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## What to Drink in October

*Italian wines for small parties, big meaty family dinners, and the celebration of the harvest.*

By Joe Bastianich



October is one of my favorite times of the year to drink wine. The harvest is drawing to a close, the leaves are turning, and a chill picks up in the air. It's exactly the kind of weather that makes me want to build a fire and invite friends and family to warm their hands at the hearth. In my native Friuli, Italy, we mark the season with a tradition not unlike American Thanksgiving: the hunter's dinner, where the abundance of fall produce is served alongside the cinghiale (wild boar) and game birds common to the region. Because these dinners celebrate the bounty of the land, I like to serve terroir-driven wines that complement the warmth and richness of autumnal flavors. My picks, as you will see, all come from Italy.

Whether you're in Italy or in the States, the cooler temperatures provide an excuse to reunite with old friends, experiment with new recipes, and enjoy some truly spectacular pours.

### About Joe Bastianich

After a brief stint on Wall Street, Bastianich spent a year working on vineyards and in restaurants, and immersing himself in the rich tradition of Italian winemaking and cuisine. He then partnered with his mother, Lidia, to open his first restaurant, New York's Becco, and in 1998 teamed up with chef Mario Batali to create Babbo Ristorante e Enoteca. He has subsequently co-launched Lupa, Esca, Otto Enoteca Pizzeria, Casa Mono, Bar Jamón, Del Posto, and Italian Wine Merchants, an upscale retail shop devoted to Italian wines. Recently, the native New Yorker headed West and opened a suite of restaurants, again with Batali: in Los

Angeles, Pizzeria Mozza and Osteria Mozza, and Las Vegas B & B Ristorante and its more casual companion, Enoteca San Marco.

Bastianich also runs the acclaimed wine estates Azienda Agricola Bastianich (in Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and La Mozza s.r.l (in Maremma, Tuscany). He has teamed with David Lynch to write *Vino Italiano*, a comprehensive look at Italian Wines, and *Vino Italiano Buying Guide*, a companion guide. In 2005 Joseph won the James Beard Foundation's Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional award, as well as the title of Bon Appétit's Wine and Spirits Professional. Joseph appears regularly as a wine authority on both Lidia's and Mario's television shows and as a contributor on NBC's Today Show.

*Photos: Wine bottles courtesy of Italian Wine Merchants.*

### Wines for Thanksgiving

I love to fill an autumn house with the smells of roasting game, and at my winery in Friuli, we have a traditional hunter's dinner each October. These meals allow us to showcase more fine and delicate wines: I like to pour the firmly structured Camartina blend produced by Querciabella with a slow-braised cinghiale to temper and tame the rich and fragrant meat.

This Thanksgiving, try a wild game bird instead of a turkey, and you'll find that your pairing options increase exponentially. There is no better match for an oven-roasted pheasant than Sfurat, Italy's answer to red Burgundy. The simple pan dripping-flavored potatoes—which we like to serve with the bird—allow the subtleties

of the noble Nebbiolo grape (also used to make Barolo and Barbaresco wines) to shine through.

## Recommendations

### Valtellina Sfursat 5 Stelle Nino Negri 2003 (\$60)

Raspberries and currants with notes of tobacco and cedar box make up this complex nose, which evolves into cooked berries as the wine opens up. There's an explosion of berries on the palate with a resounding finish of damp earth and pine resin.



**Camartina Querciabella 2003 (\$70)** (different vintage pictured) Sweet oak and brooding ripe plums give this giant super Tuscan its thick, brooding appeal. It's a dominating mouthful of Tuscan earth and sunshine.

## Toasting the Harvest

The abundance of the Earth is never more apparent than in October, and no produce is more symbolic of the season than the pumpkin. Italians have been cooking with gourds for centuries and there are hundreds of ways to prepare these squash fruit, but my personal favorite is to make fresh pasta. Nothing tastes more like fall to me than a plate of pumpkin lune (moon-shaped pasta) in a sweet butter sage sauce, which I like to pair with a rich, barrel-fermented white. The creamy "super-white" (a blended white wine), Vespa Bianco, that I bottle in Friuli is a perfect accompaniment to any autumn meal; it's redolent of the pears and clover honey harvested throughout the season. I might be biased, but I think this may be my favorite autumn white.

This is also a wonderful time of the year for mushrooms, which are finally ready to be foraged from the forest floor after threading through the soil all summer long. Porcini risotto is a classic way to honor the mushroom's flavor. The arborio rice slowly absorbs the funghi's musk, and each bite is filled with savory earthiness. I always like to complement this dish with Barbaresco, a wine that delivers the very essence of terroir with its wild and forestale (forestlike) scents.

## Recommendations



**Vespa Bianco Friulian Superwhite Bastianich 2004 (\$37)** (pictured)

A creamy, rich white with a huge structure, this wine is full of extraction and glycerin. Green apples and ripe cantaloupe nose with citrus notes and gravel on

the palate. A long and resounding finish.

### Barbaresco "Cotta" Sottimano 2004 (\$60)

A massive palate awaits you with silken tannins and a finish that evolves from ripe, wild strawberries in a deep pine forest to fresh tar and yeasty toast.

## For Intimate Gatherings

The chill that picks up in October is a great excuse for a party. Nothing warms a house like the sound of laughter and glasses clinking; family and friends are more than happy to try some fun new wines. The Northern Italian grape Tocai Friulano has a playful mix of floral and mineral scents and is crisp enough to cut the fattiness of any cured meat. Serve with grilled mortadella and fresh horseradish.

You can lure folks to the table quickly with a dish of warm bagna cauda, a dipping sauce for vegetables made from olive oil, garlic, and anchovies. Like the Italian version of a fondue, bagna cauda is a communal dish and should be served with a convivial wine such as a Barbera d'Asti, which has hints of cherry and spice. End the evening on a high note with a fruity Valpolicella; the enduringly velvety finish will warm your guests long after you've said your good-byes.

## Recommendations



**Tocai Friulano Valter Scarbolo 2005 (\$15)**

A textbook example of Friuli's hometown grape. This Tocai offers classic notes of peach and honey supported by bright acidity. It's light and refreshing enough to make it an excellent

aperitivo but has the weight and structure to stand up to a variety of dishes. A serious bargain, too.

### Barbera d'Asti "Tre Vigne" Vietti 2005 (\$25)

This food-friendly wine has not-so-subtle flavors of blueberries and stewed plums with hints of wet forest. The palate is firm with typically noted Barbera acidity.

### Valpolicella Classico Superiore, Giuseppe Quintarelli 1999 (\$75) (pictured)

The 1999 is the current release from the most legendary producer of Valpolicella. This ripasso-style Valpolicella ("ripasso," or repassed, refers to the process through which some Valpolicella is fermented a second time with the skins and lees of Amarone wine) boasts rich black-cherry fruit interlaced with a stony minerality, balanced acidity, and an underlying gamy quality. It has real power and elegance. Consider this a great opportunity to try a world-class wine while you save up to buy a bottle of the company's amazing Amarone.