

Invisible Italy

Newsflash! There's more to Italian wine than the Piemonte region or those wicker-wrapped chianti bottles-turned-candle-holders scattered about the tabletops in dimly lit neighborhood trattorias.

Confidence is high that the readers of this column are well aware of the many enological splendors to be discovered all across the Italian landscape (prosecco, trebbiano d'Abruzzo, valpolicella, negroamaro). But sometimes it feels like the entire industry has been reduced to the now ubiquitous Santa Margherita pinot grigio ads (a fine wine, to be sure, but hardly the non plus ultra of Italian winemaking).

Walter Martley did some digging around Puglia—the so-called “heel of the boot,” better known as Apulia to Anglo-Saxons—and found a native gem.

He pointed to the **2006 Botromagno Primitivo (\$15)** as a prime example of homespun brilliance, citing its “dark ruby color, with notes of cherry, earth, tobacco and leather,” as well as its fermentation/aging in steel casks, as hallmarks of this cooperative-produced stunner.

“This wine is delicious without being too serious!” he said, adding, “I’ve served it with beefy lasagna,

hearty calzones and roasted lamb with much success.”

Shooting across the Tyrrhenian Sea, Kelly Magyarics discovered why Sardinia has started popping up on wine lovers’ radars. Though impressed with the dry red cannonau and dessert-friendly malvasia, Magyarics was most struck by the uncharacteristically expressive vermentino.

“Although Italian white wines also tend to be crisp, with apple and lemon notes, I find too many of them rather neutral, including Italy’s most popular white import, pinot grigio. But I think Vermentino is an exception,” she argued, singling out **Argiolas Costamolino Vermentino di Sardegna (\$15)** as “a terrific example of an Italian white with character.”

Magyarics said partial malolactic fermentation “softens the wine a bit,” without hampering the “aromas and flavors of honey and pineapple along with the citrus.” She suggested pouring this fragrant white alongside creamy pastas or herb-rubbed fish dishes.

“It’s also a smart choice for a versatile house white,” she counseled.—WR



Our Wine Pros



KELLY MAGYARICS
WINE EDUCATOR/
WRITER, www.trywine.net



WALTER MARTLEY
WINE SPECIALIST,
Whole Foods Market - Fairfax

catch specials per day—a collection which typically includes tuna, grouper, mahi mahi and another seasonal selection (frequently tilapia or possibly snapper)—along with another dozen seafood standards. ■ \$\$

HONG KONG PALACE ☺

6387 Leesburg Pike; 703-532-0940.

Although Szechuan gems like cold jellyfish and fried bullfrog abound, the sinus-clearing flounder and bean curd stew—stocked with silky bean curd blocks and minced peppers—keeps calling us back. ■ \$

NVM IRELAND'S FOUR PROVINCES

105 W. Broad St.; 703-534-8999. The fish and chips offers up twin filets of battered Atlantic pollock (crunchy crust, sweet white meat) flanked by steak fries and an extra-chunky tartar sauce. ■ \$\$

NVM KASHA'S KITCHEN ☺

1053 W. Broad St.; 703-533-8484. A daunting roast vegetable pita wrap—it's basically an earthen football—is bulging with grilled eggplant, sliced mushrooms, cucumbers, fresh garlic, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, red peppers and a tangy homemade dressing. ■ \$

PILIN THAI

116 W. Broad St.; 703-241-5850. Quiet atmosphere and traditional Thai dishes. ■ \$

FALLS CHURCH

2941 RESTAURANT ★

2941 Fairview Park Drive; 703-270-1500. Fresh Kumamoto oysters are decorated with fluke tartare, zesty cantaloupe and spicy shiso (terrific synergy). Tea-smoked duck soars sky high with sweet-and-sour cherries and almond-studded barley risotto. ■ \$\$\$\$

DUANGRAT'S ☺

5878 Leesburg Pike; 703-820-5775. A work of edible art, the golden quail platter summons a trio of delicately seasoned game birds (dusted with white pepper) formed into a pyramid of crackling skin and perfumed meat, all surrounded by a ring of sweet soy jelly. ■ \$\$

NVM EL MAJAJHAUL CHIM-PUN CALLAO

3815-B S. George Mason Drive; 703-845-9501. An order of the seco de res never fails to satisfy, featuring a healthy slab of beef short ribs, prepared in a cilantro stew with peas, and served with soupy white beans and steamed rice. ■ \$

FLAVORS SOUL FOOD ☺

3420 Carlyn Hill Drive; 703-379-4411. The fried chicken platter yields an amazing bird with a crunchy crust and tender meat that only improves when you give it a squirt of hot sauce. ■ \$

NVM FORTUNE

6249 Arlington Blvd.; 703-538-3333. The expansive Chinese restaurant always appears to be bustling, but never more so than when the army of steam cart-toting servers circumnavigates the main dining room (daily from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.), hawking their myriad wares. ■ \$\$

FOUR SISTERS ☺

8190 Strawberry Lane, Suite 1; 703-539-8566. A half moon-shaped omelet filled with