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# A Wine Writer's Top Italian Wines Of 2023

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*I write about wine (and sometimes food) from around the world.*

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Carla Maugeri, Maugeri, Milo, Etna PHOTO TOM HYLAND

Think of this article as a “Best of Italian Wines” for 2023. I certainly did not taste every Italian wine (how could I with several thousand examples?), but I did sample several hundred from several regions in the country, so let’s call this the top Italian wines, basically the wines that impressed me the most this year in multiple categories.

## **Sparkling**

### **Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Riserva Anna Maria**

BETA

**Clementi 2014** - You can always count on Maurizio Zanella to produce a stellar example of his Franciacorta Anna Maria Clementi (named for his mother) each release. The 2014, a blend of 76% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Nero and 9% Pinot Bianco, was fermented for six months in small oak casks and matured on its lees for eight years; there is zero dosage. While the 2014 is a touch lighter than some recent vintages, it is another outstanding wine, with bright fruit, lively acidity, excellent complexity and significant persistence. I would estimate peak drinking in ten to twelve years.

### **1701 Franciacorta Satèn 2018 and Franciacorta Rosé 2019**

Established in 2011, 1701 (named for the initial vintage year from this territory), is the first biodynamic Franciacorta producer. Two of their cuvées I tasted this year were outstanding. The 2018 Satèn, produced exclusively from Chardonnay, has attractive aromas of lemon zest, magnolia and a hint of honey. The finish is quite long and very satisfying, there is excellent complexity, impressive harmony and beautiful finesse.

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I love rosé sparkling wines, but have been disappointed by too many examples in Italy. This 2019 from 1701 is a happy

exception. This is an excellent wine, vibrant, fresh and delicious, with a rich mid-palate, impressive complexity and a lengthy finish. I love the cranberry and strawberry fruit flavors with this cuvée, which is dry and perfectly balanced. These two wines display the finesse and refinement found in the best wines produced according to biodynamics.

## **Rosato**

### **Ciavolich Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo "Fosso Cancelli" 2022 -**

Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, produced from the Montepulciano varietal, has become very popular over the past few years, and it's no surprise to see this, as the best examples have more character and richness than many other *rosati* that are too often light and simple. The best example I tasted this year was from Ciavolich, an excellent medium-sized producer that excels with its limited production wines under the Fosso Cancelli label. This Cerasuolo was vinified in amphora, giving this wine additional richness and texture. Here is a glorious dry rosato that is rich enough to pair with veal or pork, while it is ideal on its own as well; enjoy over the next 3-5 years.

### **Cirelli Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo Amphora 2022 - Another**

impressive Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, also treated in amphora, this is a touch lighter than the Ciavolich, but no less satisfying. Offering very good acidity and admirable finesse, this is a beautifully made wine. Enjoy over the next 3-4 years.



Tenuta Cataldi Madonna, Ofena, Abruzzo ©TOM HYLAND

### **Cataldi Madonna Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo Piè delle Vigne**

**2021** - Here is one of the most distinctive examples of Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, one the combines white and red wine vinification (the lots are fermented separately and then blended together). The result is a lovely wine, with significant texture and weight on the palate and a dry finish with very good acidity. Unlike most examples of rosato, this is rich enough to stand up to roast pork or a veal chop. It's also delicious on its own!

**Rocca di Montegrossi Rosato 2022** - 100% Sangiovese from this excellent producer in Chianti Classico. Medium-full with appealing cherry and strawberry fruit, a dry finish, tart acidity and excellent harmony; this is a beautifully made wine for lovers of serious rosé; enjoy over the next two to three years.

### **Bianco**

Too many to mention - so a short list of only nine.

### **Maugeri Etna Bianco Superiore Contrada Volpare**

BETA

**“Frontemare” 2022** - Etna Bianco is another category that has become much more important over the last few years. Arguably the best examples are from the Milo district on the east slope of Etna. This single vineyard offering has tremendous depth of fruit, superb varietal character and outstanding persistence - this is a vibrant white wine. There is the structure and stuffing with this wine for at least a decade of aging potential. Based on this vintage as well as the 2021, this is one of Italy's finest white wines!

**Laura di Vito Fiano di Avellino Arianiè 2020** - Laura di Vito has only been producing Fiano di Avellino since 2018 - she sold her family's grapes previously - but she is already a premier producer of Fiano di Avellino. Each vintage she releases three single vineyard Fiano, as well as a fourth example, a blend of the three plots. Each wine is special; my favorite from the 2020 vintage is the Arianiè bottling. Offering notes of golden apple, lime and hazelnut, along with outstanding complexity and finesse, this is a great Fiano di Avellino that combines sense of place with notable varietal character.

**Colli di Lapio Greco di Tufo Alexandros 2022** - Colli di Lapio is famous for their Fiano di Avellino, which is a prototypical version of this wine, but this Greco di Tufo is arguably their best wine in most vintages. This is one of the richest as well as varietally pure examples of Greco di Tufo I have ever tasted. A classic Greco di Tufo, with a powerful finish, this will drink well for more than a decade. Simply delicious!

**Le Batistelle Soave Classico Roccolo del Durlo 2021 -**

Today there are a few dozen top-notch producers of Soave and Soave Classico; Le Batistelle in Monteforte d'Alpone is among the very best. They produce three offerings each vintage, with the finest being Roccolo del Durlo from an old-vine site at their estate. Medium-full and bursting with aromas of pear, tropical fruit and significant floral notes (elderflowers), this is a stunning Soave Classico with great complexity and impressive persistence.

**Emidio Pepe Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2018** - Emidio Pepe has been one of the finest producers not just in Abruzzo, but in all of Italy over the past three decades. Known for his long-lived examples of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, as well as Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, he waits an additional year or two to release the Trebbiano, and the results are impeccable. The 2018 offers excellent ripeness with notes of orange rind, petrol and almond, and has great complexity and outstanding texture. This will drink well for ten years plus.

**Marina Cvetic Trebbiano d'Abruzzo Riserva 2020** - Here is a very particular style of Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, lush on the palate with ripe fruit and distinct wood notes, as the wine is matured in French barriques for more than a year. The 2020 is very rich, has great style and character and displays significant complexity, with notes of baked apple, lemon rind and nutmeg. This will stand up to any white meat as well as most red meats; enjoy over the next seven to eight years.

**Bisci Verdicchio di Matelica Vigneto Fogliano 2020 -**

Verdicchio di Matelica does not receive the attention of Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, but the best wines from both

territories are outstanding. Bisci is arguably the finest producer of Verdicchio di Matelica, and this 2020 single vineyard offering is stellar, with its intensity, varietal purity and juiciness combining to make an outstanding white wine that has at least ten years of aging potential.

### **Andrea Felici Castelli di Jesi Riserva Il Cantico della**

**Figura 2019** - This Jesi producer makes only two wines each vintage: a classic Verdicchio and a *riserva* named Il Cantico della Figura. The former is as elegant and as pure a Verdicchio as you will find, while the riserva is an amazing wine, one of power and finesse, with superb typicity; the 2019 is especially impressive with vibrant acidity and notable persistence, as well as the structure to guarantee 10-12 years of pleasure.

### **Ca' del Bosco Chardonnay Duemiladiciotto 2018**

(Duemiladiciotto means 2018) - It's rare that I am truly impressed by an Italian Chardonnay, especially given the dozens of marvelous Italian whites made from indigenous varieties. But the 2018 Chardonnay from famed Franciacorta producer Ca' del Bosco is an exception. Fermented in small oak casks, this is a full-bodied Chardonnay that explodes on the palate with ripe lemon and apricot fruit, backed by very good acidity and persistence. Very impressive on its own, pair this with lobster or lighter game.



Laura Bianchi, Castello di Monsanto PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

## Rosso

Again, there were numerous excellent/outstanding Italian red wines released in 2023, so I'll concentrate on a small selection.

**2020 Barbaresco** - A beautiful vintage for Barbaresco, with very good acidity, impressive ripeness and lovely charm. The best included: **Carlo Giacosa Montefico** and **Ovello, Piero Busso San Stunet, Bruno Giacosa Rabajà, Cascina delle Rose Rio Sordo, Rizzi Pajorè, Albino Rocca Ronchi** and **Angelo**.

Other stellar examples of Barbaresco released this year included **Ada Nada Rombone "Elisa" 2019, Produttori del Barbaresco Riserva "Don Fiorano" 2016** and **Piero Busso Gallina 2019** (great wine - 95 points).



**2019 Barolo** - One of the four best vintages for Barolo from the decade of the 2010s. Excellent concentration, outstanding varietal purity, rich tannins and very good acidity; the best Barolos from the 2019 vintage offer the promise of 15-25 years of drinkability. The finest include **Bartolo Mascarello, Paolo Scavino Bric Dël Fiasc, Aldo Conterno Romirasco, Giovanni Rosso Serra and Cerretta, Paolo Manzone Meriame, Marchesi di Barolo Sarmassa, Einaudi Monvigliero, Vietti Ravera, Poderi Oddero Rocche di Castiglione, Francesco Rinaldi Brunate and Renato Corino “Rocche dell’Annunziata** (96 points, Barolo of the year).



Estate vineyards at Le Piane, Boca PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

**Le Piane Boca 2018** - There are approximately ten producers of Boca, a Nebbiolo/Vespolina blend from the eponymous district in Alto Piemonte; without question, Christoph Künzli at Le Piane crafts the best examples year in and year out. He has commented that his 2018 Boca is his finest to date, releasing it after the 2019,

an impressive wine in its own right. Le Piane Boca rates with the finest Barolo and Barbaresco on a regular basis; for the 2019, there is that little extra in the sense of aromatics, polish, texture and finesse that make this wine one of the best reds in all of Italy this year; the wine is so aristocratic and velvety, you might think you are tasting a Grand Cru Burgundy.

**Castello di Monsanto Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Il Poggio” 2018** - Monsanto has released a Chianti Classico from their Il Poggio vineyard at their estate in Barbarino Tavarnelle since the 1962 vintage, which at the time made it the first single vineyard Chianti Classico. Today the wine is sold as a Gran Selezione, and it's rarely been better than the 2018 version. Although the wines from Chianti Classico in 2018 were not as powerful as those from 2015, 2016 and 2017, there is an elegance to this vintage that gives it remarkable appeal. This is one of the most appealing and silky examples of Il Poggio ever, and as delicious as the wine is at present, it will be even better over the next eight to ten years. A regal Chianti Classico.

**Gagliole Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Gallule” 2019** - One of the most underrated Chianti Classico estates is Gagliole near Panzano; every wine produced here is of excellent quality. The Gallule Gran Selezione from 2019 represents the best from this producer, as well as what a great Gran Selezione should be, as it has excellent concentration, impressive ripeness, very good acidity and significant persistence. Beyond all that, the wine is delicious! Look for 12-18 years of aging potential with this wine.

**Ruffino Chianti Classico Gran Selezione Riserva Ducale Oro 2018** - For years, this noteworthy wine was labeled as a

Chianti Classico riserva; it is now Gran Selezione. I've tasted numerous vintages over the years, and while I've enjoyed most examples, I never thought it was in the upper echelon of Chianti Classico. Well, this 2018 changes things. There is excellent typicity, a rich, layered mid-palate, excellent persistence and beautiful harmony. 2018 was a marvelous year for Chianti Classico, and Ruffino capitalized on this; this is so appealing now; it will also drink well over the next 10-12 years.

**Isole e Olena Cepparello 2020** - This 100% Sangiovese from one of the most celebrated estates in the Chianti Classico zone is as pure and complex a Sangiovese as can be found in Tuscany today. Ideal ripeness, superb harmony and significant pleasure are the keys to this wine, one that has cellar potential for 12-15 years. An essential Tuscan red that will appeal to all types of wine drinkers, from novice to professionals.

**Grattamacco Bolgheri Superiore 2020** - One of the essential Bolgheri reds, the 2020 is a stunning wine, with excellent depth of fruit, ideal ripeness, outstanding complexity and superb structure. Winemaker Luca Marrone includes a higher percentage of Sangiovese to go along with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot than most other Bolgheri producers; this ensures very good acidity, which in turn preserves freshness. Beautifully balanced, the 2020 Grattamacco has at least 15-20 years of life ahead of it.

**Il Marroneto Brunello di Montalcino Madonna delle Grazie 2018** - Because of the intense focus on the 2019 vintage for Brunello di Montalcino (these wines will be released in 2024), the 2018 Brunello vintage will be overlooked. The wines from

2018 are not as rich as those from 2019 (or 2015, 2016 or 2017), yet they are classically structured with very good acidity and notable typicity. The finest I tasted this year was the Madonna delle Grazie from Il Marroneto. Proprietor Alessandro Mori is one of the most brilliant minds in the area, and crafts among the most refined and expressive versions of Brunello di Montalcino each vintage. The 2018 Madonna delle Grazie, a selection of his finest grapes, has very good acidity and excellent persistence, with beautifully restrained wood notes and significant typicity. A beautiful wine that emphasizes finesse over power. Peak drinking will be in 12-15 years.

### **Antonelli Montefalco Sagrantino Chiusa di Pannone**

**2018** - Filippo Antonelli initially produced this wine - the first single vineyard Montefalco Sagrantino - from the 2003 vintage. This 2018, sourced from vines planted in 1995, is arguably the finest to date. Matured in large casks for 30 months, this is full-bodied with excellent concentration, very good acidity, notable complexity and a lengthy, beautifully balanced finish. While the level of tannins has always been a concern for producers of Sagrantino, Antonelli has been able to craft his wines in an elegant fashion, without the astringent sensation that too often dominates this typology. Rich, with a layered mid-palate and distinct charm, this is one of the finest examples of Montefalco Sagrantino I have ever tasted. Approachable now, this will improve over the next several years, with peak drinking in 15-18 years.

### **Nicodemi Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Notàri 2020**

**(Colline Teramane DOCG)** - Once a serviceable red meant for rich meals, Montepulciano d'Abruzzo has become a serious wine of notable complexity and structure over the past two decades.

One of the leading producers that has overseen this change has been Nicodemi, who makes several versions of this famous Abruzzese red, with the leading example being their Notàri. Sourced from 40-45 year-old vines and aged for one year in new and used mid-size barrels, this offers sublime varietal purity, excellent harmony and freshness along with medium-full, round tannins. This is a pleasure to enjoy now, while another eight to ten years will reward the patient drinker.

**Barone Cornacchia Montepulciano d'Abruzzo "Poggio Varano" 2021** - Several producers in Abruzzo now employ amphora in their winemaking for white, rosé and red wines. This Montepulciano d'Abruzzo from Barone Cornacchia is among the most successful examples of an amphora-treated Montepulciano I tasted this past year. Medium-full, there are distinct notes of black olive, anise and black plum; there is very good acidity along with elegant, medium-weight tannins and ideal harmony. Best of all, this is an appealing red at present with plenty of charm; peak drinking in eight to twelve years.

**Feudi di San Gregorio Taurasi di Montevergine Riserva 2016** - Sadly, you don't read much about Taurasi these days. It may be one of Italy's greatest and longest-lived red wines, but there just aren't as many notable releases of the wine produced today; let's hope this is only a temporary situation. One of the most consistently excellent examples is the Piano di Montevergine *riserva* from Feudi di San Gregorio. Bright, deep purple with classic aromas of morel cherry, black plum and mocha, this offers excellent depth of fruit, substantial tannins that are well balanced, very good acidity and a lengthy finish with impressive fruit persistence. Combining excellent sense of place

with great typicity, this will reward the patient drinker for at least another 12-18 years of drinking pleasure.

BETA

**Girolamo Russo Etna Rosso Calderara Sottana 2021 -**

Girolamo Russo may just be the best producer in Etna, as the winery produces not only excellent Etna Rosso, but also distinctive Etna Bianco and Rosato. The vines at Calderara Sottana are 50 years old, which lend tremendous complexity to the finished wine. There is very good acidity, notable persistence, outstanding typicity, and impressive drinkability. This is a wonderful example of Etna Rosso at its finest, combining local terroir along with subtle sensations of red wines from Piedmont as well as Burgundy.

**Alta Mora Etna Rosso Guardiola 2019 -** The Guardiola

contrada is the source of the finest Nerello Mascalese grapes for Alta Mora; the vines are 150-years-old! This is a gorgeous wine with outstanding ripeness and depth of fruit; there are aromas of morel and Bing cherry, along with a hint of ash; the tannins are medium-full and velvety, and the overall effect is simply stunning. Look for this wine to peak in 12-15 years. A great Etna Rosso!

**Dolce****Coffee Recioto di Soave “Le Sponde” 2019 -** Recioto di

Soave is an underrated and largely unknown Italian dessert wine. Produced from local Garganega grapes, this is a *passito* wine, one

in which the grapes are naturally dried; the typical method is to hang the grapes from chains in a warm, dark room. The resulting wine is lush and exotic. The 2019 Coffee version has flavors of pear, honey, caramel and fig, and there is a lengthy, lightly sweet finish that is clean and well balanced. Enjoy this on its own over the next ten to twelve years, or pair it with *pannetone* or serve it over vanilla ice cream.

### **Ricasoli 1141 Castello di Brolio Vin Santo del Chianti**

**Classico 2012** - Vin Santo is my favorite Italian dessert wine, and why not with the remarkable flavors and sensations of this wine? Produced for several decades, the Castello di Brolio Vin Santo is among the most accomplished and regal of all examples of this iconic Tuscan wine. The 2012 is a blend of two white varietals: Malvasia (90%) and Trebbiano (5%), along with 5% Sangiovese. Light amber gold with luscious aromas of apricot, baked pear and almond, the wine was aged for nine years in very small oak casks known as caratelli. Even with more than 12% residual sugar, this finishes clean and dry and is never heavy. You could pair this with certain pastries or biscotti, but I believe it is ideal sipped on its own. This should drink well for at least a dozen years, probably longer.

### **Rocca di Montegrossi Vin Santo del Chianti Classico**

**2013** - At Rocca di Montegrossi in Monti in Chianti, proprietor Marco Ricasoli Firidolfi regularly produces the finest example of Vin Santo, bar none. Produced entirely from Malvasia, this is deeply colored (deep amber/tawny) with hedonistic aromas, including notes of caramelized pear, brown sugar, cinnamon, figs and dried apricot. Extremely rich on the palate - this is as intense a Vin Santo as I've tasted - this has almost 40% residual sugar, yet thanks to lively acidity as well perfect balance, the wine

finishes clean. **This is a remarkable wine, and was my highest scoring Italian wine in 2023.** This is a wine that needs to be appreciated in small sips, so take your time tasting this wine, especially as once you open the bottle and then refrigerate it, it will keep for over a year. Of course, you could wait to open the bottle in ten to twelve years, when it will be amazing! A classic!

**Donnafugata Ben Ryé 2021** - On the small island of Pantelleria, just south of the island of Sicily, there is a remarkable dessert wine called Passito di Pantelleria, made from the local Zibibbo grape (a type of Moscato). There are several excellent examples; clearly the most famous - and arguably the finest - is Ben Ryé (pronounced re-ay). Lush, ripe and almost hedonistic, this is a superb dessert wine, one of the very best in all of Italy. I've tasted many vintages of this wine, and I'm happy to say that I've never had a better version than this 2021. Medium-sweet with flavors of apricot, orange zest, honey and a hint of saffron; enjoy this with biscotti or better yet on its own; try it tonight and be wowed or taste it again in another ten years - this is remarkable!

**Tom Hyland**[Follow](#)

I am a Chicago-based wine writer, educator and photographer, with 40 years of experience in the wine industry. For the past 21 years, I have...

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