



TASTINGS

Sample some wines from around the world, including Boutique Wild Flower Chardonnay 2005 and Antucura Calvucura Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon Mendoza 2003, on Friday at **The Wine Specialist**. 5 to 8 p.m. 2115 M St. NW, Washington. www.winespecialist.com.

SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

The beauty of Italian wine

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I found ourselves enjoying a wonderful bowl of risotto and a plate of pasta at one of our favorite Italian restaurants. We would playfully pick forkfuls of pasta or rice from each other's dishes and tease each other about who made the better choice. The only thing that was out of place was our full glasses of wine. Both remained untouched.

We had ordered a bottle of well-known Barolo from a decent vintage and had great expectations of enjoying it over the course of the evening. Unfortunately, the first sip did not live up to our expectations. The wine seemed out of balance; too little fruit and too much acidity. Maybe it was "tight" — requiring more exposure to air to soften it — but I had a sinking feeling that we had just picked a dud. So there it sat.

At last, Cindy reflexively picked up her glass and took a sip. A smile slowly spread across her face and, nodding her approval, took another taste. I was a bit apprehensive, but I decided to follow suit and was soon rewarded with soft red berry fruit flavors, in perfect harmony with the tannins and acidity. What happened? Did the wine have time to breathe? Maybe, but I suspect it had more to do with the food than contact with air. And therein lies the lesson; Italian wines love food.

Over the centuries, cuisine and wine from specific regions have evolved into a symbiotic relationship where one enhances the other. I believe no other country demonstrates this phenomenon more keenly than Italy. It seems every region in the Mediterranean-kissed country is blessed with wines that pair perfectly with the local fare. Our dinner experience was a reminder that sometimes wine on its own is good, but wine with the right food is sublime.

With that in mind, I decided to whip up a variety of Italian dishes and pair them with various Italian

wines available in our area. All wines are imported by Empson USA, and retail prices are approximate.

Canella Non-vintage Brut Rose, Spumante, Italy (\$20)

This pretty sparkling wine, made from Pinot Nero grapes, is a great way to start the evening off, with scents of strawberry, apple and citrus. Light flavors of strawberry, peach and kiwi dance across the tongue on medium-sized bubbles that shout "party." Serve chilled as a charming aperitif.

2005 Leonildo Pieropan Soave Classico, Soave, Italy (\$21)

A standout among Soave wines, this Garganega-based white has a fragrant nose of apricot and nectarines. The lush flavors of stone fruits have depth and weight in the mouth and feature just a hint of grass on the medium finish. A perfect complement to Crostini topped with ricotta and anchovies.

2004 Terrabianca 'Croce' Chianti Classico Riserva, Piedmont, Italy (\$29)

A beautiful example of classic Sangiovese, it features a bouquet of cherry, wild strawberry and cinnamon on the nose. Soft flavors of cherry, plum, mocha and spices linger on the tongue. Ample acidity keeps the fruit focused all the way through the medium finish. A delightful companion to veal Ossobuco.

2005 Bortoluzzi Pinot Grigio, Friuli, Italy (\$20)

Scents of marzipan, peaches and limes fill the glass and the mouth where additional flavors of apricots and nectarines join in. The crisp acidity keeps the flavors bright, and it's a great candidate with Linguini con vongole (linguini with clams).

2005 Jermann Chardonnay, Friuli, Italy (\$38)

This is a full-bodied Chardonnay featuring a nose of buttered crois-

sants and ripe pears. Substantial flavors of pear, apple and peach cobbler are supported by yeasty notes of baked bread. Just a touch of slaty mineral adds a bit of complexity and pulls the wine into sharp focus. This would be a wonderful accompaniment to grilled Branzini.

2003 Santadi Rocca Rubia Riserva, Sardinia, Italy (\$30)

This red wine, made from Carignano, an indigenous grape on Sardinia, is worth hunting down. Scents of blueberries, violets and licorice are featured on the nose. Full, ripe flavors of black fruits, cocoa, espresso are well-represented on the palate, where hints of earthiness join in on the long, well-balanced finish. Pasta with braised boar Bolognese with Pecorino cheese would be an ideal match on a cold winter night.

2003 Poderi Colla Barbaresco Roncaglie, Piedmont, Italy (\$50)

This wine is made from Nebbiolo grapes from the famous Roncaglia estate. Aromas of violets, earth and leather fill the glass. Blackberries, cherries and tobacco play off of the big tannins and lead to a lengthy finish featuring forest mushrooms and leather. A grilled veal chop with black truffle sauce would be heaven on Earth with this wine.

2003 Rerrabianca Campaccio Selezione Riserva, Tuscany, Italy (\$68)

Typically referred to as a "Super Tuscan", this mammoth red wine is a blend of 50 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 50 percent Sangiovese. Big flavors of ripe plum, black cherry, black raspberry and vanilla play out over the entire tongue. Just a hint of bell pepper sneaks in on the medium-length finish. It could use an hour or so before enjoying it with a Florentine style porterhouse steak.



Do you have a favorite bottle of wine? E-mail me at scott@vineguy.com.

