

WINE WITHOUT THE SNOBBERY

BY LIBBY BRODIE

These crowd-pleasing bottles prove Italy's whites can be every bit as compelling as its famous reds

THOUGH the reds are arguably more famous – the revered Barolos, the bold Super Tuscans, the classic Chiantis – the white wines of Italy are quickly on the rise. Often refreshing with notes of sun-ripened citrus and wild herbs, they are the orderable crowd-pleasers on any wine list.

Who doesn't like a Gavi? Everyone likes a Gavi! The bright, crisp Vermentino, the more generous Grillo and of course the ever present, inoffensively bland Pinot Grigio (admittedly the only wine I am yet to see the point of). The sparkling wines have been sidelined by that attention-hog, the ubiquitous, endlessly popular Prosecco but next time take a punt on the traditional method Trentodocs and Franciacortas. There are fewer of them around and they may be a tad more expensive, but they are worth it.

Italian wine is made to be drunk with Italian food – indeed there are few nations who take their mealtimes more seriously. Sadly, it is not always possible to jump on a jet to Tuscany for lunch, so here are some recent favourites.

HARRY'S BAR – MAYFAIR

This institution's prestige was cemented at a recent dinner when the fabulous Joan Collins sat at a few tables over. Only a star so glamorous could distract me from the opulent décor and even more opulent dishes. It is like stepping into an Italian foodie fairytale. Seared scallops served with creamy ricotta and stuffed courgette flowers, Meuniere Dover Sole dripping in butter and a richly decadent tiramisu – all served with Ca' Del Bosco Franciacorta, one of the best examples of this brilliant traditional method sparkling. Should

ITALY BEYOND THE REDS

you find yourself near their winery in Italy, it is worth a look for its eclectic art collection. The life-sized rhino suspended in the winery was quite the surprise.

PIAZZA ITALIANA – THE CITY

This is the restaurant that introduced me to vitello tonnato, thin slices of tender veal blanketed by a tuna sauce that melts in the mouth. The high-ceilinged marble arches, neolonic pillars and dark wood furniture signal that this place takes its dining seriously, and so it proved with course after course, served by our stern-faced but solicitous waiter. Crunchy-coated arancini oozed with truffle at their soft centre, slivers of ceviche were

bejewelled with citrus, generous bowls of pasta (and yes, I do judge a place on its carbonara) were a triumph. You will not leave hungry. An extensive wine list means each plate can be paired to a glass so leave yourself in the sommelier's hands. A lunch-meeting mecca for foodies.

KITCHEN AT HOLMES – BAKER STREET

Channelling the Amalfi Coast, this whitewashed terrace calls for people watching while sipping on limoncello spritz. The old favourites of Gavi di Gavi and Pinot Grigio are here but order a Soave instead. An amazing wine from the Veneto region made from Garganega grapes that is

due its time in the sun. Sadly, the calories are listed on the menu but shockingly my favourite starter, the cuttlefish "non-spaghetti" is a saintly 67 – a clear sign to order at least three. Tender cuttlefish noodles bring all the flavour with a topping of anchovy and mullet roe crumble, garlic and chilli. Seafood comes to the fore with plump lobster linguine and whole sea bream served with bright wedges of Amalfi lemons (another surprisingly low 200 calories). Nothing is messed about with too much. Simply cooked food with excellent ingredients – just like in Italy.

CAMPANELLE – THE CITY

Only just opened but already

assured beyond its tender age. Arches of light, gentleman's club moss-green banquettes and an 18th century staircase create a pleasing blend of the historic and modern. A comfortably thick wedge of Parmigiana di Melanzane to start before the 45-day aged steak with summer truffle – a juicy, earthy carnivore's delight with a side of salt-sprinkled Sicilian tomatoes – all excellently paired with a Dolcetto d'Alba. Praise is due to the fantastic Sommelier who was so passionate about pairing she even (charmingly) argued a case for a wine we had not selected, as it could not be bettered for our wild sea bass with caponata. She was absolutely right.

WINE RECOMMENDATIONS



SEACHANGE PROSECCO

SEACHANGE WINE.COM
£13.99
One of my favourite multi-award-winning Proseccos. I adore the ethos of Seachange who channel all their profits into ocean conservation and work to eliminate waste in their products and packaging. Crisp and refined with a playfully light mousse of bubbles, this is a win in every way.



FERRARI PERLÉ ROSÉ 2018

VINVM £49.50
An overlooked region for premium Italian sparkling wine, the slopes of the Trentino mountains produce wonderful, pristine Trentodoc fizz like this bright and expressive rosé by Ferrari. Wild strawberries cut through by the dark zest of blood orange. Precise and refreshing effervescence.



CUVEE PRESTIGE CA DEL BOSCO HEDONISM

£45
A classic blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Nero and Pinot Bianco. This expertly crafted refined fizz has a delicious creaminess in the mouth from over two years on the lees but keeps its poised freshness with lemon citrus and a graceful minerality. Start your Franciacorta adventure here.

THE PERFECT PAIRING

Each week Libby recommends a perfect pairing – this week it's Manzilla Sherry, salted almonds and olives



YOU've been drinking sherry wrong. Forget your grandparents' creamy concoctions for Christmas, sherry came from hot Southern Spain – it is a drink made for the summer heat. Sherry should be served cold from the fridge, not so frozen it masks the more delicate flavours but chilled, allowing its complexities to unfold. Immediately refreshing and slightly

salty, it tastes like that first plunge into the ocean. Cool, crisp, a relief from the baking sands of the beach. This year's Manzilla La Gitana 'En Rama' Hidalgo (£21.95, Lea & Sandeman) has been applauded as one of its best yet and its saltiness makes it great for sipping alongside salted almonds and juicy olives. Shades on, glass in hand – transport yourself to Southern Spain.