

EMILIA-ROMAGNA: FAMILY, FRIZZANTE AND FOOD

Emilia-Romagna is the gastronomic capital of Italy, a lofty title in a country that is easily the most famous foodie playground in the world. Between dairy and meat production alone the region is world famous, with international household names in Parma *prosciutto* and *mortadella* (a supremely superior Bologna) and Parmigiano Reggiano parmesan cheese. The finest balsamic vinegar is made in the Emilian city of Modena, and some of the best pastas originate from the cereal grains, potatoes, tomatoes and onions grown in the vast ag fields. You know you've hit E-R on your road trip across the Boot when you hit those flat fertile greens. Over half of the region is flat, with hills climbing up to the Apennine mountains on its southern border, and the Adriatic at its Eastern edge. It stays cool, temperate and fecund, and the native grapes have been cultivated here since before the Romans.

The region certainly boasts very idiosyncratic wine styles. The most beloved (and maligned) of its wines are the Lambruscos: frothy frizzante red wines that are sadly famous for sweet, soda pop flavors and often cast off as a joke, not for serious wine people. But Lambruscos are a whole family of grapes, at least eight distinct varieties, as well as a whole slew of regions and styles with any number of iterations of pale pink to inky purple, super dry to semi-secco. We know to trust Italians to make wines that pair perfectly to their cuisine. Now it is time to trust what Lambrusco can do on your table, too.

Kevin Wardell, December 2020

WINE NO. 1

Tre Monti 'D'Albana' Frizzante
Albana
Imola, Emilia-Romagna, Italy 2019
RE-ORDER: \$ 20

GRAPE: ALBANA [al-BAH-nah]

At the very top of the podium, and the very first DOCG awarded in all of Italy, stands a little humble white grape named Albana. Grown only in the heartland of Emilia-Romagna, and introduced to the area by ancient Romans, it was likely named by them too, (*Albus* is latin for white.) Albana is said to be a red grape in a white grape's clothing. It is full-bodied, tannic, and aromatic. Maybe it was this robust character - the grape's high acid, exotic, floral, and phenolic nature - that made it stand out as the most inspiring candidate for the very first DOCG designation in 1966.

GROWER: Azienda Agrícola Tre Monti dates back to the early 1960s, beginning with the inspiration of husband and wife team Sergio and Thea Navacchia. After Thea's death in 1989, friends Francesco Spagnolli, Vittorio Fiore, and Donato Lanati joined in the endeavor. The winery farm estate lies in the center of Imola, where all of the vineyards are managed (as of 2014) with sustainable viticulture, including inter-row cover-cropping and organic practices. The winemaking is now handled by Vittorio Navacchia, with a deft hand and minimal intervention. This bottling is fermented in stainless steel, and then refermented in bottle. At just 11% alcohol, this bubble is ever so slight and can be enjoyed anytime, anywhere, in any vessel you can find to pour it in.

GLASS: This wine is a chameleon. At once it appears simple, lithe, and green, but then it shape-shifts into something more exotic, becoming robust with ripe pear topped with white cherries. It is somehow clean as cotton, fluffy as sea spray foam, delightfully dry and perky, and yet as fruity and juicy as tangerine wedges alongside bites of plump red tomato. It keeps up an intrigue of aromatic wood, like nag champa or san paolo, while also being intensely clean and mineral. This is a favorite Bergamot pastime, finding wines that aren't one-dimensional or easy to pin down, but are most definitely easy to please.

SIDE NOTES: Albana is barely ever made bubbly, it is much more common as a dry, middle-of-the-road white. It is also made as a sweet *Albana Passito* wine, where grapes are botrytised or air-dried to make a sticky.

WINE NO. 2

Noelia Ricci 'Godenza'

Sangiovese

Predappio, Emilia-Romagna, Italy 2018

RE-ORDER: \$31

GRAPE: SANGIOVESE [san-GEE-OH-vay-say]

While the "blood of Jupiter" Sangiovese grape is ubiquitous with Chianti, it is believed, according to Emilia-Romagna lore, to actually come from the hills of Monte Giove near San' Angelo di Romagna. The wines from this area were named *Sangue del Giove*, "Blood of Giove" - convincingly close to what we now call Sangiovese. While big, tannic Sangio is most famously made in Tuscany, it thrives in cooler climates in Northern Italy, such as the Sangiovese di Romagna DOC in the foothills of the Apennine mountains. In the sandstone and clay hills it expresses its herbal and earthy side with gusto.

GROWER: The Noelia Ricci vineyard is planted to about 22 acres on clay and calcareous sand with southwest exposure at a lofty elevation of 1100 feet, making it one of the higher parts of all of Romagna, which is notoriously pancake flat. The small village of Predappio rests in the foothills of the Apennine mountains bordering Le Marche, and for centuries this area has been singularly obsessed with Sangiovese. Dating all the way back to 1383, the Predappio regional laws decreed quality parameters for yields, harvest and vinification. The Noelia Ricci estate is not only calcareous, sandy clay, but also rich in minerals and sulfur. The winery is dedicated to natural winemaking and minimal intervention, aiming to make transparent Sangiovese that shines through the best light possible. The grapes are fermented with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel for 28 days, then aged for 8 months in stainless steel tanks, then bottled in its youth, and aged with a minimum of 12 months in bottle.

GLASS: This is so very Pinot-like on the nose, with robust red fruits and an uncanny pretty herbal nose. It is reminiscent of high elevation alpine reds; and though it grows at only around 1100 feet, that's significant elevation when in Emilia-Romagna. There's fresh green coffee bean and green tea on the nose, and it's almost flinty like gunpowder. It opens up to dried flowers and salty umami hoisin sauce, all on top of a helping of fresh fruit - think cherries and raspberries, a bit of pink grapefruit and tart cherry skins- making this an undeniably interesting Sangiovese, from exotic, lesser-known climates.

SIDE NOTES: Emilia-Romagna is the cheese capital of Italy any way you slice it, with countless famous flavors from many DOP zones like Parmigiano Reggiano, Grana Padano, Provolone, and Squacquerone di Romagna.

WINE NO. 3

Paltrinieri 'Leclisse'

Lambrusco di Sorbara

Sorbara, Emilia-Romagna, Italy

RE-ORDER: \$24

GRAPE: LAMBRUSCO DI SORBARA [lamb-ROU-SKOE dee SORE-bah-rah]

The oldest and most famous of the Lambrusco lineage, di Sorbara is the most abundant and widely planted of the fizzy red grapes. It is the lightest Lambrusco both in body and in color, and is well-loved for its floral fragrance, often reminiscent of violets. It stands out in the family for its brilliant acidity and beautiful pale, crushed cranberry color.

GROWER: Paltrinieri is a family winery three generations and running. Alberto runs the vineyards and manages the cellar, his wife Barbera manages the business and also manages Alberto. The vines are grown in alluvial sand and chalk soils near the town of Modena, right off of the A1 autostrada, the main vertical highway connecting Italy North to South. Modena is an ancient, historical waypoint and connection for travellers. The Vigna del Cristo is the Paltrinieri's main vineyard, named for a neighboring trattoria, a well-known waystation situated between the two local rivers: Secchia and Panaro. The trattoria was established before the town and appellation of Sorbara were officially created. This bottling, "L'eclisse" (Eclipse) is a tank selection from this historic site. Maceration occurs on the skins for about three days, then alcoholic fermentation in stainless tanks, with secondary fermentation for about 90 days in pressurized stainless steel tanks, with all native yeasts.

GLASS: Incredibly, grandma/Nonna still hand ties every single bottle of this lightly effervescent fizzy lifting drink. So pale and yet so robust, this is one of those wines that is not so much about fruit as minerality. There are some pithy pink grapefruits, a ribbon of Meyer lemon rind, some salted blood orange, and guava juice, and there are dark raspberries all over the nose. But all the while there is so much brightness, and it finishes with dryzabone character. Flashes of tart marderin and valencia orange somehow hint at SourPatch candy. That acidic fruity tartness will pair perfectly well with all kinds of the local charcuterie - serve this up alongside prosciutto di Parma, mortadella, coppa and salumi di fellino.

SIDE NOTES: In the fertile fields of Emilia-Romagna, pigs have been reared since at least 1000 BC, and the local art of making prosciutto, mortadelle, sausages and salami has been renowned since Medieval times. The capital city Bologna is, as a result, an internationally famous food destination.

WINE NO. 4

Azienda Agricola Graziano "Fontana dei Boschi"
Lambrusco Grasparossa
Castelvetro di Modena, Emilia-Romagna, Italy 2018
RE-ORDER: \$28

GRAPE: LAMBRUSCO GRASPAROSSA [lamb-ROU-SKOE gah-rah-spa-ROH-sah]

Grasparossa is the star of the lambrusco show, often reaching greater ripeness, darker color, and making more concentrated, tannic and intense wines than its siblings. It prefers the slopes and hills of the Castelvetro area to the valley bottoms shared by its brethren. It makes what is arguably *the* classic Lambrusco full-fruited fizz, with tons of plum and black cherry and a touch of tannin. Grasparossa can only be 85% of the blend to qualify as Castelvetro DOC, showing that it gets by with a little help from its friends.

GROWER: Though Vittorio Graziano's family has always owned farmland and vines in the village of Castelvetro di Modena, his father built furniture for a living. Vittorio started drinking wine at 18 to please a girlfriend who loved the dry, sparkling reds of the area. After a few years working a miserable desk job as a youth, he decided it was time, with no formal training, to take on his family's 1.25 acres of vines from his family farm. He soon began befriending the village's old contadini, asking about farming methods, local varieties and soils, and heeding their advice, he started sourcing land and replanting vines. The acquisition of more vines around his house in 1992 and re-plantings brought the estate up to 12 acres currently.

Vittorio has never used chemicals in his vineyards and refuses to use manure, opting for wild herbs and planted legumes to improve his soil. He also grows about a dozen local grape varieties, and with the exception of Trebbiano, Lambrusco Grasparossa and Malbo Gentile, he has no idea what their names are. Both white and red grapes are destemmed, then fermented in fiberglass containers. For the sparkling wines, he racks the wine off the lees with about 10g of sugar left before bottling, with refermentation in bottle for 2 to 3 months. Many consider Vittorio to be the maestro of traditional Lambrusco, and this bottling is an incredible insight into his bizarre and beautiful world.

GLASS: This is a trove of winter baking spice, like the three C's of Chai: clove, cardamom, and cinnamon galore. So dark and a bit meaty and brooding, this sparkling red finishes lean and lip-smackingly dry. The palate is perky with fresh-cracked black peppercorn, allspice and waxy black licorice, and so very super herbal with hints of Fernet Branca. This is a mineral driven, Christmas pellegrino! Pop this grasparossa and trim a tree, hang some lights, bake some goodies, and dare to pair with roast beast.

SIDE NOTES: "Fontana dei Boschi" means fountain of the forest, or maybe frizzante forest froth, bubbly of the trees, woodland lambrusco, thicket fizz or maybe jungle bubbly?