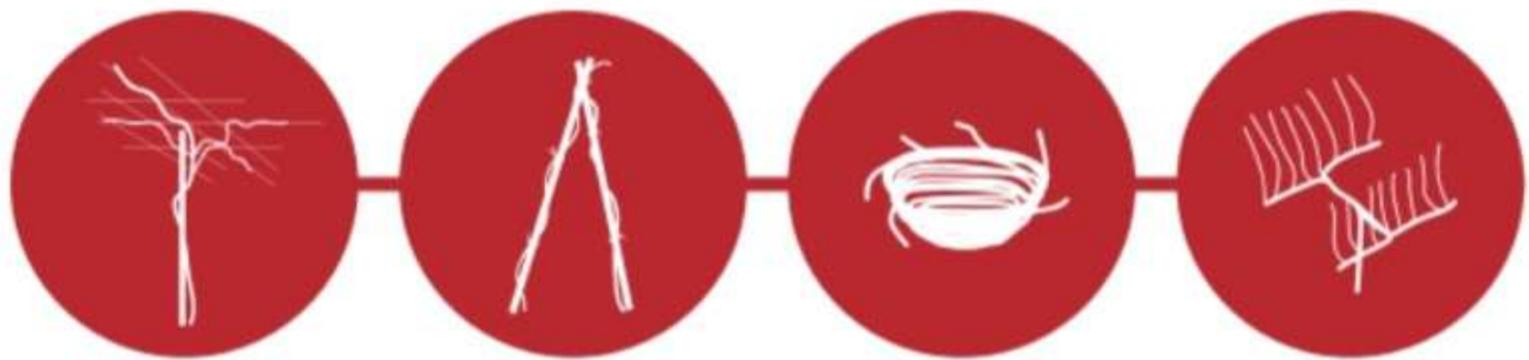


All shapes AND SIZES



Getting the best from a particular terroir sometimes calls for vines to be trained in very specific ways.

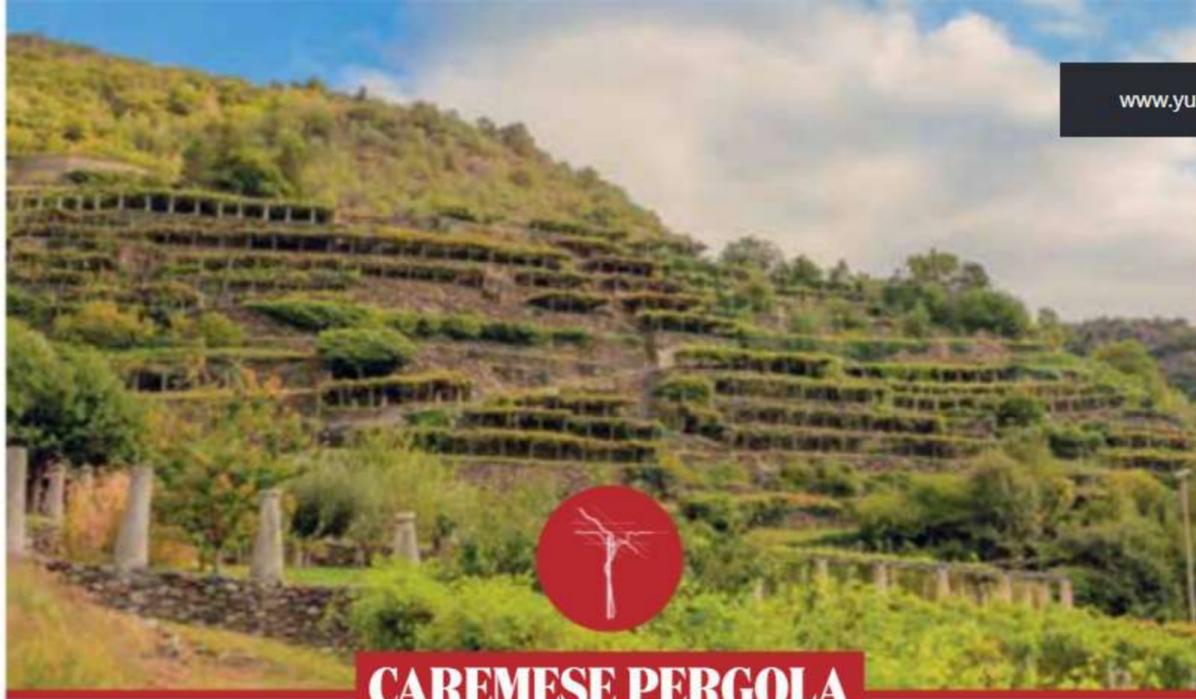
Laura Hadland finds out more

Some of the very best wines in the world are grown in extreme places. Controlled stress forces the vine to concentrate its energy, yielding fewer, smaller grapes that contain more flavour. Whether it be the edges of viticulture in terms of altitude (and gradient), latitude or climate, innovative producers have found ways of managing their plantings to bring out the very best finished product.

Grapevines are routinely trained into specific shapes to ensure a consistent yield.

Controlling the canopy size and shape, maximising exposure to sunlight and facilitating an efficient harvest all contribute to getting the best out of the plants, wherever in the world they are grown.

While the squat trunks of ancient goblet-pruned vines of Lodi or the sprawling limbs and reaching fingers of traditional cordon-pruned vines in Spain may cast a familiar silhouette, there are some parts of the world where vineyards take on a more unique appearance. >



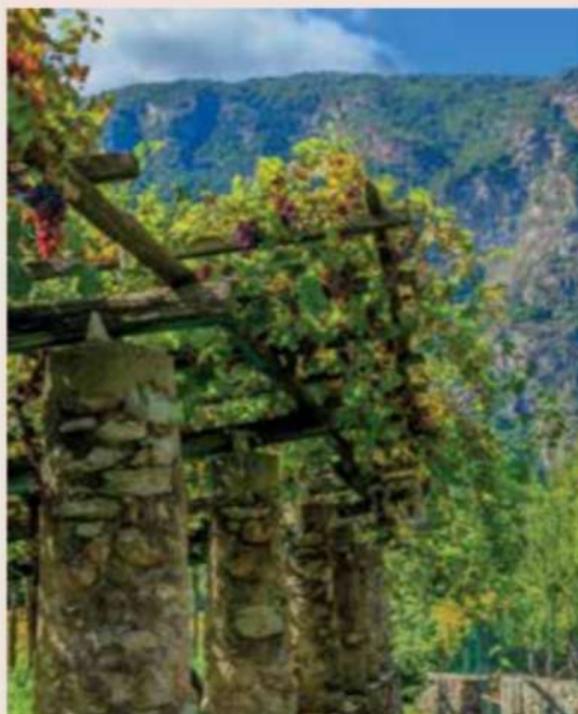
CAREMESE PERGOLA

The Caremese Pergola system creates one of the most show-stopping and highly structured vineyard vistas in the world. This little known wine region, the Carema DOC, covers only 20 hectares spread out over roughly four square miles. It is the smallest appellation in Italy. But enterprising growers have been taming its steep slopes since Roman times.

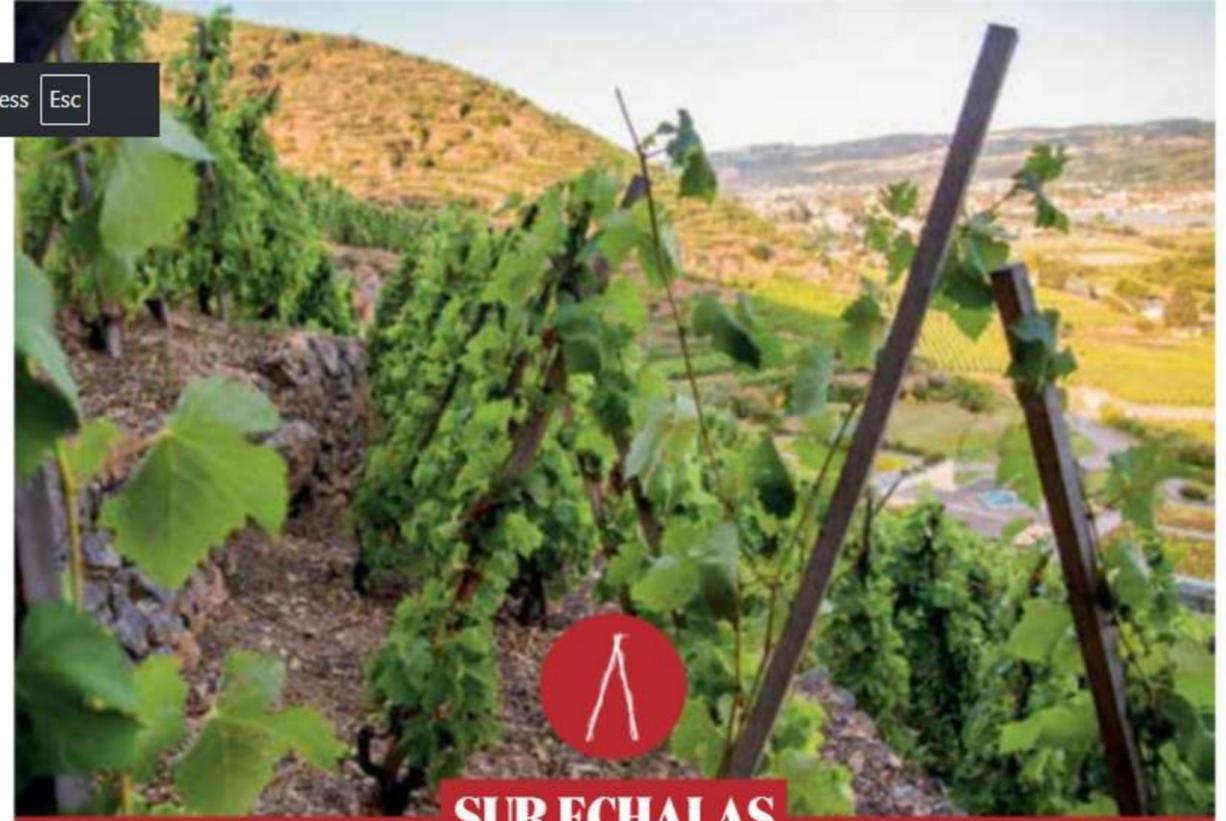
The picturesque, moderate altitude vineyards of Carema are located around 40 miles north of Turin, in the foothills of the Alps. The appellation sits within a natural amphitheatre, which gives access to plenty of sunshine, as well as protection from the strong, cold northerly winds. However, an amphitheatre also makes for steep slopes, and this is where the pergolas come in.

The remote parcels of land dotted around the landscape that have been put under vine in Carema were first terraced with dry stone walls. Each row is accessed by steep stone steps. A tall, chestnut wood ‘wolf’s mouth’ pergola, known as *topia* in the local Piemontese dialect, is supported by a series of round stone columns called *pilun*. As well as being load-bearing, the *pilun* absorb the heat of the sun in the day and release it slowly at night, helping to maintain a relatively steady diurnal temperature.

Hand harvesting from those uneven terraces is difficult. Just walking up the rough, tall steps is hard enough for most, so why is it all worthwhile? Carema’s rocky limestone soils and unique climate offer very different conditions for growing Nebbiolo than are seen further south in Piedmont. The wines of Carema are much softer and lighter than those of Barolo or the Langhe. They offer a complexity of character and an ease of drinking that is well worth the effort.



PHOTOGRAPHY © CANARIE



SUR ECHALAS

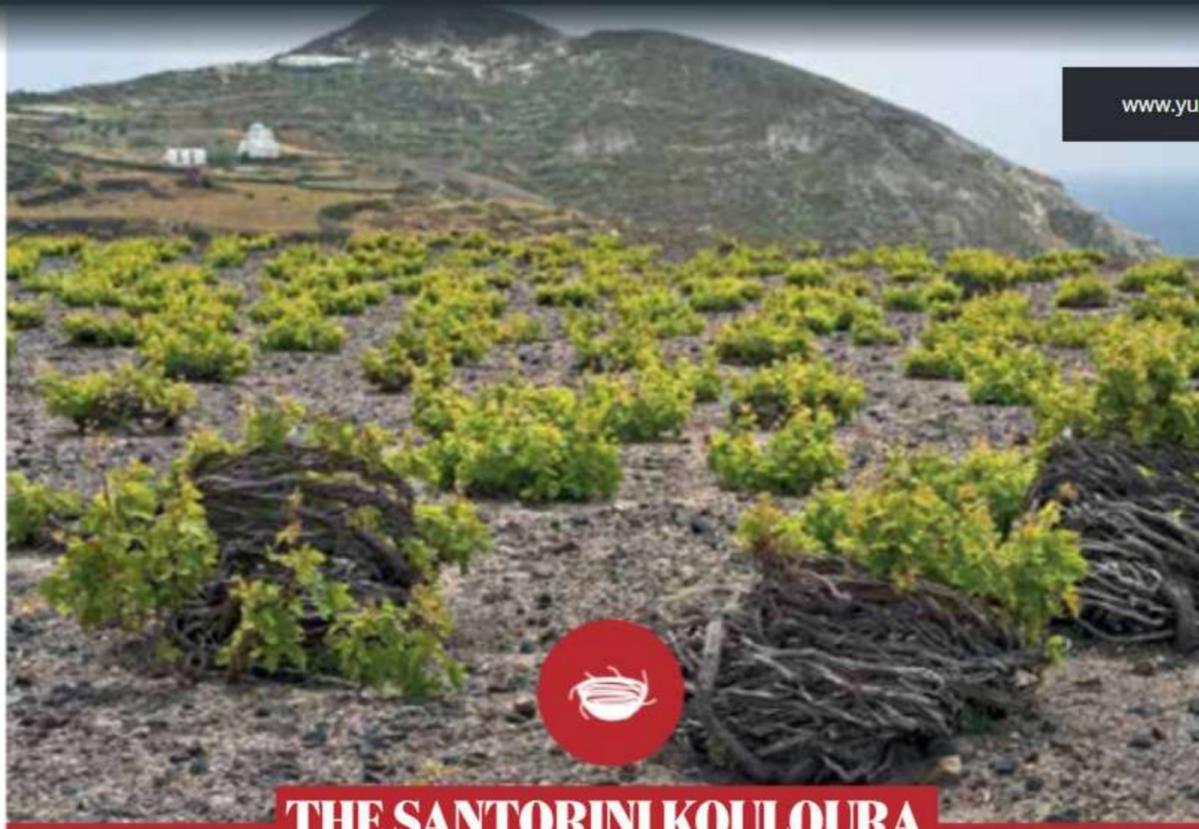
Intended to deal with steep, terraced slopes and protect against wind damage, training vines *sur echalas*—or tied to a stake—is a method used for vines with a tendency towards a sprawling canopy, like Syrah and Viognier.

In the Côte Rôtie AOC, where those two grapes are the only permitted varieties, the vines are tied to two stout wooden poles, shaped in an inverted-V formation. This is

to help the vines stand firm on the sloping ground. The absence of trellis wires means that the shoots can move freely, allowing the wind to pass through without causing damage. Adopting echalas on the steep terraces also allows for the most efficient use of the limited available soil surface. The vines can be planted at a relatively high density, which in turn means they have to compete for resources, turning out fewer but better quality grapes.



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THE SANTORINI KOULOURA

The wreath-like trained vines of Santorini, a small Greek island in the southern Aegean Sea, create as memorable a landscape as you might witness in Carema, but it is of a very different nature. In contrast to the sweeping terraces and tall pergolas, Santorini's basket vines sit squat on an arid, flat landscape.

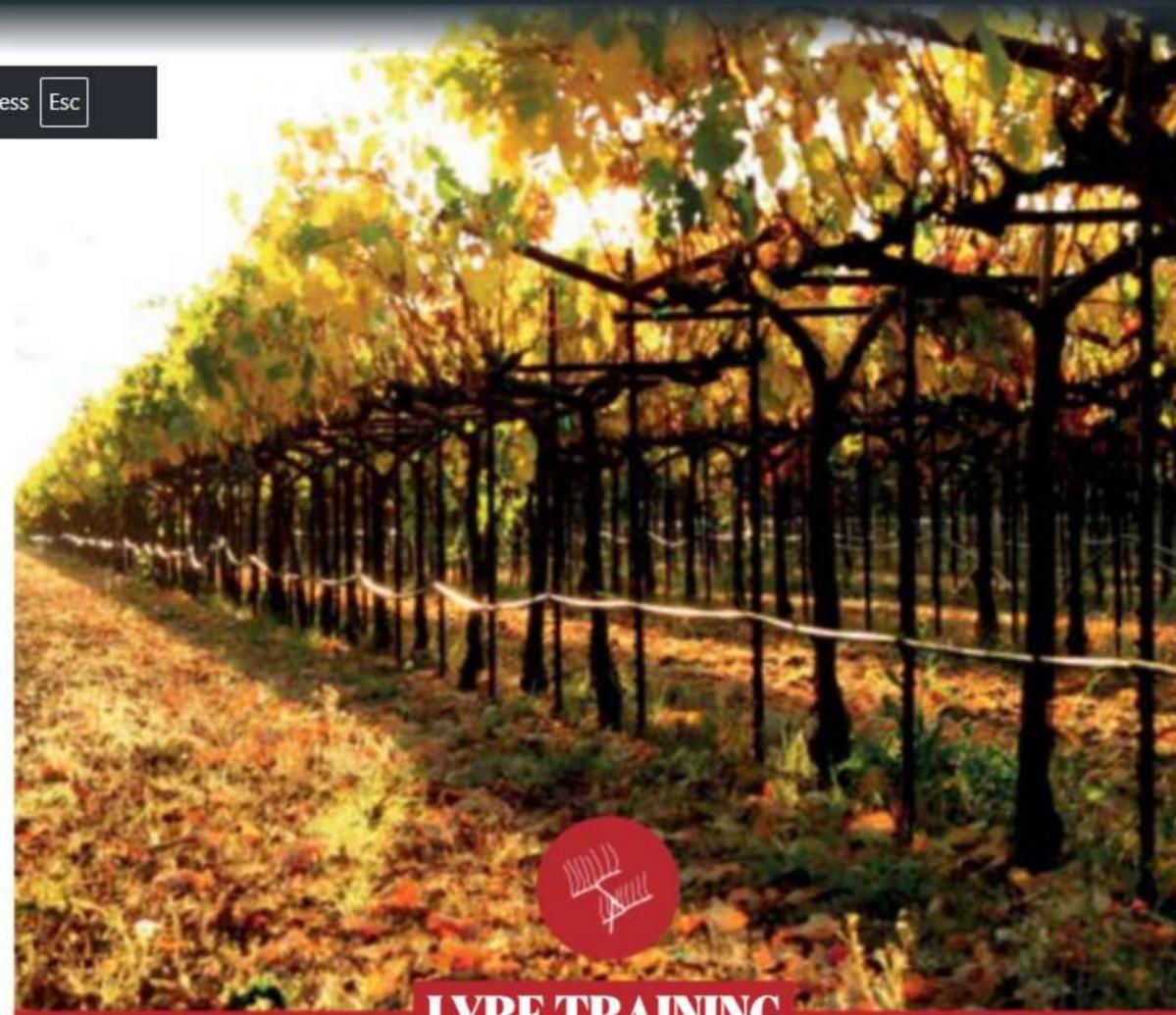
Their unique round, flat shape is woven by expert vine dressers who have employed the method for centuries. Once the fruit has developed, it is sheltered inside the basket of cane and foliage to ripen. This technique allows winegrowers to take advantage of the volcanic soils and long hours of sunshine, while simultaneously protecting the vines from the perils of island life.

In Santorini, the threats are many. Strong winds can snap a vine and whip up grains of volcanic sand which would otherwise lacerate the plants. The scorching, relentless sun could burn grapes left unsheltered, rendering them useless for vinification. Finally, the lack of water in and on the terrain is a huge threat since rain is so fleetingly rare during the growing season.

Climate change has been exacerbating these difficulties for Santorini's winemakers. The 2023-24 growing season saw the lowest yields on record, but surprisingly this is not wholly bad news. What was produced has been described as outstanding in quality. The resulting wines, dominated by the tropical fruit-scented, saline Assyrtiko and full, ripe, spicy Mavrotragano, are showing huge complexity and, thanks to their scarcity, commanding higher prices.



PHOTOGRAPHY © VASILY MULYUKIN



LYRE TRAINING

The Lyre system is not particularly associated with one specific wine region, but rather is a relatively new innovation developed by the French viticulturist Alain Cardonneau in the 1980s that also results in a striking landscape. It utilises a horizontally divided trellis system in wide rows to increase grape quality in varieties like Cabernet Franc, which are inclined towards growing upwards.

Each vine is trained with two inclined planes of canopy from a Y-shaped trunk, in order to maximise the exposure of the leaves to the sun. Photosynthesis levels are higher and more sugars can be supplied to the grapes, which hang down and are sheltered from sunburn by the sloped canopy. Viewed from the end of the row, the upright fingers of the vine are said to resemble the musical instrument after which this system is named.

Growers adopting this trellis method have to

commit to a significant upfront investment. The installation of the system requires specifically adapted equipment which costs more than the usual vertical trellis. It also takes the immature vines an additional year of growth before they reach the necessary size to be trained.

On the other hand, when ripe, the bunches are more accessible and, thanks to the increased air circulation, tend to be healthier. This facilitates both ease of harvest and quality in the finished wines.

The pros clearly outweigh the cons, as the system can be found, although sparingly, across the world. It has mainly been adopted by New World growers in California and Chile but is also sometimes utilised by Old World growers too. The Château Haut Bertinerie in Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux is one such example who have broken away from the traditional Guyot method of their neighbours. 🍷

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