

Top Italian Wine Tasting

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ITALY'S VINEYARD

Italy, land of culture, art, and gastronomy, is also renowned worldwide for its ancient winemaking tradition. With deep roots in the country's history and identity, wine in Italy represents much more than just a beverage: it is cultural heritage, an expression of culinary creativity, and a quintessential symbol of conviviality.

From the Alpine landscapes of Alto Adige to the sun-drenched hills of Sicily, Italian vineyards stretch across an extraordinary variety of territories. Each region preserves a unique style and its own enological identity. You'll find everything from the intense, structured reds of Piedmont, like Barolo and Barbaresco, to the fragrant, fresh whites of Campania, such as



Falanghina and Greco di Tufo. The different terroirs and grape varieties makes Italy a true paradise for wine enthusiasts.

In Italy, wine is an integral part of daily life. It is never missing from the table, carefully chosen to complement and enhance each dish. It is the common thread of special moments and informal gatherings: from a romantic candlelit dinner to a family celebration that lasts late into the night, wine is always the star.

Over the centuries, Italy's winemaking tradition has been passed down from generation to generation, refining agricultural techniques and vinification



methods. Today, Italy is one of the world's leading wine producers, offering an incredible variety of labels to satisfy every palate - from full-bodied reds to fruity whites, all the way to sweet dessert wines.

The so called "Bel Paese" holds a global record in terms of ampelographic biodiversity. Across approximately **700,000 hectares of vineyards**, there are around **545 registered native grape varieties**, with 75% of the planted surface area shared among over 80 different varieties. Italy counts **118 IGT** (Indicazione Geografica Tipica), **341 DOC** (Denominazione di Origine Controllata), and **78 DOCG** (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita). It ranks among the top producers and exporters of wine in the world. In the 2024 vintage, about 48 million hectoliters of wine were produced. Geography and climate play a fundamental role in shaping the organoleptic characteristics of each bottle, and every wine carries the imprint of its territory, making Italy a wine universe to be explored - sip by sip.

In this masterclass, we will explore **four Italian territories** through four wines and wine types, offering an overview of Italian wine production.

THE TASTING



This Franciacorta winery, one of the founding members of the regional wine consortium, is managed by the second generation of the family, led by Riccardo Ricci Curbastro, an agronomist. Today, as in many Franciacorta estates, the new generation is starting to take the lead - represented here by Gualberto Jr. (named after the founding grandfather), Daniele, and Filippo. Their energy is reflected in sparkling wines that highlight fragrance and drinkability, thanks to a well-balanced use of oak and dosage.



Franciacorta Extra Brut 2020

A vintage Extra Brut with marked minerality and fruit-forward aromas derived from the base varieties, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The wine spends 4 years aging on the lees before being released. After careful grape selection and pressing, the must ferments in stainless steel and 20% of the mass in oak barrels. The second

fermentation takes place in bottle, following the principles of the traditional method, and the wine then matures on the lees for 42 months. In the glass, it displays a straw-yellow color with fine, persistent

bubbles. On the nose, initial mineral notes emerge, followed by fruity touches and toasty nuances reminiscent of the lees. On the palate, it has excellent body, with a dry, well-structured sip driven by a pleasantly fresh progression.

FRANCIACORTA

Located in Lombardy, between Lake Iseo and the city of Brescia, the Franciacorta appellation is renowned for the production of traditional method sparkling wines. The main grape varieties used are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and to a lesser extent, Pinot Blanc and a local variety known as Erbatat. The bottle refermentation and long aging on the lees - from a minimum of 18 months to several years for Riserva versions - result in sparkling wines of great elegance and strong territorial identity.

This appellation was the first Italian wine produced using the bottle refermentation method to obtain the status of Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG) in 1995.

Today, it includes several styles, starting with Franciacorta itself, which vary according to grape composition, aging on the lees, and aromatic characteristics.

Franciacorta

Made from Chardonnay and/or Pinot Noir, with up to 50% Pinot Blanc permitted. The Erbatat variety is allowed up to a maximum of 10%. Bottle refermentation and a minimum of 18 months aging on the lees. Bottle pressure ranges between 5 and 6 atmospheres. The result is a sapid, fresh, fine, and harmonious wine.

THE TASTING



Satèn

Made from Chardonnay and up to 50% Pinot Blanc. The smooth mouthfeel comes from a careful selection of base wines and a lower bottle pressure (maximum 5 atmospheres). The minimum required aging on the lees is 24 months, and it is only produced in the Brut version. Soft and fresh, with a floral bouquet.

Rosé

Chardonnay (maximum 65%), Pinot Noir (minimum 35%), Pinot Blanc (maximum 50%), Erbatamat (maximum 10%). Pinot Noir grapes ferment in contact with the skins just long enough to impart the desired intensity of color. It can be produced with base wine made from Pinot Noir vinified as rosé or red, or by blending it with base wines from Chardonnay and/or Pinot Blanc. Minimum required lees aging is 24 months. Expect notes of strawberry, rose, and toasted nuances.

Millesimato (Vintage)

The term “millesimato” indicates that at least 85% of the wine comes from a single vintage. Produced only in particularly high-quality years, these wines are enhanced by longer aging than non-vintage Franciacorta. They must age on the lees for at least 30 months. They reflect the character of the vintage with a multifaceted profile.

Riserva

Franciacorta Riserva wines are vintage wines of exceptional quality that require many years of lees aging to fully express their aromatic and flavor potential. Regulations require a minimum of 60 months on the lees. These are deep wines with complex notes.

THE TASTING



Annalisa and Alessandro Zorzettig run the winery, which proudly maintains the family name that has distinguished many generations of winemakers in Spessa di Cividale. Annalisa is an innovative and dynamic producer; a whirlwind of ideas, while Alessandro focuses more on vineyard management. Throughout the company's continuous expansion, the level of quality has never been compromised; excellence has been achieved by carefully selecting the grapes used for the Myò line.



FCO Bianco Fiori Di Leonie Myò 2020

This wine is a blend based on Pinot Bianco, Sauvignon Blanc, and Friulano, and is part of the biodiversity project that the winery has been pursuing for several years across its 120 hectares of estate vineyards. The 2020 vintage was aged for 6 months in stainless steel and an additional 6 months in barriques. On the nose, it is complex and refined, offering tropical nuances of banana and papaya,

along with broom, orange blossom, and mandarin. On the palate, it is splendid - energetic, balanced,

and harmonious - with a sip that finishes long and mineral, delivering great elegance and charm.

FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

A region renowned for its white wine production, Friuli today cultivates white grape varieties on about 85% of its 26,500 hectares of vineyards. This is actually a surprising development, considering that just 15 years ago there was a substantial balance between white and red grapes. The most widely planted varieties are the so-called international grapes, which arrived in the region after the phylloxera crisis at the beginning of the last century: Pinot (Grigio, Bianco, and Nero), as well as Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Sauvignon Blanc. However, the dominant variety is Glera, which now alone accounts for almost a third of the vineyard area, with a production largely vinified and/or marketed by Veneto-based companies.



As for red wines, there has recently been a rediscovery of ancient grape varieties such as Pignolo and Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso, which enjoy a respectable reputation. The region is divided into 12 DOCs (Carso, Collio, Delle Venezie, Friuli, Friuli Annia, Friuli Aquileia, Friuli Colli Orientali, Friuli Grave, Friuli Isonzo, Friuli Latisana, Lison-Pramaggiore, and Prosecco) and 4 DOCGs: COF Picolit and Ramandolo – both sweet wines made from Verduzzo grapes – Lison (minimum 85% Tai), and Rosazzo, a dry white wine based on Friulano, Sauvignon, Pinot Bianco, Chardonnay, and Ribolla Gialla.

However, the real distinction lies between the lowland viticulture, which stretches between Pordenone, Udine, and the Adriatic, and the hillside viticulture, between Udine, Gorizia, and Trieste. Here we find the

THE TASTING



region's most renowned denominations: Collio and Colli Orientali del Friuli, along with the Carso DOC – arid, iron-rich soils where, in addition to the aforementioned varieties, Vitovska and Terrano (also known as “Blood of the Carso”) are grown – and the Friuli Isonzo DOC in the province of Gorizia.

Producers in this region were among the first in Italy to adopt the French approach to white winemaking, using malolactic fermentation and barriques, particularly inspired by Alsace in terms of style and the practice of vinifying different grape varieties separately to produce single-varietal wines.

For some years now, quality winemaking in Friuli has been among the most innovative and diverse in Italy, developing on one hand hyper-reductive techniques aimed at preserving the intensity of varietal aromas as much as possible, and on the other hand, embracing the trend of skin-contact white wines and amphora aging.



THE TASTING



For over two decades now, the Moretti family's winery has represented one of the most significant forces in Tuscany's new wave of winemaking. Their reach also includes the Bolgheri estate Orma and the Sicilian Feudo Maccari. The wines of Sette Ponti—named after the seven bridges crossing the Arno between Florence and Arezzo (one of which, Buriano, is possibly depicted in Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa)—are characterized by a modern flair and impeccable execution, aligning with the avant-garde trends of Tuscan winemaking and its commercial success.



Oreno 2022

Oreno 2022 is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petit Verdot. Intense and complex, the bouquet overflows with aromas of ripe red berries and wild berry jam, fused with balsamic hints of eucalyptus, chocolate, cocoa, and spices. The palate opens with a warm, smooth, and enveloping entry. The tannins are elegant, and the long, unforgettable finish is enhanced by

a delightful sapidity. Its structure, finesse, and harmony make it a wine with great aging potential that can

evolve beautifully if left to rest in the cellar for a few years.

TUSCANY

Tuscany, along with Piedmont, is the most important region in the Guide both in terms of the number of wineries reviewed and the international renown of its denominations. It has always held this position. Once again this year, it leads the national ranking with 90 award-winning wines and reaffirms itself as a driving force in the domestic market and - together with Veneto - in exports. It's one of Italy's largest wine regions, and it certainly doesn't lack prestigious and internationally recognized terroirs and zones.

What truly makes it a star, however, alongside its diversity of soils and microclimates, is the extraordinary range of styles, the entrepreneurial spirit, and the constant innovation of its producers. From the Apuan Alps to the Apennine hills, from the coastal Maremma to Bolgheri and the rolling hills of Chianti Classico, Tuscany offers an embarrassment of riches.

The region boasts numerous denominations (11 DOCGs and 39 DOCs), from historic to more recent ones, all capable of competing on both Italian and international markets. A key factor in its global success - especially in the English-speaking world - is the appealing combination of high-quality wines, culinary tradition, art, and stunning landscapes. The great Tuscan tradition is found between Florence and Siena: **Chianti**, **Vino Nobile di Montepulciano**, **Brunello di Montalcino**, and **Vernaccia di San Gimignano** (the region's only important white wine), along with Carmignano (in the province of Prato, between Florence and Pistoia).

Newer or rising areas since the 1970s include **Bolgheri**, **Maremma**, **Cortona**, **Montecucco**, **Garfagnana**, and **Mugello**.

THE TASTING

PELLEGRINO 1880

Giardino Pantesco Passito by Pellegrino is crafted from a selection of Zibibbo grapes dried under the August sun on traditional cannizzi—reed mats tied together with rope. The vines are cultivated using the alberello (bush vine) method and take root in the sandy, volcanic soils of the island. A long maceration of 8–10 hours and a five-month aging period in temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks impart a highly pleasant and intense aromatic profile.

Passito naturale di Pantelleria Doc - Giardino Pantesco



On the nose, distinct notes of yellow peach, melon, and citrus emerge, underpinned by a subtle mineral background. The palate is well-balanced, offering a dense and sweet sip complemented by a fresh, vivid acidity. This interplay defines a flavor profile that weaves together hints of dried fruit, candied citrus, and a saline minerality,

SICILY

Sicily is one of Italy's largest wine regions by vineyard area—around 113,300 hectares, half of which are located in the province of Trapani, making it the most heavily planted province in the country. In 2021, Sicily produced approximately 6,169,000 hectoliters, of which 57% were white wines. The region boasts 23 DOCs and 1 DOCG, Cerasuolo di Vittoria (composed of 50–70% Nero d'Avola and 30–50% Frappato).

Among the most widely grown indigenous **white grapes** are:

- ❖ **Carricante**, native to Etna, which produces mineral-driven wines with remarkable aging potential;
- ❖ **Catarratto**, accounting for 20% of all grapes grown in Sicily and ranking as the third most planted white variety in Italy, after Glera and Pinot Grigio, and tied with Trebbiano Toscano;
- ❖ **Grillo**, ideal for both fortified, oxidative wines like Marsala and also used for dry whites;
- ❖ **Inzolia** (also known as Insolia or Ansonica), which gives structured wines with notable acidity.

Additionally, Sicily cultivates aromatic grapes used primarily in sweet wines, such as **Malvasia**, **Moscato**, and **Zibibbo** (also known as Muscat of Alexandria).



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THE TASTING



As for **red grapes**, Sicily's wine heritage features:

- ❖ **Frappato**, which together with **Nero d'Avola** forms the base of Cerasuolo di Vittoria - producing fruit-forward yet complex and age-worthy wines;
- ❖ **Nerello Cappuccio and Nerello Mascalese**, native to Etna and the Messina area, particularly in the Faro DOC. Nerello Mascalese is finer and more elegant than Cappuccio and is often compared to Pinot Noir due to its finesse.

Among the wines with great historical significance is Marsala: a fortified and oxidative-style wine made from Grillo, Inzolia, Catarratto, and Damaschino grapes for the Oro (Gold) and Ambra (Amber) styles (produced in versions like Fine, Superiore, Superiore Riserva, Vergine or Soleras, which can also be further classified as Riserva or Stravecchio depending on the aging before market release). The Rubino (Ruby) version, made from Nero d'Avola and Nerello Mascalese, is particularly charming and offers extraordinary longevity.

Marsala became famous at the end of the 18th century thanks to an English entrepreneur, John Woodhouse, and for nearly two centuries it was the island's most important wine. In recent years, however, it has faced major challenges and has yet to find a clear path back to prominence.

The fastest-growing wine area in Sicily in this new century is without a doubt the Etna region - now seen as a promised land for a new generation of producers. Even though the entire province of Catania accounts for less than 2% of the island's total vineyards (just over 2,000 hectares), the name Etna has acquired a level of prestige comparable to the most important wine regions in Italy.

Etna's volcanic soils, which are rocky in some areas and sandy or ashy in others, combined with very high altitudes (even over 1,000 meters), abundant water, sharp diurnal temperature swings, and many ungrafted bush-trained vines (alberello a piede franco), create a unique terroir.

- ❖ **Etna Rosso**, made primarily from Nerello Mascalese (minimum 80%) and Nerello Cappuccio, is a red wine that manages to blend Mediterranean warmth with northern-style freshness, energy, and elegance.
- ❖ **Etna Bianco**, based mainly on Carricante (minimum 60%, rising to 80% in Etna Bianco Superiore) and optionally Catarratto (up to 40%), is a fresh, age-worthy white wine with great finesse.

THE MAIN DOCG / DOC PRODUCTION ZONES AND GRAPE

Following is a small list of Italian DOC and DOCG zones and grape varieties that are important at an international level:

VALLE D'AOSTA

Doc: Valle d'Aosta

Varietals:

White grapes: malvoisie (pinot grigio), petite arvine, prié blanc

Red grapes: cornalin, fumin, nus, petit rouge, picotener (a local word for Nebbiolo)

PIEDMONT

DOCG production zones: Alta Langa, Asti, Barbera d'Asti, Barbera del Monferrato Superiore, Barolo, Barbaresco, Diano d'Alba, Dogliani, Erbaluce di Caluso, Gattinara, Gavi, Ghemme, Nizza, Roero, Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato

DOC production zones: Barbera d'Alba, Colli Tortonesi, Langhe, Nebbiolo d'Alba

Varietals

White grapes: Arneis, Cortese, Erbaluce, Moscato, Timorasso

Red grapes: Barbera, Dolcetto, Freisa, Nebbiolo, Ruché

LIGURIA

Doc production zones: Colli di Luni, Dolceacqua, Riviera Ligure di Ponente

Varietals:

White grapes: Pigato, Vermentino

Red grapes: Rossese

LOMBARDY

Docg production zones: Franciacorta, Moscato di Scanzo, Oltrepò Pavese Metodo Classico, Valtellina Superiore

DOC production zones: Garda, Lugana, Valtellina Rosso

Varietals:

White grapes: Moscato Riesling italico, Turbiana

Red grapes: Barbera Chiavennasca ("Nebbiolo" in local dialect), Croatina, Gropello, Pinot Nero

TRENTINO - ALTO ADIGE

Doc production zones: Alto Adige, Lago di Caldaro, Teroldego Rotaliano, Trento

Varietals:

White grapes: Gewürztraminer, Incrocio Manzoni, Nosiola, Pinot Bianco

Red grapes: Lagrein, Marzemino, Schiava, Teroldego





VENETO

Docg production zones: Amarone della Valpolicella, Asolo Prosecco, Bardolino Superiore, Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco, Recioto di Soave, Soave Superiore

Doc production zones: Bardolino, Garda, Lessini Durello, Prosecco, Soave, Valpolicella, Valpolicella Ripasso

Varietals:

White grapes: Durella, Garganega, Glera, Trebbiano di Soave

Red grapes: Corvina, Corvinone, Molinara, Rondinella

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA

Doc production zones: Collio, Friuli Colli Orientali, Friuli Grave, Prosecco

Varietals:

White grapes: Friulano, Glera, Ribolla Gialla, Verduzzo

Red grapes: Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso, Schioppettino



EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Docg production zones: Romagna Albana

Doc production zones: Lambrusco di Sorbara; Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro; Lambrusco Salamino di Santa Croce, Romagna

Varietals:

White grapes: Albana, Malvasia di Candia, Pignoletto

Red grapes: Lambrusco (Grasparossa, Castelvetro, Salamino, Sorbara), Sangiovese

TUSCANY

Docg production zones: Brunello di Montalcino, Carmignano, Chianti, Chianti Classico, Morellino di Scansano, Vernaccia di San Gimignano, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

Doc production zones: Bolgheri, Cortona, Elba, Montecarlo, Montecucco, Rosso di Montalcino, Rosso di Montepulciano, Vin Santo del Chianti

Varietals:

White grapes: Ansonica, Trebbiano Toscano, Vermentino, Vernaccia di San Gimignano

Red grapes: Canaiolo, Ciliegiolo, Colorino, Sangiovese

MARCHE

Docg production zones: Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva, Conero, Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva

Doc production zones: Rosso Piceno, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, Verdicchio di Matelica

Varietals:

White grapes: Passerina, Pecorino, Verdicchio

Red grapes: Montepulciano, Sangiovese

UMBRIA

Docg production zones: Montefalco Sagrantino

Doc production zones: Orvieto

Varietals:

White grapes: Grechetto, Trebbiano Spoletino, Verdello

Red grapes: Sagrantino, Sangiovese

LAZIO

Docg production zones: Cesanese del Piglio, Frascati Superiore

Doc production zones: Roma

Varietals:

White grapes: Bellone, Grechetto, Malvasia Puntinata, Moscato di Terracina

Red grapes: Aleatico, Cesanese

ABRUZZO

Docg production zones: Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Colline Teramane

Doc production zones: Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo

Varietals:

White grapes: Pecorino, Trebbiano

Red grapes: Montepulciano



MOLISE

Doc production zones: Tintilia del Molise

Varietals:

Red grapes: Tintilia

CAMPANIA

Docg: Fiano di Avellino, Greco di Tufo, Taurasi

Doc: Costa d'Amalfi, Falanghina del Sannio, Ischia

Varietals:

White grapes: Biancolella, Falanghina, Fiano, Greco

Red grapes: Aglianico, Piediroso

BASILICATA

Docg production zones: Aglianico del Vulture Superiore

Doc production zones: Aglianico del Vulture

Varietals:

Red grapes: Aglianico

PUGLIA

Doc production zones: Castel del Monte, Gioia del Colle, Primitivo, Primitivo di Manduria, Salice Salentino,

Varietals:

White grapes: Verdeca

Red grapes: Negroamaro, Nero di Troia, Primitivo

CALABRIA

Doc production zones: Cirò

Varietals:

White grapes: Greco Bianco

Red grapes: Gaglioppo, Magliocco

SICILY

Doc production zones: Etna, Faro, Marsala

Varietals:

White grapes: Carricante, Cataratto, Grillo

Red grapes: Nerello Cappuccio, Nerello Mascalese, Nero d'Avola



SARDINIA

Docg production zones: Vermentino di Gallura

Doc production zones: Cannonau di Sardegna, Carignano del Sulcis, Malvasia di Bosa, Mandrolisai, Vernaccia di Oristano, Vermentino di Sardegna

Varietals:

White grapes: Malvasia, Nuragus, Vermentino, Vernaccia

Red grapes: Bovale, Cannonau, Carignano

WINE ANALYSIS AND TASTING

Wine tasting is the experience that allows us to explore the many sensory nuances of this beverage. It is based on three fundamental pillars: visual, olfactory, and gustatory examination. Using this method helps develop our sensory abilities and allows us to better understand the characteristics and quality of the wines we taste.

APPEARANCE: By observing the wine in the glass, we can gather information about the wine's age, the grape variety used, and, in the case of sparkling wines, the presence and quality of the perlage (bubbles).

SMELL: Through the sense of smell, we can analyze the wine's aromatic profile. By evaluating the quality, intensity, richness, and types of aromas, we can

understand whether the wine is simple or complex, young or mature, and whether it was aged in wood or stainless steel, among other aspects..

FLAVOR (OR "PALATE"): By focusing on the sensations perceived on the palate and tongue, we can assess components such as sweetness, acidity, bitterness, and saltiness, as well as the quantity and quality of tannins and their balance. We also evaluate key structural elements of the wine such as body and persistence.



FOOD AND WINE

Pairing food and wine is the pinnacle of the tasting experience. When the two are perfectly matched, each enhances the other, increasing the overall pleasure of both eating and drinking.

While there are no absolute rules for the perfect pairing in every situation, there are guidelines that can lead to thoughtful and enjoyable combinations.

Food flavor sensations:

- ❖ Sweetness (typical of desserts or ingredients like honey)
- ❖ Sweet tendency (found in starchy foods like pasta, bread, potatoes)
- ❖ Softness (often linked to carbohydrates)
- ❖ Fat (in foods like cured meats and oils)
- ❖ Saltiness (e.g., in aged cheeses, many cured meats)
- ❖ Spiciness/Heat (due to added spices)
- ❖ Acidic tendency (e.g., tomatoes, some vegetables)
- ❖ Bitterness
- ❖ Succulence (moisture content, like in rare meats)

Wine sensations:

- ❖ Saltiness (mineral sensation)
- ❖ Acidity (common in young and/or white wines)
- ❖ Sweetness (found in wines with residual sugar, like passiti)
- ❖ Alcohol (perceived as warmth)
- ❖ Tannins (cause a drying sensation in the mouth)
- ❖ Effervescence (CO₂ bubbles, typical of sparkling wines)
- ❖ Structure/Body
- ❖ Aromatic intensity
- ❖ Persistence

Pairing Principles:

Pairing is based on principles of congruence and contrast, striving to create a balance between the sensations perceived. An example of a contrasting pairing is fried fish coupled with a wine of marked acidity, which “cleanses” the palate. Sometimes, however, it’s better to match similar sensations; in this instance, it’s referred to as a congruent pairing, such as a sweet dish with a sweet wine. A general rule holds that desserts should be served with sweet wines. If paired

with a dry wine, an unpleasant metallic taste might result. Soft sensations like richness and creaminess are complemented and brought out by freshness, acidity, and effervescence.

Sapidity/minerality is balanced and brought out by a wine’s softness, meaning wines with low acidity, a decent alcoholic strength, or slight residual sugars, and in the case of red wines, low tannin levels.

Juiciness calls for the astringent sensation provided by tannins, which “dries” the palate.

Finally, a food’s structure should match a wine’s structure: a robust, full-bodied food shouldn’t be paired with a light, delicate wine, and vice versa. Qual structure and intensity.

