

WINE News

Classic Italy



AUGUST 9, 2021 FEATURES

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Get Away this August with Italian Wine

By Greg St. Clair

With so many wines from so many regions, it is always difficult to figure out what to put in the Italian newsletter. There are stories for each winery, and a long list of grape varieties that would make your head spin—let alone knowing how to pronounce them. We really need a half-dozen newsletters on Italy alone. So, there's a little bit of everything in this edition: some whites, reds, sparkling, bold wines, and more nuanced offerings. This time of the year, all of Italy is in a countdown to *Ferragosto*—that's the 15th of August when most everyone hits the road for some vacation at what's usually the hottest time of the year.

Here in coastal Northern California our nicest weather actually begins in late August, going into September, and as the grape harvest begins, we finally get summery weather! So how about we take a cue from the Italians? With selections from Sicily in the south to Friuli, Alto Adige, or Val d'Aosta in the north, let's make *Ferragosto* an Italian wine vacation for all! We always have wines arriving, so you'll see some exciting recent vintages of Poggerino, one of my favorites, along with a new Pinot Noir from Torti, and a sensational 2019 Sangiovese from Innocenti. Keep your eyes open!

2019 La Ginestraia Pigato Riviera Ligure di Ponente (\$24.99) Liguria is not one of the most famous winegrowing areas in Italy. In fact, it's just one steep slope—and occasionally you see vineyards hanging over the edge. Yet there are some superb wines that come from here and they are perfectly matched for the local cuisine. Pigato is the grape variety in this wine, and it offers a scintillating, crisp, mineral-driven experience with an explosive finish. Try it with Liguria's signature dish, pesto!



2019 Poggiarellino Rosso di Montalcino (\$17.99) Let me be one of the first to let you know that the 2019 vintage is sensational. And this 100% Sangiovese is stunning. Because we buy direct from the winery, this Rosso—which is actually a declassified Brunello—is an unbelievable deal. The wine shows the classic Marasca cherry aromatics from the north of Montalcino coupled with a bold, full-bodied richness on your palate. This wine is delicious now, but it will age well for another 5–7 years.



2020 Proprietà Sperino "Rosa del Rosa" Piemonte Rosato (\$19.99) Don't wait—this is one of our most popular pink wines we sell every year! We just got our yearly allocation and it will be gone before long. This 85% Nebbiolo and 15% Vespolina blend is crisp, dry, and shows vibrant aromatics. Bits of strawberry and stone fruits highlight the nose, and those flavors carry through on the palate. This is a perfect aperitivo, or try it with cold cuts, or my summer favorite, roast chicken. **92 VN**



Cover: You can almost taste the Italian summer in this image of the villa at Poggiarellino. (Photo: Poggiarellino)

Lambrusco: What's not to Like!

OK, before you pass over this article, all of these wines are *dry!*

Lambrusco is one of the most popular wines in Italy this time of year, but it's a much-misunderstood category in the States. This is mostly due to the ocean of cheap, sweet versions that were popular here in the 1970s and 1980s, plus a perplexing diversity of grape varieties, styles, and colors. Lambrusco has half a dozen different appellations, half a dozen different grape varieties, and ranges from the extremely high yields in the flatlands to lesser yields in the rolling hills of Castelvetro. It takes a bit of work to figure it out, but *wow*—once you try a couple, you will be hooked.

Some of the more delicate versions have the Emilia appellation, where Lini is one of the top producers. These wines are lighter, crisper, and *dry*, while being perfect for salumi on a hot afternoon. Lower in alcohol, they are the perfect daytime wines and should be served refreshingly cold. We have three varieties from Lini:

Lini “Labrusca” Lambrusco Emilia Bianco (\$14.99), Lini “Labrusca” Lambrusco Emilia Rosé (\$14.99), and Lini “Labrusca” Lambrusco Emilia Rosso (\$14.99).

The Lambrusco Sorbara wines have more depth, generally darker colors, and are boldly flavored.

The **Ca de Medici “Remigio” Sorbara Lambrusco (\$16.99), Zanasi Lambrusco di Sorbara (\$16.99),**



and **Bellei Lambrusco di Sorbara Pietra Rossa (\$17.99)** are all excellent examples. I find the Sorbara Lambruschi are sensational with Thai or Indian cuisine, as their bold flavors hold up well to the spicy elements.

To my mind, the Grasperossa grape that grows in Castelvetro is the pinnacle of Lambrusco. More structured, and with deeper flavors, wines made with this variety are also better suited to the more classic Italian cuisine from Emilia-Romagna like lasagna (in Bologna it comes with a béchamel sauce, not tomato), gnocco fritto, or the one everyone is familiar with, the Bolognese sauce which never goes on spaghetti in Bologna—it goes on tagliatelle!

These wines will blow your mind: **2019 Cleto Chiarli “Cialdini” Lambrusco Grasperossa di Castelvetro (\$15.99), Bellei Lambrusco Grasperossa di Castelvetro Pietrascura Dry (\$17.99), and Zanasi Lambrusco Grasperossa di Castelvetro (\$16.99).** Here's the only wine that has a “slight” sweetness to it: the **Bellei Lambrusco Grasperossa Pietrascura Amabile (\$17.99)** is just slightly off dry—it just adds a bit more texture and is really good with Mexican cuisine!



Tedeschi: Overlooking Verona

There was a time when Amarone was one of the most popular Italian red wines in America. The once slightly sweet, high-alcohol wine went toe-to-toe with late harvest Zinfandel for a couple of decades. Yet that style is dying off here and was changing in Italy even further back. Modern Amarone tastes more like Barolo from a ripe vintage than it does like most anything from the past. Unfortunately, it still has the reputation of being super high-alcohol, but the old, sweet versions could not be further from the modern reality. I frequently get asked to set up tastings for aspiring sommeliers so they can understand Italian wines (they all get stumped in Italy), and I like to use the Valpolicella-Valpolicella Ripasso-Amarone ladder of development. This is because each of these wines is a decided step up from the previous, and all good tasters know that you can glean more from nuanced wines than big, powerful ones.

There are other more famous wineries in the hills above Verona, but for me Tedeschi is unique. The wines are so precise and faceted, they give such a detailed expression of these vineyards.

The **2019 Tedeschi “Lucchine” Valpolicella Classico (\$14.99)** is one of my favorite wines, showing that size and density don't always lead to quality. This wine is so drinkable you'd better have a backup, as you might get into bottle number two!



The **2017 Tedeschi “Capitel San Rocco” Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore (\$23.99)** is truly a next level up. This wine is refermented on the lees of the Amarone. It gains a bit in size, and what's more, it takes on lots of flavor from those lees, and then is aged for six months in large Slavonian oak. **93 JS**

The **2016 Tedeschi “Marne 180” Amarone della Valpolicella Classico (\$49.99)** is the first level of Amarone from Tedeschi. Grown in a marl soil (that's the Marne reference) the grapes are dried for four months and then aged for two-and-a-half years in large Slavonian oak. **94 JS**

I have to admit that when I tasted the **2013 Tedeschi “Capitel Monte Olmi” Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Riserva (\$89.99)** I was stunned. The purity of flavors from this six-acre vineyard just thrilled me. Displaying elegance yet showing power, this single-vineyard wine is aged for four years. **94 JS, 93 VN**



Brunello: 2015 or 2016, That Is the Question!

I have been a specialist in Montalcino for the last 20 years. Until recently, I visited the region two or three times a year. This past year the global pandemic has thrown travel into a crazy hiatus, but I was in Montalcino in February 2020 as COVID was ravaging Italy's more densely populated northern regions. When I stepped off the plane in Florence there were a pair of hazmat-suited guys with temperature-taking devices ping-pong my forehead a couple of times to make sure I wasn't feverish.

I was there for Benvenuto Brunello, an annual press tasting that is particularly well-run and provides a great opportunity to experience 150 or more Brunello di Montalcino. I spent the week there visiting five or six wineries a day as well. Italians like to spend a bit more time with you, and the polite thing to do is to spend that time with them—and one way or another food is always involved. Tasting at the wineries gives one an opportunity that's unique in the wine world: because of Brunello's long gestation period—four years of aging—I get the chance to first taste years before the wines will be released and watch the progress of vintage after vintage before they are even bottled.

So, I have watched the growth of both the 2015 and 2016 vintages closely, and I am always asked which vintage is better. You might think there is a straightforward answer, or you might think it's a stylistic choice, but truthfully, neither is correct. Montalcino is an interesting growing area. The town sits high up, almost in the middle of a 10-mile-square growing zone, and the land slopes away in all directions. The eastern and northern slopes don't get as much afternoon sun as the southern and western faces, and then there is the soil, altitude, slope, and myriad other factors that make each producer's wine different. The real distinction between the vintages can only be addressed winery by winery. The vintages do have an overall difference, however where the 2015 vintage is broader, riper, and richer; the 2016 is longer, showing more evident structure and length. I feel that both will age well, but the 2015 is more drinkable now, while the 2016 needs more a bit more time.

Many of our offerings are pre-arrival, so be careful to pay attention when you order if you want something to try now.

2015 Brunello and Riserva

2015 Mocali Brunello di Montalcino (\$25.99) How do you spell bargain? **93 RP**

2015 Il Valentiano Brunello di Montalcino (\$29.99)
A Direct Import, so you are saving big money. Chocolatey richness with a savory finish. **93 JS**

2015 La Lecciaia Brunello di Montalcino (\$37.99)
Wonderful balance; depth; more woody aromatics.

2015 Cava d'Onice "Sensis" Brunello di Montalcino (\$36.99) Great fruit, depth, and balance. **96 JS**

2015 La Lecciaia "Manapetra" Brunello di Montalcino (\$28.99) Silly good for this price. **95 JS**

2015 Val di Suga Brunello di Montalcino (\$36.99)
Power, depth, and tannic structure. **94 RP**



2015 Col d'Orcia Brunello di Montalcino (\$49.95) This is one of Montalcino's best and always overlooked. Classic flavors; all organic.

2015 Villa Poggio Salvi "Pomona" Brunello di Montalcino (\$69.99)
Classic flavors of leather and earth, with length and structure. **94 WE**

2015 Poggio Antico "Altero" Brunello di Montalcino (\$55.99) **97 JS**

2015 San Polo Brunello di Montalcino (\$57.99) Focus and length, with an incredible core of fruit. **95 JS**

2015 Sesta di Sopra Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.99) Stunning depth, richness, and totally drinkable. **95 JS, 94 RP**

2015 Livio Sassetti "Pertimali" Brunello di Montalcino (\$69.99)
Pre-arrival. **98 JS**

2015 Valdicava Brunello di Montalcino (\$119.99) Pre-arrival. **99 JS**

2015 Fuligni Brunello di Montalcino Riserva (\$134.99) Pre-arrival; elsewhere \$175. **99 JS, 98 RP**

2016 Brunello

2016 Collosorbo Brunello di Montalcino (\$41.99) **96 WE**

2016 Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino (\$39.99)
Pre-arrival. **95 JS, 95 JD, 95 RP**

2016 Argiano Brunello di Montalcino (\$47.99)
Pre-arrival. **97 JS**

2016 Il Poggione Brunello di Montalcino (\$69.99)

2016 Silvio Nardi "Poggio Doria" Brunello di Montalcino (\$109.99) Pre-arrival. **96 RP**

2016 Caparzo "La Casa" Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.99) Pre-arrival. From the heart of the Montosoli hill, depth and power. **96 JS, 95 WS**

2016 Casanova di Neri Brunello di Montalcino (\$54.99) Pre-arrival. I love this wine, which is always overlooked in comparison to the Tenuta Nuova, but my favorite of their wines. **95 WS**

2016 Castelli Martinuzzi Brunello di Montalcino (\$39.99)
Pre-arrival. Lively, focused, with great balance. **95 JS**

2016 Ciacci Piccolomini Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.99)
Pre-arrival. **97 WE**

2016 Ciacci Piccolomini "Pianrosso" Brunello di Montalcino (\$79.99) Pre-arrival. **98 JS, 98 RP**

2016 Fuligni Brunello di Montalcino (\$99.99) Pre-arrival. **99 WE**

2016 Le Ragnaie Brunello di Montalcino (\$64.99) Pre-arrival. **96 WS**

2016 San Polo "Podernovi" Brunello di Montalcino (\$145.00)
Extraordinary aromatics and power. I love this wine.

2016 Talenti "Piero" Brunello di Montalcino (\$149.99) Pre-arrival.

2016 Livio Sassetti "Pertimali" Brunello di Montalcino (\$79.99)
Pre-arrival. **100 JS**

2016 Valdicava Brunello di Montalcino (\$139.99) Pre-arrival. **98 JS**





The view from Rancia. (Photo: Fèlsina)

Walk in the Sunlight of Chianti Classico with Fèlsina

Here at K&L we have a special place in our hearts for this extremely popular Chianti Classico producer. Fèlsina (the accent is on the first syllable, so FEL-sina) lies in the southeastern corner of Chianti Classico in the commune of Castelnuovo Berardenga. That is about a 20-minute drive (if you are Italian) due east of Siena. Wines from this commune have more tannic structure in general than wines from the higher-altitude communes to the north. And while microclimate and soils make the most difference, this is the southern boundary of Chianti Classico. The winery took off in the early 1980s when Giuseppe Mazzocolin took the reins. It was an odd choice: a classics professor, not an agrarian, but Giuseppe is a gentle man, a poet, artist, and a dreamer, and fortunately he had beautiful dreams.

I remember vividly the first time I visited the estate. It was pouring down rain like only it can in Italy. Giuseppe insisted we had to drive through the vineyard, but before we could start he ran back into his office to get something. It was a music cassette of Etta James singing “Stormy Weather.” Like I said, he’s an artist. Yet Giuseppe would be the first to deflect any credit for the winery’s success from him to their consulting enologist, Franco Bernabei, who was also the consulting enologist for Fontodi at the time. He cuts a dashing figure as one of Italy’s leading consultants and has taken the wines of Fèlsina to a new level—indeed they have been one of the DOCG’s leaders for some time. We just got a shipment in, but these wines are so popular you should never wait, because they will sell out quickly!

The nose of the **2018 Fèlsina “Berardenga” Chianti Classico (\$21.99)** is so pure, full of black cherry, plum, and earth, and is just a classic representation of what Chianti Classico should smell like. On the palate the wine is supple, smooth, while balancing its structure with sumptuous fruit, waves of plum, black cherry, spice, and leather that just keep coming at you. The finish shows a superbly balanced wine, in

a perfect drinking stage, lush, focused, and so complex. Hard to find something better at this price point. **93 JS, 92 VN**

2017 Fèlsina Chianti Classico Riserva (\$26.95) This has always been a big wine for me. Powerful and focused, with tannin and richness, it’s layered, bold, and dark, and the flavors are shy, hidden by the richness of this wine. On the palate the wine has incredible length, with a concentrated and focused center. The fruit is saturated, incredibly flavored—a combination of wild cherry and wild strawberry accented with Tuscan brush. I think the best idea is to age this wine—get a few bottles to taste now, but also stock up for the long haul. It’s going to last a long time. **93 JS**

2017 Fèlsina “Rancia” Chianti Classico Riserva (\$46.99) This has been my favorite wine from Fèlsina since I first tasted it decades ago. It always has such definition, depth, and incredible length, the hallmarks of quality wine. The 2017 vintage has more nerve and a more vibrant center than some of the more powerful vintages. I suggest you decant this for a couple of hours ahead of time—you’ll be well rewarded. It is truly a sensory experience. **95 JS, 95 VN**

2017 Fèlsina “Fontalloro” Toscana (\$44.99) One of the first all-Sangiovese “Super Tuscan,” the vineyard sits astride Chianti Classico’s southern boundary. This is one of Tuscany’s collectible wines. The nose is a savory combination of salted plums and porcini dust, with a concentrated cassis-like fruit focus. On the palate the fine-grained tannins are polished but give the wine a framework without intruding. Long, persistent, and just a baby, this wine is destined for greatness and a long life, but it’s so exceptionally well balanced you can drink it now. **95 RP**



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