

The Points Guy

MAXIMIZE YOUR TRAVEL

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Tenuta dell’Ornellaia, one of the earliest “Super Tuscan red blends,” blossomed in the 1970s and changed the way the wine world categorized bottles by ditching the strict rules of Italian Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC). These are great wines, and they’re pretty expensive — about \$190 a bottle or \$78 for the estate’s second wine, Le Serre Nuove. But there is one wine from Ornellaia that you can buy only at its tasting room in Bolgheri, located on the Maremma coast of Tuscany: Variazioni in Rosso dell’Ornellaia.

As marketing director Alessandro Lunardi explains, this is “a wine where Ornellaia channels the specific individuality of each vintage. The most recent vintage is 2011, and the blend is primarily Cabernet Franc. Vintage 2010, by comparison, was marked by Cabernet Sauvignon.” Variazioni can only be tasted and purchased in limited quantity at the estate for about \$40.

As the summer travel season heats up, wine lovers visiting Italy will be on the lookout for a number of these “you-can-only-buy-it-here” wines. Why don’t they sell here in the US? Mostly because importers limit the number of different wines they will sell from any one producer — no matter how famous the winery is. Additionally, some places produce limited editions sold only at the winery as rewards for loyalists who make the pilgrimage.

Below are nine more delicious Italian wines not sold in the U.S. but worth tracking down on your next trip to Italy. All are available at their respective wineries, but some may also be found in Italian wine shops throughout the

country. And while a few may have expensive price tags, others are ridiculously affordable — but only if you buy them there.

1. Essenzia di Caiarossa Rosso di Toscana IGT

Region: Pisa in Tuscany

Approximate Price: \$107

Beginning in 2009, Caiarossa decided to make a special red blend in select extraordinary vintages — 2009, 2011 and 2012 thus far — that would show the “essence” of their estate. The current release, 2009, is ripe and rich with dark fruits and earthy syrah flavors. But if you plan to carry a bottle back with you, bring a large suitcase; Essenzia is only sold in magnums.

2. Marchesi di Grésy Langhe Chardonnay

Region: Barbaresco in Piedmont

Approximate Price: \$30

This winery is well-known in the US for its extraordinary nebbiolo reds, but even the Marchesi’s other wines are hardly ordinary. Its chardonnay from the Langhe region is made in stainless steel but gains additional texture and flavors through extended time on its lees, the pieces of grapes and spent yeast cells that drop to the bottom after fermentation.

3. Marchesi de Frescobaldi Castello di Pomino “Leonia” Brut

Region: Near Florence in Tuscany

Approximate Price: \$26

Talk about a “family winery.” The Frescobaldis have been making wine just outside Florence for more than 700 years. This elegant sparkling wine from pinot noir grapes is named after Leonia Frescobaldi, who started making it after visiting Champagne in the 1800s. It has a rich, textured fullness, clean strawberry-like flavors and comes from the small appellation of Pomino located within the larger Chianti Rufina region.

4. Donnafugata “Prio” Sicilia Catarratto

Region: Marsala in Sicily

Approximate Price: \$10 — for now!

A few years ago, the Rallo family made the switch from producing sweet Marsala wines in western Sicily to making excellent table wines from both international and local grape varieties. Catarratto is one of the more promising indigenous white grapes, producing a wine that has aromas of white flowers and nicely textured flavors of apples.

5. Coppo “Piero Coppo” Riserva Del Fondatore Brut

Region: Near Asti in Piedmont

Approximate Price: \$82

The Coppo family has been making table and sparkling wines for four generations in the little town of Canelli, located just south of Asti in Italy’s Piedmont region. This flavorful brut — a standard term for most bubbly that are dry — is a combination of 60% pinot noir and 40% chardonnay and has a creamy elegance with aromas and flavors of freshly baked brioche. It takes its name from the founder of the winery.

6. Tenute Silvio Nardi Turan Sant'Antimo Rosso

Region: Montalcino in Tuscany

Approximate Price: \$13

Winemakers in Montalcino can use the Sant'Antimo designation when their wines are not 100% Sangiovese. But these bottles are overshadowed in reputation by the 100% Sangiovese-based wines of Brunello di Montalcino, and so the wines are seldom seen in the U.S. Winemaker and owner Emilia Nardi also makes a memorable Sant'Antimo Rosso, which blends 30% Sangiovese white grapes with 40% petit verdot, 20% syrah and 10% colorino to make a lean, well-structured wine with cherry flavors and a definite food-friendliness.

7. Masi Angelorum Recioto della Valpolicella Classico

Region: Valpolicella in Verona

Approximate Price: \$41

Valpolicella is famous for its powerful wines made from the treacly dried grapes of this region located just outside Verona. These days, generally that translates to a dry table wine or amarone-style wine. Masi's Angelorum, however, is indeed a traditional dessert wine with Port-like flavors but contains less alcohol. Made from the region's trademark grapes — corvina, rondinella and molinara — it's a delightful after-dinner companion when served with blue cheeses such as gorgonzola.

8. Ceretto Barolo Chinato

Region: Barolo in Piedmont

Approximate Price: \$40

The Ceretto family is famous not only for its great single-vineyard crus of Barolos and Barbarescos, but also for owning one of the best restaurants in northern Italy — Piazza Duomo in truffle-rich Alba. The family also helped resurrect the Barolo chinato category in which herbal quinine is added to 100% Barolo wine to produce an intriguing contrast of sweet-and-bitter flavors, often savored with chocolate.

9. Masseria Li Veli Valdana Malvina Aleatico Passito

Region: Salice Salentino in Apulia

Approximate Price: \$61

If Li Veli seems to ring a bell, it could be because visitors to London's Covent Garden neighborhood often dine at the Li Veli Bistro, Apulian winery's outpost there. Li Veli makes a variety of bottles on the plain of Salento, not the least of which is its *passito*, a dessert wine made from the dried and somewhat bitter aleatico grape, producing a textured, sweet-but-tart sipping companion to be enjoyed with an aged Toscano cigar.

A Final Tip

If you visit these wineries in Italy, be sure to also ask if they make grappa — most places do, and these traditional Italian brandies are generally more elegant, and scarce, than what you'll find in the U.S.

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