



Tim's Wine Market

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When in Rome, what do the Romans drink? Inevitably, when the discussion turns to Old World wine regions, the Roman Empire and the wine trade go hand in hand. After all, the Romans planted grape vines almost everywhere they conquered, and engaged in vigorous trading of wine with the few neighbors they left alone. Fast forward 2,000 years, however, and look at a wine growing map of modern Italy. Many of the regions and wines you will recognize are hundreds of miles from Rome! Yet Lazio, the region surrounding Rome, is the country's 6th-largest producer by volume, producing wine across 20 DOCs.

Approximately 90% of the wine produced in Lazio is white, made from heirloom varieties such as Malvasia and Trebbiano. Most of this wine is still funneled into the Eternal City itself, where it is sold in restaurants and consumed by locals. In recent years, many historical techniques of the region, such as skin contact white wines and amphora fermentation, have become popular again, particularly with younger winemakers. As for the remaining 10%, these are predominantly red wines, made from various combinations of Sangiovese and French varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Though the latter may appear to be a recent innovation, these and other Bordeaux varieties have a long history in Italy, Lazio included.

The history of this particular property dates back to the late 1940s, when many of Italy's wine-growing regions were struggling to survive after being decimated by WWII. In much of southern Italy and Lazio, winemakers were focused on quantity over quality, often over-cropping and using modern chemical treatments to boost production. However, when the Prince Alberico Boncompagni Ludovisi was re-planting his vineyard holdings outside Rome, he focused on small production, eschewing chemicals and mechanization whenever possible. Today we would call his methods organic or low-intervention viticulture, but at the time it was simply tradition.

In another unconventional decision, the prince decided to incorporate Bordeaux varieties in the re-planting, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and, most surprisingly, Semillon. The quality and unorthodox nature of the prince's wines made them popular among Rome's growing middle class, and winemakers from across Italy took notice. One such winemaker was the legendary Piero Antinori, who would later marry into the family and bring his substantial winemaking knowledge to the table. Today the estate is run by Antinori's three daughters, who still bottle this wine under their grandfather's label.

2021 Tenuta Principe Alberico "Appia Antica" Bianco - \$25

This white wine is, in some ways, characteristic of the traditional Roman-era viticulture of Lazio in that it is a blend centered on a clone of the Malvasia grape. Malvasia, along with its many offspring, was one of the most important varieties cultivated throughout the Roman Empire. Today, it is still found throughout the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, and remains the principal white variety of Lazio, where it is prized for its aromatic complexity. This particular clone of Malvasia is called "Puntinata," or "spotted," in the local dialect. Joining it in the vineyard is Semillon, which contributes freshness and aromatic intensity. Though new to the region Semillon is also well suited for the drier climate of Lazio. These two varieties are planted within the same vineyard block but harvested separately as Semillon ripens considerably earlier.

When you open this wine, you will want to serve it chilled, but not ice cold, around 55 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, being composed of two aromatic varieties, it will benefit from decanting as well, up to half an hour. On the palate, notes of fresh quince, yellow plum, pineapple rind, green fig, and honeysuckle make this wine an ideal pairing with a wide variety of dishes. Drink now through 2025 with prosciutto-wrapped asparagus, chicken Madeira, or pasta carbonara.

2020 Tenuta Principe Alberico “Appia Antica” Rosso - \$25

Bordeaux varieties such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon have been cultivated in central Italy as early as the 15th century, when the end of the Avignon Papacy saw many church officials returning to Rome. Tuscany and Lazio were the site of many of these experimental plantings, and in subsequent years these varieties, particularly Cabernet Franc, would spread throughout much of central and northern Italy.

However, for most modern wine drinkers, the history of these grapes in Italy begins with the “Super Tuscan” boom of the 1970s, centered on Cabernet Sauvignon and largely spearheaded by Piero Antinori. After the success of his Tignanello label, Antinori wanted to see how Cabernet Sauvignon performed in other parts of Italy. In fact, one of the reasons he took an interest in Tenuta Principe Alberico was its history of producing similar wines in Lazio! In addition, unlike Tuscany, the soils of Lazio are largely volcanic, which brings out unique aromatic qualities in many Bordeaux varieties.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. In addition, this wine will benefit from serving at cellar temperature, or around 58-60 degrees Fahrenheit. On the palate, this wine delivers notes of black cherry, black currant preserve, mocha, black licorice, and earth. Drink now through 2025 with arancini, pasta amatriciana, or Tuscan sausage and kale dishes.

Pasta Carbonara

This is the fourth time I have published this recipe for EXP, which I adopted from Milk Street, because it is always popular and it works so darn well with Italian wines. Please note this is an authentic carbonara recipe, considered one of the Roman “mother” pasta dishes. The core principal is the most important; properly seasoned cooking water for the pasta and using Pecorino-Romano, not Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. The lactic bite of cheese made from sheep’s milk is what makes this dish. Also, being an authentic interpretation this has no cream, which is the invention of American-Italian restaurants because it saves time to prepare.

3 oz pancetta, thinly sliced and chopped

1¾ C water

6 large egg yolks

2 tsp cornstarch

**6 oz Pecorino-Romano, finely grated,
plus more to serve**

12 oz spaghetti

2 tbsp kosher salt

**2 tsp black pepper, ground,
plus more to serve**

In a 10-inch skillet over medium, cook the pancetta, stirring, until crisp, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Measure out and reserve 3 tablespoons of the rendered fat; if needed, supplement with olive oil. Set the pancetta and fat aside.

In a large pot, bring 4 quarts water to a boil. Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, whisk the water, egg yolks and cornstarch until smooth. Add the cheese and stir until evenly moistened. Set the pan over medium-low and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture comes to a gentle simmer and is airy and thickened, 5 to 7 minutes; use a silicone spatula to occasionally get into the corners of the pan. Off heat, whisk in the reserved pancetta fat. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Stir the pasta and salt into the boiling water and cook until al dente. Reserve about ½ cup of the cooking water, then drain the pasta very well. Return the pasta to the pot and let cool for about 1 minute.

Pour the pecorino-egg mixture over the pasta and toss with tongs until well combined, then toss in the pepper. Let stand, tossing the pasta two or three times, until most of the liquid has been absorbed, about 3 minutes. Crumble in the pancetta, then toss again. The pasta should be creamy but not loose. If needed, toss in up to 2 tablespoons reserved pasta water to adjust the consistency. Transfer to a warmed serving bowl and serve, passing more pecorino and pepper on the side.