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Merano WineFestival Awards Its First 100/100 Platinum Wines

The bottles were unveiled in Rome alongside plans for a 2027 observatory on wine production, sales, consumption and perception.

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Organizers on Wednesday presented the program for the 35th Merano WineFestival in Rome and used the event to announce two major developments for the Italian wine sector: the first four WineHunter Award Platinum winners to receive a perfect 100/100

score, and a new Merano Wine Observatory planned for 2027 to track long-term changes in wine production and consumption.

The festival will take place from Nov. 6 to Nov. 10 at the Kurhaus in Merano, in Italy's Alto Adige region. The program was introduced at the Italian Senate in the Sala Caduti di Nassirya during an event promoted by Senate Vice President Gian Marco Centinaio and moderated by journalist Andrea Radic, who coordinates the tasting commission.

The first four wines to receive a 100/100 Platinum score in the history of the WineHunter awards were Ferrari Trento's Perlé Ferrari Trento DOC 2002 from Trentino, Cantina Terlano's Alto Adige Terlano DOC Rarity 2013 from Alto Adige, Azienda Vinicola Attilio Contini's Vernaccia di Oristano DOC Riserva 1998 from Sardinia, and Avignonesi's Vin Santo di Montepulciano DOC "Occhio di Pernice" 2012 from Tuscany. Organizers said the full list of 101 WineHunter Award Platinum winners across wine, food and spirits has been published online.

Helmuth Köcher, founder of Merano WineFestival and creator of The WineHunter selection, said the event is trying to respond to a market that is changing in structure, not just in taste. According to organizers, the planned Merano Wine Observatory will operate year-round beginning in 2027 and will focus on how wine may be produced, sold, consumed and perceived over the next several decades. Köcher said the project will study data, consumer behavior and industry experience with a focus on global trends.

At the Senate event, Köcher pointed to several areas that he said are becoming more important in the market, including health-conscious consumption, low-alcohol and no-alcohol products, sustainability and the relationship between wine and fine dining. Those themes are reflected in the 2026 festival program, which includes dedicated areas for low-alcohol products, organic and biodynamic wines, natural wines, PIWI grape varieties and discussions on scientific research in viticulture and enology.

Centinaio said the festival has become an important meeting point for the sector and a showcase for Italian quality. Other speakers included Merano Mayor Katharina Zeller; Maria Chiara Gadda, vice president of the Chamber Agriculture Commission; Silvia Fregolent, vice president of the Senate's 9th Commission; Matteo Zoppas, president of

the Italian Trade Agency, known as ICE; Diana Lenzi of Coldiretti; and Luigi D’Eramo, undersecretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry.

Several of those speakers used the occasion to frame the wine industry in broader economic and political terms. Gadda said the sector is dealing with climate change, shifts in production models and trade pressures. Zoppas said ICE has doubled the volume of incoming delegations tied to the event as part of an effort to create more contacts between producers and foreign buyers, importers and distributors. Lenzi said wine remains a central agricultural and economic asset for Italy and cited 241,000 businesses, 681,000 cultivated hectares and an estimated 11 billion euros in value tied to PDO and PGI production systems. Fregolent cited national output of 47.3 million hectoliters, 14 billion euros in revenue and 7.8 billion in exports.

The five-day festival will open on Nov. 6 with an international ceremony and a live-streamed toast linked to Tokyo, where the first edition of Merano WineFestival Japan is scheduled to take place at the same time. That day will also feature TasteTerroir - bio&dynamica, a format centered on organic, biodynamic and natural wines, as well as producers working with PIWI grape varieties. Organizers said the opening day will also highlight sustainable viticulture, amphora winemaking, underwater aging and selected Rieslings.

One of the main public events on the first day will be the WineHunter Award Platinum ceremony at the Puccini Theatre at 4:30 p.m., where five special Honor Awards will also be presented, along with recognitions for leading Italian winemakers chosen for the Cult Oenologist pathway. The names announced by organizers for that section are Franco Bernabei, Carlo Ferrini, Luca D’Attoma, Riccardo Cotarella, Alessandro Cellai, Gianni Menotti, Paolo Caciorgna, Paolo Vagaggini and Gabriele Gadenz.

The festival’s evening program on Nov. 6 will include a gala dinner at the Kurhaus organized with Teritoria, a network of hospitality and restaurant properties in Europe. Organizers said the dinner will feature chefs from different Italian regions. During that event, the festival also plans to present five WineHunter Stars for 2026. According to organizers, the recipients are winemaker Roberto Cipresso, maître-sommelier Beppe Palmieri of Osteria Francescana, television host Giuseppe “Peppone” Calabrese, Filippo

Felluga accepting the Wine Artist Star in memory of Livio Felluga, and Master of Wine Cristina Mercuri for communication.

From Nov. 7 through Nov. 9, the Kurhaus will host the core tasting program. Organizers said Wine Italia will include more than 350 wineries, while Wine International will bring together more than 100 producers from 12 countries, including Lebanon, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Argentina and South Africa. The WineHunter Area will pour more than 120 selected labels with service from FISAR Alto Adige sommeliers. Organizers also said the program will introduce a “Next Platinum” selection and feature labels that received the Gold Grand Medal at Mondial des Vins Extrêmes, a competition focused on mountain and steep-slope viticulture.

A separate GourmetArena running from Nov. 6 through Nov. 9 is expected to include about 150 companies presenting food products, beer and spirits from across Italy. Organizers said that area will also host cooking demonstrations, pairings, the no-low alcohol zone and a WineHunter Rosé Selection. Hotel Terme Merano will host guided tastings and book presentations under the WineHunter Masterclasses label.

The festival also plans a business component aimed at trade contacts. Organizers said B2B networking will be strengthened through the WH Buyers’ Club and the ICE Buyers Area, while public events tied to the Fuori Salone will spread along Corso Libertà in Merano. The closing day on Nov. 10 will be dedicated to sparkling wines under the “Catwalk Champagne&more” format, paired with products such as caviar and oysters. The Northern Selection of the EmergenteSala competition will also hold its awards ceremony that day.

Sustainability and research are set to remain a visible part of the event. Organizers said the “Breath and Cry of the Earth” summit will return on the morning of Nov. 6 at the Puccini Theatre in partnership with the International Viticulture & Enology Society, Connected Reality and ForTeam. The program is expected to include research presentations from academics and specialists working in viticulture and enology, including participants from the University of Trento, the University of Verona and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano.

The cultural program will include talks and book presentations on gender equality in the wine industry, family business, women’s leadership and regional wine history. Organizers said Laura Donadoni will present the European project “Grapes of Change,” while other sessions will feature Camilla Lunelli, Chiara Giorleo, Mario Vacca, Olga Sofia Schiaffino and journalist and sommelier Antonella Amodio.

The festival is also bringing back a digital sales tool for visitors who want to buy bottles they taste at producer stands. Organizers said the system, developed with the platform Most’, allows users to scan a QR code at a booth, add products to a cart and complete a single purchase and shipment at the end of the day.

According to the figures released in Rome, this year’s edition is expected to involve 810 companies and more than 2,600 products available for tasting. Organizers also cited more than 100 international producers from 12 countries, 126 labels in the WineHunter Area and 150 participants in the GourmetArena. Tickets and professional accreditations are now available through the festival website.