



I don't need much of an excuse to drink Italian wines but warm weather is good one. Even though most are now at least 13.5% alcohol, to me they still feel lighter on the palate and I love the way they are so versatile with the lighter cuisine of the summer. For that reason this month you get two really great wines from our friends at Small Vineyards. Both are TWM exclusives and fresh off the boat for you.

2007 Marchetti Rosso Conero (\$15)

As a rule I don't wish to be anyone else but I think it might be nice to be Maurizio Marchetti for a couple of months. His great, great, Grandfather made a fortune in the spice trade, bought a four-hundred acre estate in the Marches then built a small castle on it. Maurizio now lives there with his wife, a cardiologist, and spends his time painting and making a little wine. I say "little" because he only has about 36 acres of grapes planted and only produces about 8000 cases of wine.

The Marches region (pronounced mar-kay) is dominated by the Apennine Mountains and most of the vineyards lie in the east-west valleys and a strip of land near the Adriatic Ocean. Until thirty years ago the region was considered very poor but since then the Marches has experienced a mini industrial revolution and is now considered a stronger-than-average state. With the growth in wealth has come an improvement in the regions wines and now the Marche is seen as a great source for modern, Italian wines at reasonable prices.

For red wine the dominate grape of the region is Montepulciano but there are also significant planting of Sangiovese. (There is significant evidence the two are closely related.) Many examples of the wines are grown in the low valleys, where sand is the dominant soil type, and the wines display a pleasant, fruity quality. Marchetti's vineyards lie on the south side of the Ensino River, where the soil is mostly clay and limestone, consequently his wines have bigger shoulders and more dimension. Maurizio is also lucky enough to be very picky about his fruit, often harvesting less than a bottle of wine per plant if he feels that is what makes the best wine.

For this wine Maurizio hand harvests the fruit and then ferments in stainless steel tanks. After a ten-day post fermentation maceration the wine is gently pressed into Slovenian oak casks (all very old) and aged for eighteen months. The wine is then lightly filtered then bottled. The final blend for the 2007 is 90% Montepulciano and 10% Sangiovese, he produced 2500 cases.

If you don't like Italian wines because they are too light this one should be a revelation for you. The color is deep garnet and there is pretty good staining in the tears. The nose is a heady combination of fresh blackberries, some black cherry, black tea, dried sage and saddle leather. In the mouth this wine shows a big first impression of black fruits then develops a firm, muscular frame that holds everything in place into a long finish. Drink this wine over the next three years with braised meats or grilled sausages.

2005 Fattoria Capannacce Rosso de Maremma (\$15)

I may envy the lifestyle of Maurizio Marchetti but it is the life, or maybe the attitude of this owner/winemaker that admire the most. Alberto Porta is a world traveler, speaks six languages (learning his seventh, Arabic) and makes wine in the rural and fiercely independent region of Tuscany known as Maremma. His passion for life is legendary and nothing slows him down, not even that he was stricken with polio thirty years ago while traveling in Malaysia. As the disease progresses he has simply outfitted his wheelchair with thick, knobby tires so he can maneuver around the vineyard and direct the harvest. Nothing slows him down or dampens his spirits, he loves life and approaches his wines with the same level of enthusiasm.

The Maremma, from which this wine comes, is not really famous but is certainly well known. Stretching between Livorno and Grosseto, the region has pristine white beaches, rolling hills, forests and vast stretches of rural farm land. Inhabited since before the Etruscans, the area was never known for winemaking until after WWII. For that reason there are few laws regarding grape selection or winemaking in the region, allowing independent winemakers like Porta to make the best wines possible. When asked why he chose Sangiovese, Syrah and Grenache as the base of his wines Alberto simply exclaimed, "those are the grapes I like to drink!"

Winemaking at this estate is very modern. After hand harvesting the grapes are put in stainless steel tanks where they undergo alcoholic and malolactic fermentations. Once complete the wine is moved to small, French barrels (225L) where it is aged for twelve to eighteen months. Porta only produces two wines, a Reserve tier wine called Poggio Crocino that is aged only in new and one year oak, and this Rosso, which is then aged in the two and three year old barrels. The final blend for this wine is 50% Sangiovese, 30% Syrah, 10% Grenache and 10% Canaiolo.

If the Rosso Conero is a slightly rustic, broad shouldered wine, this is a more suave and elegant bottling. The color is very deep garnet and there is slight staining in the tears. The nose is an exotic blend of fresh red cherries, pomegranate, red rose and red currants. In the mouth this wine hits with a big shot of juicy red fruits and then develops a firm, fresh fruit crunch that lifts the wine on the palate before it softens again into the finish. This is a really nice wine now, with an hour or so in the decanter, and will continue to improve for a couple of years. Serve with pasta or grilled meats.

Orecchiette with sausage and broccoli rabe

salt

1 pound orecchiette

8 ounces italian sausage, casings removed

6 cloves medium-large garlic minced (2 tablespoons)

1 bunch broccoli rabe (about 1 pound), trimmed and cut into 1 1/2 inch lengths

1/2 cup low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

1/2 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (about 1 ounce)

This is one of my favorite summer pasta dishes. It uses three of my favorite ingredients, pasta, pork sausage and bitter broccoli rabe. Broccoli and penne pasta also work great with this dish if you want to save time in the grocery store.

1. Bring 4 quarts water to a rolling boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon salt and the pasta, stir to separate, and cook until al dente. Drain and return the pasta to the pot.
2. While the pasta is cooking, cook the sausage until browned in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, breaking it into 1/2-inch pieces with a wooden spoon, about 3 minutes. Stir in the garlic and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring constantly, until the garlic is fragrant and slightly toasted, about 1 1/2 minutes. Add the broccoli rabe and chicken broth, cover, and cook until the broccoli rabe turns bright green, 2 minutes. Uncover and cook, stirring frequently, until most of the broth has evaporated and the broccoli rabe is tender, 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Add the sausage-rabe mixture, oil, and cheese to the pot with the pasta and toss to combine. Serve immediately.

Roasted Chickpeas, Mushrooms, Artichokes and Tomatoes (Adapted from Patricia Wells *Vegetable Harvest*)

I don't often find a vegetarian recipe that works with sturdy red wine but this one is perfect. I like this recipe a lot as a main course with a bitter green salad or as a side dish with roast chicken. It is perfect for either red wine this month.

2 tsp cumin seeds

2 cup canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed

2 cup canned artichoke hearts, drained

8 oz of baby Bella mushrooms, cleaned, trimmed and sliced thin

1 cup of tomato sauce

1/2 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, finely grated

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees
2. Toast the cumin seeds in a small, dry skillet, shaking constantly until they are fragrant. Be careful they will burn quickly. Once they finished, set aside until cool then grind to a fine powder in a spice grinder or mortar and pestle.
3. In a large bowl combine all the ingredients except the cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to a 1 quart gratin dish that has been rubbed with olive oil, smoothing the mixture with the back of a spoon. Place in the center of the oven and bake for 20 minutes, or until the edges begin to bubble. Cover the top with the cheese then return to the oven for 10 minutes, or until the cheese is lightly browned and the mixture is lightly bubbly all over. Serve with crusty, Italian or French bread.