

CIAO, ITALIA!

by *Hanna Lee*, www.womenforwinesense.com

Americans have been enjoying Italian wines for many decades. I personally love Italian wines and feel Italian at heart. I have traveled to Italy on numerous occasions, especially its northern regions. I fell in love with their culture, gastronomy, people, and, of course, their great wines.

I interviewed David Rosengarten, one of the world's foremost authorities on food, wine and cooking. David has been covering these areas for many years for publications like the *New York Times*, *Food & Wine*, and *Gourmet* and publishes *The Rosengarten Report*. He is also an award-winning cookbook author, having had a show on the Food Network for over ten years.

HL: You have given many seminars on Northern Italian wines. What do people find most charming about them?

DR: It's no secret that Americans are in love with the culture of Italy – so the things I emphasize are regional, and how these wines are used with food in their regions. I see a distinct loss of interest in attendees when wines don't show regional character or are made from non-Italian grapes, or are recommended as the "perfect wines for an American BBQ!"

HL: What Northern Italian varietals are your favorites and why?

DR: Of course, one cannot deny the appeal of the grand red wines of Piemonte, such as Barolo and Barbaresco. I especially love them when they are made in an old-fashioned, rustic style, and have had the opportunity to age for at least twenty years. However, I'm a big fan of other reds from that area that don't hit the pocketbook as hard, for example, of Ghemme, Carema, Spanna and Gattinara.

Also from Piemonte...I'm especially in love with the lighter, more everyday wines, the ones not made from Nebbiolo. When you have a dish with tomato sauce, you must have Barbera!

I am also fond of many other wines across the band of northern Italy. One of my favorite areas is Valpolicella, in the Veneto. Of course I love the big, rich, almost sweet Amarones that are made there – but what I like most of all is when a great producer can bring some of that Amarone complexity to a much lighter, more graceful Valpolicella.

HL: How would you describe these varietals compared with those more

familiar to Americans, e.g., Cabernet Sauvignon?

DR: Italian varieties tend to have a much more mysterious profile. I love hovering over a glass of an aged Italian red and starting to pick out the layered, hidden olfactory qualities: cheese, wet steel, blood, truffles, roses...

HL: At a classic Thanksgiving dinner with turkey, stuffing, and all the fixings, which Northern Italian wines would you recommend and why?

DR: The "problem" with the turkey dinner is that many of the accompaniments are sweet, and it takes wine with a little sweetness to stand up to candied yams, marshmallows, cranberry jelly, etc. I have found that Amarone (even the "dry" ones) can play this role remarkably well.

HL: Which Northern Italian wines would best complement a traditional Christmas dinner?

DR: Many Americans like to evoke festivity with Italian food on the holidays; the traditional Christmas Eve "Feast of the Seven Fishes" has become a very popular option among foodie Americans. And what could be a better accompaniment to this than crisp Italian white wine? There

are many northern Italian options to choose from, but my pick would be Vermentino from Liguria.

HL: Which Northern Italian sparklers are best for ringing in the New Year?

DR: There are some sparkling wines from Lombardy and Trentino that do a good job of mimicking the style of wine produced in Champagne, France. But I love the Italian sparkling wine that seems most Italian, Prosecco. You would never mistake it for Champagne. It is much simpler, more light-hearted, with more of an emphasis on young, bright fruit. I find it to be devastatingly good with such antipasto items as prosciutto, salumi of all types, and hard, grating cheeses that are young enough to eat in chunks (such as Grana Padano and Parmigiano-Reggiano).

The Women for WineSense NY Chapter will be hosting a Piemonte wine and food tasting with cookbook author Brian Yarvin, whose latest title will focus on this incredible region and will be out this winter. For more wine events in Manhattan, please visit www.womenforwinesense.org. To learn more about wines and food from Italy, please visit the Italy America Chamber of Commerce website, www.italchamber.org and the Italian Trade Commission at www.italianmade.com. *Cin, Cin!*

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ZAGAT 2002

Yorkvillers go "south-of-the-border" at this "dark", "mysterious" Mexican beloved for its "dependably" "delish" "gourmet" fare and "friendly owners"; their only regret is that this onetime "sleeper" has "been discovered" and it's now necessary to "call ahead."

OUR TOWN

"Maz Mezcal had a quite recent overhaul generated by its expansion. The renovation resulted in a beautiful, restful, considerably larger space with soft rose walls nuzzled with orange and low, sexy lighting from hand-painted talavera tile sconces. Despite the radical expansion, Maz Mezcal has retained its amiable neighborhood feeling, and the kitchen is putting out better and more ambitious food than ever before, all at quite reasonable prices.

