



Sangiovese

As we transition to cooler climates in September and October, I look for positives to offset the waning of temperatures which allow me to enjoy my extensive gardens and pool. I think this is a perfect time to focus on food and wines which are less ponderous and heavy than those enjoyed in winter but are more in my 'comfort zone' than lighter summer pairings.

The grape that comes to mind for me is Sangiovese. This is the most prominent grape in Tuscany and other parts of Central Italy and shows different stylistic attributes depending on where it is planted. The primary flavors are cherry, roasted tomato, sweet balsamic, oregano, and espresso. All these flavors are wonderful but when blended, they can become extraordinary. Regarding Sangiovese's taste profile, it is bone-dry with medium-full body, medium-high tannins, and medium-high acidity. Take all the flavor and taste attributes into account and they produce wine which demands food. Thankfully, there are legions of food opportunities to marry with this grape. In general, I prefer wines based on 100% Sangiovese, but if you find the 100% versions to be too tannic and/or acidic, the blend of predominantly

Sangiovese with minor amounts of Colorino and Canaiolo might be to your liking. These wines are very good in general without adding international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot which changes the flavor and taste profile of the wine. In other words, stay with the Italian varieties and you'll most likely have a better matching wine with Italian food.

The most commonly available Italian wine is Chianti. The introductory level is called Chianti normale and Sangiovese must account for 70% of the blend (in Chianti Classico, the minimum must be 80%). There are many producers of the basic Chianti, and most are in the \$15–\$30 price range. My favorite producers include Felsina, Villa Cafaggio (which also makes Kirkland's Chianti Classico Riserva), Lornano, Fonterutoli, Riecine, Ruffino, Isole e Olena, and Castello di Ama. Most of these are 100% Sangiovese or with small amounts of Colorino and/or Canaiolo blended.

All are food wines with elevated acids and tannins and show several of the aromas of violets, sour cherry, eucalyptus, balsamic hints, herbs, spices, floral notes, black fruits, tobacco, and underbrush. The net of the melding of so many of these aromas results in a very savory sensation in the mouth.



Each sip's acidity calls for more food. I find these wines go best with lightly spiced grilled meats (chicken and pork) and especially with spaghetti and lasagna.

All these producers also make a Riserva Chianti which 'ups the ante' in the mouth and goes well with spaghetti and more heavily spiced meats, including beef. The best recent vintages for both Chianti normale and Chianti riserva are 2019 and 2021. These two vintages are among the best vintages ever with Riservas ranging from \$20-\$50.

As of 2013, the Chianti Consorzio approved a new level of quality named Gran Selezione (prices from \$50-\$150). Most of the named producers in this article produce a Gran Selezione category Chianti. One of my favorites is Monsanto's Il Poggio. In fact, I brought the 1977 vintage to a Centenary Dinner featuring the 1893 Château d'Yquem as well as the 1961 Lafite Rothschild and it showed well with these world-class wines. Another of my favorite Gran Selezione is the Felsina Rancia. This wine along with the Felsina Fontalloro are consistently among my favorite Sangiovese wines.


A few special words are needed to explain why two of the best Sangiovese wines from the Chianti regions are not listed. In the 1960s, it was required that Chianti contain at least three non-Sangiovese grapes of which two were white. My two favorite producers bowed to the Italian laws which denoted Chianti as the first DOC in 1967 but took the Chianti designation off the labels and bottled their best wines as IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) or the lowest wine category because they produced their best wine with 100% Sangiovese. These two wines are Fontodi's Flaccianello and Monteverdine's Le Pergole Torte. Both wines are among Italy's if not the world's greatest and sell for \$250-\$350 respectively. These wines have all the aromas noted earlier but with larger layers and power and subtle nuances. Both stand up to bold food flavors and reward long storage (20 to 40 years). They can be difficult to locate (especially Le Pergole Torte) but the rewards of finding both are profound. Good luck in finding these great wines and enjoying any of the wines referenced in this article. *À Votre Santé!* 



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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