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## The embrace of native grapes in Amarone

While Corvina has always been central to Amarone della Valpolicella, producers are now leaving behind international varieties in the blend in favour of other native grapes from the region. Sarah Heller MW explores the trend

**L**ike many of Italy's fine wine regions, Valpolicella has emerged from a few decades of dalliance with 'interloper' grapes in pursuit of international tastes, now returning firmly to its roots. Along with Corvina, bedrock of the Amarone blend – now substitutable with Corvinone, an unrelated and more structured variety – plus the mandatory Rondinella, producers are exploring even more of the region's native grapes. There's Oseleta – increasingly popular following its resuscitation by Masi – and Molinara – which is staging a mini-comeback after years of decline – along with curios such as Dindarella, Negrara, Rossignola and even (Lombardian) Croatina.

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Producers are deeply cognisant of their role in safeguarding tradition

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Carla, Nadia and Alberto Zenato

Another critical factor is appassimento – Amarone's distinctive drying process – for which international varieties are suboptimal. For example, Bordeaux grapes often leave a marked herbaceousness and harsh tannin. By contrast, Oseleta's virtually non-existent juice following appassimento makes extraction very gentle, according to Masi's Raffaele Boscaini. Along similar lines, Camerani prizes her hillside grown Corvinone – more common in the winery's eastern Val d'Illasi home – for the reliable appassimento that its thick-skinned, small bunches achieve, yielding a fine herbal spice. Nadia Zenato (Zenato) notes that her family's choice to include spicy, berry-toned Croatina is also partially due to its appassimento-friendly sparse bunches.