

A vibrant, high-angle photograph of a narrow Venetian canal. The water is a clear, bright green. On the left, a multi-story brick building with dark green shutters and arched windows lines the canal. A gondola with a gondolier in a striped shirt and three passengers is in the foreground. The canal extends into the distance between more historic buildings under a clear blue sky.

ITALIAN
SUMMER
VACATION

JULY 2025

CHEVALIER

VIVA LA VACANZA!



ITALIAN SUMMER VACATION

On its surface, I find the hypothetical question *Where would you ideally spend your next vacation?* very easy to answer. Italy comes to mind immediately, but then if you asked, *Where in Italy?* I'd have to think about it a little longer. After all, every corner of the country seemingly has a case for why one should spend their R&R there. Would I opt for the mountainous beauty and world-class hiking trails of Alto Adige? Or would I go for some lounging along the gorgeous Ligurian coastline? Having spent a semester in Florence, I can't resist the draw of a place that served briefly as home. But southernmost Sicily also beckons with its exotic allure.

One of my otherwise trusty strategies when it comes to vacation planning—to prioritize great food and wine regions—also doesn't help very much because, similarly, Italy teems with interesting and delicious cuisine and wines everywhere you look. In the foothills of the Alps, Piedmont, with its stately Baroli, may be the country's most renowned wine region, but lesser-known regions, like Liguria, Veneto, and Alto Adige, are also home

to beautiful and distinctive wines. Not far from the French border and looking down on the Ligurian Sea, Punta Crena makes one of the most fun and refreshing fizzy whites you'll taste this summer. And just a few minutes from Lake Garda, Corte Gardoni makes a crisp, *aperitivo*-worthy *rosato* from a blend of the local Venetian grapes. And high up near the country's border with Austria, Michela Carlotto produces some of Italy's best Pinot Nero.

Back in the region I know better than any other—but which I always yearn to discover more—Elisa Sesti draws an exceptional amount of soul and elegance from her Tuscan vines. And finally, just beyond the toe of the Italian boot, Carmelo Vecchio and Rosa La Guzza produce unique wines, like their Donna Bianca, from the ancient native varieties that run down the slopes of Mount Etna. The food, wine, architecture, and landscape here essentially make Sicily a whole other planet from the mainland, worthy of its own two weeks of vacation. —TOM WOLF



2023 LUMASSINA FRIZZANTE

◆ PUNTA CRENA \$26

THIS IS THE WINE TYPICALLY SERVED to accompany *antipasti* as guests gather at Punta Crena, a winery overlooking the Mediterranean on the northern Italian coast. Small platters of marinated anchovies, salt-cured anchovies topped with butter, frittata of local herbs, oily focaccia, and cured olives from the family's very own thousand-year-old Taggiasca olive trees make their way around the table as this frizzante charmer from the indigenous Lumassina grape flows freely. Few things are quite as uplifting as this ethereal, floral, lemony quaffer.



2024 CHIARETTO DI BARDOLINO "NICHESOLE"

◆ CORTE GARDONI \$17

IT'S *APERITIVO* HOUR and you're sitting under the shade of a tree on the eastern bank of Lake Garda, looking out onto dozens of sailboats gliding along, seemingly in no hurry to be anywhere. Someone offers you a spritz, but *no, grazie*—you're more in the mood for a glass of exquisite rosé. They come back with a frosty carafe of a pale pink nectar. You pour yourself a glass, take a sip, and ask, "Where's this from?" You're surprised to hear the reply: "Just down the road." This region may not bear the renown of Tuscany, Piedmont, and Sicily, but if it is famous for anything—other than the vistas—it is for the dry rosé called Chiaretto.

This one comes from the Piccolis, who have owned vineyards in these parts for more than four centuries. The family's experience and the underrated excellence of this terroir of glacial moraine—south of the lake and at the western limit of the Veneto region—explain why this bottle offers such outstanding character and class. With notes of white peach, melon, and grapefruit, this Chiaretto is the quintessential Italian *rosato* for a summer evening *al fresco* with a heaping plate of fresh, sauce-laden pasta.



2020 ALTO ADIGE PINOT NERO “FILARI DI MAZZON”

◆ FERRUCCIO CARLOTTO \$48

ALTO ADIGE SITS LIKE A CROWN along Italy’s northernmost border. This far-flung region is an epic Alpine paradise undulating between snowcapped peaks, mossy forests, wildflower-blanketed meadows, and pristine mirrored lakes. Part of Austria until just over one hundred years ago, Alto Adige was annexed by Italy at the end of World War I. The resulting province was shaped long ago by German-Austrian influence, and it is still full of rich contrasts in customs, language, and cuisine. Sleepy villages of wooden chalet-style houses are built around steeped medieval churches. You’re likely to be greeted with a simple *hallo* rather than a sing-song *buongiorno!* While pasta remains an omnipresent staple (like their *strangolapreti*, or “priest stranglers,” a gnocchi-like bread and spinach dumpling), other local delicacies include goulash, speck, and apple strudel.

Just fifteen kilometers south of Bolzano, in the small commune of Ora (or Auer in German, as it’s known by the locals) sits the humble cellar of Weingut Carlotto. Father-daughter duo Ferruccio and Michela Carlotto have been making wine here together for more than twenty years, farming five hectares planted to Pinot Nero, Lagrein, and Schiava. Pinot Nero makes up two-thirds of their vineyard land, and for good reason. The esteemed cru of Mazzon in which they work is renowned as the birthplace for Italy’s finest expression of Pinot Noir, providing the ultimate terroir and growing conditions for the grape. The soil is a rich and complex mixture of sand, clay, limestone, and chalk; its high-altitude, west-facing exposition means vines benefit from warm afternoon sun; strong southerly winds blow up from Lake Garda to keep the grapes dry and healthy. Only a dozen or so producers farm Pinot Noir on this precious, perfect hillside, and to work a tiny piece of it is an enormous prize.



Of the three wines she crafts, Michela considers the Pinot Noir to be the most arduous—and to possess the most potential for glory. In the glass, note the shade of pale ruby, and the tart red currant, worn leather, and forest floor aromatics; the vivid fruit and earthiness lead to a palate with silky tannins, gentle spice, and a subtle bittersweet quality like dark chocolate and black cherries. Emanating an exquisite Italian Alpine characterfulness that could come from nowhere else in the world, the glass offers tangible energy and freshness, as well as a cooling minerality like a mountain spring. This is exquisite Pinot Noir—one of Italy’s most beguiling hidden gems.

2022 TERRE SICILIANE ROSSO “DONNA BIANCA”

◆ VIGNETI VECCHIO \$48

CONTRADA DONNA BIANCA (named for the snowcapped “lady” Etna, whose summit towers overhead) is a vineyard situated at 820 meters above sea level in the commune of Randazzo. Planted in 1950, the vines here are primarily own-rooted, struggling through volcanic debris and bold lava ridges protruding from Earth’s crust to produce the most delicate, sensual *rosso* in the Vigneti Vecchio lineup. The surprising presence of Grenache in the blend—historic on certain parts of Etna—and a smattering of white grapes co-planted with the reds contribute to the silky texture and intoxicating floral aromatics you’ll find in this bottling. It is a volcanic infusion of exceptional finesse.

2023 ROSSO DI MONTALCINO ◆ SESTI \$42

FEW WINERIES CAN CLAIM to grow vines on a certified UNESCO archaeological site, but Sesti is one of them. The bucolic grounds here at the southern border of Montalcino are awe-inspiring, with steep cliffs, a dense forest, and the freshness of a cooling breeze from the sea. Elisa Sesti likes to say that Sangiovese is a primadonna variety that requires pampering and the right conditions to thrive. Luckily, her vines live a good life. Her Rosso di Montalcino, with its seductive and mood-enhancing perfume, is like a delicious elixir of black cherry, bitter herbs, and fragrant violet.

2017 BAROLO BUSSIA RISERVA “CASCINA DARDI”

◆ ALESSANDRO E GIAN NATALE FANTINO \$76

LOCATION IS CRUCIAL IN THE LANGHE, as vineyard site is the first and foremost determinant to a grower’s ability to produce fine Barolo. Brothers Alessandro and Gian Natale Fantino are blessed in this respect: proud proprietors of several hectares in a south-facing section of Monforte d’Alba’s fabled Bussia cru known as Dardi, named for the family’s old farmhouse, they have the terroir essentials to craft a grandiose Nebbiolo for the ages.

And yet, this is only part of the equation. Traditional treatment in the cellar—fermentation with native yeast and long aging in Slavonian oak casks, or *botti grandi*—ensures the beautiful fruit from Dardi is not altered or masked. Minimizing filtration and added sulfur at bottling preserves a velvetiness that makes the wines texturally seductive from release and through the years.



<p>2023 Lumassina Frizzante <i>Punta Crena</i> LIGURIA</p>	<p>Lumassina</p>	<p>Vines planted in 1980, 1999 Silt</p>	<p>Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52°F</p>	<p>Stone fruit, lemongrass, seashells Crisp, saline, zesty</p>	<p>Drink now</p>
<p>2024 Chiaretto di Bardolino “Nichesole” <i>Corte Gardoni</i> VENETO</p>	<p>50% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, 25% Molinara, Barbera, and Sangiovese</p>	<p>15- to 50-year-old vines Moraine</p>	<p>Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52°F</p>	<p>Nectarine, watermelon, rose petal Delicate, bright, aromatic</p>	<p>Drink now</p>
<p>2020 Alto Adige Pinot Nero “Filari di Mazzon” <i>Ferruccio Carlotto</i> ALTO ADIGE</p>	<p>Pinot Nero</p>	<p>Vines planted in 2000, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015 Sand, clay, chalk, limestone</p>	<p>Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60°F</p>	<p>Orange peel, black cherry, cocoa, peppercorn Weightless, refined, age-worthy</p>	<p>Drink now through 2030</p>
<p>2022 Terre Siciliane Rosso “Donna Bianca” <i>Vigneti Vecchio</i> SICILY</p>	<p>50% Nerello Mascalese, 20% Nerello Cappuccio, 20% Alicante, 10% indigenous white grapes</p>	<p>Vines planted in 1950 Volcanic</p>	<p>Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60°F</p>	<p>Currant, lavender, eucalyptus Fresh, herbal, velvety tannin</p>	<p>Drink now through 2032</p>
<p>2023 Rosso di Montalcino <i>Sesti</i> TUSCANY</p>	<p>Sangiovese</p>	<p>15-year-old vines Oceanic sediment</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62°F</p>	<p>Red berries, mint, tea leaves, umami Sophisticated, versatile, thirst-quenching</p>	<p>Drink now through 2032</p>
<p>2017 Barolo Bussia Riserva “Cascina Dardi” <i>Alessandro e Gian Natale Fantino</i> PIEDMONT</p>	<p>Nebbiolo</p>	<p>60-year-old vines Sandy clay</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62°F Decant recommended</p>	<p>Plum, peony, iron, spice Structural, rich, seductive</p>	<p>Drink now through 2035</p>

front cover: Venice canals. © ANDREW MAJOR
inner panel, left: Polignano a Mare. © GAIL SKOFF
inner panel, right: Aperitivo hour in Puglia. © GAIL SKOFF
far left, top: Paolo Ruffino of Punta Crena. © JIMMY HAYES
far left, bottom: Piccoli family of Corte Gardoni. © GAIL SKOFF

near left: Michela Carlotto. © GAIL SKOFF
back cover, top: Mount Etna. © VIGNETI VECCHIO
back cover, middle: Monforte d’Alba. © MADISON H. BROWN
back cover, bottom: Lake Garda. © GAIL SKOFF

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SICILY & MOUNT ETNA according to Rosa La Guzza of Vigneti Vecchio

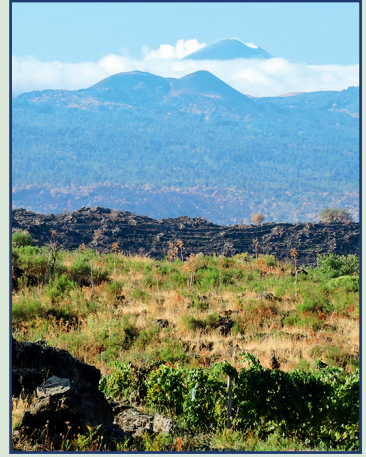
Where to eat, drink, & sleep

- Trattoria Linguagrossa {LINGUAGLOSSA}: *In the summer, they set up a wonderful outdoor area in the main square of the town. Excellent seafood and meat cuisine with obsessive attention to high-quality ingredients.*

Exploring

A stone's throw away—I definitely recommend a visit to the Etna Park and the Alcantara River Park, with its impressive gorges (canyons dug by the river inside pre-historic lava flows) and adventures ranging from trekking to quad excursions, or take a leisurely donkey ride.

- Etna Park {NICOLOSI}
- Alcantara River Park {FRANCAVILLA DI SICILIA}
- Etna Donkey Trekking {LINGUAGLOSSA}
- Walking tour with Alessandro Mertoli



BAROLO according to Alessandro Fantino of A. & G. Fantino

Where to eat, drink, & sleep

- La Locanda del Nocciolo {NOVELLO}:
A cozy farmstay hotel suitable for families, with a restaurant and swimming pool. Clean and equipped with every comfort!
- Ristorante Repubblica di Perno {MONFORTE D'ALBA}:
This tiny restaurant makes traditional, yet refined cuisine. Reservations required, very few seats. Delicious food.

VENETO according to Andrea Piccoli of Corte Gardoni

Where to eat, drink, & sleep

- La Dispensa di Castellaro {VALEGGIO SUL MINCIO}:
An ancient and historic grocery store where, for some years, they have been making traditional dishes with top-quality, carefully sourced ingredients.
- Ristorante e Locanda alla Fassa {CASTELLETTO}:
A beautiful place on the lake with simple but excellent cuisine.
- La Taverna di via Stella {VERONA}:
Typical Veronese fare, and very good.
- Il Ridotto {VENICE}: *Delicious cuisine just a few meters from Piazza San Marco. The chef is passionate about wild herbs and uses them often in the kitchen.*
- Osteria Bancogiro {VENICE}: *Just before the Rialto Bridge, near the fish market, this is an enchanting place where quality and prices are superb.*

