

I Love Italian Wine and Food - The Sardinia Region

Contributed by Levi Reiss
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I love Italian wine and food so much that I am doing a series on the typical and special wines and foods of Italy's twenty regions. This article explores the Sardinia region of southern Italy. Bargains abound. I'll make specific recommendations, and won't be silent if I'm unhappy with a wine.
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If you are looking for fine Italian wine and food, consider the Sardinia region of southern Italy. You may find a bargain, and I hope that you'll have fun on this fact-filled wine education tour.

{bot_wrgoogle}Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean, located in the Tyrrhenian Sea west of mainland Italy. Sardinia's terrain is mountainous, and its beaches are excellent. Sardinia is known for archeological ruins and has become a tourist destination for the international jet set. Because of its exceptional location Sardinia has always popular, Invaders include Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, and Spaniards, without mentioning numerous Italian peoples. During part of the 18th and 19th Century it was united with the northern region of Piedmont in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. The population is about 1.6 million.

Sardinia's administrative center is Cagliari, an ancient university town on the southern coast of the island. Its population is approximately one hundred sixty thousand. The famous author D. H. Lawrence compared this beautiful city to a "White Jerusalem." Another city of interest is Sassari, which has the best collection of Sardinian art.

Sardinia is Italy's leading source of organic produce, and includes nearly one-third of Italy's land cultivated biologically. The climate is subtropical and more than half the territory is devoted to pasture land. Food is plentiful, it is said that there are over 500 kinds of bread, perhaps one for every village. The inland is full of meat, including lamb, goat, pork and game, while the coast teems with fish, lobster, and eel.

Sardinia devotes about 107 thousand acres to grapevines, it ranks 8th among the 20 Italian regions. Its total annual wine production is about 28 million gallons, giving it a 12th place. About 57% of the wine production is red or rosé (only a bit of rosé), leaving 43% for white. The region produces 19 DOC wines and one DOCG wine, Vermentino di Gallura, one of the two DOCG wines produced in southern Italy. DOC stands for Denominazione di Origine Controllata, which may be translated as Denomination of Controlled Origin, presumably a high-quality wine. The G in DOCG stands for Garantita, but there is in fact no guarantee that such wines are truly superior. About 15% of Sardinian wine carries the DOC or DOCG designation. Sardinia is home to almost dozen four major and secondary grape varieties, about half white and half red.

There are no widely grown international white grape varieties in Sardinia. The best known Italian white varieties are Vermentino, Nuragus, and Vernaccia.

Widely grown international red grape varieties include Cannonau, known as Garnacha in Spain, and Grenache in France and elsewhere, and Carignano, known as

Carignan in France. The best known Italian red variety is Monica, which probably originated in Spain, and may be related to California's Mission grape variety.

Before we review the Sardinian wine and cheese that we were lucky enough to purchase at a local wine store and a local Italian food store, here are a few suggestions of what to eat with indigenous wines when touring this beautiful region.

Start with Melanzane in Pinzimonio, Smoked Eggplants in Mint-Basil Oil.

As a second course try Aragosta Arrosto, Roasted Lobster with Parsley and Bread Crumbs.

For dessert indulge yourself with Seadas, Pastry with Cheese and Bitter Honey.

OUR WINE REVIEW POLICY While we have communicated with well over a thousand Italian wine producers and merchants to help prepare these articles, our policy is clear. All wines that we taste and review are purchased at the full retail price.

Wine Reviewed

Sella and Mosca Cannonau di Sardegna (V) DOC Reserva 2003 13.5% alcohol about \$12.50

Cannonau wine may qualify as the mother of all European wines. It is made from the Grenache grape, which originated in Spain. The producer, Sella and Mosca, has the second largest contiguous vineyard in Italy. Over 6 million bottles are year are produced on an estate of more than 1500 acres. Some will say that such a humongous estate is unlikely to produce an outstanding wine. Such a claim may be incorrect, but this wine was far from outstanding.

The marketing materials stated that this wine is more or less ruby in color, tending to orange upon aging, with a light scent of grapes with a characteristic flavor ranging from dry to sweetish. It was aged three years in oak prior to its release and may be cellared for a decade or more. The wine is said to be particularly suitable to accompany red meats and seasoned cheeses. Uncork it at least one hour before serving.

I found that it had quite a light color for a red wine. To my mind, it was thin but pleasant with very little nose. I first tasted it with a rib steak marinated in a spicy sauce. This pairing brought out the fruit, and the wine was pleasantly acidic, but I would have preferred a more robust wine to balance the meat. I finished the bottle withy barbequed hamburgers, and it didn't go quite as well. The wine was weak, perhaps affected by staying too long in the bottle.

Pecorino Sardo is a traditional sheep's milk, semi-cooked hard cheese that comes

in a "sweet" or "ripened" variety. The sweet variety is soft, and the ripened variety is hard. My cheese was ripened and treated with balsamic vinegar. A commercial roasted eggplant with sweet red peppers accompanied the wine and cheese. Everything went well together, the nutty flavors of the cheese balanced the wine's fruit. In conclusion, I liked the wine best with the cheese. I don't plan on buying this wine again, I found it a bit overpriced. Even though it didn't cost a lot, one might have thought that a mass-produced wine from Sardinia would be somewhat less expensive.

About the Author

Levi Reiss has authored or co-authored ten books on computers and the Internet, but to be honest, he would rather just drink fine Italian or other wine, accompanied by the right foods. He teaches classes in computers at an Ontario French-language community college. His wine website is www.theworldwidewine.com . You can reach him at ital@mail.theworldwidewine.com.