert wine that is very, um, sweet in the aromas on the nose, but then the acidity and the minerality kicks in. And so there's this beautiful

balance between these two elements. Um, it's a grape that Picolit means, Pico means small. So it's a grape that for its um, only grows few grapes on the bunch, but there are very, very high concentration. We do very late harvest. Sometimes we, we harvest in October sometimes, even in November and we do select the bunches with the fewer grapes. So it's really something special. On the aromatic profile, when it's younger, the Picolit, it really gets its um, dry notes of dry fruit, uh, apricot, fig, but also candy and these like zesty touch that really takes you back to the acidity of the wine and never makes it too sweet. Let me fascinate this term. Um, and also when it gets older, you know, those nutty flavours, like some heavier nutty flavours.

Janina Doyle 00:22:25 Yeah. Okay.

Laura Felluga 00:22:25 Layer up and making it a very, very intriguing wine. The term medicinal wine was, was created for Picolit. It's really a wine that could be enough it to be, you know, experience on his own. Because with this Abbazia di Rosazzo but even more with Picolit really keeps on changing in your glass. The wine that never, not only in the bottle with bottle aging, but also in the glass. So, it's an experience that is always new that keeps on renovating, changing, very dynamic. Um, and also when it comes to pairing, I don't know alone, it's my favorite pairing, but um, we, we at home we tend to prefer pairing it with, you know, aged cheeses, like blue cheeses.

Janina Doyle 00:23:11 Ah, okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Laura Felluga 00:23:11 Because the contrast between...

Janina Doyle 00:23:13 The salty and the sweet.

Laura Felluga 00:23:14 The, yeah, provides a very, very exquisite experience.

Janina Doyle 00:23:20 Interesting. Very, very nice. I need to get myself some Picolet. Now I wanna finish off with one red grape variety that's local to the area for people to know about and that's Refosco, but actually specifically, Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso. Am I pronouncing that right? Was that a terrible attempt?

Laura Felluga 00:23:39 No, absolutely. It's perfect. Best than most of the ones...

Janina Doyle 00:23:44 Oh ok, you're too kind. Could we talk about, because, because there's Refosco has there's different types of Refosco isn't there specifically and the majority you're gonna find in, um, Friuli are Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso.

Laura Felluga 00:23:58 I have to tell you, I don't know about this diverse, uh Refosco maybe even more, what did you know about you? There's different areas like did you know from, of Refoscos not grown in Friuli?

Janina Doyle 00:24:09 No, I've heard that there is just like, I don't, I guess it's slightly mutations or slightly different clones and that there are different Refoscos, but this is the one that is specific to you guys.

Laura Felluga 00:24:21 Okay. So Refosco, but this is, I wanna mention the one thing, this is true for all of the varieties that we grow, like we grow different kinds of the same varieties, really contributes to it's one part of the missions and really contributes to the complexity of the wines. Peduncolo is nothing but the wood part of the, of the bunch.

Janina Doyle 00:24:40 Right.

Laura Felluga 00:24:41 And this slightly gets some rather hues when...

Janina Doyle 00:24:46 Ah, yes. Like the trunk goes, the trunk and the cane goes just a little bit more red.

Laura Felluga 00:24:50 Yeah, exactly. That's the origin of the name. It is also one of the most traditional. So in general terms, the region is mostly known as one of the best regions for white wines, but the, the red wine tradition is very much existing. So Merlot, that was brought by Napoleon, uh, was one of the most grown red varietals and as developed a very specific identity in Friuli-Venezia Giulia as well with the Refosco. Refosco is more, uh, it has these big bunches with a, how do you call it a big wing?

Janina Doyle 00:25:27 The, the grape span? You mean the top it's really big. The bunch itself is really big at the top?

Laura Felluga 00:25:32 Exactly and it's a more, you know, where Merlot in Friuli is a little bit more fruity and fleshy, uh, fleshy contribution to the wines. Refosco gives structure. It's deeper in the aromas. It's a little bit more austere and it has a very peculiar tannicity that really, really characterize the grapes. Sometimes we do green harvests, to help him go through the maturation process. And yes, it's very intriguing red wine, but in general terms, I would say whites from the region are outstanding and reds from the region are surprising because they are very special, very unexpected. So I would've definitely invite you to taste the Refosco if you get chance to.

Janina Doyle 00:26:15 Perfect. How many wines are you guys making in the portfolio? How many do we have to work our way through?

Laura Felluga 00:26:23 So when you come to the winery, you would be able to taste 19 of them.

Janina Doyle 00:26:29 19!

Laura Felluga 00:26:30 19, between single varietals and blends and single vineyards of the single varietals. So we keep on, we keep on making a research. We keep on, uh, you know, trying to understand the, the property better. In the UK, currently you can find the Pinot Grigio single varietal, the Friulano single varietal, the Sauvignon single varietal, of course Terre Alte and also Illivio. Illivio was a, um, wine. Illivio means "The Livio" and was a wine that was gifted to my grandfather when he turned 85, by his children.

Janina Doyle 00:27:09 Love it.

Laura Felluga 00:27:10 So it's kind of the wine that represents the family the most among the, the portfolio. And it's um, based on Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, which just a touch of Picolit that it's really the..

Janina Doyle 00:27:19 Yeah, Very good. Picolit.

Laura Felluga 00:27:20 Like it makes it a gift. It really wraps, wraps the blend, wraps the blend for him. And it's, there's a, it's the only one that we produce with a little bit more of a new oak in the vinification.

Janina Doyle 00:27:34 Yes. Okay. A little bit of power behind that one. Amazing. Laura, thank you so much for just taking us on a journey for people to understand this region a little bit more and certainly the iconic, incredible special wines that are made at Livio Felluga. So thank you so much for joining us.

Laura Felluga 00:27:49 Thank you. Thank you Janina. Thank you for the attention and please visit us soon. We'll be waiting for you.

Janina Doyle 00:27:54 I'm doing it. I'm doing it. I'm getting the plane right now. Thank you.

Laura Felluga 00:27:59 Thank you, cheers.

Janina Doyle 00:28:04 So that is it for part two with Laura Felluga. I think she did an amazing job painting the picture and what it's like to be in the Northeast of Italy, the views, the terroir, the grapes. It's been a really long time since I have had any Picolit and Laura has spiked my interest again here. So for those of you feel exactly the same way, I'm wanting to explore that grape variety further. There is a DOCG Colli Orientali del Friuli Picolit. Wine from this DOCG will be sweet and it's made in the Passito method. So, air dried before vinification either on the vine, in straw baskets or on shelves in rooms that are dedicated to the drying of grapes. Livio Felluga does a sweet Picolit. So, if you are ever going to visit them, you know exactly what wine needs to be bought and packed in your suitcase to eradicate those holiday blues when you are back.

Janina Doyle 00:29:03 So I have another Italian proverb to finish off this episode. And of course, with my attempted Italian, it says:

“Dove regna il vino non regna il silenzio.”

Which means where wine rains silence does not rain. This is all about the typical Italian meal. Good wine is always present, and it creates the perfect atmosphere and energy when shared with friends and family. Hence a lot of noise is made when people are having fun. So that is it for today. Can I remind you to pop across to the people's choice podcast awards and vote for me in the arts section, if you haven't already given this podcast a like, don't forget to subscribe and do share the podcast with your wine, loving friends. If you have a moment to leave me a comment or a review, especially with apple podcasts, it does make the podcast more discoverable. So next week I'm gonna be taking you back out into the vineyards for part two of viticulture. So, you can learn a bit more about those decisions that are made to grow that perfect vine and produce even more perfect grapes. So, to all of you this week, may you drink well, seize those opportunities for success and until next Monday, cheers to you.