

## 2016 Askos Verdeca

### Masseria Li Veli, Puglia, Italy

#### Product details

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<b>Vintage:</b>	2016	<b>Drinking:</b>	
<b>Producer:</b>	Masseria Li Veli	<b>Alcohol:</b>	
<b>Region:</b>	Puglia	<b>Variety:</b>	Verdeca
<b>Country:</b>	Italy		

#### About the producer

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##### **MASSERAI LI VELI WINE**

Puglia has always felt somewhat separate to the rest of Italy, particularly the southern half, the heel: Salento. This limestone peninsula has its own, independent character. Closer to Croatia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece than to Barolo or even Chianti, it's an area with ancient influences from overseas, strange dialects such as Greki, from its time as an Ancient Greek colony, and unique architecture in the conical shape of trulli stone houses. It is also a region with its own distinct viticulture - the Primitivo grape is its most famous export (named Zinfandel in other parts of the world), but there are many other indigenous Puglian grape varieties too.

Puglia has traditionally been a region of outliers, those going against the grain. The Masseria Li Veli winery was built by one such, and is now operated by a family with a similar philosophy. The Marquis Antonio de Viti de Marco, an internationally recognised professor of economics in Rome since the 1880s, refused to take an oath of loyalty to Mussolini's Fascist party in 1931 and left the capital to follow his passion for winemaking instead. He made a different promise altogether - to create a cellar which would become a flagship for Southern Italy.

In 1999, the Falvo family, whose 40 years' experience of running a winery had been at the famous Montepulciano winery, Avignonesi, sold up in well-heeled Tuscany and answered the call of the heel. Sadly, de Marco's ambition had not been maintained after his death. Happily, the Falvo family spared no expense in not only restoring the down-at-heel Masseria Li Veli to its former glory but taking it to new levels.

They planted 50 hectares of vineyard, reinstating oft-overlooked Puglian grape varieties such as Negroamaro, Susumaniello and Verdeca. The vineyards are planted in a hexagonal shape called settonce developed by Roman military engineers, combined with the ancient local alberello training method. Together, they provide high planting density, maximum soil exploitation by the vine roots, maximum exposure of foliage to the sun, good circulation of air and equilibrium of plant growth.

The proximity of the Adriatic on one side and the Gulf of Taranto on the other means this part of Puglia (Masseria Li Veli is equidistant between Brindisi and Lecce) often receives cooling sea breezes at night in the long, dry summers. Spring and autumn are short, winters are mild and rainfall is low over the year. However, there are large underground water reserves which relieve vine roots, which thrive in the red topsoil and calciferous clay of Puglia.

Masserie are properties left over from another foreign influence - the Norman occupation. They were the base for a complete agricultural operation, as well as protective castle and summer residence. These days, the Masseria Li Veli winery still houses a complete process, from cultivation to bottling. The large, light-coloured stone cellar is air-conditioned to 16°C. Ultra-modern fermentation tanks - eight



horizontal submerged cap vats with a capacity of 125 hectoliters and 10 vertical vessels with a capacity of 130 hectoliters - can be programmed to follow highly specified vinification processes determined by the Falvo family, based on their extensive experience in winemaking. The barrel cellar, protected by a large glass door and located on the ground level beneath groin vaults, houses approximately 10,000 hectoliters, divided between steel vats and about 400 French oak barriques. It is an operation built for volume, yet the quality is remarkably high for the price range.

Orion is Masseria Li Veli's pure expression of Primitivo. It is intense on the nose, bursting with the ripest of cherries and other red fruits, before introducing sweet spices which persist on the palate, where the full-bodied smoothness is broken by a streak of pleasant acidity. Primonero is a blend of Negroamaro (85%) and Primitivo. As its name suggests, Negroamaro is a dark purple grape, even the pulp, but has bright fruit and a floral bouquet to it. It has a lingering finish with sweet tannins.

Another grape typical of Puglia - this time white - is Fiano Minitolo. This small, aromatic and strong-flavoured grape, in the hands of the Falvo winemakers, produces a wine which is rounded but firm, with tropical and floral aromas drifting over a core of pear covered with a squeeze of citrus acidity to keep it fresh, and finished with mineral punctuation.

If the Masseria Li Veli winery's classic range of wines includes some lesser known grape varieties, they are nothing compared to the estate's experimental Askos line, named after the Greek word for decanter, which aims to revive varieties close to extinction. Susumaniello is a bombastic wine full of black cherry and blackberry flavours, with Chesterfield leather notes. It has great acidity and firm tannins, meaning it can get even better over time.

In the Valle d'Itria, north of Salento, where Masseria Li Veli is located, the winemakers grow Verdeca. It's a grape variety usually destined for dessert wines and vermouth, but as a varietal wine, with a little Fiano Minutolo, it is full of tropical fruit and spice notes, with a mildly piquant aftertaste.

Not that Masseria Li Veli does not make a sweet wine - it's just that it uses Aleatico, an extraordinarily aromatic grape on the vine, which becomes even more complex and concentrated when dried. The deep amber Aleatico Passito is aged for 40 months in oak and emerges with dried and candied fruits - apricot, dates and figs - vying for the nose with liquorice and coffee notes. On the palate, the oily liquid reveals digestivo amaro notes of herbs and barks - a balance which works perfectly with an espresso and an almond biscuit.

Explore our full selection of Masseria Li Veli wines, including the popular Fiano and Aleatico Passito.