



For this month we'll continue following the process of wine, from vine to bottle, looking at a vineyard term called *exposition*. These are the factors that determine how the vines will be farmed, and includes variables such as elevation and orientation to the sun. The features for this month come from vineyards where the producers take these factors into consideration in order to create the best possible wine in the bottle.

2017 Palamá Verdeca Frizzante "Arcangelo" (\$15)

The wines from Nini Palamá are no stranger to long-time club members, or those who follow the weekly newsletter. Our relationship with this winery started shortly after their American importer, Small Vineyards, brought his wines to us in 2010. What makes the wines from Palamá so unique, and worthy of so many features, is they show the polish and elegance of northern Italian producers, but his are from the southern region of Apulia.

Geographically, Apulia, or Puglia in Italian, represents the heel of the boot of Italy, on the southeast side of the country. In wine terms we divide the entire region in half, with the northern area shielded to the west by the Apennine Mountains, while the south is surrounded on three sides by water. The northern zone is also warm, but not quite as dry, and the vineyards lie at a slightly higher altitude. Collectively Apulia is the largest region in Italy for olive oil, producing almost half of the country's crop, and 17% of their wine.

The land on which the vineyards of Apulia lie were formed by the weathering of the Apennine Mountains, which create a "spine" that runs the entire length of Italy. This is a very old mountain range, starting to form around 65 million years ago. Since then they have been weathering, so smaller particulates were separated from the bedrock and washed down to lower elevations. Today this forms the deep sand, gravel and clay soils that are the vineyard lands of Apulia. In these conditions the vines thrive, as being old soils they are rich in organic material. This region also receives a high level of sunlight days as the vineyards lie in a rain shadow of the Apennines too, reducing cloud cover and rain. This all combines to allow most producers to farm big yields of grapes and make, at best, very ordinary wines.

This is not the case for Palamá. To keep yields down they work extensively in the vineyard so that each vine only produces enough grapes for one bottle of wine. This gives him the concentration he is looking for, and he has the skill in the cellar to make sure the results are very polished. This wine is a newer product to us, a sparkling wine produced from an obscure variety, Verdeca.

Unless you bought the still version of this wine we featured a couple of weeks ago, this is likely the first time you have tasted the Verdeca grape. This is a very old variety that grows in Southern Italy, primarily in the higher elevations of Puglia, with pockets planted in Basilicata. It is even allowed as part of the blend of Lacryma del Christi, a wine made as a field blend from the slopes of Mount Vesuvius in Campania. It is not typically bottled as a stand-alone variety, but leave it to Nini to make something uncommonly delicious with the variety.

You will notice this immediately when you pull the cork and the wine lightly pops. This is not full sparkling, but what the Italians call *frizzante*. The bubbles will not persist for very long, but it helps to keep the wine cold. The nose is has a familiar smell fresh cut yellow apples, vanilla, pineapple and yellow plums. The feel on the palate is dry, with a light dusting of minerality surrounding the plump fruit into the finish. This is a lovely brunch wine, with eggs Benedict or a frittata of Prosciutto, goat cheese and leeks, but will work with almost any light dinner as well.

2016 Podere Ciona Semifonte (\$20)

The small estate of Podere Ciona is owned by the Gatteschi family and located at the southern edge of the Chianti Classico zone, outside of the city of Siena. Here the family farms 12 acres of vines and produces about 1500 cases per year. In addition to the winery, the family also operates a small agroturismo where you can stay and even take cooking lessons from Mama, Franca Gatteschi. Last September I led a tour group through Tuscany and we were privileged to not only tour this lovely little estate with winemaker/owner Lorenzo Gatteschi, but his mother also prepared our lunch!

Lorenzo produces several wines but their top bottling is not a Chianti Classico, but rather a "Super Tuscan" bottling called Le Diacce. Even more surprising is that it is not based off of Sangiovese, but rather is entirely Merlot. Merlot rarely takes center stage in this part of Tuscany, but the Le Diacce vineyard is very steep and lies between 1600 and 2050 feet above sea level. This is very high for the Classico zone and Sangiovese would struggle to ripen. The site also sits on a hilltop surrounded for miles by thick forests. The thick forests that surround the estate help to cool the property quickly at night so the grapes retain great natural acidity. Also, unlike most of Chianti Classico where clay soils are the norm, here are a combination of quartz arenite (sandstone), clay schist and marl. These soils provide great drainage while retaining heat during the warm summer days. As a result, they are able to ripen Bordeaux varieties that normally struggle in the Tuscan climate.

Why this is important for us is that Semifonte is a blend of the youngest vines from the Le Diacce site, along with 20% Alicante Bouchet, which grows in a corner of the vineyard on the opposite side of their property. The Alicante is planted in a warm spot that allows this late ripening variety to ripen. When I visited in mid-September I was surprised to learn you can actually see the vines from across the vineyard as they turn purple as the grapes reach ripeness. This is because Alicante Bouchet is a *teinturier* variety, from the French verb, to stain. The grapes contain so much anthocyanin, or color compounds, that their juice is red, instead of clear like most red grape varieties. Tasting the wine from barrel, as it was about half-done fermenting, it practically stained the glass it was so dark! This adds a lot of color and extra dimension to the finished wine.

When you open this wine, give it a splash in the decanter before serving. The nose opens quickly to reveal a lovely combination of red licorice, candied cherries, milk chocolate, rose petals, pipe tobacco and touch of cocoa powder. On the palate it has a good sense of concentration, with moderate tannins that frame the fruit into a nicely long finish. This wine is delicious now but I also often cellar a bottle or two for a couple of years and it always gets better. Drink with any pasta dish- they served this with a white lasagna with pesto, studded with green beans. It was absolutely delicious.

Prosciutto and Goat Cheese Frittata

In America, most of us do not consider eggs a staple for lunch and dinner, but they are a great way to get protein in a lighter form. I love to serve frittata on a hot summer night with a salad and a little Champagne. This recipe is superb with the Verdeca Frizzante, as well as crisp white and red wines. This recipe serves four, but can be easily halved, just reduce the size of the pan to an eight inch skillet. Also, do not waste money on expensive Prosciutto for this recipe, the basic Boar's Head works fine.

12 large eggs
4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (1 cup)
¼ cup chopped fresh basil
3 tablespoons half-and-half
¾ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 small leeks, white and light green parts only, halved lengthwise, sliced thin, and washed thoroughly
3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into 1/2-inch-wide strips

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Whisk eggs, goat cheese, basil, half-and-half, salt, and pepper together in bowl until well combined, about 30 seconds; set aside.
2. Heat oil in 10-inch oven-safe nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add leeks, cover, and cook until softened, 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Add prosciutto and egg mixture to skillet and cook, using rubber spatula to stir and scrape bottom of skillet, until large curds form and spatula begins to leave wake but eggs are still very wet, about 2 minutes. Shake skillet to distribute eggs evenly; cook, without stirring, for 30 seconds to let bottom set.
4. Bake until surface of frittata is puffy and golden, about 5 minutes. (When cut into with paring knife, eggs should be slightly wet.) Remove skillet from oven and let stand for 5 minutes to finish cooking. Using spatula, loosen frittata from

skillet and slide onto platter or cutting board. Cut into wedges and serve.

Easy Bolognese with Tagliatelle

“When in Rome...”, so with the features this month this recipe just seems perfect. For or three or four, divide the sauce in half and freeze the balance. I also use only 12 oz of pasta for a the smaller group.

1 pound 93 percent lean ground beef
2 tablespoons water
¼ teaspoon baking soda
Salt and pepper
4 cups beef broth
6 ounces pancetta, chopped coarse
1 onion, chopped coarse
1 large carrot, peeled and chopped coarse
1 celery rib, chopped coarse
2 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
4 tablespoons tomato paste
1 cup dry red wine
1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (1/2 cup), plus extra for serving
1 pound tagliatelle

1. Toss beef with water, baking soda, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in bowl until thoroughly combined. Set aside.
2. While beef sits, bring broth to boil over high heat in large pot (this pot will be used to cook pasta in step 6) and cook until reduced to 2 cups, about 15 minutes; set aside.
3. Pulse pancetta in food processor until finely chopped, 15 to 20 pulses. Add onion, carrot, and celery and pulse until vegetables are finely chopped and mixture has paste-like consistency, 12 to 15 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.
4. Heat butter and oil in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. When foaming subsides, add pancetta-vegetable mixture and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until liquid has evaporated, about 8 minutes. Spread mixture in even layer in bottom of pot and continue to cook, stirring every couple of minutes, until very dark browned bits form on bottom of pot, 7 to 12 minutes longer. Stir in tomato paste and cook until paste is rust-colored and bottom of pot is dark brown, 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Reduce heat to medium, add beef, and cook, using wooden spoon to break meat into pieces no larger than 1/4 inch, until beef has just

lost its raw pink color, 4 to 7 minutes. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to simmer. Cook until wine has evaporated and sauce has thickened, about 5 minutes. Stir in broth and Parmesan. Return sauce to simmer; cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 30 minutes (sauce will look thin). Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Rinse pot that held broth. While sauce simmers, bring 4 quarts water to boil in now-empty pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until al dente. Reserve 1/4 cup cooking water, then drain pasta. Add pasta to pot with sauce and toss to combine. Adjust sauce consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Transfer to platter or individual bowls and serve, passing extra Parmesan separately.