

# Holiday Vintages From Six Italian Wine Regions



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Roman Emperor Aurelian—in the year A.D. 274—declared that the Feast of the Nativity was to take place on December 25th annually, a date that almost coincided with the winter solstice, or shortest day of the year.

Today, some Italians still maintain a strict dietary fast from sundown on December 23rd until sundown the following day, followed by a dinner based on fish rather than meat. The day after that—the 25th—is considered a feast day, although preferred dishes range in variety throughout Italy. During these feasts, ample wine flows, both sparkling and still. Below are Italian wines from six different regions to consider sampling for this holiday season—and beyond.

All wines listed below would score, subjectively on a 100-point scale, above 90. Some would hit the 97, 98 mark.



San Felice Cellars, Tuscany, Italy SAN FELICE

Tuscany -

**San Felice. Avane Chardonnay. 2018.**

Avane is the ancient traditional name for the region where the San Felice winery is located in Tuscany. This unique and delicious Chardonnay includes aromas of orange peel, lime and earth. In the mouth it has an amazing creamy and oily and juicy cheek feel, with tastes of oranges and honey. This is a rounded, unique Chardonnay.

**San Felice. Il Griglio Chianti Classico Riserva. 2016. (DOCG)**

This 100% Sangiovese includes aromas of plums, blackberries and minestrone and in the mouth is light and elegant. Easy to drink. As the [skilled winemaker Leonardo Bellaccini](#) says, if you open the bottle with two friends, it will be empty before the first lunch course arrives. As Italians say—*ecco, la verità*—that's truth.

## **San Felice. Poggio Rosso Gran Selezione Chianti Classico. 2016. (DOCG)**

From a six acre (2.5 hectare) single plot this 100% Sangiovese is aged for 22 months in 500-liter barrels. Aromas of dark fruit, smoke, plums and prunes. The taste corresponds to aromas, and the wine can be paired with some serious hearty beef—such as wild boar—or with aged pecorino (sheep) cheese.

## **San Felice. Campogiovanni Brunello di Montalcino. 2015. (DOCG)**

2015 delivered rich and tannic red wines in this region of Tuscany, and the aromas of this 100% Sangiovese include those of red and light red fruit—cherries and raspberries. The taste is notably layered, fresh and elegant with harmonious acidity. Beautiful.



San Felice vineyards, Tuscany, Italy SAN FELICE

## **San Felice. Vigorello. 2015. (IGT)**

The original ‘super Tuscan’ wine produced in 1968 using non-appellation international (Bordeaux) grape varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot, as well as local Pugnietello grapes, this is aged for 20 months in French oak barriques and eight to 10 months in bottles. Strong, gorgeous, juicy and sweet rounded aromas of raspberries, plums and black cherries—with a distinct taste of light fruit that is both textured and with quality tannins. This is an approachable wine reminiscent of a Bordeaux, but with a hint of ripe blueberries from the Pugnietello. Pair with lamb and cardamom sauce.

## **San Felice. Pugnietello. 2017. (IGT)**

Pugnietello is an ancient Tuscan grape that—during early experimentations with 270 local varieties at San Felice—highlighted quality and distinction and became the ‘fingerprint’ of San Felice. This 100% Pugnietello shows sweet, round aromas of plums and red fruit. Delicious.

## **San Felice. Bell’Aja Bolgheri Superiore. 2017. (DOC)**

‘Aja’ is the traditional name of the courtyard of an Italian farmhouse—the space for gathering and conviviality. This wine comes from Bolgheri, and includes no Sangiovese but is a blend of Bordeaux varieties: 95/5 of Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon. Aromas are distinct, earthy and powerful and include fruits such as black cherries as well as licorice, cumin, candied oranges and cedar. In the mouth—tastes to match. A distinct, arresting wine.





Chianti wine region, Tuscany, Italy GETTY

## **Castello di Meleto. Chianti Classico Riserva. 2017. (DOCG)**

The Meleto Castle, perched in the Tuscan hills, produces wine (on 400-acres, or 160 hectares) as well as virgin olive oil and *cinta senese*—traditional pigs. This powerful wine from the heart of Chianti includes juicy aromas of plums and dark fruit. In the mouth, firm acidity, well-structured tannins and a taste that includes a hint of raspberries—which helps this wine pair well not only with beef, but with dark chocolate.

## **Castello di Meleto. Chianti Classico. 2018. (DOCG)**

This DOCG quality wine includes aromas of tar, blacktop, licorice, and prunes. An eclectic, smoky dark meld of pasture, riverine and barnyard scents—think licorice, turf, earth and the sparkling freshness of young raspberries. In the mouth—plum juice, minestrone soup and fresh grated black pepper. A vortex of dark and tannic tastes that does not shoot, but swirls down the throat. Buckle up.

## **Castello di Meleto. Gran Selezione Chianti Classico. 2016.**

Hefty and commanding aromas crackling with earth tones and flavors that include those of blueberries, cherries and cocoa. In the mouth this is seductive and brash and is a kicking royal flush of blueberries, peaches and Dutch drop licorice with a hint of mint. Seriously structured with excellent acidity.

## **Franciacorta -**

Franciacorta produces sparkling wines made using the traditional method, and is located in the Lombardy region of northern Italy, mid-way between the cities of Milan and Verona, at the base of alluring hills.



Town of Adro in Franciacorta, Italy GETTY

## **Castello Bonomi. Dosage Zero Millesimato. 2011.**

A ‘millesimato’ must age for at least 30 months in contact with yeast. This is a 50/50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, of which the Chardonnay first ages in small oak barrels for eight months while the Pinot ages the same length of time in steel tanks. For the second fermentation the wine ages 80 months (six and a half years). Aromas of bread crumbs, salt, caramel and tropical fruit that includes pineapple—this wine opens wide up after a few minutes in the glass. Patience is key. In the mouth the flavors include those of lime, citrus, oatmeal and bread crust.

## **Castello Bonomi. Cuvée 22 Brut.**

From this scenic 59-acre (24-hectare) vineyard at the base of Mount Orfano—which protects it from Alpine winds—comes this 12.5% Franciacorta that includes both zesty and sweet tinged aromas—green grass, green apple, spearmint, caramel. A glass provides a gorgeous and frothy mouth coating of lime, almonds, gooseberries and a hint of peach flavors. Pair with giant shrimp, cashew stuffed olives or parmigiano-reggiano cheese.

## Lambrusco -

## **Venturini Baldini. Cadelvento Spumante Rosato. (DOP)**

From the northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna—transected by an ancient Roman road—comes stellar food and the sparkling purple wine of Lambrusco. This estate was the first to gain organic certification in the region, and since being founded in 1976, the owners take all work on their 75-acre (30-hectare) vineyard with serious intent. This light orange colored 11.5% spumante is made from the Sorbara and Grasperossa varieties grown on clay/sand soils at 900 feet (300 meters) elevation. It includes aromas of lemons, strawberries, peaches and apricots, while in the mouth the energetic tastes include those of lemons and wild strawberries.

## **Venturini Baldini. Montelocco Lambrusco Rosso Biologico.**

Made from the Salamino variety of Lambrusco, the aromas of this frizzante rosso include those of raspberries and mandarins, while tastes additionally include those of cherries and cocoa.

## Sicily -

Duca di Salaparuta includes three estates—spread across the island of Sicily—and was the first Sicilian winery to produce 100% Nero D’Avola in 1984. Its main grape variety remains Nero D’Avola. Fruit is delivered to wineries in refrigerated trucks to maintain freshness.

## **Duca di Salaparuta. Triskelè Nero D’Avola/Merlot. 2017. (IGT)**

This wine spends 10 to 12 months aging in non-new French oak barriques. Fruit and earth merge in aromas that include cherry cola, crème de cassis, butterscotch, green grass and lime. In the mouth the taste includes that of raspberries, cocoa and vanilla. An easy drinking, fruit forward wine to pair with lamb, steak or aged cheeses.

**Duca di Salaparuta. Nawari Pinot Nero. 2017. (IGT)**

Unusual for the Mount Etna wine region of Sicily comes this wine made exclusively from Pinot Noir. It is cherry colored with aromas of rich, ripe cherries and includes Burgundian finesse, with sweet and gentle aromas that include florals, chocolate chunks and a hint of rum. In the mouth, tastes include orange slices and a hint of licorice.

Valdobbiadene -

From the heart of Prosecco country come these sparkling wines.

**Bortolomiol. IUS Naturae. Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore. (DOCG)**

Made 100% from Glera grapes harvested in early September over limestone based hilly terrain, and fermented with select yeasts using the charmat method, this 11.5% alcohol DOCG quality Prosecco includes aromas of peaches, mandarins, green apples, gooseberries and toast. It is a silky, plush, light wine in the mouth.



Prosecco Superiore in Valdobbiadene, Veneto, Italy GETTY

**Bortolomiol. 70 Year Anniversary Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore. 2017. (DOCG)**

Aromas of this Brut Nature Millesimato, of which only 8,000 bottles are produced, include bread crust, lemon and mint, while in the mouth the acidity is delicate and balanced and flavors include those of pears and apples. Consider pairing with a crustacean appetizer. A beautiful and convivial holiday sparkling wine.

Piedmont -

**Enrico Serafino. Serralunga d'Alba Barolo. 2016. (DOCG)**





Serralunga d'Alba village, Piedmont, Italy. GETTY

## **Enrico Serafino. Alta Langa Oudeis. 2016. (DOCG)**

Oudeis means Odysseus, the Greek sailor and adventurer. This 85/15 Pinot Noir/Chardonnay blend sparkling wine is fermented for six months on lees with regular stirring, then spends a further 36 months on lees for the secondary fermentation. This is a very approachable and easy drinking sparkling wine with vibrant acidity that could be lined up to kick off a late afternoon gathering. Full and distinguished aromas of tropical fruits, toast (from the battonage, or stirring), pine needles and honey, and a taste that includes the flavors of mandarins and breadcrumbs.

## **Mauro Veglio. Classico Barolo. 2016. (DOCG)**

Blended from vines from three vineyards (the oldest with 80% vines planted in 1950) and aged in 15% to 20% new oak for 24 months, this unfinned and unfiltered wine includes subdued and somewhat smoky aromas but distinct flavors of brandy, licorice and rum in the mouth. Quite well balanced and includes a finish with a taste of sultanas and rum.

## **Mauro Veglio. Gattera Barolo. 2016. (DOCG)**

From a single vineyard over Tortonian soils (clay, sand, limestone) that include 80% of grapevines planted in 1950, comes this Barolo with truly delicious aromas of smoke, prunes, rum, black cherries, roses, vanilla and raspberries, as well as mandarin slices. This is chewy, layered, luscious and elegant in the mouth and difficult not to love. The finish includes a hint of the taste of sultanas.

## **Mauro Veglio. Paiagallo Barolo. 2016. (DOCG)**

This wine was made by Alessandro Veglio exclusively after he rented the plot when he was in his early thirties. The vines are about 40 years old and the wine ages in 30 hectoliter oak caskets for 24 months before being bottled—unfinned and unfiltered. Aromas of blackberries, honey, cranberries, raspberries, licorice, cherries and smoke. Rich and punchy, but with soft tannins. Very approachable and fruity, this juicy wine balances acidity and tannins well. You will want to continue drinking—emblematic of this generation's more accessible Barolos than those produced just a decade ago.