



*Party 23  
Wine Tasting  
Dec. 11th*

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Hosted by  
**Trish Goodwin**

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**An Introductory Exploration  
of Italian Wines**

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## Milestones in Italian Winemaking

The colonizing Greeks brought winemaking to Sicily and Southern Italy in the 8th Century BC, while the Etruscans were making wine in Central Italy (Lazio & Tuscany).

Italy was called Oenotria “land of disciplined vines” by the Greeks, because of its mild climate that was perfect for winemaking.

Demand for wine in Italy began to increase dramatically, in step with the population of Rome, in 300 BC.

During the Roman Empire, Italian wine was made by throwing ripe grapes into a huge, open vat, crushing them, and letting them ferment, resulting in sweet, syrupy, often fizzy wine.

The ancient Romans recognized that older wines stored in tightly closed containers tasted better and began storing wine in wooden barrels.

Demand for wine decreased during the fall of the Roman Empire, and Roman Catholic monks continued producing wine during the Dark Ages, until drinking wine became popular again during the Renaissance.

In 1716, the Grand Duke of Tuscany called for areas of Tuscany to be delimited because of the noteworthy quality of the wines from those specific areas.

Winemaking was good for a while.

Then came oidium in the 1840s, a powdery mildew that ravaged vines throughout Europe.

In an attempt to control oidium by resistant American vinestock, phylloxera, a vine louse, was introduced to Europe and began affecting wine production in the 1860s. By 1895, phylloxera had destroyed an estimated 525,000 acres of vineyards in Italy.

Italian winemakers gradually recovered from these vine diseases by grafting vines onto resistant American rootstock.

In an effort to recover from the economic devastation of World War II, many Italian winemakers focused on quantity rather than quality, producing insipid bulk wines.

The denomination of origin law was established in 1963 to improve wine quality and went into effect in 1966; this law established levels of wine quality, including DOC & DOCG.

In 1992, the Goria Law was passed to enforce the 1963 denomination of origin law.

European Union subsidies were granted to Italian winemakers to pull up lesser-quality vines and replace them with fewer, higher-quality varietals in an effort to reduce surpluses of low-quality wine in the EU.

Winemaking and wine quality has steadily improved throughout Italy.



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## The Wine Regions of Italy

Valle d'Aosta

Lombardy – Home of Franciacorta, a sparkling white

Trentino-Alto Adige

Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Piedmont – Home of Barolo & Barbaresco

Veneto – Home of Amarone, Prosecco, & Soave

Liguria

Emilia-Romagna – Home of Lambrusco

Tuscany – Home of Chianti Classico & Brunello di Montalcino

Umbria – Home of Sagrantino di Montefalco

Marches

Lazio – Home of Rome

Abruzzo – Home of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo

Molise

Campania – Home of Taurasi

Puglia – Home of the primitivo and negroamaro grapes

Basilicata – Home of Aglianico del Vulture

Calabria

Sicily – Home of Marsala & the nero d'avola grape

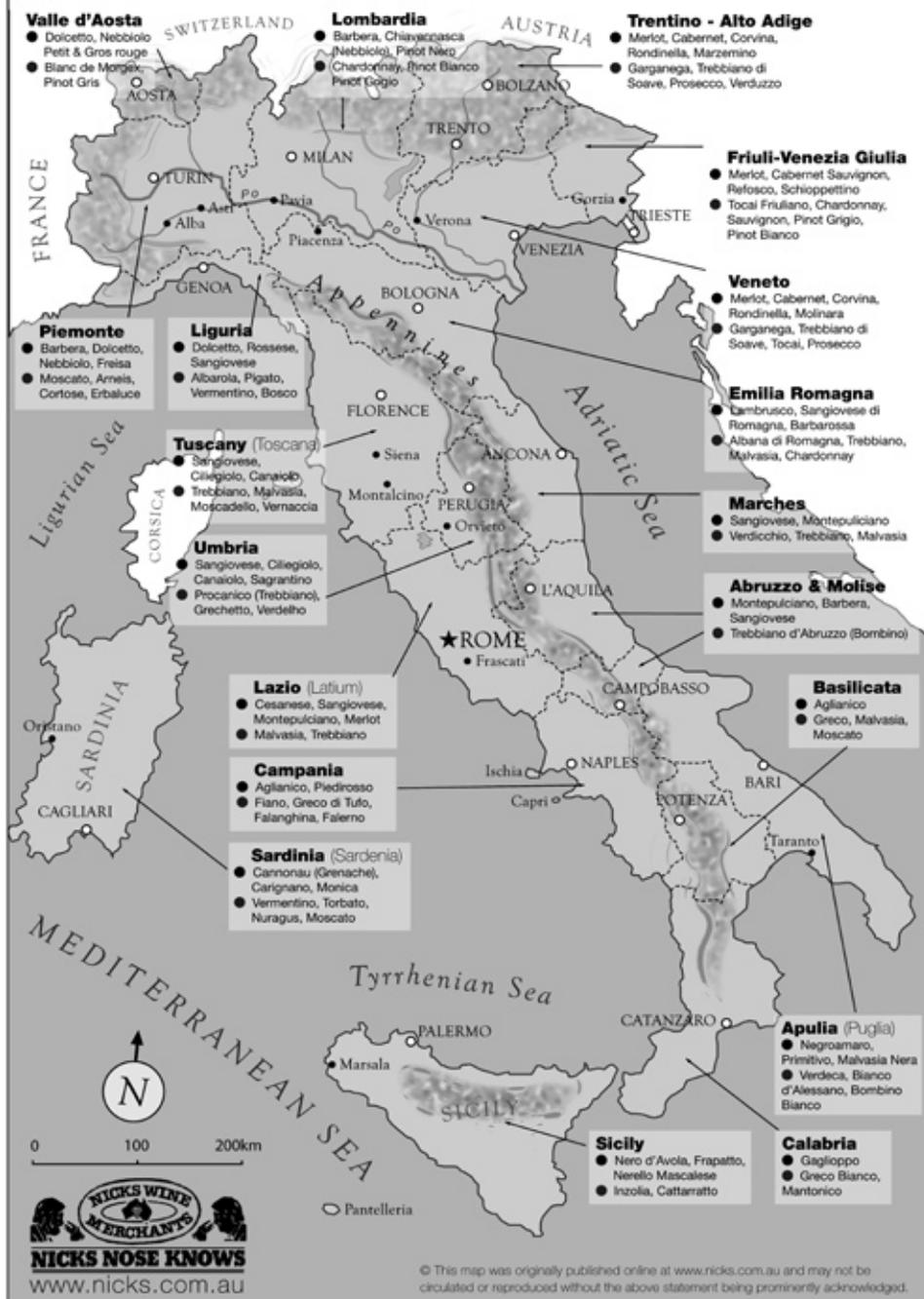
Sardinia – Home of the vermentino & cannonau grapes

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**Wine is made in every region of Italy; however, the most important fine-wine regions have historically been Tuscany and Piedmont.**

# THE WINE REGIONS OF ITALY ● REDS ● WHITES

○ Major City  
● Major Town



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## Categories of Italian Wine

### **Vino da Tavola (VdT)**

Table wine – Includes wine used for blending, making bulk wines, and distillation into industrial alcohol

### **Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT)**

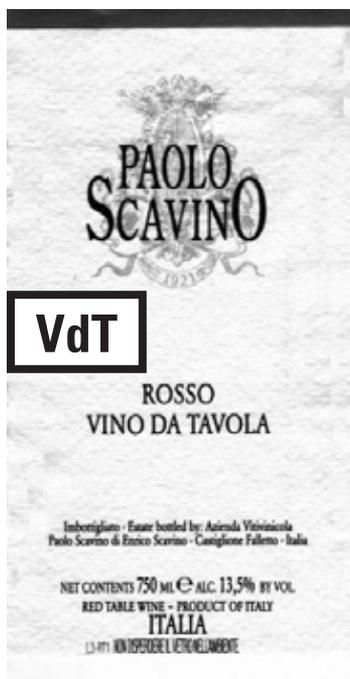
Wines that are produced within a DOC or DOCG and are typical of that geographic region but that do not meet the requirements for DOC or DOCG status

### **Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC)**

Wines made with approved grapes in approved vineyards following winemaking and aging requirements; these wines undergo chemical analysis to ensure compliance. There are more than 300 DOC wines.

### **Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG)**

Wines that have had DOC status for a minimum of 5 years and have a “reputation and commercial impact both at home and at the international level”; these wines undergo more stringent chemical analysis. There are 46 DOCG wines: 28 red & 18 white; 5 of the 46 DOCG wines are from Southern Italy.



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## Deciphering an Italian Wine Label

In general, buying a DOC or DOCG wine means it will be of good quality, but it does not mean that Italian wines without those designations are not good.

Wines like the so-called Super Tuscans do not meet the traditional standards of DOC or DOCG wines, but some are among the best-quality wines produced in Italy. They might have a designation IGT, or they might just say Vino da Tavola. The latter designation, however, could include the lowest-quality wine made in Italy, so it's best to know an Italian Vino da Tavola wine before you buy it. (The Cayman Island Journal, October 7, 2009)

The most important components of an Italian wine label are place and grape varietal. Knowing the unique grapes used in Italian wines and having a good geographic sense of Italy will get you through all but the most confusing wine labels. (lifeinitaly.com)

**Producer**

**GAJA**

**Vineyard Name**

SPERSS®

1998

**Vintage**

**Bottling Information**

**Quality Classification**

**Wine Region**

LANGHE

DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA

NEBBIOLO

**Grape/Varietal**

**Volume**

**Alcohol Content**

750 ml 14% vol

IMBOTTIGLIATO DA - BOTTLED BY  
RED WINE, PRODU

BARBESCO 1988

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## Basic Tasting Terminology

(Adapted from Oz Clarke's *Introduction to Wine*, 2003)

### Nose

The smell or aroma or bouquet (usually used to describe mature wines) of a wine.

### Sweetness

Its presence or absence is the first sensation when tasting wine, as sensors are on the tip of the tongue. Should be balanced by acidity to avoid a cloyingly sweet wine.

### Acidity

The characteristic that makes wine crisp or racy and refreshing; it makes your mouth water. You sense acidity on the sides of the tongue. Should be balanced by fruit, sweetness, or alcohol to prevent a too-tart wine.

### Tannin

The mouth-drying substance found in red wines coming from contact of the fermenting grape juice with skins, seeds, and barrel aging. Contributes to structure and texture of a wine. Should be balanced by fruit to make a palatable wine.

### Alcohol

The percentage varies from wine to wine, ranging on average from 8% to 15%. A higher level of alcohol imparts a roundness to the feel of wine in your mouth.

### Fruit

The flavor in wine coming from the grapes that doesn't taste like grapes. The fruit used to make the wine may impart flavors such as mint, raspberry, licorice, roses, plums, and fresh-cut grass, to name a few.

### Body

The weight of the wine in your mouth. Wines can be described as light-, medium-, or full-bodied.

### Length

The persistence (or lack thereof) of the wine flavors in your mouth after you've swallowed a wine.

### Balance

The harmony between the elements of wine: sweetness, acidity, tannin, alcohol, fruit, and body. A well-balanced wine tastes just right – like everything is in perfect proportion.

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## Steps to Tasting Wine

### 1. Look

Check color, hue, depth, clarity, brilliance

### 2. Swirl

### 3. Sniff

- Once shallow, at the top of the glass; swirl
- Once deeply, at the bottom of the glass; swirl
- Once more shallow, at the top of the glass
- What do you detect?

### 4. Taste (take ≈10 seconds; slosh it around – “chew” it)

Look for acidity, sweetness, tannin, mouthfeel, any flavors

### 5. Spit or swallow

### 6. Evaluate finish

How long does it last?



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## Key Italian Wine Varietals: Bianco (White)

### **Arneis**

A crisp and floral varietal from Piedmont, which has been grown there since the 15th century.

### **Fiano**

Grown on the southwest coast of Italy in Campania, this exotic grape makes luscious, full-bodied, floral whites marked by rich pear and honey-spice flavors.

### **Garganega**

The main grape varietal for wines labeled Soave, garganega makes a crisp, dry white wine with citrus and melon fruit. Soave is a very popular wine that hails from the Veneto in northeast Italy around the city of Verona.

### **Moscato**

Grown mainly in Piedmont, it is mainly used in the slightly sparkling (frizzante), semi-sweet Moscato d'Asti. Not to be confused with moscato giallo and moscato rosa, two Germanic varietals that are grown in Trentino-Alto Adige.

### **Pinot Bianco**

This pale-skinned cousin of pinot noir thrives mostly in the north of Italy, particularly in the Friuli and Alto Adige regions. Though more full-bodied than pinot grigio, it still makes light-bodied white wines, often with flavors recalling crisp pears and green apples.

### **Pinot Grigio**

A hugely successful commercial grape, its wines are characterized by crispness and cleanness. As a hugely mass-produced wine, it is usually delicate and mild, but in a good producer's hands, the wine can grow more full-bodied and complex.

### **Tocai Friuliano**

A varietal distantly related to sauvignon blanc, it yields the top wine of Friuli, full of peachiness and minerality. Currently, there is a bit of controversy regarding the name, as the EC has demanded it changed to avoid confusion with the tokay dessert wine from Hungary.

**Trebbiano**

Behind catarratto (made for industrial jug wine), this is the most widely planted white varietal in Italy. It is grown throughout the country, with a special focus on the wines from Abruzzo. Mostly, they are pale, easy drinking wines, but trebbiano from producers such as Valentini have been known to age for 15+ years, exhibiting floral aromas and a luscious texture.

**Verdicchio**

Confined to Italy's Marche region—and to only two DOCs within Marche, dei Castelli di Jesi and di Matelica—this white grape variety is known for a subtle delicacy in both its fragrance and flavor. Imagine fresh herbs followed by crisp, lemony citrus notes.

**Vermentino**

One of Italy's most compelling white grape varieties, vermentino is grown up and down Italy, but almost always by the coast (in Liguria, for instance, as well as in Tuscany and Sardinia). There, the cool climate seems to bring out its best qualities: fresh, focused acidity; savory, lightly herbal flavors; and a complex, minerally finish.

**Other major white varieties are:**

carricante, catarratto (for Marsala), coda di volpe, cortese, falanghina, grillo, inzolia, malvasia bianca, picolit, pigato, traminer, verduzzo, and vernaccia.

As far as non-native varieties, the Italians plant chardonnay, gewürztraminer (sometimes called traminer aromatico), riesling, petite arvine, and many others.

Adapted from "Italian Grapes from A to Z" ([www.foodandwine.com](http://www.foodandwine.com)) and "Key Italian Wine Varietals" ([Oliera.eu/en/Italian\\_wines.tpl](http://Oliera.eu/en/Italian_wines.tpl))

## **Key Italian Wine Varietals: Rosso (Red)**

### **Sangiovese**

Italy's claim to fame; the pride of Tuscany. Its wines are full of cherry fruit, earth, and cedar. It produces Chianti Classico, Rosso di Montalcino, Brunello di Montalcino, Rosso di Montepulciano, Montefalco Rosso, and many other wines.

### **Nebbiolo**

The most noble of Italy's varietals. The name (meaning "little fog") refers to the autumn fog that blankets most of Piedmont where it is grown, a condition the grape seems to enjoy. It is a somewhat difficult varietal to master, but produces the renowned Barolo and Barbaresco. The wines are known for their elegance and bouquet of wild mushroom, truffle, roses, and tar.

### **Montepulciano**

The grape of this name is not to be confused with the Tuscan town of Montepulciano; it is most widely planted on the opposite coast in Abruzzo. Its wines develop silky plum-like fruit, friendly acidity, and light tannin.

### **Barbera**

The most widely grown red wine grape of Piedmont and Southern Lombardy, most famously around the towns of Asti and Alba and Pavia. The wines of Barbera were once simply "what you drank while waiting for the Barolo to be ready." With a new generation of wine makers, this is no longer the case. The wine has bright cherry fruit, a very dark color, and a food-friendly acidity.

### **Corvina**

Along with the varietals rondinella and molinara, this is the principal grape which makes the famous wines of the Veneto: Valpolicella and Amarone. Valpolicella wine has dark cherry fruit and spice. After the grapes undergo passito (a drying process), the Amarone they yield is elegant, dark, and full of raisinated fruits. Some Amarones can age for 40+ years.

### **Nero d'Avola**

Nearly unheard of in the international market until recent years, this native varietal of Sicily is gaining attention for its robust, inky wines.

**Dolcetto**

A grape that grows alongside barbera and nebbiolo in Piedmont, its name means “little sweet one,” referring not to the taste of the wine but to the ease in which it grows and makes great wines, suitable for everyday drinking. Flavors of concord grape, wild blackberries, and herbs permeate the wine.

**Negroamaro**

The name literally means “black and bitter.” A widely planted grape with its concentration in the region of Puglia, it is the backbone of the acclaimed Salice Salentino: spicy, toasty, and full of dark red fruits.

**Aglianico**

Considered the “noble varietal of the south,” it is primarily grown in Campania and Basilicata. The name is derived from Hellenic, so it is considered a Greek transplant. Thick-skinned and spicy, the wines are both rustic and powerful.

**Sagrantino**

A native to Umbria, it is only planted on 250 hectares, but the wines are world-renowned. Inky purple, with rustic brooding fruit and heavily tannic, these wines can age for many years.

**Other major red varieties are:**

ciliegiolo, gaplioppo, lagrein, lambrusco, malvasia nera, monica, nerello mascalese, pignolo, primitivo, refosco, schiava, schioppettino, teroldego, & uva di troia.

“International” varietals such as merlot, cabernet sauvignon, syrah, and cabernet franc are also widely grown.

Adapted from “Italian Grapes from A to Z” ([www.foodandwine.com](http://www.foodandwine.com)) and “Key Italian Wine Varietals” ([Oliera.eu/en/Italian\\_wines.tpl](http://Oliera.eu/en/Italian_wines.tpl))

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## Fast Facts

Italy leads the world in wine production, vying with France each year for largest producer. One ton of grapes makes about 60 cases of wine, or 720 bottles. One bottle of wine contains about 2.8 pounds of grapes.

Italy produces about 17% of the world's wine.

There are more than 2000 grape varieties grown in Italy.

There are 20 wine-making regions in Italy. The country's terrain is vastly varied, and wine is made in every region of Italy.

There are 46 DOCG wines in Italy. DOCG represents the highest-quality ranking for Italian wines.

There are more than 300 DOC wines in Italy. DOC represents the second-highest-quality ranking for Italian wines.

Italy was not a unified country until 1861.

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## Fun Facts

The word "toast" started in ancient Rome, where a piece of toasted bread was dropped into wine before being tasted by the host to ensure the wine wasn't poisoned.

The Tuscan grape sangiovese is named after a Roman god and means "blood of Jove."

The first known reference to a specific vintage was made by Roman Historian Pliny the Elder about the 121 BC vintage.

An Italian study argues that women who drink two glasses of wine a day have better sex than those who don't drink at all.\*

\*Mondaini N et al. *J Sex Med.* 2009;6:2772-2777.