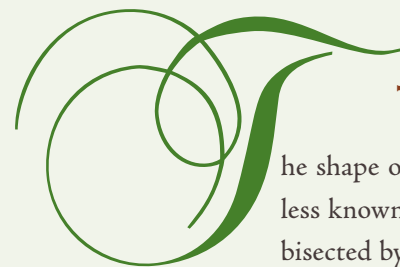


JANUARY 2024

CHEVALIER

THE APENNINES





THE APENNINES

he shape of Italy famously resembles a boot, but what is less known is that nearly the entire length of this boot is bisected by an imposing mountain range, the Apennines.

Extending from the toe to the top western edge, these mountains are home to some of the country's most rugged terrains, biodiverse ecosystems, and extraordinary wildlife, including certain species of gray wolves and brown bears now rarely found in neighboring countries.

The foothills that descend from the Apennines are also home to some of Italy's greatest wine regions. Campania, for instance, may be most famous for the Amalfi coast, but it covers a large swath of inland territory as well, much of it among the Apennines. In this more mountainous corner of Campania, amid hazelnut groves and dense, lush woodland, Terre del Vescovo farms four hectares of Aglianico. At up to 600 meters above sea level on soils of clay and limestone, Terre del Vescovo's vines benefit from significant diurnal temperature shifts crucial to developing complex, well-defined flavors and preserving freshness at this southerly latitude. Thanks to this slow maturation, the late-ripening Aglianico is harvested in November, sometimes under a blanket of snow.

Meanwhile, the northernmost producer of the six here, Fattoria Moretto, lies on the other side of the Apennines, where the mountains veer west, eventually meeting the Ligurian Alps. The hills here, in the heart of Emilia-Romagna, are gentler and lower-elevation, no doubt a crucial factor in the establishment and bustling history of nearby Bologna. But despite being closer to sea level and less dramatically steep, they can produce incredible wines, like Moretto's Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro "Monovitigno," which comes from a single vineyard that features a *selection massale* of the family's oldest parcel, originally planted in 1969. If Lambrusco had *grands crus*, this undoubtedly would be one.

Across the six bottles in this month's Club Chevalier, you'll discover the charm, complexity, and elegance of wines made in the lower slopes and foothills of the Apennines. —TOM WOLF

2020 VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI CLASSICO RISERVA

“PASSOLENTO” ♦ LA MARCA DI SAN MICHELE \$39

THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF CUPRAMONTANA, perched high in the hills of Italy's Le Marche, within view of the Adriatic Sea to the east and the Apennine Mountains to the west, is the birthplace of this young, exciting estate. Founded by the children of an old winemaking family who struck out independently to create organic wines of great character and integrity, La Marca is the alliance of this region's strong and proud history with the best possible vision for its future. In the right hands, the Verdicchio grape is capable of making one of Italy's finest white wines—the hands of this family have just the right touch.



Passolento takes its time throughout every stage of the production process, allowing it to develop the layered textures that white Burgundy lovers chase after. Picked carefully, fermented slowly with wild yeasts (including full malolactic fermentation), aged in large Slavonian oak *botti*, and bottled unfiltered, Passolento deserves to be decanted and savored with fine cuisine, and it has development potential in your cellar.

2022 LAMBRUSCO GRASPAROSSA DI CASTELVETRO “MONOVITIGNO”

♦ FATTORIA MORETTO \$29

OF THE MANY REGIONS that could reasonably be called Italy's culinary capital, Emilia-Romagna has perhaps the greatest claim to the throne. Home to *ragù* (Bolognese), Parmigiano-Reggiano, tortellini, balsamic vinegar, and much, much more, the area that lies north of Tuscany is now also making its case to be the capital of Italy's happiest wine: Lambrusco. At Fattoria Moretto, the Altariva family fashions organic, fully dry, fizzy, dark red wines from the Lambrusco Grasparossa grape, among the top class of Lambrusco varieties and the only one cultivated on the hillsides (as opposed to the flatlands) of Emilia. In this Monovitigno—a single-vineyard, single-variety cuvée—the frothy exuberance of great Lambrusco is enhanced by a chalky tannic structure. Tasting it, you feel as though the grapes were just pressed. Incredibly fresh, with aromatics that soar out of the glass, this may be the cheeriest wine you've ever tasted. It is equally well suited to your holiday table and to your patio on a warm evening. Serve chilled!

2022 LACRIMA DI MORRO D'ALBA ♦ COLLELEVA \$25

IF EVER A WINE could be described as a beacon of pure joy, it might just be the rare Lacrima di Morro d'Alba from Le Marche, near central Italy's Adriatic coast. This dry red's ambrosial perfume of lavender, roses, and tooth-staining wild berries is completely intoxicating, while its lithe, juicy freshness makes imbibing feel like a divine privilege.

Made from the Lacrima grape—presumably named for the teardrop-like shape of its berries—in the gentle hills around the town of Morro d'Alba, near Ancona, this Le Marche specialty nearly went extinct before being revived by a handful of vigneroni in the 1980s. Lucky for us, they salvaged this gem of a variety, which reaches an aromatic expression that, next to any other red wine, feels like stepping into technicolor for the first time: you'll gaze in awe at brilliant flowers and succulent fruits bursting with sweet nectar.

The wizard behind this is Stefano Antonucci, also the author of our crisp bargain Verdicchio. Grown where the Adriatic meets the Apennines, his Lacrima is equally befitting for delicacies of the sea or land. But served chilled, on a sunny day, this luminous red will refresh and enliven regardless of what accompanies it.

2016 IRPINIA CAMPI TAURASINI "RE'NA VOTA"

♦ TERRE DEL VESCOVO \$29

CAMPI TAURASINI IS an Aglianico appellation with less stringent aging requirements than Taurasi—what Rosso di Montalcino is to Brunello. The vineyards high in the sparsely populated mountain villages of Irpinia, east of Naples, produce red wines that rank among Italy's most intense and austere. This example—from Montemarano, one of the top *crus* for Aglianico in Campania—has been somewhat tamed through seven years of aging, first in large cask and then in bottle. Today the tannin is sleek and chalky, providing a firm backbone and racy structure. Rustic in the best sense, this biting red demands similarly characterful fare. Try it with aged sheep's milk cheeses, hearty stews, or a thick, dry-aged ribeye seasoned simply and singed by woodsmoke.



2019 VINO ROSSO “TORRE-KALENA” ♦ STEIGER-KALENA \$58

AFTER YEARS OF LIVING ABROAD, Giulio Steiger and his wife, Margarita, settled in Casacalenda, a mountain commune in the Molise region, determined to create high-quality wines in Giulio’s native land. From 2015 to 2018, they planted twelve hectares of the region’s typical grape varieties—Montepulciano, Aglianico, and the native Tintilia—on west-facing slopes of limestone, clay, and sand. With a climate influenced by both the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea, along with the moderating effect of nearby Lake Guardialfiera, this picturesque area has all the makings of a great wine terroir. Recognizing this potential, Giulio and Margarita built their *azienda* from the ground up, meticulously planning each step and refusing to take any shortcuts.



Their Steiger-Kalena is a red starring mainly Montepulciano aged patiently in large casks. Deep, bold, and concentrated, it nonetheless emanates an austere elegance, providing stately black fruit and bitter cocoa suggestions over dense, yet perfectly integrated tannins. This powerful southern red from Italy’s least-known region will warm your bones alongside your heartiest winter dishes.

2019 TOSCANA ROSSO ♦ CUNA DI FEDERICO STADERINI \$70

UNLIKE TUSCANY’S MOST REPUTED vineyard lands—Chianti and Montalcino—which sit south of the Arno River and Florence, Cuna is situated east of Dante’s beloved river and closer to the Italian peninsula’s eastern shore than to its western one. In recent years, this mountainous, high-elevation stretch has been more olive oil territory than wine territory, but Federico Staderini is a keen student of history. He knows that long before the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, and the Risorgimento, the Etruscans made storied wine in the area, giving Federico the idea to plant vines. As the enologist at famed Poggio di Sotto in Montalcino, Federico very easily could have been content to rest on his laurels. Thankfully for us, he started this separate domaine, cultivating Pinot Nero and crafting a gorgeous, singular red from the unlikely eastern Tuscan border. Floral and sunny—without being overripe—this Pinot Nero is fresh, complex, and extroverted. Tannin gives it structure, but the tannin is incredibly soft, primarily due to Federico’s insistence on crushing the grapes with his feet (instead of by machine) and bottling the wine unfiltered, preserving the wine’s juiciness and long finish.



2020 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Riserva “Passolento” <i>La Marca di San Michele</i> LE MARCHE	Verdicchio	Vines planted in 2001 Limestone, clay	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Decant recommended	Pine nuts, hay, spring flowers Textural, balanced, stony	Drink now through 2033
2022 Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro “Monovitigno” <i>Fattoria Moretto</i> EMILIA-ROMAGNA	Lambrusco Grasparossa	42-year-old vines Clay, silt	Serve <i>cool</i> 54–58° F Do not decant	Crushed raspberries, strawberries, cranberries Youthful, vibrant, versatile	Drink now
2022 Lacrima di Morro d’Alba <i>Colleleva</i> LE MARCHE	Lacrima	Vines planted in 1980–1990 Clay	Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional	Red currant, rose petal, violet, black pepper Juicy, perfumy, easy-drinking	Drink now
2016 Irpinia Campi Taurasini “Re’Na Vota” <i>Terre del Vescovo</i> CAMPANIA	Aglianico	Vines planted in 1952 Clay, limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Blackberry, sour plum, violet, leather Sumptuous, polished, inky, powerful	Drink now through 2030
2019 Vino Rosso “Torre-Kalena” <i>Steiger-Kalena</i> MOLISE	90% Montepulciano, 7% Aglianico, 3% Tintilia	Vines planted in 2016 Clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	Bitter cocoa, espresso, black fruit Deep, stately, dense	Drink now through 2033
2019 Toscana Rosso <i>Cuna di Federico Staderini</i> TUSCANY	Pinot Nero	Vines planted in 2004 Sand, clay	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant recommended	Plum, sour cherry, Mediterranean herbs Velvety, spicy, rich, complex	Drink now through 2035

front cover: Le Marche. © ANTHONY LYNCH

inner panel: Campania. © GAIL SKOFF

far left: Winemaker Alessandro Bonci. © MICHELE PIAMBIANCHI

middle: © DIXON BROOKE

near left: Giulio and Margarita Steiger. © STEIGER-KALENA

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FATTORIA MORETTO

These vineyards are located on gentle slopes in Castelvetro, a small town near Emilia-Romagna's culinary centers of Modena and Bologna, where clay, limestone, and silt soils give fresh, mineral wines. The Altarivas choose to highlight the local grape Lambrusco Grasparossa by vinifying it alone, which results in an intense, terroir-driven, bone-dry Lambrusco with a nose serious enough for even the most knowledgeable wine connoisseur.

CUNA

To visit Cuna from the south, take the small, two-lane road that winds its way north from Arezzo through towns you've probably never heard of—Rassina, Bibbiena, Poppi. Finally, you'll reach your destination: a forgotten limestone terroir high in the hills of eastern Tuscany, known to the Etruscans long ago.

COLLELEVA

The vineyards of Colleleva (*colle* means "hill," and *si leva* means "rises") lie on the heights of Le Marche, about halfway between the Apennines and the Adriatic coast. The combination of eastern sun exposure and cooling winds from the sea provides an optimal microclimate for balancing ripeness with fresh acidity in the grapes.

STEIGER-KALENA

Perhaps Italy's least-known region, Molise has a small wine culture still largely unknown beyond its borders. This mountainous enclave tucked between Abruzzo and Puglia is home to traditions of its own, and its undulating, sunbaked terrain offers enormous potential for fine wine. With a climate influenced by both the Apennines and the sea, this picturesque area has all the makings of a great wine terroir.

TERRE DEL VESCOVO

Deep in Campania's interior, amid hazelnut groves and dense, lush woodland, vineyard plots dot the rolling countryside. Here, small-scale farmers—proud custodians of this land—uphold centuries of a tradition shared with the Greeks, Romans, and countless others. Home to what has been dubbed "the Barolo of the South," the green haven known as Irpinia features the noble Aglianico grape at its grandest.

ITALIA

Ancona

LA MARCA DI SAN MICHELE

Cupramontana is the historical birthplace of Verdicchio production in Le Marche—the region's first vineyards were registered in the land office here in 1471. La Marca's vineyards are planted on a 12-million-year-old former limestone seabed, on slopes that climb the Apennine foothills facing east toward the Adriatic.

▲ Corno

▲ Amaro

Rome

Naples

Vesuvius

▲ Pollino

SICILY

▲ Etna

Ligurian Sea

Tyrrhenian Sea

Adriatic Sea

Ionian Sea

SARDINIA