The majestic range of Dolomites mountains, a UNESCO site, situated in northeastern Italy, is the backdrop to the extraordinary region of Alto Adige/South Tyrol, which is home to some of Europe’s highest mountain peaks, rising to a majestic 3,000 metres, featuring breathtaking, vertical walls, sheer cliffs and a high density of narrow, deep and long valleys. Glaciers, secluded valleys, and sunny vineyards are situated close together, only a few miles from each other. The scenic variety of Alto Adige and its geological conditions offer fertile ground for biodiversity. That is precisely the source of the mineral-rich cuvée that is a characteristic identity found in Alto Adige’s multitude of varieties.

At the Alto Adige 2019 Wine Summit, the theme of “contrasts” ran like a leitmotif through the event. Eduard Bernhart, director of the Consortium of Alto Adige Wine, emphasized that the Alto Adige Wine Summit has become an important programme for the internationalisation of the region’s wine industry.

“It is our desire to place Alto Adige wine in a larger context,” explained Bernhart. “The 130 international guests invited to attend the summit will have the opportunity to experience at first hand the contrasts that characterise the local wine production. In that way, they can better understand and appreciate the quality of our wines.”

According to Bernhart, these contrasts result not only from the varying elevations, with vineyards between 200 and 1,330 metres above sea level, but also from the geological composition of the soils as well as the temperature ranges between day and night, which impart to the wines their aromatic profile and freshness. He went on to add that today, Alto Adige wine stands strongly and confidently in a local, national, and international context because “the extraordinarily high number of awards for Alto Adige wines shows that the province, although a small
wine region, is today held in esteea throughout the
world”. Berchard closed by pointing out, “A
significant portion of Alto Adige wines is now
being exported.”

Martin Foradori, Vice President of the
Consorzio di Alto Adige and owner of the
Hofstatter estate in Tramin – the home of the
Traminer vine, elaborated on the components
that make up the character of a wine. “First, it
is necessary to ask, what is it that makes up the
character of a land? With regard to viticulture,
we call it terroir, which is a complex interweaving
of geographic, geological, climatic, and even
cultural and social factors. Every little variation
counts. Climate, location, soils, and people form
an unmistakable totality. And in Alto Adige, the
terroir forms the basis for the potential of
the great wines that are grown here: these are
unique wines at the intersection of Alpine and
Mediterranean vegetation and culture.”

Despite this positive picture, experts Georg
Niedrist, senior researcher at the Institute for
Alpine Environment in Bolzano and geologist
Carlo Ferretti, specialist in the agricultural
sector, with a solid track record of studies on
the grape varieties of the Alto Adige, expressed
concerns regarding the constant temperature rise
and the presence of so-called “extreme” weather
events.

“The scorching heat and periods of drought,
hailstorms, water bombs and late frosts,
although statistically still quite rare, are events
that have enormous destructive potential, and
are therefore just as relevant as the constant rise
in temperatures. Although in South Tirol these
extreme events do not yet mark a real surge,
international research indicates that they are
increasing both in frequency and in intensity,”
lamented Ferretti.

The province’s climate lies along the
meteorological divide of central and
southern Europe. The Alps protect the area
from cold air masses from the north, filled
with precipitation, while warm, moist air currents
from Lake Garda and the Mediterranean find
their way to Alto Adige. Mild, sunny days,
warm soils, sufficient precipitation, cool nights,
and strong winds bring fruit freshness into
Alto Adige wines. At elevations of up to 1,000
metres, demanding varieties such as Pinot Blanc,
Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Noir are
characterized by a particular finesse, and in
the valley areas the late ripening varieties such as
Lagrein, Merlot, and Cabernet reach ideal
maturity.

A perfect example of this was experienced by
an international panel of wine critics and experts
at the Cortaccia Rosso event, an international
comparison held during the Summit, featuring
a series of mixed flights of red wines, made
up of top scoring Bordeaux Grand Crus, Bolgheri wines such as Sassicaia and other
top Tuscan international blends. These were
intermingled with international Bordeauxstyle
blends from Cortaccia producers, including
Cortaccia, Barons de Widmann estate,
Tiefenbrunner estate and Peter Dipoli estate.
The aim was to show that these local Alto Adige
estates from the area of Cortaccia could make as
good as, or better, Bordeaux blends when judged
in a blind tasting. The results did in fact show
similar or better scores for the Cortaccia blends,
proving the fact that the full potential of Alto
Adige is still not recognized. With such positive
results, however, Alto Adige wine producers can
afford to be optimistic about the future. ◆

Above: Carlo Ferretti, specialist in agriculture.
Left: Martin Foradori, vice
president of Consortium
of Alto Adige.