

07. FRIULI

UNCANNY ITALY

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

The best way to describe Friuli is “Uncanny Italy.” It looks like Italy, feels like Italy, sounds like Italy, but something utterly different has infiltrated what we consider to be “Italian.” If Italy’s regions were children, Friuli was adopted at birth and raised in a distant land. In Friuli, the names on road signs often possess a few too many unusual consonants (like z, j, v, and k) crammed too close together. While you find staples like pasta and pizza, ingredients like cabbage, horseradish, paprika, and dill appear frequently. This strangeness makes Friuli one of the most fascinating, well-loved, and yet still somewhat obscure regions of a country everyone thinks they know.

Holding down Italy’s far northeastern corner, Friuli lies at the top of the Adriatic, west of Slovenia and south of Austria. Location and history have a lot to do with its exoticism. Over the last 2000 years, its hills have been well trampled by all sorts of empires rumbling through — Romans, Slavs, Venetians, French, Austrians, Ottomans, and Hapsburgs — all of whom left their mark. Thus culturally, Friuli feels closer to Zagreb and Budapest than Rome and Naples. Ultimately, and in turn, explaining Friuli’s uncanny look and feel, it’s an Italian/Eastern European mash-up, blending the philosophical and spiritual sensibilities of the latter with the blithe Mediterranean grace of the former.

When it comes to food and wine, Friuli’s exotic cultural stew tends to really hook people who manage to visit. Not only is it fascinating and scenic, but there’s an ethic of quality here that few other places can match. Producers care deeply about their products, which may make them pricey, but also reliably excellent. You can taste this everywhere — in the wine, prosciutto, produce, cheese, pastry, and more.

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The sweet spot for grape growing is the south-facing, hilly zone midway between the mountains and the beach. This appellation is Collio, whose soils are rocky with calcium-rich marl and sandstone. And the climate is truly moderate, which yields classically balanced wines of body, minerality, and flavor complexity.

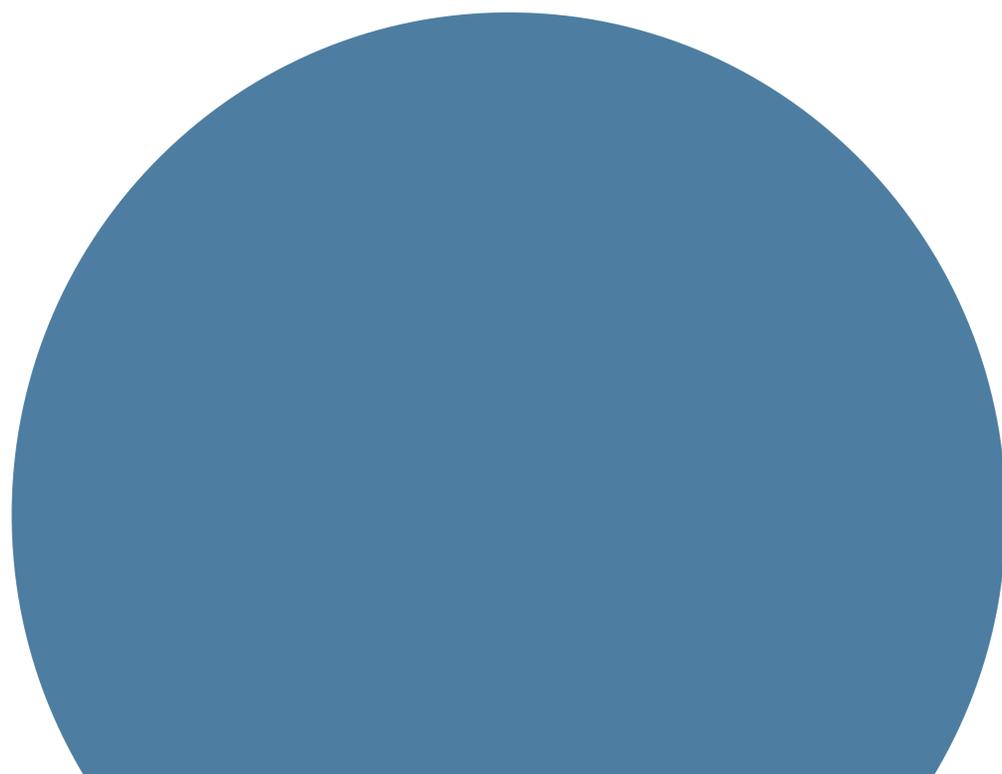
Friuli's greatest vinous distinction is being recognized as Italy's unquestioned capital of white wine. Locals will remind you that they are equally adept at red, but it's the white wines that have developed cult-like followings. If you want to experience a Pinot Grigio with gravitas, reach for a Friulian version. Equally, Sauvignon Blanc finds a truly unique and resonant expression here. The top Chardonnays stand with the best of Burgundy. And then there are fascinating and delicious local grapes that hold everyone's attention at the table – the region's eponymous, stone fruit and nutty Friulano wines and their perfect pairing, the mineral and herbal Ribolla Gialla.

If in the 1960s and '70s, the Italian half of Friuli's personality led Italy's charge into the modern era of pure, bracing single-variety white wines, decades later the Slavic side made wine weird. Driven by passion, philosophy, and spirituality, winemakers like Josko Gravner and Stanko Radikon innovated by creating unusual blends, skin-contact whites, and clay amphorae-aged wines. Indeed, it was here where many of the early trends of natural wine started to infiltrate the West. Today they strike an appealing balance between the pure and classical style of winemaking and soulfully idiosyncratic.

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Unsurprisingly, Friuli's bold, powerful whites make compelling counterparts to its cuisine, as you will find when you cook these dishes and pair them with Massican or other Friulian whites. The rosemary oil garnishing the Frico Caldo and the salad of radicchio (a Friulian specialty), horseradish, and apple suggest a thirst for a high-toned aromatic white like Sauvignon Blanc or an herbal Pinot Grigio. As you transition into polenta and mushrooms with sweet/sour onions and a paprika-rich goulash, you could pair a richer Friulano or a blend including Ribolla. Or if you wish to visit a Friulian red — the region produces excellent Merlot and Cabernet Franc, though local specialties like Refosco, Pignolo, or Schioppettino might be more inspiring. Finally, the unusual gnocchi, which blends savory and sweet, is Friuli at its wild best and would reward a sweet wine or white or red wine with a decade or more years of age.

Altogether, to dine “Friulian” is to experience a meal steeped in a rare mixture of history, geography, and cultural diversity. It reminds us that Italy can mean many things, far beyond the classical or cliché. And that unbelievable, world-class white wine is not an outlier in Italy. You just have to look in the right place.



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ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Chef Sara Hauman's career is sprinkled with culinary accolades: Eater Young Gun, Zagat 30 under 30, and Bravo Top Chef contestant. Having cooked in kitchens from Spain's famed Asador Etxebarri to San Francisco's Octavia, she now resides in Portland, OR.

Jordan Mackay is a James Beard award-winning writer covering wine, spirits, and food. He has written for the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and Food & Wine magazine. Jordan has penned countless books including Secrets of the Sommeliers, The Atlas of Taste, Franklin Barbecue, Franklin Steak, and the pending Maison Premiere Almanac.

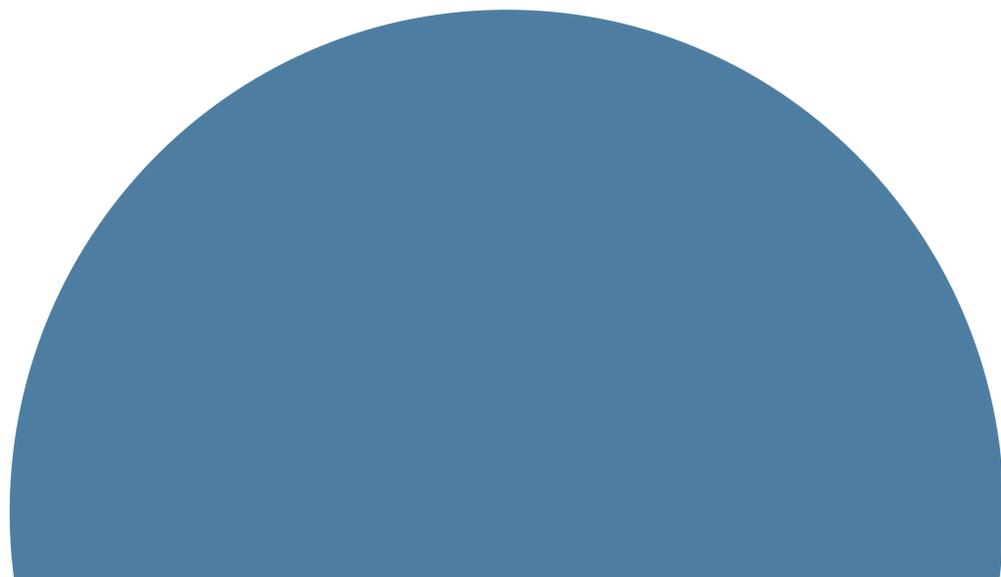


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OUR FRIULIAN DINNER PARTY MENU

Serves 6-8

1. Appetizer: FRICO CALDO
2. Salad: RADICCHIO SALAD WITH HORSERADISH AND APPLE
3. Starter: POLENTA WITH PORCINI AND AGRODOLCE ONIONS
4. Main Course: GOULASH TRIESTINO
5. Dessert: DRIED APRICOT GNOCCHI WITH HONEY AND WALNUTS



07. **FRIULI**

FRICO CALDO

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Yukon gold or waxy yellow potatoes
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- ½ medium yellow onion, diced finely
- 4 oz. Montasio* cheese, grated
- ½ tsp. salt
- A pinch of ground or grated nutmeg
- 2 Tbsp. grapeseed oil

*Parmesan can be substituted if Montasio (a Friulian cow's milk cheese) cannot be found.

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Serves 6-8

Preparation:

1. Simmer the potatoes until fork-tender in a medium pot of salted water.
2. Once tender, drain then cool to room temperature.
3. Remove the skins if desired.
4. While the potatoes are simmering, melt the butter in a small pan, then add the diced onions and a pinch of salt.
5. Cook the onions over medium heat, stirring frequently until soft and translucent, about 5-7 minutes.
6. When ready, transfer the onions to a small bowl.
7. Transfer the potatoes into a medium-sized mixing bowl and mash.
8. When the potatoes have a mashed consistency, fold in the grated cheese, salt, nutmeg, and onions.
9. Heat about 2 Tbsp. grapeseed oil in a heavy-bottom pan, approximately 10" in diameter.
10. Add half of the potato mixture to the pan, then spread and flatten it out with the back of a spatula to resemble a pancake about ¼ inch in thickness.
11. Cook the "frico caldo" over medium heat until it begins to brown, about 5-6 minutes.
12. Use the spatula to loosen the frico caldo, as needed, from the pan.
13. Once one side is browned, use a plate to turn the pancake over (place a large plate over the top of the pan then turn the pan over to drop the pancake onto the plate), then slide the frico caldo back into the pan to brown the other side.
14. Once both sides are golden brown, remove the frico caldo from the pan, and repeat with the remainder of the potato mixture.

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FRICO CALDO

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the rosemary oil:

- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 tsp. garlic, minced
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 tsp. red-wine vinegar
- 1/3 cup parsley, finely chopped
- Pinch of salt

Preparation:

1. Place the rosemary leaves and garlic in a small bowl.
2. Heat ¼ cup of the olive oil just until it begins to smoke.
3. Remove the oil from the heat and immediately pour over the rosemary and garlic.
4. Allow the rosemary and garlic to sizzle and fry in the bowl for about 30 seconds.
5. Add the vinegar and remaining olive oil to stop the cooking.
6. Stir in the chopped parsley and a pinch of salt.
7. This can be made a few days in advance and held in an air-tight container in the refrigerator.

To serve:

- While the frico is still caldo (“hot”), plate it and top with a healthy drizzle of the rosemary oil. Slice and serve.

07. FRIULI

RADICCHIO SALAD WITH HORSERADISH AND APPLE

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 1 shallot, minced
- ¼ cup red-wine vinegar
- ¼ cup freshly grated horseradish, plus more for garnish
- ¾ cup olive oil
- 2 heads radicchio, leaves separated, washed and trimmed
- 2 honeycrisp, fuji, mountain rose, or granny smith apples*
- 1 ½ cups Montasio or Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 Tbsp fresh dill, chopped coarsely
- Salt

*Choose an apple variety that has a balance of sweetness and tartness to offset the spicy horseradish.

Preparation:

1. In a small bowl, marinate the shallot in the vinegar for at least 10 minutes.
2. Add ¼ cup grated horseradish to the vinegar mixture and stir to combine.
3. Gently whisk in the olive oil and add a few pinches of salt to season.
4. The vinaigrette can be made up to 5 days in advance, however, the fresh horseradish may lose some of its spiciness the longer it sits in the refrigerator before use.
5. Slice the apples into ¼" thick pieces.
6. In a large bowl, toss together the washed radicchio, apples, grated cheese, and fresh dill.
7. Then toss with as much of the vinaigrette as you like.
8. Season the salad with a few pinches of salt, then transfer to a large serving bowl or plate.
9. Finish the salad with another grating of fresh horseradish and cheese.

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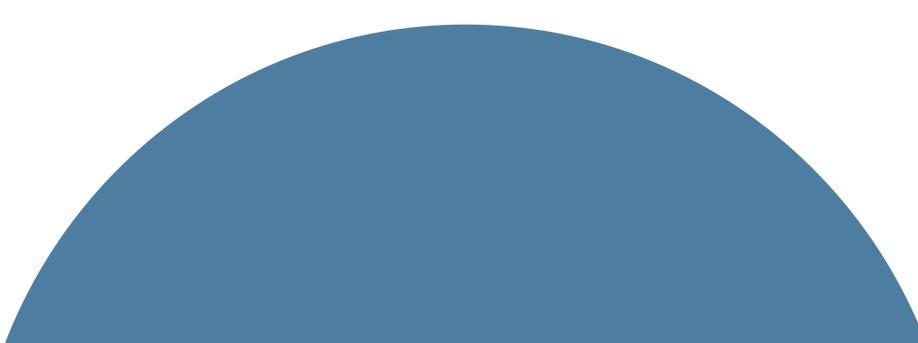
POLENTA WITH PORCINI AND AGRODOLCE ONIONS

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the polenta:

- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup stone-ground polenta
- ¼ cup creme fraiche
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1 cup parmesan, grated
- Salt
- Black pepper

Prepare the polenta:

1. Combine the broths and bring to a boil in a large pot.
 2. Slowly whisk in the polenta to the boiling broth.
 3. Keep whisking the mixture until it returns to a boil, then reduce the heat to low.
 4. The time it takes to cook the polenta will be determined by the thickness of the grind; expect it to take about 45-60 minutes.
 5. While cooking, stir the polenta frequently to avoid it sticking to the bottom of the pot.
 6. Once the polenta is fully cooked and tender, remove it from the heat and add the creme fraiche, butter, and parmesan.
 7. Stir to combine and season as desired with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
 8. Feel free to add a little more creme fraiche or warm broth to the polenta to adjust the consistency to your taste.
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07. FRIULI**POLENTA WITH PORCINI AND AGRODOLCE ONIONS**

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the mushrooms and onions:

- 2/3 cup dry white wine
- 8 oz. dried porcini mushrooms
- 4 oz. butter
- 2 lb. cippolini or pearl onions, or a mix of the two, peeled and cut in half
- 2 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- 1 ½ tsp. garlic, minced
- 2/3 cup red-wine or sherry vinegar
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 tsp. salt
- Parmesan cheese

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POLENTA WITH PORCINI AND AGRODOLCE ONIONS

Serves 6-8

Prepare the mushrooms and onions:

1. Pour the white wine over the dried porcini and allow to rehydrate for at least 2 hours.
2. In a large, heavy-bottomed pan, melt 3 oz. of the butter.
3. Add the onions and cook on medium heat, stirring or tossing when necessary.
4. The goal is to brown the onions on all sides; this should take about 10-13 minutes.
5. Once browned, add a half portion of the thyme to the pan, then the garlic, and the hydrated mushrooms including the wine.
6. Bring the mixture to a simmer, then add the vinegar, honey, and salt.
7. Simmer the mixture until almost all the liquid has evaporated and the onions are soft and tender.
8. If the onions are not quite as soft as you would like, add water or more white wine, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup at a time, as needed, until the onions reach your desired texture.
9. If you add more liquid to cook the onions, re-adjust the salt as needed.
10. Once soft, remove the pan from the heat and toss in the remaining 1 oz. of butter and remaining thyme.
11. Stir the mixture continuously until the butter has fully melted and creates a glaze on the onions.

To serve:

- Ladle the hot polenta into a serving bowl.
- Spoon the agrodolce onions on top of the polenta and finish with more freshly cracked pepper and, if desired, grated parmesan cheese.

07. FRIULI**GOULASH TRIESTINO**

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- Salt
- 2 lbs. beef chuck or stew meat
- 2 medium yellow onions, peeled
- 3 carrots, peeled
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tsp. sweet paprika
- 2 tsp. hot paprika
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 Tbsp garlic, minced
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 1 Tbsp flour
- ½ cup white wine
- 3 cups chicken or beef broth
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 2-3 oz. Parmesan rind

Preparation:

1. Season the beef with salt.
2. Cut the onions in half through the root end.
3. Place half an onion, cut side down on a cutting board, then cut in half lengthwise again.
4. Make two more lengthwise cuts to divide the onion into four sections.
5. Separate the layers of the onions and repeat this process on the rest of the onions until all of your onions resemble petals. Set onions aside.
6. Cut the carrots into ½” or bite-sized pieces, making sure the chunks are of uniform size so they cook evenly. Set the carrots aside.

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07. FRIULI**GOULASH TRIESTINO**

Serves 6-8

Preparation (continued):

7. Heat a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium heat, then add the oil.
8. Once hot, add the seasoned beef to the pan and cook on medium heat, turning the cubes as needed to ensure they brown evenly on all sides. Be careful not to crowd the pan, as the beef will not brown if the pan is too full. You may have to sear the beef in batches, depending on the size of your pot.
9. Once browned, remove the meat from the pan and reserve.
10. Add the onions and carrots to the hot Dutch oven.
11. Brown the vegetables, while stirring frequently for 4-6 minutes.
12. Once the onions and carrots have browned, lower the heat, and then add both paprikas, the dried oregano, minced garlic, and tomato paste.
13. Continuously stir to toast the spices for about a minute.
14. Add the flour and stir for another minute.
15. The spices and tomato paste will begin to stick to the bottom of the pan.
16. Add the beef back into the pot.
17. Pour the white wine into the roasting pan and let come to a simmer, while scraping the bottom of the pan to release everything that was stuck on the bottom.
18. Add the rosemary sprig and parmesan rind.
19. Add the broth and bring the whole mixture to a boil.
20. Lower the goulash to a simmer, place the lid on top and cook for approximately 90 minutes, or until the beef is tender.

To serve:

- Remove the rosemary spring and parmesan rind, then serve the whole contents of the Dutch oven alongside some creamy polenta.

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DRIED APRICOT GNOCCHI WITH HONEY AND WALNUTS

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the gnocchi:

- 20 dried apricot halves
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 ½ lbs. or 2 large russet potatoes
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 ½ - 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup parmesan, grated
- Pinch of cinnamon
- ½ tsp. salt

Preparation:

1. Pour the white wine over the dried apricots and let rehydrate overnight, covered with a clean dish towel at room temperature. Once plump, drain the apricots and set aside.
 2. Simmer the russet potatoes whole until fork tender, about 45 minutes.
 3. Remove the potatoes from the water and let cool to room temperature.
 4. Once cool, peel the potatoes, then pass them through a food mill, ricer, or mash by hand until smooth.
 5. Transfer the cooked potatoes to a medium sized mixing bowl.
 6. Create a well in the middle of the cooked potatoes, and add the sugar, egg, 1 ½ cups flour, parmesan, cinnamon, and salt.
 7. Using your fingertips, gently mix the dough together.
 8. Knead gently until the dough becomes homogeneous with no streaks of egg; use more flour as needed to create a dough that is moist but not sticky.
 9. Be careful not to overmix the dough. Finish kneading so that the dough looks like a medium sized loaf of bread.
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DRIED APRICOT GNOCCHI WITH HONEY AND WALNUTS

Serves 6-8

Preparation (continued):

10. Cut off 1-1 ½ oz. piece of gnocchi dough.
11. Roll between your palms to form a sphere, then flatten into a circle with about 2” in diameter.
12. Place 1 rehydrated apricot in the center of the circle, then bring the edges together, encasing the apricot completely. (You may need to adjust the size of your gnocchi, so don’t worry: consider the first piece as practice to gauge the amount of dough needed to cover the apricot.)
13. Roll the gnocchi between your palms once more to form a sphere.
14. Place the gnocchi on a floured baking sheet and repeat until you have filled all the dumplings with apricots.
15. At this point, if you wish you can freeze the gnocchi for up to 1 month and simply drop them in boiling water when you are ready to use.
16. Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
17. Once boiling, drop the gnocchi into the water, making sure to not overcrowd the pot.
18. Once the gnocchi begin to float, let them cook for 1-2 more minutes, then remove, and allow the excess water to drain onto a paper towel.

07. FRIULI**DRIED APRICOT GNOCCHI WITH HONEY AND WALNUTS**

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the honey and walnut sauce:

- ½ cup honey
- Splash of water
- 4 oz. butter
- ½ cup walnuts, toasted and chopped
- Additional 1 Tbsp. butter
- Cinnamon

Preparation:

1. In a medium sauté pan, combine the honey and splash of water and cook on medium heat.
 2. Once the honey begins to bubble, add the butter, and stir to melt.
 3. Once the butter is almost fully melted, lower the heat, add the walnuts, and let cook for 20 more seconds.
 4. Remove the pan from the heat and add your cooked gnocchi.
 5. Stir in the last Tbsp. of butter until it has fully melted then serve immediately with a sprinkle of cinnamon.
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