

As the Russian romantic Mikhail Lermontov once promised: “if you go to the Caucasus, you’ll return a poet.” This is what happened to Josko Gravner, the celebrated Italian vintner from Italy’s northeast Friuli region when he made the revolutionary decision thirteen years ago to age his wines in clay amphorae instead of oak, cement or stainless steel.

His poetic choice brought him to rediscover a traditional that had been perfected by the ancient Greeks and Romans, the Mediterranean’s first commercial winemakers. Like his predecessors, Gravner opted for clay amphorae from Georgia, a former Soviet republic.

Today, wine aged in amphorae is a fast growing trend in Italy. From the tip to the toe of the peninsula, vintners are opting for clay recipients because they believe that these neutral containers allow the true characteristics of the fruit to emerge.

COS, a boutique winery in Sicily, uses amphorae for its Phitos Bianco (grecanico) and Rosso (frappato, nero d’Avola). Owner Giusto Occhipinti says: “Josko’s wines have inspired me intensely. Amphorae allow the wine to breath without added wood nuances.” He continues: “I used to drink water from Sicilian clay pots, amphorae wines taste as pure as they should.”

Barone Pizzini in the central Marche region, produces a passito from verdicchio grapes with a percentage aged in amphora. Enologist Alessandro Fenino says: “the fruit speaks for itself in amphorae.”

Clay amphorae are produced in Spain, Italy and Georgia. Georgian Zaliko Bozhadze, who makes amphorae sold in Italy, says: “Clay Jars are like a time machine that allows us to go back to our ancestors’ wines.”