



CHEVALIER

ITALIAN
CLASSICS

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cover: The Castello di Argiano amid Sesti's vineyards. PHOTO © GAIL SKOFF

above: The view from Castagnoli. PHOTO © DIXON BROOKE

right: Slavonian oak fermentation vats at Fantino. PHOTO © CLARK Z. TERRY

ITALIAN CLASSICS

*T*asting every style of Italian wine would take more than a lifetime: the country is home to hundreds of indigenous grape varieties across 330 distinct DOC zones, spanning from the

Mediterranean to the Adriatic, from the boot's northern Alpine heights at the Austrian confine to the sun-drenched coastline of Sicily, some seven-hundred-plus miles south. In spite of the endless wines to choose from, a handful stand out as Italy's most iconic—unrivaled and unparalleled bottles that should be featured on every Italian wine list.

This month's club focuses on six Italian classics: Prosecco, Pinot Grigio, Lambrusco, Chianti, Brunello, and Barolo. We'll explore more obscure appellations like Alghero, Gambellara, and Torrette another time. For now, let's cozy up to a vintage masterpiece from Fellini or Pasolini and prepare a warming plate of pasta as we work our way through these quintessential *vini italiani*.





PROSECCO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE
SUPERIORE BRUT ♦ SOMMARIVA \$14.95

PROSECCO IS EASILY Italy's largest DOC zone, and it continues to grow: 3,000 hectares have just been approved in a recent expansion, taking the total hectares planted to more than 23,000. Picture the entire city of San Francisco under vine—twice over. This equates to almost half a billion bottles of Prosecco each year, most of which hail from mechanizable flatlands. Call us snobs, but we wouldn't even use most of this generic plonk in our mimosas. However, the beating heart of this massive region is undoubtedly the Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore DOCG subzone, a real mouthful that ultimately designates the most qualitative

terroir for Glera, the Prosecco grape. In the shadow of the Alps, poor, well-draining soils at higher altitude yield elegant, aromatic bubbly worlds apart from the mass-produced wines flooding the market. Cinzia Sommariva is an adamant ambassador of the style, following in her parents' footsteps to consistently craft a Prosecco of total class and charm—no mimosas necessary.



2018 FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI PINOT GRIGIO

♦ LA VIARTE \$25

COMPARABLY TO PROSECCO, the Pinot Grigio grape has a history of being overplanted, overcropped, and over-manipulated in the hands of industrial-scale wineries that have all but ruined its reputation as a fine wine of northeast Italy. For anyone looking to experience its charms when crafted by a quality-oriented producer faithful to the traditions of Friuli, where it arguably reaches its greatest expression in Italy, pay attention to La Viarte's Pinot Grigio from the



radiant green terraced vineyards of the Colli Orientali district. Not thin by any means, it is still exquisitely refreshing: bright citrus and fresh flowers, pinpoint precision, lip-smacking acidity . . . The perfect *aperitivo*, it is a stellar companion to a wide range of *antipasti*. This is what Friulian Pinot Grigio is all about.

LAMBRUSCO GRASPAROSSA DI CASTELVETRO
“MONOVITIGNO” ♦ FATTORIA MORETTO \$27



HERE AT LAST is a wine connoisseur's Lambrusco. Grown in the hills above Modena, Moretto's organically farmed Monovitigno is exceptional in its category: first of all, it is made up of 100% Grasperossa, the most tannic, low-yielding, and dark-fruited member of the Lambrusco family. Second, it is among the only existing single-vineyard wines from this appellation, highlighting the family's oldest clones on a plot of clay and silt. A bone-dry Lambrusco meant for the table—it pairs perfectly with pizza, salumi, cheeses, pastas, and beyond—the Monovitigno packs a serious punch. With soaring aromatics that recall wild berries and freshly turned earth, it delivers a palate-cleansing acidity and a crisp, clean, slightly tannic finale. Oh, and it sparkles! Fizzy reds are found throughout northern Italy, but for good reason Lambrusco is the best-known example. Serve it cool!

2016 CHIANTI CLASSICO
♦ CASTAGNOLI \$30

PERCHED AT 450 METERS above sea level atop a towering hill that overlooks the magnificent Tuscan countryside, with Monte Amiata looming in the distance, Castagnoli's terraced vineyards are a sight to behold. The cool nights here favor bright, focused acidity and vivid fruit, while the thin, flaky blue soils of *galestro*—a schist-like clay—impart an almost crunchy, stony backbone. Winemaking at Castagnoli is elemental: the harvest is brought in by hand, destemmed and crushed, and left to ferment naturally in open-top bins with occasional punchdowns and pump-overs. Aging in neutral wood—mainly *botti grandi*—conserves Sangiovese's vibrant, rustic energy and savory, herbaceous qualities, yielding a splendid Chianti Classico with extraordinary potential at table and for the cellar.



2013 BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

◆ SESTI \$105

BEFORE BECOMING one of Italy's legendary wines, Brunello was a rarity produced only by a handful of families in the rural hills of southern Tuscany. By the time Giuseppe and Sarah Sesti moved to the area in 1975, word had begun to spread about the noble local red. One of few English speakers in the area, Giuseppe volunteered his services to help translate for visiting journalists and sommeliers, consequently spending many hours in the cellars of the appellation's pioneering producers.



Twenty years later, the couple had planted their own vineyard on the perfectly exposed, well-ventilated slopes surrounding their home. The time had come to apply the knowledge Giuseppe gleaned from those artisans responsible for forging Brunello di Montalcino's reputation.

Tasting the Sestis' 2013, one is tempted to imagine this is how the historic wines from Montalcino's early days might have tasted. The perfume is truly regal: rich, fragrant, and balmy, exuding suggestions of earth, sweet spices, and pine forest. Dense, deep, and imposing on the palate, it is concentrated and fleshy, with thick and chewy tannins.

2012 BAROLO RISERVA "BUSSIA CASCINA DARDI"

◆ A. & G. FANTINO \$67

BROTHERS Alessandro and Gian Natale Fantino manage to marry two crucial elements in their Barolos: the deep structure that guarantees a long evolution through the years and the plush, inviting texture that endows their wines with immediate drinkability. Ultra-traditionalists in the cellar, they swear by native yeast fermentation and long aging in Slavonian oak casks (*botti grandi*). 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* to craft a grandiose Nebbiolo for the ages. Sweetly perfumed, with supple, fine-grained tannins and excellent old-vine concentration, this 2012 Riserva will drink beautifully over the next fifteen years.





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| Prosecco Conegliano Valdobbiadene Superiore Brut <i>Sommariva</i> VENETO | Glera | 25-year-old vines Mineral-rich, rocky red clay | Serve <i>cold</i> 48–52° F Do not decant | White flowers, pear, apple Delicate, lithe, sprightly | Drink now |
| 2018 Friuli Colli Orientali Pinot Grigio <i>La Viarte</i> FRIULI | Pinot Grigio | 16- to 34-year- old vines Eocene marl and sandstone | Serve <i>cold</i> 50–54° F Do not decant | Lemon, lime, white peach, flowers Crisp, bone-dry, stimulating, mineral | Drink now |
| Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro “Monovitigno” <i>Fattoria Moretto</i> EMILIA-ROMAGNA | Lambrusco Grasparossa | Vines planted from 2010 to 2012 Clay, silt | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 54–58° F Do not decant | Blackberry, wild strawberry, brambles, earth Exuberant, frothy, clean, lightly tannic | Drink now |
| 2016 Chianti Classico <i>Castagnoli</i> TUSCANY | Sangiovese | 9- to 26-year- old vines <i>Galestro</i> , loam, limestone | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours | Sour cherry, game, wild herbs Savory, energetic, taut, muscular | Drink now through 2035 |
| 2013 Brunello di Montalcino <i>Sesti</i> TUSCANY | Sangiovese | 20-year-old vines Oceanic sediment | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours | Mint, incense, dried flowers, camphor Elegant, fine-grained, savory, layered | Drink now through 2035 |
| 2012 Barolo Riserva “Bussia Cascina Dardi” <i>A. & G. Fantino</i> PIEDMONT | Nebbiolo | 60-year-old vines Sandy clay | Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant 1–2 hours | Truffle, tea, orange peel, raspberry Deep, plush, structured | Drink now through 2035 |



far left, top: Harvest at Sommariva. PHOTO © SOMMARIVA

far left, bottom: La Viarte’s terraced vineyards. PHOTO © LA VIARTE

middle: Spontaneous fermentation at Castagnoli.

PHOTO © GAIL SKOFF

above left: Elisa and Giuseppe Sesti. PHOTO © DIXON BROOKE

near left: PHOTO © DANIEL MADERO

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BAROLO

The “king of wines and wine of kings” is produced in eleven villages in the rolling Langhe hills southwest of Alba. A wine of profound structure with haunting aromatics, it is among Italy’s most age-worthy.

PROSECCO CONEGLIANO VALDOBBIADENE SUPERIORE

The most qualitative zone for Prosecco production, this spectacularly hilly appellation is responsible for the most complex and refined of northeast Italy’s famous festive sparkler.

FRIULI COLLI ORIENTALI

Pinot Grigio is grown all over northeast Italy, but it truly shines in Friuli. Typically crisp and clean, it is capable of expressing delightful character when not mass-marketed.

LAMBRUSCO GRAPAROSSA DI CASTELVETRO

“Lambrusco” encompasses numerous members of the eponymous family of grapes, grown across several appellations principally in the Emilia region. Castelvetro is home to the smallest of these, with arguably the best *terroir*.

CHIANTI CLASSICO

The quintessential red for rustic Italian cuisine, Chianti comes from several subregions of variable quality. Seek out wines from the original “Classico” zone for the real deal.

BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

A warmer home for Sangiovese south of Chianti, this noble appellation produces correspondingly more generous wines, which at their best are a regal expression of Italy’s most-planted grape variety.

