

I Love Italian Wine and Food - The Lombardy 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 Lombardy region of northern 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 Lombardy region of northern Italy. You may find a bargain, and I hope that you'll have fun on this fact-filled wine education tour.

{bot_wrgoogle}Mountainous Lombardy is located in the north central zone of Italy on the Swiss border. It is one of the few regions of Italy without a seacoast. On the other hand Lombardy is known for its beautiful lakes. Lombardy owes its name to the Lombards, a Germanic people who ruled it and neighboring regions for two hundred years well over a thousand years ago. Other rulers included the Celts, the Romans, and the Franks. Its population is 9.4 million, the largest in Italy. In fact, about one of six Italian residents lives in Lombardy.

Lombardy is second to Emilia-Romagna in agricultural production. Among its many agricultural products are rice, wheat, corn, fruits, olives, cattle, pigs, and sheep. Natives still eat more risotto (a rice dish) and polenta (corn bread) than pasta.

The capital of Lombardy's is Milan, Italy's financial, fashion, and media center. With a population of 1.3 million, Milan is larger than seven regions of Italy.

Lombardy devotes about 66 thousand acres to grapevines, it ranks 11th among the 20 Italian regions. Its total annual wine production is about 44 million gallons, also giving it an 11th place. About 62% of the wine production is red or rosé, leaving 38% for white. The region produces 15 DOC wines and 3 DOCG wines, Franciacorta, a sparkling wine made in the traditional (Champagne) manner, and 2 red wines; Valtellina Superiore, reviewed below, and Sforzato di Valtellina. DOC stands for Denominazione di Origine Controllata, which may be translated as Denomination of Controlled Origin. The G in DOCG stands for Garantita, but there is in fact no guarantee that such wines are truly superior. Over 47% of Lombardy's wine carries the DOC or the DOCG designation. Lombardy is home to about four dozen major and secondary grape varieties, approximately three fifths red and two fifths white.

Widely grown international white grape varieties include Pinot Bianco, known as Pinot Blanc outside of Italy, Chardonnay, Trebbiano, and Malvasia. The best known Italian white varieties are Gargena, an Italian variety of Riesling, Renano Italico, and an Italian variety of Trebbiano, Trebbiano di Lugana.

Widely grown international red grape varieties include Pinot Noir. The best known strictly Italian red varieties are Barbera, Bonarda, Lambrusco, and a local Nebbiolo called Chiavennasca.

Before we reviewing the Lombardy 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 Pizzoccheri della Valtellina, Buckwheat Flour Ribbons with Wilted Cabbage, Potatoes, and Mountain Cheese.

For a second course try Ossobuco all Milanese, Braised Veal Shanks with Grenolata (Parsley, Garlic, and Lemon).

And for dessert, indulge in Budino di Pannetone, Pannetone Bread Pudding

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

Triaccio 'Sassela' Valtellina Superiore 2002 13% alcohol about \$16.50 DOCG

In his work Codice Atlantico, Leonardo da Vinci described Valtellina, the source of this wine as "A valley surrounded by tall and terrible mountains, it makes really powerful wines." This area has made wine since the days of the Etruscans and the Ligurians, prior to the ancient Romans. It is the northernmost area for growing the Nebbiolo grape. The wine itself is one of the three DOCG wines in Lombardy.

The marketing materials stated that its nose is quite outspoken, with aromas including mushroom, dried cranberry, and paraffin. It is dry with good fruit, surrounded by supple tannins. This medium-bodied wine is recommended with hard cheeses or grilled game birds.

This wine was aged 18 months in large wooden casks and a further 6 months in steel tanks. The producer says it can be cellared for 8-10 years and suggests drinking it with pasta of all sorts, air-dried beef, and cheese.

I first tasted this wine with beef ribs. It was round but a bit intimidated by the spicy cumin and curry sauce. Paired with a slow cooked beef and potato stew it handled itself better. It was quite fruity and cut the meal's grease. It almost tasted like a Beaujolais.

I tried it with two cheeses. Grana Padano is a classic Parmesan-type cheese made for a millennium in northern Italy including the Lombardy region. It is a cylindrical, cooked, semi-fat cheese which matures slowly. It has a grainy consistency and may be sliced or grated. The cheese's taste is fragrant and delicate. The wine brought out the nutty aspect of the cheese, while intensifying its fruit. It paired well with Pecorino Toscana from Tuscany, two regions south of Lombardy.

Final verdict. I was a bit disappointed with this wine, DOCG is supposed to mean top of the line, and it was not.

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 .