

## WHOLE ROASTED FISH WITH WILD FENNEL

BY GEORGEANNE BRENNAN

*The Mediterranean basin, like much of California, is home to swaths of wild fennel that grow along roadsides, dot the hills, and crowd the shores of the sea itself, so it's not surprising that a classic Mediterranean preparation of fresh fish involves wild fennel. In its purest version, a whole fish, its cavity stuffed with fennel fronds, is roasted or grilled atop a bed of fennel stalks, as it is here. The delicate fish, with its slight hint of the wild land, sparks each sip of the perfectly chilled Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi.*

2 whole branzino, sea bass, or  
snapper, about 1 pound each,  
gutted, heads and tails intact  
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Coarse sea salt  
Freshly ground black pepper

1 Meyer lemon  
4 sprigs fresh thyme  
4 8–10-inch wild fennel stalks and  
fronds, or substitute cultivated  
fennel tops, plus fronds for  
optional garnish

Preheat oven to 450° F.

Rinse fish inside and out and pat dry. Rub inside and out with olive oil. Generously season cavity and skin with salt and pepper. Cut 2 slices from lemon and tuck 1 slice into each cavity. Add 2 sprigs of thyme in the cavity, along with 1 fennel stalk and fronds, which will need to be folded over to fit.

Drizzle a rimmed baking sheet with olive oil and lay remaining fennel in the center. Place a prepared fish on each piece of fennel. The wild fennel will have thinner stalks and more fronds than the cultivated. If the cultivated stalks seem too thick, cut them in half lengthwise before placing the fish. Let prepared fish stand at room temperature for 30 minutes, or refrigerate for up to 2 hours before roasting.

To roast, place baking sheet with fish in the hot oven and roast, without turning, until skin is golden and flesh flakes easily when lifted at the thickest portion, about 18 to 20 minutes. Remove and let rest for 5 minutes.

To serve, fillet the fish. For the upper fillet, make a cut directly behind the head. With tongs or your fingers, lift the head and gently pull the spine in the direction of the tail. The fillet, along with the head and tail bone, will come free. Remove the head and bone and discard, along with the lemon slice. Remove any remaining herbs from the fillet and place it skin side down on a dinner plate. Repeat with the second fish. If desired, garnish each plate with a frond of fresh fennel and a slice of Meyer lemon. Serve immediately.

*Serves 4*

The James Beard award-winning cookbook author Georgeanne Brennan is also the author of the best-selling food memoir *A Pig in Provence*. She continues to write about food and cooking from her longtime homes in Provence and in Northern California, where she co-owns an aperitif wine bar. You can find more of her recipes at [www.georgeannebrennan.com](http://www.georgeannebrennan.com).



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# ADVENTURES

## 2021 VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI COLLELEVA

While many Americans are familiar with the western half of Italy, much of the country's eastern Adriatic coast—with the exception of Venice and Puglia—remains uncharted territory. The eastern regions' comparatively quiet reputation is, however, very fortunate for wine drinkers who prize great value. Housed in an old monastery half an hour from Italy's Adriatic coast in the region of Le Marche, Colleleva's cellar is the source of one of the country's greatest overachievers: this Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi. Facing the sea from the rolling foothills of the Apennines, where they are constantly refreshed by cooling winds from the Adriatic, Colleleva's Verdicchio vines are planted in an ideal terroir for balancing ripeness with fresh acidity. In order to preserve as much of the grape's intrinsically fresh and crisp qualities, Colleleva bottles the wine after just a few months in stainless steel. The resulting

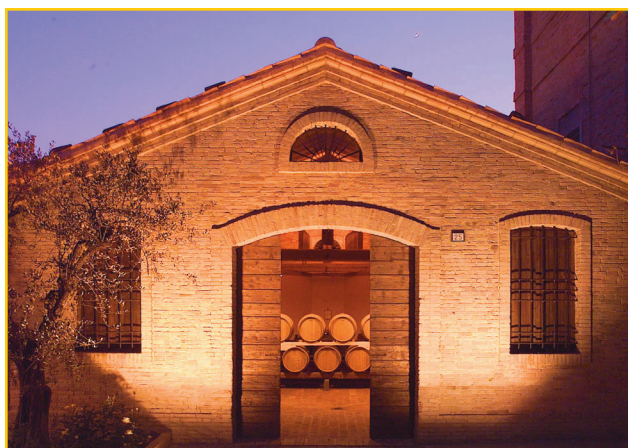


*bianco*, with its notes of lime, anise, and sea breeze, is a perfect match for all kinds of seafood dishes, especially Georgeanne Brennan's recipe for whole roasted fish with wild fennel.

—TOM WOLF

**\$16.00 per bottle**

**\$172.80 per case**



ABOVE An old monastery is perfect for the maturation and aging of the azienda's wines. © Colleleva

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## 2021 LACRIMA DI MORRO D'ALBA COLLELEVA

Once planted and beloved throughout Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, and Campania, among other regions, Lacrima eventually faded from much of Italy. Not because it wasn't delicious—it makes one of the most ambrosial reds you'll taste all year—but because many growers deemed it too complicated to cultivate. *Lacrima*, after all, means "tear" in Italian, a reference to the tear-like drops that often flow from the grape's delicate thin skin. The broken berries had a tendency to attract pests, which also couldn't resist Lacrima's delectable juice, so many farmers tore out their Lacrima in favor of less fragile grapes. Today, the only region where it has kept a devoted following is Le Marche, where it is mostly planted just north of Ancona in the DOC Lacrima di Morro d'Alba. Colleleva's rendition is an elegant, quaffable *rosso* filled with notes of blackberries, lavender, and graphite. Like the Verdicchio, this bottling can pair well with certain seafood dishes like tuna or trout, but it also offers a beautiful match for roast chicken and wild mushrooms on toast. —TOM WOLF

Pairs well with seared tuna, porchetta, and wild mushrooms on toast.

**\$25.00 per bottle**

**\$270.00 per case**

					
2021 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Colleleva	Verdicchio	30-year-old vines Sandy tuffo	Serve cold 48–52° F Do not decant	Lime, anise, sea breeze Textured, refreshing, joyous	Drink now
2021 Lacrima di Morro d'Alba Colleleva	Lacrima	Vines planted between 1980 and 1990 Clay	Serve cool 56–60° F Decant optional	Blackberries, lavender, graphite Ambrosial, lithe, delightfully aromatic	Drink now