

# Edi Simčič

## Goriška Brda, Slovenia

DAVID VOGELS, CWP

### *Edi Simčič*

Vipolže 39a  
5212 Dobrovo, Brda  
Slovenia  
+386-5395-9173  
www.edisimcic.si  
Importer: Small Vineyards  
www.svimports.com



***THESE SLOVENIAN WINES HAVE CROSSED THE BORDER BETWEEN REGIONAL SPECIALTY AND INTERNATIONAL ATTRACTION.***

Not so long ago, there was an international boundary between the Italian wine region of Collio, on the eastern edge of Friuli, and the Slovenian region of Brda. But consider that both words mean “hills” in their respective tongues, and you begin to understand that this is a continuous district with only loose distinctions of nationality and language. Signs appear in both Italian and Slovenian throughout the region. In fact, when I naively asked my Italian hosts whether I needed a passport to cross the border on my first trip to Brda, they had to suppress their smiles. What border? Since the end of the Cold War, the only indication that a boundary ever existed is a pair of abandoned pillboxes on either side of the road.

After World War II, when Communist Yugoslavia annexed this territory previously held by Italy, Edi Simčič found his vineyards 500 yards on the wrong side of the border. Instead of selling his grapes wherever he could find the best price, he now had to work for a 750-member, government-controlled cooperative. Small wonder that once the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it took only a year for the Simčič family to set up a company and begin selling their own bottlings. In the two decades since, the Edi Simčič winery has become one of Slovenia’s leading lights, crafting wines every bit the equal of its Italian neighbors’.

With no border guards in sight, the only challenge for a visitor today is to find the Simčič

Photo by Marijan Močivnik

Edi Simčič (left); cellar (right).

facility in the village of Vipolže. A map isn't much help, because every winding street in this town is signposted as "Vipolže." Fortunately, my GPS proves up to the task of finding No. 39a, an unassuming ranch house where I encounter Edi's son, winemaker Aleks Simčič. Within the last two years, the family has finished digging out a modern new cellar and tasting room beneath the house—"Here you have to adapt to the space you have," says Simčič—and has purchased the house across the road for renting out to agritourists.

Starting with less than 9 acres in 1990, the Simčič estate has gradually added neighboring plots; it now comprises a patchwork of about 30 acres of vines on the sloping hills to the south and west of the village. "It gives us a bit more possibility for selection of the grapes," says Simčič. "If you want to work the way we do, with very simple processing in the cellar, you need perfect grapes. We are not buying at all" from contract growers.

As in Friuli, there are two primary climatic influences: the Adriatic Sea to the south and the Julian Alps to the northeast. Soils are predominantly *ponca*, the mineral-rich Friulian marl. But unlike Collio winemakers across the border, Simčič specializes in the white Rebula grape, known in Italy as Ribolla Gialla. "The majority grows on the Slovenian side," according to Simčič, "because it has to be planted on the steeper parts with the poor marl soil. It's very productive, so for high-quality grapes, you really have to do lots of selection in the vineyards." It's also late-ripening, so it's generally picked with the reds, three or four weeks later than Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc. The Simčič Rebula vines are 35-45 years old, adding further intensity.

In addition to its 4.5 acres of Rebula, Simčič has 5 acres of Chardonnay, 3.75 acres of Sauvignon Blanc, 2.5 acres of Pinot Gris, and about an acre or less each of Malvasija, Sauvignonasse (Friuliano), and Pinot Blanc, as well as 8.75 acres of Merlot and 1.25 acres each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. In the winery, all the grapes are barrel-fermented "for the integration of oak," says Simčič. The white wines are aged for 11 months in French barriques, from neutral to 40% new, and then seven months in bottle before release; the reds are aged as long as 42 months in 100%-new French oak. "Finding good barrels is one of the key elements," in Simčič's view. "The purpose of the oak is to get the proper oxygen to evolve, but it should be behind somewhere, not in front of the wine."

Winemaker Aleks Simčič (above).





Simčič vineyards in Brda.

Total production is about 3,000 cases per year, 70% of which is exported. “Production is expensive,” says Simčič, “because these are very hilly areas, and you have to do lots of manual work.” Rather than trying to compete with regions that can cut costs with machine harvesting, he adds, “we decided to go this direction”—aiming for quality rather than volume. Sustainable agriculture is another part of the equation, Simčič notes: “We are growing grass everywhere, we are not using herbicides or pesticides; we are only protecting against *Peronospora* or oidium. Once you are producing low quantities per vine”—with yields of only 1.4-1.6 tons per acre—“there is no need for additional fertilizing.”

And that whimsical cartoon dog on the labels? “The dog is to show tradition, loyalty, and happiness—an atmosphere of sharing with friends. The purpose of the wine is to make our life better.” Mission accomplished. 🍷



## OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

### Beli Pinot (Pinot Blanc) 2007 \$40

Aged only in neutral oak. “We are interpreting it in a way to really show the elegance and finesse of the wine,” says Aleks Simčič. Pale gold in color, it displays aromas of peach and pear, leading to an oily, round palate that’s both fruity and acidic. Persistent finish.

### Chardonnay Kozana 2007 \$70

The only single-vineyard Simčič wine, from a high-altitude, 25-year-old vineyard planted in stony soils outside the village of Kozana. 2005 was the first vintage; only about 100 cases are produced each year. This ’07 is clear straw in color, with fairly high acidity and a rich mouthfeel. It’s more austere and structured than the blended Chardonnay, promising a longer life span.

### Rebula 2006 \$35

Rather than extended maceration, as practiced by Josko Gravner in Friuli, Simčič prefers extended bottle aging to develop Rebula’s secondary characteristics. The light-gold-colored 2006 offers a yeasty nose of peach and citrus fruits. Viscous in the mouth, it stays fresh and edgy on the finish.

### Rebula 2002 \$35

From a later harvest due to rain throughout the growing season. Medium gold in color, it’s more intense than the ’06, with briny notes of honey, butterscotch, and pear, yet it retains a lively acidity.

### Sauvignon 2006 \$35

The 2006 vintage produced rich, ripe whites (the Sauvignon Blanc came in at 15% alcohol) that still managed to keep their acidity. Displaying a light-straw color, this wine sends up notes of hay, peach, and stony minerality, followed by a long, warm, mouthwatering finish.

### Sivi Pinot (Pinot Gris) 2007 \$30

“We’re looking for a rich wine with balance that can age well, but still keep the freshness,” says Simčič. “We like to show the potential of the grape and the territory—closer to Alsatian wines than most of the ones from Italy.” Pale gold with pink highlights, the ’07 gives off fruity aromas dominated by ripe apple skin. Its ripe, rich palate has an acidic backbone that carries through to a long finish.

### Triton Lex 2006 \$36

A blend of about one-third each Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Rebula, in the style of a Friulian “super-white.” “Rebula is a perfect match,” Simčič believes, “because it adds drinkability, freshness, minerality, but is not competing with the flavors of the other two.” This hay-colored wine shows aromas of ripe pear with hints of butter and pyrazine. Smoky notes come from the touch of oak, spicy minerality from the marl soil. Juicy acidity emerges on the lengthy finish.

### Duet Lex 2005 \$90

A Bordeaux blend of about 80% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Cabernet Franc, this current release is plum-colored, with a magenta rim. Malbec-like scents of plum, cassis, dirt, violets, and iron emerge on the nose, followed by a complex, international-style palate with soft tannins and moderate acidity.

### Kolos 2004 \$150

A barrel selection of the Duet Lex grapes, known until 2003 as Duet Riserva. Medium garnet in color, with a light rim, it offers notes of tobacco, espresso, blackcurrant, cassis, and blackberry, backed by elegant acidity.

Prices are current estimated retail.