

NOVEMBER 2024

CHEVALIER

CORSICA





CORSICA

For all the regions with which Kermit has become closely associated after more than five decades in business, Corsica might, surprisingly, be the one where we work with the greatest concentration of “stars” today. And yet, as rich as our Corsican selection has become, Kermit almost came up empty on his first scouting trip to the island. After his first visit in 1980, he wrote: *I remember looking down from the airplane window seeing alpine forest and lakes and thinking, uh oh, I got on the wrong plane. Then suddenly I was looking down into the beautiful waters of the Mediterranean. I was with Jean-Marie Peyraud from Domaine Tempier. His father helped research and define the wine appellations of Corsica back in the sixties, so we arrived armed with Lucien Peyraud’s leads.*

It was work, dangerous, unsatisfying work. Dirt roads were carved into mountain sides, and there were no barriers between the car and a long plummeting dunk in the ocean. Wine after wine was uninspiring plonk, most of them cooked before they could be put into bottle. Then, our final day, our last, late-at-night appointment, we poked

our tired beaks into glasses of, of all things, a white wine. Jean-Marie and I looked up at each other, eyes sparkling—we knew we’d found a rare gem.

I sometimes wonder what it would have meant for Kermit’s ensuing devotion to the island’s wines if he’d come back without tasting that gem. Fortunately, he did, and in the decades since, we’ve discovered many more gems from every corner of the island.

At the base of the island’s northern peninsula, Yves Leccia and Antoine-Marie Arena have mastered Biancu Gentile. One of the first to replant this nearly lost variety, Yves now blends his with Vermentinu, producing an irresistible *blanc* full of sun-ripened fruit and sea-mist salinity. Antoine-Marie, meanwhile, leaves his unblended, the result of which is a slightly exotic and herbal white wine that tastes like nothing from the mainland. At Domaine Giacometti, Simon Giacometti magically bends the hot and arid conditions of the Agriates Desert into a bright and lively red made entirely from Sciaccarellu. This might be as close as you get on the island to the spirit of the Loire or Beaujolais.

Slightly inland, you encounter entirely different landscapes and conditions from the coast, just miles away. At Domaine Maestracci, surrounded on several sides by mountains, you find a more rugged and remote sliver of the island, which produces a relatively meaty, full-blooded *rouge*.

Finally, as you head south, you reach Domaine Abbattucci and, at Corsica’s southern tip, Clos Canarelli. Jean-Charles Abbattucci is a hero throughout Corsica and France for his family’s work to preserve and promote the island’s indigenous grapes and turn them into extraordinary wines. Named for his daughter, his Faustine cuvée is an exquisite rendition of Sciaccarellu—bright, tart, and remarkably food-friendly. Similarly, Yves Canarelli is a revered trailblazer who makes one of the greatest rosés, not just in Corsica, but in all of France. Showcasing extraordinary finesse and versatility at table with bounty from land or sea, this blend of Sciaccarellu, Niellucciu, and Grenache epitomizes the slightly exotic, lively, and utterly unique nature of Corsica’s best wines. —TOM WOLF



2023 CORSE FIGARI ROSÉ ♦ CLOS CANARELLI \$45

CLOS CANARELLI IS a small patchwork of the family's vineyards around the village of Tarrabucetta, within the appellation of Figari on the southern tip of Corsica. Figari has a Wild West feel to it—the mountains of the north give way here to hot and dry foothills and prairies, closer to its neighbor Sardinia in feel than to the rest of Corsica. You half expect tumbleweeds to blow over the small roads that cross the empty expanses in this region, where small, shuttered-up, nearly ghost towns dot the landscape.

Decomposed granite dominates the soil, and fierce, hot winds blowing up from Africa carrying sand and salt relentlessly sweep the land. It's a tough place to grow grapes—or much of anything, for that matter. Yves Canarelli, who owns and runs the domaine, introduced biodynamic farming to the region and over several years of trial and error has successfully adapted it to his land. Never before have vines in such a hot, arid, windswept area looked so lush and content.

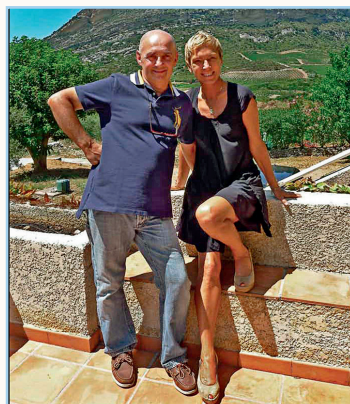
Through nothing but word of mouth, a following and fervor has grown around Yves's wines, making them the rarest and hardest to find in Corsica. Some say his Sciaccarellu-based rosé is not only the best rosé there is from Corsica, but the best all of France has to offer. Others in the press have named him “Le Roi du Vermentinu,” while many have fallen for his Niellucciu-based red, with its ethereal, airy, smoke-filled nose, and intense, voluminous black fruit. What all agree on is the wines have focus, purity, and vibrancy, while never being flashy or showy.



2023 ÎLE DE BEAUTÉ *BLANC* “YL”

♦ YVES LECCIA \$37

YVES LECCIA BLENDS Biancu Gentile with Vermentinu for the domaine's entry-level white, an absolutely lip-smacking, thirst-quenching creation that perfectly summarizes the appeal of island wines. Sun-ripened fruit, sea-mist salinity, and an alluring note of fresh herbs bring Leccia's stunning Mediterranean vineyards straight to your glass.



2023 VIN DE FRANCE *BLANC* “B.G.”

◆ ANTOINE-MARIE ARENA \$54

ANTOINE ARENA SPEARHEADED the resurrection of indigenous Bianco Gentile back in the '90s. Today, his son Antoine-Marie is leading the way on

its path to the pantheon of noble grapes, now that the vines are a bit older and the domaine has more experience under its belt with this nearly lost variety. In the glass, you'll find there is something exotic here, something herbal, something quite serious with great tension. His striking wines, which leave no doubt the Arena legacy will live on through Antoine-Marie, represent the best that Corsica's terroir has to offer.



2023 VIN DE FRANCE *ROUGE* “SEMPRE CUNTENTU”

◆ DOMAINE GIACOMETTI \$37

IN AN ARID, rugged offshoot of the Patrimonio appellation known as the Désert des Agriates, the Giacometti family creates wines that reflect the rustic nature of the land without sacrificing approachability or generous, juicy fruit. The perfume of this Sciacarellu leaps out of the glass with such exuberance that it can barely be contained, flamboyantly mimicking the vivid scent of fresh-pressed berries, as if a fistful of ripe summer fruit had been smooshed against a hot stone. The name is Corsican for “always happy,” and you'll understand exactly why immediately upon pulling the cork.



2023 VIN DE FRANCE *ROUGE* “FAUSTINE”

◆ DOMAINE COMTE ABBATUCCI \$44

JEAN-CHARLES ABBATUCCI FARMS the rugged, windswept granite slopes of southern Corsica, applying biodynamic and other experimental farming practices to Corsican grape varieties like Sciaccarellu, Barbarossa, and Carcajolu Neru. His Faustine *rouge*—named for his daughter—is probably the best introduction to his lineup of unique, world-class wines. It is made from Sciaccarellu, a grape whose name in Corsican refers to the way the berries, when ripe, crunch under one’s teeth. You feel a similar sensation while sipping on the crushed, fermented result of those same berries: this vibrant, resinous *rouge* is reminiscent of succulent, freshly harvested red berries and pomegranate seeds. Its freshness and light hue belie its impressive structure and density. Have you ever tasted another wine like this? Corsicans love goat meat, and Faustine would be a perfect match for goat chops.



2018 CORSE CALVI *ROUGE* “E PROVE”

◆ DOMAINE MAESTRACCI \$27

JUST INLAND FROM the lovely port town of Calvi, vines cover vast granite expanses in the shadow of the towering Monte Grosso. This interplay of maritime and mountain influences provides cool nights to contrast with the hot days in Corsica’s dry and windy hills—perfect conditions for growing concentrated grapes saturated with flavor. On the E Prove plateau, Camille-Anaïs Raoust of Domaine Maestracci farms Niellucciu, Grenache, Sciaccarellu, and Syrah for this robust red that seems infused with the local aromas of maquis herbs and wild fruit. Aged for two years—including one in barrels—before release, this red has a smoky, spicy element that makes it an ideal match for richly flavored Mediterranean cuisine. Grilled lamb chops, ratatouille, or a vegetable tagine would certainly do the trick.





2023 Corse Figari Rosé <i>Clos Canarelli</i>	50% Sciaccarellu, 30% Niellucciu, 20% Grenache	Vines planted in 1997 Granite	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52°F Decant optional	Strawberries, watermelon, orange zest Vibrant, ethereal, pure	Drink now
2023 Île de Beauté Blanc “YL” <i>Yves Leccia</i>	70% Vermentinu, 30% Biancu Gentile	5- to 20-year-old vines Clay, limestone, schist	Serve <i>cold</i> 46–50°F Decant optional	Sea spray, citrus blossom, wild maquis Lush, mineral, saline	Drink now
2023 Vin de France Blanc “B.G.” <i>Antoine-Marie Arena</i>	Bianco Gentile	Vines planted in 1997 Clay, limestone	Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52°F Decant recommended	Meyer lemon, chalk, brine Exotic, herbal, zesty	Drink now through 2030
2023 Vin de France Rouge “Sempre Contentu” <i>Domaine Giacometti</i>	Sciaccarellu	17-year-old vines Clay, granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60°F Decant optional	Smashed raspberries, pepper, dried herbs Juicy, fresh, exuberant	Drink now
2023 Vin de France Rouge “Faustine” <i>Domaine Comte Abbatucci</i>	70% Sciaccarellu, 30% Niellucciu	10- to 20-year- old vines Granite	Serve <i>cool</i> 56–60°F Decant optional	Rosemary, cranberries, pomegranate Crunchy, lively, aromatic	Drink now
2018 Corse Calvi Rouge “E Prove” <i>Domaine Maestracci</i>	35% Niellucciu, 35% Grenache, 15% Sciaccarellu, 15% Syrah	25- to 40-year- old vines Clay, sand, granite	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62°F Decant recommended	Black cherries, tobacco, iron, maquis Structural, complex, toothsome	Drink now through 2030

front cover: Bonifacio. © DIXON BROOKE

inner panel: © GAIL SKOFF

far left, top: Yves Canarelli. © CLOS CANARELLI

far left, bottom: Yves and Sandrine Leccia. © GAIL SKOFF

middle, top: Antoine-Marie and Antoine Arena. © GAIL SKOFF

middle, bottom: Simon Giacometti. © ANTHONY LYNCH

near left: Faustine and Jean-Charles Abbatucci. © MAGALI CANCEL

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ANTOINE-MARIE ARENA

While Antoine-Marie continues to embrace his father's philosophy—farming organically and applying a light hand in the cellar—managing his own domaine has given him more freedom to pursue fresh ideas. In his recently constructed cellar—right across the street from the family home—this young, passionate prodigy is crafting exclusively his own wines and experimenting with new methods of vinification.

YVES LECCIA

The Leccias have worked the finest terroirs of Patrimonio for countless generations. Raised in a small village in the heart of Patrimonio, Yves worked alongside his father before he decided to branch off on his own in 2004 with the help of his wife, Sandrine, to focus on a single, prestigious terroir: "E Croce" sits on a thin chalk soil above a thick bedrock of pure schist, facing the Gulf of Saint-Florent. He keeps yields low, knows when to harvest, and allows E Croce to fully express itself in the wine.

DOMAINE GIACOMETTI

The Agriates Desert is an arid swath of land where the hot and dry Libecciu that rolls down off the Italian coast combined with the clay-granite soils make growing anything extremely laborious. The vines require constant plowing to allow the roots to forage deep for water and nutrients. The Giacometti family boldly moved here in 1987, taking over vines that had been planted in 1966, and they have long made a generous, approachable style of Patrimonio.

DOMAINE MAESTRACCI

High in the foothills of Monte Grossu mountain lies the granite plateau of Reginu, an area long known for *U Vinu di E Prove*—the wine of the Prove. The plateau has been used for vine and olive growing for centuries. In 1945, when the owner of an olive-pressing operation packed up his mill, Roger Maestracci saw a golden opportunity and moved in. Within a few years Domaine Maestracci had established a firm winemaking reputation in the area.

DOMAINE ABBATUCCI

In Ajaccio, the colorful, picturesque capital of Corsica, there are streets, monuments, and plazas named after General Jean-Charles Abbattu— a hero of the French Revolution and comrade in arms to Napoléon Bonaparte. Domaine Abbattu is run by a descendant of the general, Jean-Charles Abbattu, who has now become a local hero of another kind—for providing the local populace with its most sought-after libation.

CLOS CANARELLI

Since taking over the family domaine in 1993, Yves Canarelli has championed the restoration of native Corsican varietals. The appellation Corse Figari lies along a plateau where grapes have been farmed since the fifth century B.C. in the most ancient growing region of Corsica.

