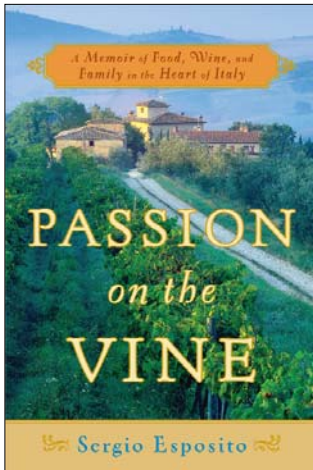


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**Sergio Esposito**

*Passion on the Vine: A Memoir of Food, Wine, and Family in the Heart of Italy*

Do not read this book on an empty stomach: The author lovingly describes so many exquisite-sounding Italian meals that those without immediate access to fresh mozzarella and artichokes will feel very sorry for themselves.

Esposito, the owner of Italian Wine Merchants in New York City, opens his debut memoir with an account of his idyllic childhood in the slums of Naples, where women lowered baskets from their balconies to buy the fish straight from the sea and grapes straight from the vine. His lifelong love affair with Italian food began in this gastronomic paradise, but his family was ripped from Naples in 1974, when he was still a child, and condemned to live in Albany, N.Y. Esposito writes heart-wrenchingly of their tearful adjustment to a new culture and cuisine (so-called). The pasta they ate in Italy, he writes, had been laid in the middle of the street, “so that the unique combination of Mediterranean and mountain winds would dry it in just the right way, to produce the perfect texture when it was boiled.” At his family’s first meal with their American cousins, the pasta was “mushy...like glue in my throat.”

Still, it was in Albany that Esposito’s uncle shared his nightly glass of California red, launching an autodidact’s career dedicated to improving the reputation of Italian wines and revitalizing the flagging economy of traditional winemakers. Describing his travels through his native land, first as a student and then as a wine merchant, Esposito writes with such earnest enthusiasm that detailed accounts of winemakers purchasing different types of equipment are actually interesting. He reaches his poetic heights, however, in describing the food and vintages he consumed on each adventure. In one Roman restaurant, a southern white wine “smelled of apricots, white flowers, dried honey, nuts...[I] got the sensation that I was being seduced in a Pompeii brothel before the volcano erupted.”

A charming tribute to food, drink and homeland.

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