

# TIBERIO

*10 Great Bottles of Italian Wine Under \$25  
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by Eric Asimov*

Though noted primarily for red wine, Italy actually makes more white. These are diverse, delicious, great values and not a pinot grigio among them..



Regardless of the ubiquity of pinot grigio and Prosecco, the antiquated notion of Italy as solely a red wine culture retains its tenacious grip on the imagination. It was not true 20 years ago, and it's not true today.

Italy makes more wine than any other country on earth, and it might surprise you, as it did me, to learn that it makes more white than red.

In 2018, the last year for which figures are available, 57 percent of Italy's wine production was white, including Prosecco, a sparkling white, according to Italian Wine Central, an online provider of information and education.

Historically, it was the other way around, with Italy producing far more red than white. But white wine production in Italy surged past red for the first time in 2011, according to Italian Wine Central, and the proportion has grown almost every year since.

True, much of that production is pinot grigio and Prosecco. Both are largely generic, bland wines that are nonetheless highly popular. But just as the best-selling big-brand American wines do not suggest the potential for quality in the United States wine industry, these genres reveal little of how far Italian white wine has come in the last 30 years.

From Sicily, south of the Italian mainland, to Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northeast and the Valle d'Aosta in the northwest, Italy is overflowing with fascinating, distinctive white wines. Many of these wines are reasonably priced and great values. As the weather warms up and diets adjust to the season, these wines will make for wonderful summer drinking.

Shopping online from my pandemic isolation in Manhattan, I picked out 10 excellent bottles priced at \$25 or less. Each wine is made from a different grape or blend, which maybe is not so easy to imagine. Can you think of 10 American white wines without duplicating grapes? Really good ones, all under \$25? I didn't think so.

Yet, I look at the 10 wines I chose, and then consider all the Italian whites that I did not include. I easily could have picked another 10 great bottles without duplication if I were making my usual rounds through the city.

My choices included a trebbiano Abruzzese and a pecorino, both from Abruzzo; three from Sicily, a carricante from Etna, a grillo from western Sicily and a blend of insolia and grecanico from the Vittoria region; a zibibbo from Calabria and a verdicchio from the Marche; a grechetto from Umbria, a cortese from the Piedmont and a kerner from Alto Adige.

Not surprisingly in a country where rigid organization is rarely evident, many of these grapes have multiple names depending on the region they are grown.

Grecanico in Sicily is the same as garganega in Veneto, the primary grape of Soave. Trebbiano Abruzzese is different, and superior, to the myriad trebbianos grown elsewhere in Italy. Zibibbo is the same grape elsewhere in the world known as muscat of Alexandria. Insolia, also spelled inzolia, is known in other parts of Italy as Ansonica.

Confusing? You bet. It's enough to make Italian marketers plotz, as we say in New York. They would prefer Italian wine to be simplified. Make it all pinot grigio and Prosecco, and they'd be very happy.

But the diversity of Italian wine is its glory. I've said nothing of ribolla gialla from Friuli-Venezia Giulia or vitovska from the Carso area; fiano or falanghina from Campania, or prié blanc from the Valle d'Aosta; vespaiola from Vicenza or nosiola. What kind of food? Summer foods. Salads, pestos, dishes incorporating fresh tomatoes and cooked clams. Seafood and sunlight. Drinking these wines has made me feel less cooped up from Trentino.

I could go on, but you get the idea. And, by the way, there's chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and riesling to be had as well, if you were missing them.

As a general rule, these wines are leaner than American or French whites, but not always. They are more acidic and less oaky. And despite the habit of pouring pinot grigio and Prosecco at so many gallery openings and happy hours, they are at their best with food.

## Tiberio Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2018

I've written about this wine several times, but it's so good it deserves the attention. The siblings Christiana and Antonio Tiberio run this excellent estate, and they are good spokespeople for the trebbiano Abruzzese grape. Other strains of the trebbiano grape are more common, and Trebbiano d'Abruzzo may be made of either trebbiano Toscano, trebbiano Abruzzese or a combination. But the trebbiano Abruzzese grape is superior. For evidence, try this wine. The 2018 is dry, aromatic and richly textured, with bracing saline and floral flavors. Tiberio also makes a wonderful single-vineyard Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, Fonte Canale, which is considerably more expensive, and an excellent pecorino, which is not. (The Sorting Table, Napa, Calif.)

