

ITALY

It's difficult to overstate the importance of Italy's contributions to western culture. Whether you're discussing the historical significance of art, politics, religion, sports, cars or fashion, Italy has perennially been one of the most important nations in the world, especially when you're discussing food & wine.

So for our first stop, we'll be exploring one of the greatest wine-producing and culinary nations in the world, providing some brief background of the major wine-producing regions in the country (trust us, there are a lot) and of course offering a selection of wines to try at home.

Paradise Pantry's
European Vacation 2020



Paradise
Pantry

WELCOME TO ITALY

Vino has quite literally been part of Italian culture since the beginning of recorded history.

Ancient Greeks referred to the boot-shaped nation as “the land of wine” or *Oenoteria*.

It is no surprise that the Italian love for great wine has continued into the twenty-first century; no European nation (except for arguably France) produces more wine, and with its diverse array of climates & soils, there is no shortage of variety in wine styles, and distinctive terroir throughout the country’s many states.

Although we will only highlight a few regions in this short book, volumes have been written about Italian wine, and it goes without saying that Italy’s contribution to the culinary world are innumerable.

From the far-south island of Sicily, to the Alps at the Northernmost border, each of Italy’s regions has created its own distinctive styles, whether you’re discussing wine, food or even fashion. Likewise, the dramatic variety of climates makes for an even richer and more diverse selection of wines and cuisines.

While the variety offered throughout Italy can seem enticing, the head-spinning number of varieties can also prove to be overwhelming. With its unfamiliar names and often confusing labels, Italian wine can be a bit of a puzzle. Here are a couple of tips to make purchasing Italian wine simpler.

Italian Labels and Names

Without getting too deep into the weeds, let’s take a look at some of the more confusing aspects you may encounter while picking out wine. We’ll use a couple of Italy’s flagship reds as an example.

You may have heard of big, robust and delicious Barolo, and with good reason. However, Barolo is not the varietal. Rather, that would be the Nebbiolo grape. What about Barbaresco? Also a Nebbiolo.

Then there’s Barbera— is that a grape? Well, yes— but what about Barbera d’Alba versus Barbera d’Asti? Well, one comes from Asti, and one comes from Alba...both of which are in Piedmont.

Sigh.

It may take a Google search to figure out what the heck you’re buying, but often Italian wines are labeled with the village or region rather than the grape. For this reason, a good way to approach the complexities of Italian wine is to focus on some of the major grapes, rather than getting bogged down in the regions.

Take a look at some of the more well known and more widely produced reds and do some research to see where they are most prevalent. Try Nebbiolo, Barbera, Sangiovese, Primitivo or even Merlot to get started. They may have different names, but it may help you decide when you’re looking for a specific flavor.

For white, Gavi, Soave and Pinot Grigio can steer you in the right direction for an entry point.

It’s pretty obvious why Italian wine labels can be confusing. Fortunately, the Italian government has at least made an attempt to help differentiate some of these places, and styles using a system very similar to that of France’s AOC system.

DOC, DOCG & IGT

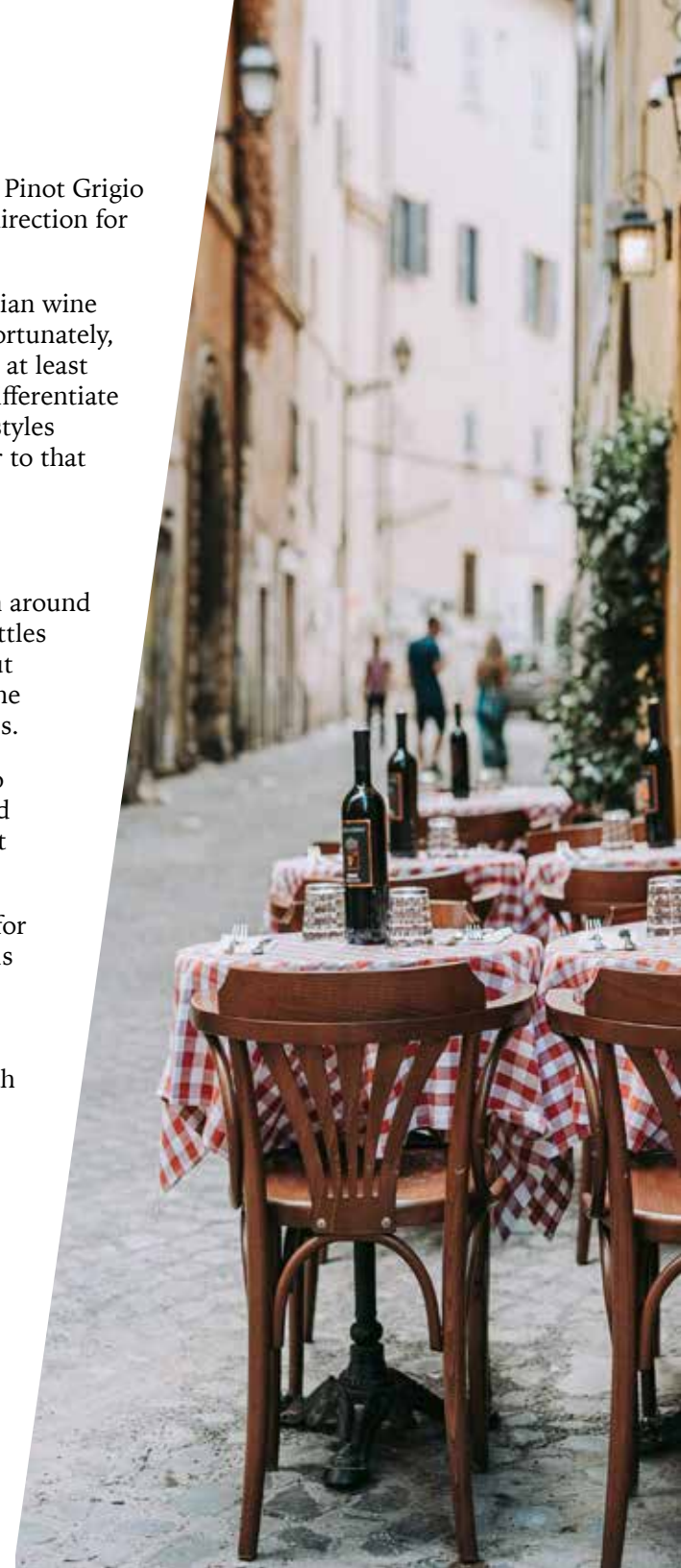
The shiny labels often seen around the neck of Italian wine bottles almost seem decorative, but they can help to disperse the confusion about wine labels.

They are indications of two things: specific location and overall quality. Let’s keep it simple:

IGT: Not necessarily bad (for example a “super-Tuscan” is IGT), but IGT indicates no specific region. Typically consider this basic table wine from a larger area with minimal grape specificity.

DOC: Indicates a still broad area, but focused on a specific region and the grapes designated to that area.

DOCG: Tend to be higher quality and more specific, based on specificity of terroir and area.





PIEDMONT

Piedmont is in the northwestern region of the "boot" and is considered one of the premier wine-producing regions not only in Italy but in all of Europe.

Piemonte literally means "at the foot of the mountains", referring to its close proximity to the alps, and in kind its hilly vineyards and distinctive seasons create an ideal environment for a variety of hearty reds and often sparkling whites.

The region is a classic example of the inseparable nature of Italian cuisine and wine, with a culinary culture that is easily on par with that of Burgundy in France.

It's an area known as much for rich and delicious truffles as it is for the hazelnuts responsible for the world-famous Nutella spread.

With hot and dry summers, cool autumns and cold, foggy winters, it's no wonder that Piedmont renders some of the most highly esteemed wine in the world.

The most renowned red from the region is far and away Nebbiolo, which is most notably produced in the villages of Barolo, Barbaresco & Brunello as well as Langhe and Roero (all of which you may encounter on wine labels.). Langhe is also known for Dolcetto, while Monferrato produces plenty of Barbera, as do the towns of Asti and Alba.

You may also recognize the name Asti from the Moscato d'Asti, a sweet and delicious sparkling white from that area. Piedmont is also notable for whites like Cortese (aka Gavi) and Arneis and Erbaluce, as well as smaller amounts of Reisling.

TUSCANY

As one of the more tourist-centric regions of Italy, Tuscany is as known for its food and wine as it is for its architecture and sweeping landscapes. Home to Florence and Pisa (as in ‘the Leaning Tower of...’) as well as the well known wine-producing regions of Chianti and Montepulciano, Tuscany is located south of Piedmont on the nation’s western coast.

Due to its more north-central coastal locale, Tuscany offers a considerably more temperate climate than the comparatively high altitude Piedmont, with warmer growing seasons and more sunny days per capita. The World Atlas of Wine points out that the region is surprisingly young as Italian wine production standards are concerned, having just sprung into mass production in the 1940’s. That being the case, Tuscany’s flagship red grape, Sangiovese has had something of a mixed past, having fallen in stature in the earlier years as an often unsophisticated table wine.

Despite earlier, struggles, Sangiovese has emerged as one of the most renowned varieties in the country, specifically from the DOCG regions of Chianti Classico and Montalcino, which produce deep, complex varieties ranging from earthy and spicy to fruity with balsamic notes.

Besides the widely known and perennially lauded Chianti, the

south-central area of Montalcino is known for what is widely considered to be the Tuscan answer to Barolo:

Brunello di Montalcino (see our bonus bottle on the following sheet) has gained notoriety, especially in the US, as one of the great Italian imports, akin to the finest French Pinot Noir.

Tuscany has also gained notoriety as the region rendering what have come to be known as “super-Tuscans”— IGT classified red blends, often utilizing French grape varieties (Merlot, Cab Franc, Syrah) to create big, full-bodied reds to rival French Cabernet. Despite their disregard for the complicated regional differentiations, these blends are highly sought after and are often sold at some of the highest price points of any Italian wine.

Although, Sangiovese is without question the predominant variety in Tuscany, the region is also known for a handful of well-produced whites.

The rich, and often grassy and herbal Vermentino is known as a robust, food-friendly white that pairs especially well with light meat and fish entrees.

Tuscany, and the southern-bound regions of Lazio and Umbria are also known for Trebbiano, Grechetto and to a lesser extent, the fruity and floral Verdicchio.





VENETO

Sandwiched between the high-altitude and chilly Trentino-Alto Adige and eastern-bordering Friuli, Veneto is one of the most well-known regions in the entire nation. Although it is widely known for the romance of the Venetian canals (Venice is the capitol), Veneto is held in exceptionally high esteem for producing some of the finest wines—specifically white wines—in the entire country.

The most popular wine produced in Veneto bar none is Prosecco. Similarly to the Champagne region of France, Prosecco has been designated as a regional name; therefore, Prosecco can only come from Prosecco, Italy. Ranging from off-dry to syrup-y sweet, Lambrusco is one of the most popular and well known sparkling wines in the world. (Although it hails from the directly southern region of Emilia-Romagna, Lambrusco is another

excellent sparkling RED Italian native)

Stepping aside from Prosecco, Veneto's Soave (SWA-vey) DOC region produces aromatic whites from the Garganega grape that often rival fine French Chardonnay with their rich mouthfeel and toasted almond notes.

The Veneto is also known as one of the most prolific wine producing wine regions in Italy, and both Soave and Prosecco occasionally fall prey to overzealous wine producers, rendering wines that can range from unpalatably sweet to uncharacteristically bland. Choose wisely, and as always, the knowledgeable staff at Paradise Pantry is always here to give you a hand. (hint: we've got a lightly sparkling Garganega coming up for you on the next page.)

Although Veneto is widely known for whites, the Valpolicella region just north of Verona presents something truly special in the red category. Known as Amarone della Valpolicella or simply Amarone, this regional blend of Corvina and Corvinone grapes is customarily grown, picked, then dried to remove 40% of its weight, rendering an exceptionally concentrated, potent and rich, sometimes fizzy red wine. Amarone is a clear highlight for Italian red wines, and has historically been served as the climax for a traditional Veronese feast.

Between fertile volcanic soils producing some of the most famous wines in the country, and the tourist mecca of Venice, Veneto is without question one of the cultural landmarks in Italy.

FEATURED WINES

MONTETONDO
Garganega Frizzante
Verona
2019

One of the hallmark Italian white varieties, this lightly sparkling Garganega is an ideal summer evening wine. Harvested from 80-year old vines at peak ripeness, this offering from Montetondo presents a floral bouquet of white flowers and crisp apple, with a fresh, mineral-driven palate.

Nuanced but casual, it will pair perfectly with some fresh vegetables and light chicken or fish dishes, but with its crisp minerality and approachable acidity, it will stand up to heartier fare as well.

ANNA MARIA ABBONA
Dolcetto
Dogliani Superiore, Piedmont
2017

Hailing from Piedmont, typically renowned for the Nebbiolo grape, this 100% Dolcetto has been a specialty for this small independent vineyard since the mid-80's when they committed to bucking the norm.

This flagship offering presents a medium-bodied, balanced, and moderately tannic red with hints of blackberry, black pepper and cocoa.

Perfect with red sauces, garlic and pastas, but also pairs well with richer meats like lamb.

PAOLO SCAVINO
Nebbiolo
Langhe, Piedmont
2018

It's impossible to explore Italy without discussing Nebbiolo.

This Scavino Nebbiolo represents the best of Langhe with a harmonious balance of soft tannin and acidity, a bright, lively ruby color, and the trademark notes of leather, cherry and light anise found in the best Nebbiolo.

With more body and tannin than the Dolcetto, this will pair well with charcuterie, creamy cheese or other richer, fattier sauces and proteins.

FONTANAFREDDA
Gavi - Cortese
Piedmont
2019

Like Garganega, Cortese (also known as Gavi as per the native region) is considered one of the major Italian whites.

Fontanafredda ages this Gavi in stainless steel for three months, thus preserving its rich floral bouquet, and flavors of vanilla, lemon zest, and most notably, bitter apple.

Pairs perfectly with basil or citrus-based sauces and dressings (including pesto) as well as fish and shellfish. Perfect for lunchtime sipping or with your first course.

BONUS

PIANCORNELLO
Brunello
Montalcino, Tuscany
2015

On to Tuscany! Alongside Barolo and Barbaresco, Brunello di Montalcino is one of the highlights of not only the region, but also the nation of Italy..

Considered a "food wine" in that its rich and velvety character is meant to compliment foods and styles that are native to the region. This dark cherry/berry, herbal and spice-driven offering from Piancornello will pair best with lightly seasoned meats especially rabbit and beef, as well as portobellos and truffles.

Price: \$100 for the four pack \$150 with the added bonus wine

FEATURED CHEESES

TESTUN AL BAROLO Mixed Milks

Tetsun means 'hard cheese'. Aged 12 months from animals grazing on Alpine pastures. Covered in a thin crust of Nebbiolo grapes must from Barolo aged in small oak barrels. Fruity wine flavors. We say cheers to this cheese!

PANTALEO Goat's Milk

Thin with a natural rind, Pantaleo has flavors of herbs with hints of lemon and lime in the finish. Aged a minimum of 100 days, the cheese has a firm, almost dry paste that makes it perfect for shaving over salads. Its unique flavors also make it a nice addition to a cheese plate— will pair perfectly with this month's Gavi.

L'ALVEARE Sheep's Milk

Wrapped in cotton, coated in beeswax, this pecorino is matured naturally. Full, smooth taste, with a hint of honey from the wax. Delight your tastebuds with this great cheese. Will pair wonderfully with any of the wines on offer for the Italy wine selection.

Includes: Sliced Italian Prosciutto and Paradise Pantry Italian Marinated Olive Blend

\$40.⁰⁰





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