

# FOOD & WINE

WINE  
+  
TRAVEL

## Ease into Fall

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AND COZY SIPS  
FOR THE SEASON

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# BOTTLE SERVICE



## The F&W Guide to Italian Wine

From classic benchmarks to extraordinary values, with wines from up and down the length of America's favorite Mediterranean country, here's our guide to every Italian bottle you'll need for fall entertaining, the holidays, and beyond.

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# Eight Italian Wine Benchmarks

Italy makes some of the world’s greatest wines. And if you love Italian wine, then you owe it to yourself to invest in—not every night, but every so often—a bottle that will tell you with every sip why the best Italian wines are world-class. It’s true that there are some Italian benchmarks that are hard to find (Valentini’s ultra-elusive Trebbiano d’Abruzzo), some that one simply can’t afford even on a splurge night (Masseto, which runs a cool \$975 a bottle), and a few that you can’t get or afford (Soldera’s famed Brunello di Montalcino: Don’t ask, and don’t worry because it isn’t available anyway). But those are the outliers. Most, while pricey, more than reward the investment and, in truth, aren’t too hard to find. Here are eight stellar bottles to track down.

PROSECCO SUPERIORE

2023 ADAMI VIGNETO GIARDINO (\$27)

Although oceans of inexpensive, pleasantly anonymous Prosecco lap at our shores daily, not all Prosecco is created equal (and not by a long shot). The dramatic hills of the Prosecco Superiore region produce truly distinctive sparkling wines, and Adami’s Vigneto Giardino is among the best—and was also the first single-vineyard Prosecco ever produced for the commercial market, back in 1933. It’s creamy and subtle, filled with bright green-apple and floral notes, ending on lingering spice.

FRANCIACORTA

2016 CA’ DEL BOSCO ANNAMARIA CLEMENTI (\$120)

Franciacorta is Italy’s most prestigious sparkling wine region, and this wine is arguably its greatest expression. Now named for founder Maurizio Zanella’s mother, Annamaria, Ca’ del Bosco’s single-vintage top cuvée was first made in 1979. (It acquired its current name in 2008.) Zanella’s mission has been to prove that Italy can produce world-class sparkling wines fully as profound as those of Champagne; if anyone has any doubts, a sip of this wine will dispel them.

TRENTINO

2022 FORADORI NORMALE TEROLDEGO (\$35)

One of the benchmark reds of northern Trentino, this is also the signature wine of one of Italy’s most significant winemakers, Elisabetta Foradori. Her championing of Teroldego in the 1980s and 1990s helped bring attention back to this Trentino grape; her visibility as a woman winemaker at a time when that was a rarity in Italy helped inspire a new generation of Italian women; and her devotion to low-intervention winemaking and biodynamic farming has made her an influence in those worlds, too.

FRIULI

2021 LIVIO FELLUGA TERRE ALTE (\$130)

Terre Alte is one of the great white wines of Italy and in 1981 (together with Jermann’s Vintage Tunina, a few years earlier) effectively created the Super-Friulian category. In many ways, it represents the life’s work of winemaker Livio Felluga, who died in 2016 at age 102: A luscious yet vividly bright blend of Friulano, Sauvignon, and Pinot Bianco, all from ancient vines, it’s round and complex and generally irresistible. And it’s able to age for a decade or more, at least if you can resist drinking it now.

TAURASI

2019 MASTROBERARDINO RADICI TAURASI (\$60)

Aglianico is the signature red grape of Campania, the wine region that surrounds Naples, and the Taurasi appellation is where Aglianico reaches its greatest heights. The Mastroberardino family’s Radici bottling is arguably the classic expression of this formidable grape and is a testament to the work of Antonio Mastroberardino, who in the years after World War II did more than anyone else to restore Aglianico’s reputation—brooding, dark, powerful, and able to age decades in a cellar.

TUSCANY

2022 ANTINORI TIGNANELLO (\$180)

In the early 1970s, a bleak time for Tuscan wine, Marchese Piero Antinori defied local rules in Chianti Classico by refusing to blend white grapes into his red Sangiovese (a requirement back then), adding a proportion of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc to the blend (which was not allowed), and aging the result in French barriques. The result was Tignanello. Lush and powerful yet impeccably elegant, it helped create the Super-Tuscan category and to this day remains an Italian superstar.

CHIANTI CLASSICO

2019 CASTELLO DI MONSANTO IL POGGIO (\$95)

As Chianti lingered in postwar doldrums during the 1950s and 1960s, Monsanto founder Fabrizio Bianchi wasn’t content to make or have his region defined by mediocre wines. As a result, in 1962 his Il Poggio bottling became Chianti Classico’s first single-vineyard wine, and to this day (now made by his daughter, Laura Bianchi) it’s one of the best—aromatic and complex, impressive when young, spellbinding with some age. Buy one bottle now and one (or more) to put away.

BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

2019 BIONDI-SANTI BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO (\$315)

In the late 1800s, Clemente Santi effectively invented modern Brunello di Montalcino, using 100% Sangiovese for red wines and aging them in Slavonian oak barrels. Much has changed at the estate since then—it’s now operated by Clemente’s grandson Ferruccio Biondi Santi and owned by the French company that owns Charles Heidsieck Champagne, EPI—but the wine, finessed and layered, with deep red fruit and herb-and-spice nuances, remains an icon of the appellation.







# Great Chianti Classicos for Fall Dinners

Chianti Classico—a region, not a quality designation, lodged between Florence and Siena in the heart of Tuscany—is Italy’s most famous source for Sangiovese-based reds. For many people, it’s also the Platonic ideal of Italian red wine overall. Yet, for many years, the zone felt a little asleep; there were bright spots, but mostly, the wines were perfectly good rather than exciting. Now that’s changed, as a new generation of winemakers has come to the fore and many stalwarts have upped their game substantially. Today, the long-standing fame of the region is more than justified, and not only at the high end. Even basic Chianti Classicos, at least from top producers, are some of the best bargains in the wine world right now, terrific with food and often able to age for years.

### 2023 RIECINE CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$30)

2023 was a challenging vintage in Tuscany, with hail and rain followed by late-summer heat-waves, yet based on this wine from Riecine, you’d never know it. There’s a spearmint grace note above its sweet strawberry-cherry fruit; it’s Chianti Classico in a luscious, intense form, but still poised and vivid.

### 2022 ISTINE CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$33)

Winemaker Angela Fronti has rapidly become one of the new stars of Chianti Classico, thanks to wines like this one. It has that perfect Chianti equilibrium of ripe berry fruit (think summer raspberries) and juiciness against savory notes of woodland herbs and lightly astringent tannins.

### 2022 MONTERAPONI CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$35)

The hillside vineyards around the town of Radda have become the source of some of Chianti Classico’s most exciting wines. Among them are those of Monteraponi, a brilliant organic estate run by Michele Braganti and his partner, Alessandra Deiana, like this dark-fruited, polished red, with its hint of sagelike herbs.

### 2022 POGGERINO CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$35)

Piero Lanza is a true vigneron, in that he does practically everything at Poggerino: “Agronomist, winemaker, business manager ... I like to say that Poggerino has a human scale.” His Chianti Classico has the same direct appeal as he does, with its pomegranate and cherry flavors, soft tannins, and a light eucalyptus note.

### 2021 QUERCIBABELLA CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$35)

For several decades, Quercibella has been a pioneer in biodynamic agriculture in Chianti Classico and sustainability efforts overall. Plus, its wines are excellent: Witness this blueberry-inflected red, with its emphatic but silky tannins. (Or, for a few dollars more, try the even more impressive Riserva bottling.)

### 2022 SAN GIUSTO A RENTENNANO CHIANTI CLASSICO (\$42)

The remarkable purity of flavor in this Chianti Classico—plush dark-cherry and berry notes and a lingering hint of almond—stems from impeccable work in the vineyard, the use of cement tanks for fermentation, and aging the wine only in large casks or neutral oak barrels.

### 2019 ROCCA DI MONTEGROSSI SAN MARCELLINO GRAN SELEZIONE (\$75)

Gran Selezione Chianti Classicos must be 90% Sangiovese and aged at least 30 months before release—or many more, as in the case of this layered red. It comes from a single vineyard near Monti, a portion of whose vines were planted 50-plus years ago.



## ITALIAN WINE NEED-TO-KNOWS

### CLASSICO

A wine labeled “classico”—e.g., Soave Classico, Valpolicella Classico—uses only grapes from the original or historic area of the region, which was likely later expanded. (Chianti Classico, unusually, is also its own DOCG.)

### DOC

A *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* is an officially demarcated wine region with specific quality standards. There are over 300; examples include Prosecco, Valpolicella, and Rosso di Montalcino.

### DOCG

The designation *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* is the top of the Italian wine region hierarchy. Examples include Barolo and Chianti Classico.

### IGT

*Indicazione Geografica Tipica* is a term for wines from a specific region that do not necessarily use the typical grapes or winemaking style required by a DOC or DOCG.

### SPUMANTE

Sparkling wine. Spumante wines can come from almost anywhere, but the most famous regions are Prosecco and Prosecco Superiore, Franciacorta, Asti, and Trento DOC.

### FRIZZANTE

Lightly sparkling wine—Moscato d’Asti and Lambrusco are classic examples.

### SUPER-TUSCAN

An unofficial term coined in the 1980s for high-level Tuscan wines that do not follow the rules for, say, Chianti Classico by blending in international grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon. Sassicaia and Tignanello were the first Super-Tuscans, though their first vintages predate the term (1968 and 1971, respectively).





# Sicilian Superstars

For decades, even centuries, Sicily was known as a source of rustic, inexpensive red wines, typically sold in bulk for bottling as simple table wine. But beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, glimmers of ambition from producers such as Tasca d’Almerita and Donnafugata began to appear, bringing wines that took full advantage of the island’s potential. Starting around 2001, Mount Etna began its climb to fame as a wine region, as opposed to just a sometimes (very) alarming volcano. Today, Sicily’s wines represent some of the best of Italy, especially the ones made from the island’s abundance of native varieties.



## 2022 DONNAFUGATA FLORAMUNDI CERASUOLO DI VITTORIA (\$24)

Donnafugata makes wines from vineyards all over Sicily; this one comes from near the town of Vittoria. Cerasuolo, which translates to “cherrylike,” is a local blend of Nero d’Avola and Frappato. Its juicy red-berry flavors have grace notes of green olives and Mediterranean herbs.

## 2022 FEUDO MONTONI LAGNUSA NERO D’AVOLA (\$27)

In the center of Sicily, owners Fabio Sireci and Melissa Muller maintain a hidden agricultural paradise at this organic estate. They grow lentils, chickpeas, herbs, olives, and much more, including (of course) grapes. This Nero d’Avola is fresh and vivid, all ripe strawberries and blackberries, with an earthy finish.

## 2024 TASCA D’ALMERITA TENUTA WHITAKER MOZIA GRILLO (\$30)

Just off the coast near Marsala is the tiny island of Mozia, where Tenuta Whitaker, one of the many Tasca family properties, makes this distinctive white from the Sicilian Grillo variety. It’s abundantly flavorful, like a basket of tangerines, pineapples, and limes, but a nice edge of acidity keeps it from being cloying.

## 2023 VALLE DELL’ACATE IL FRAPPATO (\$31)

Take a sip of this Frappato, a light-bodied, lively Sicilian red variety that has lately come back into fashion, and you’ll summon a childhood memory of raspberry hard candies (or an adult memory, if you still enjoy them). Valle Dell’Acate is one of the benchmark wineries of Sicily’s southeastern Ragusa province.

## 2023 TENUTA DI FESSINA ERSE ETNA BIANCO (\$31)

Founded in 2007, Tenuta di Fessina is a name to watch among the second wave of new Etna producers. This 90% Carricante white is medium-bodied and silky, filled with fresh lemon-pear flavors and palate-whetting acidity: a great shellfish wine.

## 2023 AZIENDA AGRICOLA COS FRAPPATO (\$33)

COS is a groundbreaking Sicilian winery, among the first on the island to farm biodynamically and age its wines in clay amphorae. This light-bodied red suggests fresh summer strawberries, with orange-peel notes on the finish. Chill it down, even as summer’s heat turns into cooler fall.



# Barolo Without the Big Bucks

Nebbiolo is among the world’s great red grapes, able to create wines that impeccably balance power and elegance. While Piedmont’s Barolo and Barbaresco appellations are the two places in the world where Nebbiolo reaches its greatest heights, the variety also grows in the broader Langhe region outside those appellations, labeled simply as “Langhe Nebbiolo.” Same climate, same soil, same grape variety: Perhaps the wines don’t reach the level of top cru Barolos, but they echo them in character, and they are substantially more affordable. For those seeking an entryway into the world of Nebbiolo, these seven bottles are great options.

## 2023 G.D. VAJRA LANGHE NEBBIOLO (\$24)

The G.D. Vajra estate is located in Vergne, one of the highest villages in the commune of Barolo, and this supple red captures Nebbiolo at its most inviting. It’s abundant with cherry-strawberry fruit, a hint of violets, and easy-going rather than aggressive tannins.

## 2022 BRUNO ROCCA FRALÙ LANGHE NEBBIOLO (\$40)

The Rocca family has been in Barbaresco since the early 1800s but, like many historic Piedmontese families, didn’t start making wine under its own name until 1978. This red from younger vines suggests spiced currants and cherries, with a hint of fresh bay leaf.

## 2022 AZIENDA AGRICOLA RONCHI IN AMPHORIS LANGHE NEBBIOLO (\$33)

The Ronchi cru produces some of the best Barbarescos around, and this wine comes from declassified fruit from those vines. It’s more intense than most Langhe Nebbiolos, but a year in terracotta amphorae helps soften its substantial tannins.

## 2022 MASSOLINO LANGHE NEBBIOLO (\$44)

Massolino’s Barolos—particularly from the famed Vigna Rionda cru—are benchmarks for the area around Serralunga d’Alba. This transparently ruby-hued wine delivers a lot of the same character—red berry flavor, with a floral note of violets—at a much more modest price.

## 2023 PIERO BUSO LANGHE NEBBIOLO (\$35)

This family-owned winery near Neive is known for its long-aging, single-cru Barbarescos. This wine has a generous, easygoing character, all ripe raspberry and baking spices, with a light cola note. It comes from younger vines in Barbaresco and the surrounding area.

## 2023 SANDRONE VALMAGGIORE NEBBIOLO D’ALBA (\$60)

Luciano Sandrone was a Barolo legend until his death in 2023, and his work has been brilliantly carried on by his brother Luca and daughter Barbara. This red has gorgeous rose-petal and raspberry aromas, supple tannins, and lingering flavors.





## Super-Refreshing Cool-Climate Whites

These days, when wine drinkers are looking for more freshness and less weighty richness, northern Italy's Alto Adige and Friuli regions are impossible to ignore. Hillside—often extremely dramatic—vineyards, cool temperatures, and a range of varieties from the very familiar (Pinot Grigio) to the very obscure (Picolit) make these almost uniformly crisp whites wildly adaptable to dishes of all kinds. And prices, except for the very top cuvées, have remained relatively affordable even as acclaim has risen.

### 2023 MARCO FELLUGA JUST MOLAMATTA FRIULI BIANCO (\$18)

Friulian winemaker Marco Felluga died in 2024 at age 96, but his work continues, carried on by his granddaughter Ilaria. This vivid white blend is full of green-apple and grapefruit notes; it's intensely refreshing.

### 2023 GRADIS'CIUTTA COLLIO SAUVIGNON (\$24)

Robert Princic founded Gradis'ciutta in 1997 at age 20, making ultra-precise whites from his organically farmed vineyards. This Sauvignon is the hue of 12-karat gold, and its aroma and flavor suggest fresh pineapple, lemon zest, and dry hay.

### 2023 I CLIVI SAN PIETRO FRIULANO (\$26)

This bracing, aromatic Friulano—the signature white grape of Italy's northeastern Friuli region—comes from 70-year-old organic vines in the Gramogliano hills. Light-bodied with green-apple tartness, it finishes on a subtle almond note.

### 2024 ABBAZIA DI NOVACELLA KERNER (\$29)

Abbazia di Novacella has been owned by an order of Augustinian monks since the 1100s. Among the many wines they produce is this grapefruit-scented, juicy white, whose flavors end on a mint-tarragon note. (Kerner is an early 20th-century cross of Trollinger and Riesling.)

### 2023 POJER E SANDRI PALAI MÜLLER-THURGAU (\$18)

Extravagant aromas of pineapple and citrus lead into the tangy flavors of this bright yet savory white from renowned vignerons (and longtime friends) Mario Pojer and Fiorentino Sandri. It's hard to imagine a better match for a plate of fluke crudo.

### 2024 ELENA WALCH ALTO ADIGE SAUVIGNON (\$26)

Sisters and fifth-generation vintners Julia and Karoline Walch run this renowned family-owned Alto Adige estate. This is a zesty northern Italian Sauvignon, all passion fruit and lime zest, with very little of the variety's typical herbaceousness.

### 2023 CANTINA TERLANO TERLANER CUVÉE (\$26)

This lush but focused blend of 60% Pinot Bianco, 30% Chardonnay, and 10% Sauvignon Blanc suggests wildflower honey and Bosc pears. It comes from one of Alto Adige's top grower co-ops. (Their basic Pinot Grigio is also a year-in-year-out steal.)

### 2022 LA RONCAIA ECLISSE (\$35)

La Roncaia, in Friuli's Colli Orientali region, makes a number of impressive wines. The winery's top white is this blend of Sauvignon and the local Picolit variety, which offers flamboyant aromas of melon, peach, and tangerine; those lead into a full-bodied wine bolstered by juicy acidity.





# Italy's Greatest Values



There is not a single region in Italy that doesn't produce amazing wine values, from the tip of Sicily to the northern reaches of Alto Adige. Whether from familiar regions and grapes (Tuscan Sangiovese, for example) or lesser-known places and varieties (Calabria's Gaglioppo grape, to name one), there is so much to explore that it can be daunting. To help with that, here are 15 do-not-miss bottles to try.

RED

**2020 MONTE ANTICO  
TOSCANA ROSSO (\$12)**

Widely available and eminently affordable, this earthy Tuscan red—a blend of 85% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon—picks in a lot of juicy red-fruit flavor. It was created by pioneering Italian wine importer Neil Empson, together with star winemaker Franco Bernabei.

**2022 MASCIARELLI  
MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO (\$16)**

The lush blackberry–black cherry flavors of this steal of a red speak to the late Gianni Masciarelli's belief that Abruzzo could produce remarkable wines at a fair price. Your local pizza place ought to include a bottle with every delivery. Seriously.

**2021 DI MAJO NORANTE  
SANGIOVESE (\$15)**

When I tasted this red from the tiny Molise region, I wrote, "This tastes like it should be poured for dinner in an old house on an Italian hillside." Think cherry liqueur, aromatic herbs, a little leathery rusticity, and a 100% affinity for something substantial like osso buco.

**2023 FATTORIA LE PUPILLE  
MORELLINO DI SCANSANO (\$20)**

Tuscany's coastal Maremma region is home to the Morellino di Scansano appellation. (*Morellino* is the local term for Sangiovese.) True to local form, this red has savory notes that suggest dried Mediterranean herbs and rose petals, with bright cherry fruit.

**2021 LIBRANDI SEGNO  
LIBRANDI CIRÒ ROSSO (\$15)**

Calabria's Cirò Rosso wines, made from the Gaglioppo grape, can have an almost rosé-like transparency but—as with this classic version—are also full of peppery herbal notes, ripe strawberry-cranberry fruit, and fine, lightly grippy tannins. Early fall grilling? Bring it on.

**2023 SELVAPIANA CHIANTI  
RUFINA (\$22)**

The Chianti Rufina appellation, northeast of Florence, is less well known than Chianti Classico; as a result, even its best wines are often terrific values. Witness this supple, rosemary-scented red, with fresh raspberry and light cola notes, from what's arguably the top producer in the region.

**2023 TENUTA SANT'ANTONIO  
NANFRÈ VALPOLICELLA (\$15)**

Tenuta Sant'Antonio makes acclaimed Amarones, but the estate's lovely Valpolicella flips the style away from Amarone's power entirely. This is a transparently ruby-hued red, modest in alcohol (12.5%), with a wildly aromatic nose of cassia, flowers, orange peel, and incense.

**2021 TOLAINI AL PASSO  
TOSCANA (\$29)**

An impressive Super-Tuscan for a non-super price—a rarity these days—this garnet-hued red, a full-bodied blend of Sangiovese, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon, delivers plenty of round, rich black-cherry and currant flavors, all of which linger on a woody cedar note.

WHITE

**2024 SELLA & MOSCA LA  
CALA VERMENTINO DI  
SARDEGNA (\$14)**

Sella & Mosca, founded in 1899 by two Piedmontese adventurers, is one of the most well-known wineries on Sardinia, and its expression of the island's signature white grape is spot on: floral, citrusy, fresh, and a great match for seafood of any kind.

**2023 LE MONDE FRIULI  
PINOT GRIGIO (\$20)**

A lot of Pinot Grigio underdelivers; this one flips that, offering impressive flavor for a fair price. From Friuli's Grave region, it suggests jasmine flowers, melon, and white peach. Le Monde farms and makes wine sustainably, with 70% of its energy coming from solar cells.

**2023 TASCA D'ALMERITA  
TENUTA REGALEALI BIANCO (\$15)**

There's probably not a single seafood restaurant in Sicily without this classic, grapefruit-inflected white on its list. A blend of Inzolia, Catarratto, and Grecanico, with a touch of Chardonnay, it's been made by the Tasca d'Almerita family for over 60 vintages now.

**2023 PALA SOPRASOLE  
VERMENTINO DI SARDEGNA (\$22)**

Sardinian winery Pala's Soprasole bottling adds a little creamy richness to Vermentino's brisk acidity and citrus flavors. It suggests peaches spritzed with lime juice, the flavors long and lingering, and would be superb with any firm white fish.

**2023 SCARPETTA PINOT  
GRIGIO (\$18)**

Restaurateurs Bobby Stuckey and Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson make this lively nectarine- and melon-inflected Pinot Grigio using fruit from both Friuli's gravelly Grave region and hillside "ponca" soils—essentially, layered marl and sandstone—in the Colli Orientali area.

**2024 CÀ DEI FRATI I FRATI  
LUGANA (\$25)**

The slight green note on the nose of this northern Italian white is reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc, but in the mouth, the wine is richer and rounder, with flavors leaning more toward Meyer lemon and Ruby Red grapefruit. It comes from vineyards near the southern shore of Lake Garda.

**2024 FONTALEONI  
VERNACCIA DI SAN  
GIMIGNANO (\$19)**

The Vernaccia grape has grown since the 1200s around the Tuscan town of San Gimignano; this classic version—intriguingly austere, with a stony edge to its brisk green-apple and pear flavors—gives a good explanation of its enduring appeal.