

Wine Traditions in the South Tyrol



Figure 1. Wine making in the South Tyrol (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.).

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Introduction

With a wine-making history that dates back more than 3,000 years, a variety of diverse, high-quality wines (Fig. 1) are produced in the South Tyrol, thanks to the region's special geographic location, with elevations that range from 200 to 1,000 meters, and Alpine and Mediterranean climates (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). From sparkling white wines to red wines such as Shiava and Pinot Noir, the region produces distinctive, unique wines, which are key to the fabric of agricultural and culinary traditions in the region (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.).

History of Wine-Making in South Tyrol

One of the oldest wine regions among German-speaking countries, wine-making in South Tyrol came to the region before the birth of Christ, when the Rhaetian people used hand-made wooden barrels for making wine (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). In the eighth century AD, monasteries established wineries and named the wines after towns of origin, such as Traminer after Tramin (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). Under Hapsburg rule, wine-making continued to flourish, with the number of varieties increasing.

Wine in the Alpine region separated the wealthy uplanders from the poor lowlanders, due to its availability and classification as a luxury item—wine was mostly produced for one's own family consumption and was not otherwise available for the average person (Gibson, & Weinberg, 1980). Modern agriculture meant more efficiency and less need to labor in the vineyards. Then came prosperity after World War II, and, after relative isolation, the Alpine region opened up to the outside world (Gibson, & Weinberg, 1980). Wines started to flow in cafes as part of the move towards public drinking (Gibson, & Weinberg, 1980). Soon, the world started discovering the wines of the South Tyrol.

Today, South Tyrolean wines have nabbed multiple awards, with the production of whites and reds wines from about 20 grape varieties (SuedTirol, n.d.). More than 150 wineries operate in South Tyrol, allowing visitors to experience a wonderful tasting in a grand winery among a beautiful landscape (Fig. 1) (South Tyrol, n.d.).



Figure 2. Sunshine and warm air currents nourish the vineyards in South Tirol (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.).

Wine Production in South Tyrol

With over 300 days of sunlight per year, the Alps protect the vineyards (Fig. 2) from cold winds, and allow warm air currents from the Mediterranean to bathe them with warmth (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). Large temperature differentials between day and night, an average temperature of 64° F during the growing period, and adequate moisture create a perfect environment for growing grapes (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.).

In the Alto Adige wine-growing region, there are just 5,400 hectares of vineyard producing 20 grape varieties (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). Grape varieties are chosen upon their suitability for the location, and are cultivated with environmentally-friendly practices

(such as the integration of beneficial insects), often with labor by hand on steeply terraced slopes (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). The pergola trellis has gradually given way to a modern wire frame trellis system (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). The best wines mature in French oak barrels, however large wooden barrels—per the old tradition—are still being used for wines in this region (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). There are 46,636,600 kilograms of grapes harvested each year in South Tyrol, with 32,571,200 hl of wine produced (Fig. 3) with the D.O.C. label (Gummerrer, & Hack, 2012).

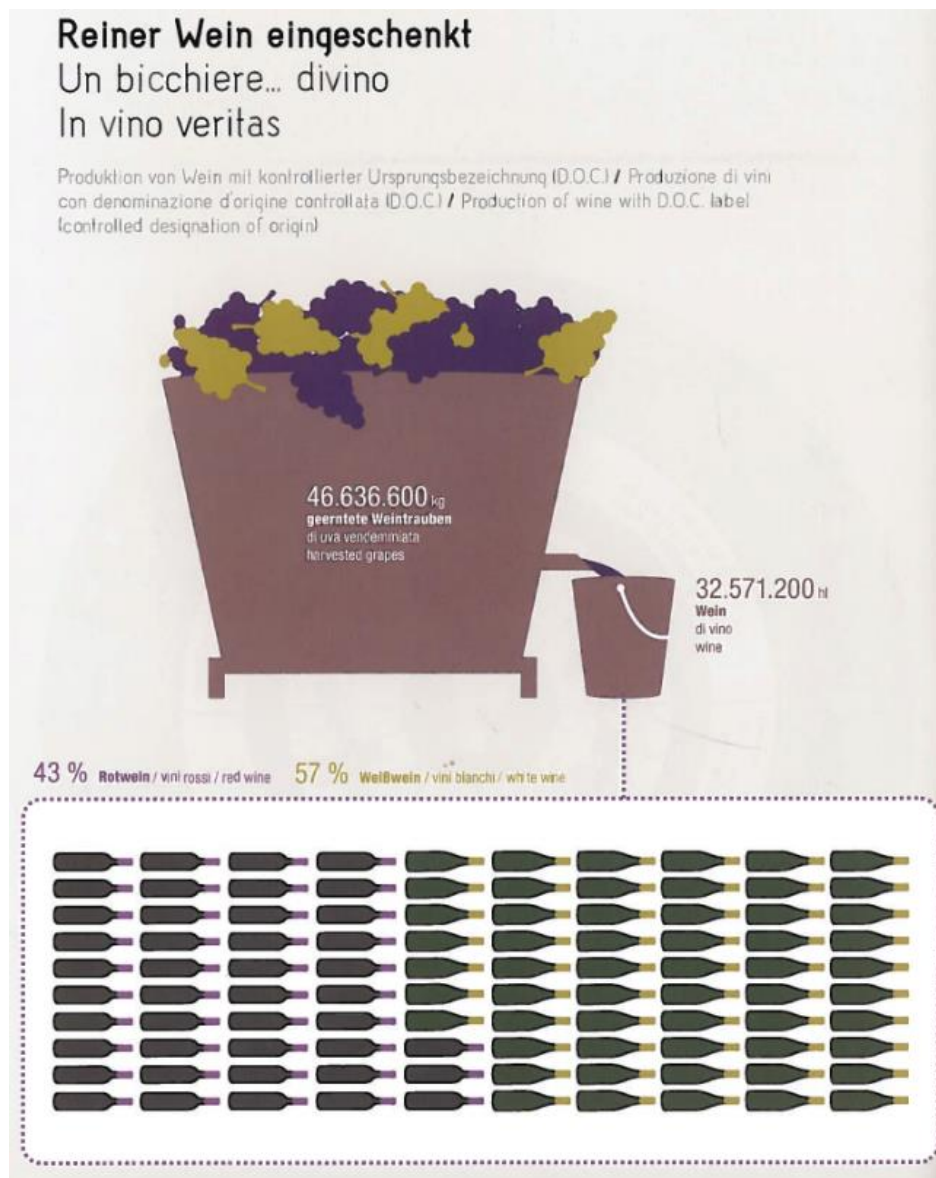


Figure 3. Total wine production with D.O.C. label in South Tyrol (Gummerrer, & Hack, 2012).

Wines of South Tyrol

Most of the wine production (Fig. 4) in South Tyrol is of white wine (60%), with 40% for red wine (Gummerrer, & Hack, 2012). Wines produced in the region include: indigenous wines, including Schiava (Vernatsch) and Lagrein; white wine varieties such as Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon, Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, Riesling, Sylvaner, Veltliner, Kerner, Muller Thurgau, and Mosacato Giallo; red wine varieties including Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet, and Musacto Rosa; and sparkling wines made from Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir per the method champenoise (Sudtirol Wein, n.d.). The largest wine production by type (Fig. 5) is Schiava (22.9%).

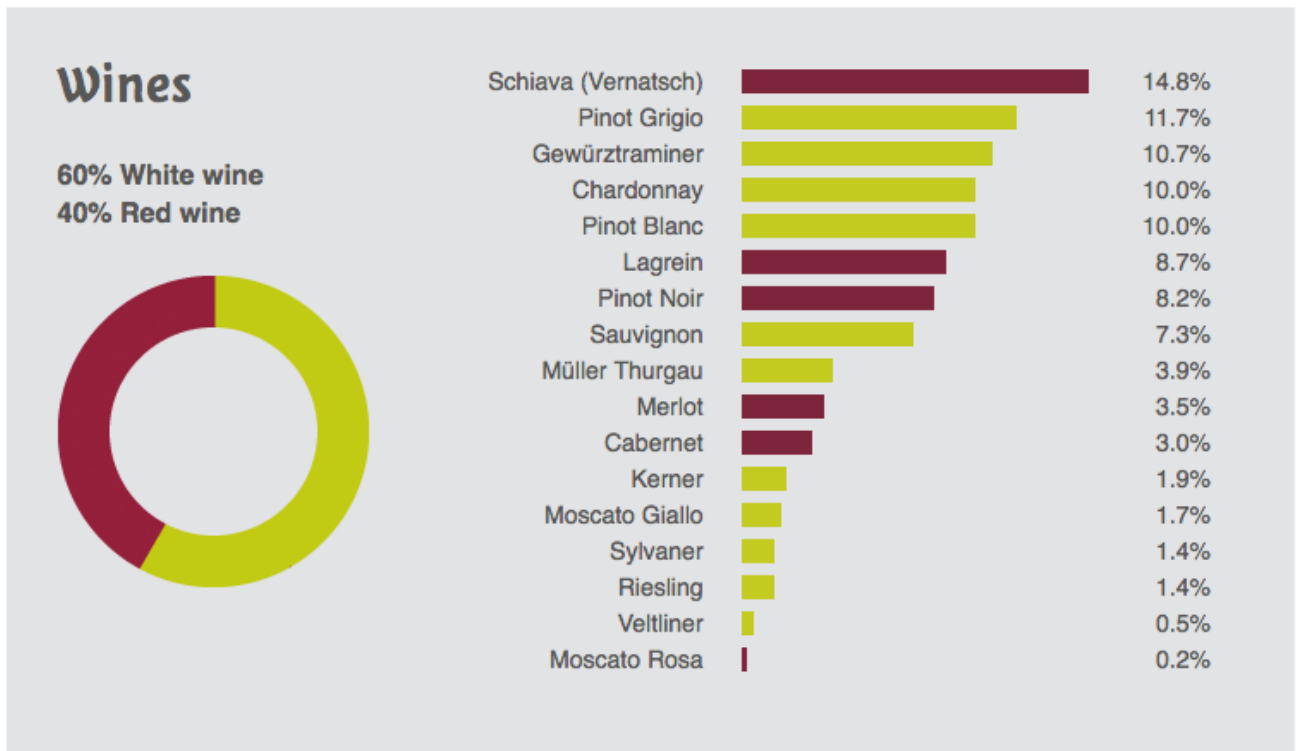


Figure 4. Wine production in South Tyrol (South Tyrol. (n.d.).

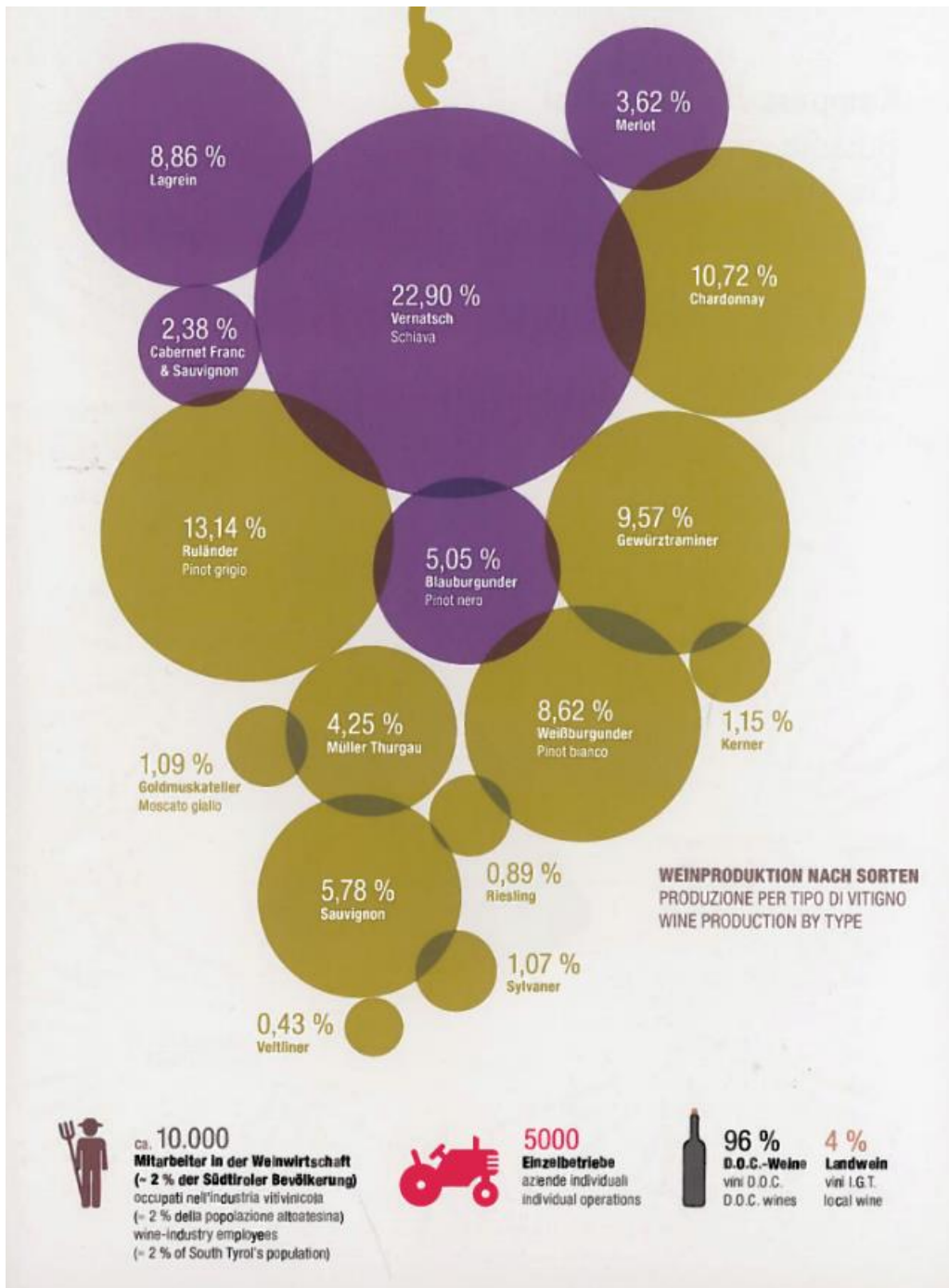


Figure 5. Wine production by type in South Tyrol (Gummerrer, & Hack, 2012).

Conclusion

The history and unique geography and climate culminate into a rich wine-making tradition that is uniquely South Tyrolean. A variety of wines are produced to suit every palate and accompany every local dish, whether it be spinach dumplings or apple strudel.

Alpine wines are becoming more well-known around the world, but they offer a special opportunity to celebrate the local agricultural and culinary traditions when visiting this region.

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