



Terlato Wines International CEO Bill Terlato (center) with viticulturists from the Friulian estate, Pierpaolo Sirch and Marco Simonit.

Pushing Pinot Grigio
UPWARD

**TERLATO WINES INTERNATIONAL CEO BILL TERLATO
ELEVATES ITALIAN PINOT GRIGIO IN THE
COLLI ORIENTALI DEL FRIULI DOC**

first press

by Courtney Schiessl

Italian Pinot Grigio can be described by a trio of terms: ubiquitous, straightforward, and inexpensive. This is well-accepted by American wine drinkers, many of whom rely on Pinot Grigio as a refreshing “catch-all” white wine that’s budget-friendly enough to buy in bulk. Yes, the category is popular, but is it interesting? Not so much.

Some producers, however, won’t settle for that depiction. Among them is Terlato Wines International, a pioneer of the Italian Pinot Grigio category in the U.S. Led by CEO Bill Terlato, the company has a mission to turn Pinot Grigio on its head by creating a premium, complex wine from one of northern Italy’s most exciting regions: Colli Orientali del Friuli. Enophiles who think they know this pervasive category have certainly not yet tasted the Terlato Vineyards Pinot Grigio.

Pioneering and Reinventing

It’s nearly impossible to find a wine shop or restaurant in the U.S. that doesn’t carry the grape. As Italy currently has more Pinot Grigio vines planted than any other country, a significant portion of these offerings are Italian, particularly from the country’s northeastern regions.

But when Bill, a third-generation member of the family company, assessed the overall Italian Pinot Grigio category in 2013, he believed something was lacking. “The wines were bland and neutral—nothing like what Pinot Grigio could be,” Bill says. “I knew we could make a benchmark Italian Pinot Grigio that was clearly different than the rest.”

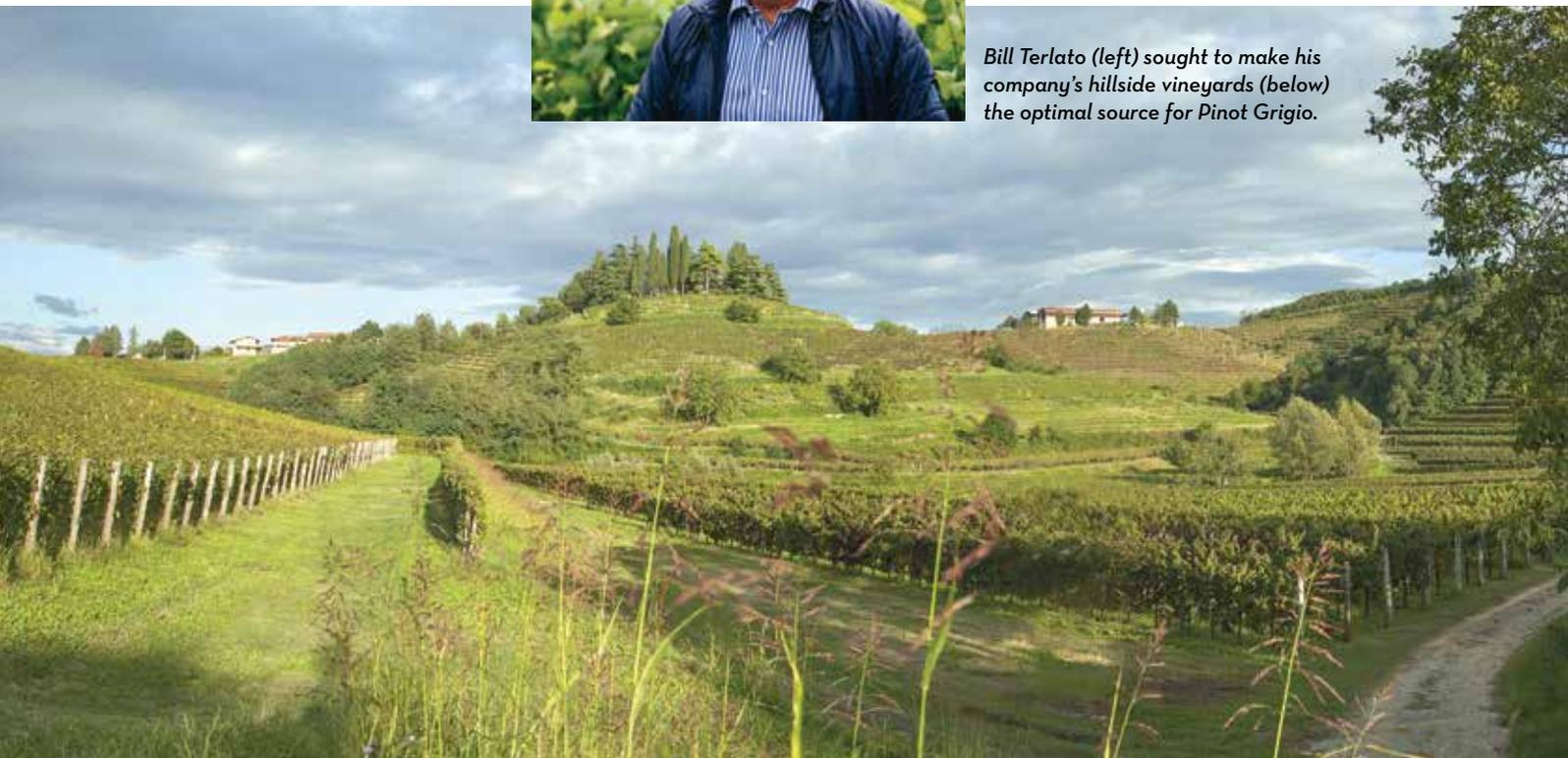


He set out with a goal to redefine both consumer and trade expectations for Pinot Grigio while becoming a leader in the \$15-and-over segment, and, considering his company’s history, was well-equipped to do so. Bill notes that his father, Tony, “created the Pinot Grigio category here in the U.S.” back in 1978, when Italian Pinot Grigio was still a rarity. But as the category took off, large producers began sourcing fruit from less-ideal vineyards geared solely toward quantity. “Over the last 40 years, as volumes grew, the wines became commercial and industrial and quality suffered,” Bill adds. “I knew we could do better.”

Over its 60-year history, Terlato Wines International has established itself as a forward-thinking luxury wine producer after progressing from retail to importing, distribution, and eventually winery ownership and vineyard development.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Bill—who initially planned to attend law

Bill Terlato (left) sought to make his company’s hillside vineyards (below) the optimal source for Pinot Grigio.



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school before falling in love with the family business during a stint as a sales rep—ventured outside the more common Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige regions when looking for a home for Terlato's Pinot Grigio. Winemakers Primo Franco of Nino Franco Prosecco and Roberto Anselmi of Anselmi Wines (both of which are in the Terlato portfolio) instead steered him toward a property in Friuli-Venezia Giulia's Colli Orientali region.

Bill believed strongly in Colli Orientali's potential for producing premier Pinot Grigio and launched Terlato Vineyards' rendition of the variety from this 240-acre estate with the 2014 vintage. After increasing production with the 2016 vintage, the project quickly turned Terlato's goal into reality, as its Pinot Grigio is currently the fastest-growing in Italy, according to Nielsen data.

Friuli's Potential

When asked what sets the Terlato Vineyards Pinot Grigio apart from its counterparts, Bill's answer is simple: "Taste it and see the difference." The concentrated, complex wine is far more than the requisite porch-pounder Pinot Grigio consumers have come to expect: Several factors

contribute to its nuanced character, all of which relate back to the company's decision to solely use estate-grown fruit from the Colli Orientali region in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. "We believe that Friuli—specifically Colli Orientali in Friuli—is the best place to produce white wine in Italy, and we want to be the best in class," Bill notes.

Tucked into the corner of northeastern Italy and bordered by both Austria and Slovenia, Friuli has certainly made waves in the past decade for its ability to produce aromatic, expressive white wines. Colli Orientali and neighboring Collio are the two most important Friulian regions for quality winemaking; in the former, hills (*colline* in Italian) define the landscape and vineyards are planted along slopes or on terraces. Grapes here benefit from plentiful sun and warmth during the day, encouraging ripening in order to build full flavor and body, but cool air from the nearby Julian Alps also flows through the vineyards at night, preserving lifting acidity.

This push-pull of richness and refreshment defines the Terlato Pinot Grigio and the wines of Colli Orientali as a whole. And while Friuli's natural growing conditions for high-quality white wines have contributed excellent fruit to Terlato's Pinot Grigio, the company has bolstered the region as well. According to Bill, production of Friulian wines has grown more than 15 percent in just one year—more than any other Italian region—largely due to the success of Terlato Vineyards' Pinot Grigio.

Quality Over Quantity

The distinction that Terlato's Pinot Grigio is produced from estate vineyards is an important one. Beyond the natural advantages of hillside vineyards and excellent marl and schist soils, estate production allows Terlato to follow its grapes through the entire viticultural process. "It's about having complete control," Bill says. Opting for low yields and hand-harvesting, for instance, prioritizes quality over quantity despite the fact that these methods are more costly and time-consuming.

At its Friulian estate, Terlato has also partnered with viticulturalists Marco Simonit and Pierpaolo Sirch, known for their



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namesake pruning method. Specifically designed to elongate the life of a vine, this approach has created a wealth of healthy old vines on the estate. "We have many older vines averaging 20–30 years in age which produce wines of exceptional quality," Bill notes.

While it might be easier and cheaper to sacrifice these viticultural methods in favor of mechanized ones, Bill feels the effort and expense are worthwhile given consumers' rising preferences for compelling premium wines over high-volume and low-cost options. The facts back up his theory: While many Italian Pinot Grigios can be found around the \$10 price point, Terlato expects 16,000 placements in retail shops and restaurants by the end of 2018 despite the slightly increased price.

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To Bill, it simply establishes a natural extension of a company that's pushed boundaries for decades. "Our goal is to extend multiple generations into the future as a family-owned luxury beverage company," he says, noting that the fourth generation of Terlatos are currently entering the business. "We continue to produce and represent selected world-class brands and will continue to acquire vineyards in the best regions." ❧

