

# Decanter

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APRIL 2023

## Vino in America

The bond between Italy's winemakers & the USA

## Tasting Tuscany

Chianti Classico, Brunello & Morellino di Scansano

## 20 great whites

White picks from all of Italy's 20 wine regions

## London calling

Top Italian restaurants chosen for wine lovers

+  
**335**

wines tasted  
in this issue

WAKE UP TO  
**ITALY**

Rediscover the classics &  
find fresh new favourites



# 20 whites from 20 regions

All over the country, Italy's unparalleled cast of grape varieties produce an array of top-quality white wines worthy of greater acclaim than they often receive

WORDS & SELECTION ALDO FIORELLI

**M**attia Spedicato, wine manager at Michelin three-star Geranium in Copenhagen (No1 in The World's 50 Best Restaurants 2022 list), impressed producers last October in Sicily when he confessed that two-thirds of the restaurant's wine list is dedicated to white wines: in the past, an old vintage of a Chardonnay, a Fiano or a Trebbiano was presumed unsellable as consumers were wary of white wines more than a year or two old.

'Fine white wines are lacking in Italy,' stated Antinori's CEO Renzo Cotarella during the launch of a new top-shelf Chardonnay, Nibbio, produced at the company's Umbrian estate Castello della Sala, also the source of the prestigious Cervaro della Sala. For me, the turning point in the perception of Italy's fine whites was a decade ago. Frescobaldi released the 2013 first vintage of Ornellaia Bianco (*see box*) in 2015, and today, in part due to limited quantity, it costs more than its red sibling.

Now, however, Italy can claim at least one superb white wine in every region. In the south, Basilicata, Calabria, Molise and Puglia do struggle more than the rest, given their almost complete focus on red wine production, although there are still some good examples to be found. Emilia Romagna has its own gem in the Albana variety, and Liguria and Sardinia have Vermentino. Deep knowledge and business expertise in key regions such as Piedmont and Tuscany have enabled the introduction of wines such as Gaia & Rey (first vintage 1983), Querciabella's Batàr (1988), and in Umbria the Cervaro della Sala (1985). In Alto Adige, Rarità from Cantina Terlano (1979) is made

using the so-called 'Stocker method' of extremely long lees ageing.

## NATIONAL TREASURES

These wines showed producers that it was possible to make the leap from commercial appeal to the fine wine market. Other great examples followed, such as Alois Lageder's dense Löwengang Chardonnay, Dipoli's steely Voglar Sauvignon Blanc and Cantina Tramin's Epokale Gewürztraminer, all from Alto Adige. In Veneto, Pieropan proved the potential of Soave Classico, pursued with success by others, as in Prà's Monte Grande and Gini's Contrada Salvarenza. Friuli Venezia Giulia has possibly the best soils for white wine in all of Italy ('ponca', ancient marine sedimentary marls), though this has not always been linked with top-end wines.

Further south, Campania is finally emerging with quality Fiano after years

of inconsistency. Etna's volcanic soil and altitude puts Sicily front and centre on the map for vibrant whites, such as Frank Cornelissen's complex Munjebel, I Custodi delle Vigne dell'Etna's whites, Tenuta di Fessina's A' Puddara, and Feudo Cavaliere's Millemetri Bianco. On the Adriatic side, the elegant strength of Verdicchio is raising the reputation of the Marche region's older and younger producers, such as Villa Bucci and Pievalta. Then there are niche gems, such as Aosta valley's Chambave sub-zone in the far northwest, with the mineral tanginess of its Muscat; and the welcome return of densely textured Viognier and Grechetto from Boncompagni Ludovisi at Tenuta di Fiorano near Rome in Lazio.

At the top of the quality pyramid since the 1970s is Valentini, whose cult Trebbiano d'Abruzzo embodies the vibrancy and stunning ageing potential of current head Francesco Paolo's wines. Even Trebbiano Toscano is under a deep rediscovery due to its ability to retain acidity later into the growing season. Examples such as Bòggina from Petrolo, or the IGT Monteraponi in Chianti Classico, are fine whites to look out for.

Clearly Italy's significant patrimony today is not just one great white wine from each region, but a treasure of biodiversity and a changed mindset about the undeniable potential and quality of the country's fine white wines. *The wines that follow are in a geographical order of regions running north to south...*

## Decanter PREMIUM

To see *Decanter* Regional Editor for Italy James Button's report on the first ever vertical tasting of all seven vintage releases of Ornellaia Bianco, 2013-2019, with tasting notes and scores, go to [decanter.com/premium](https://www.decanter.com/premium) ('Ornellaia Bianco: A link to the past', November 2022)

### La Crotta di Vegneron, Attente Chambave Muscat, Valle d'Aosta 2020

£24.40 Tannico†

Chambave is a niche appellation in the Aosta valley, and this cooperative's top selection of Muscat is fermented in stainless steel and aged sur lie in big oak vessels. It's rare to taste a Muscat, with its intense aromatic profile, that's also so vibrant, mineral and complex. Aromas of passion fruit, sage, white peach, rosewater and rocky minerality are supported by a super-tense structure with zesty acidity and a luscious finish. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alcohol** 13.5%



### Gaja, Gaia & Rey, Langhe, Piedmont 2020

£147.50 (ib)-£266 Crop & Vine, Farr Vintners, Hatton & Edwards, Hedonism, Taurus Wines, The Fine Wine Co, Turville Valley

The first Chardonnay vines planted in Langhe, in 1979 in Treiso (then the estate's highest-altitude vineyard), produced the fruit for Gaia & Rey, which was first produced in 1983. Fermented and aged in new French oak, the delicate 2020 has a toasty aroma with pink grapefruit, then lemon candy and stone fruit flavours. Full, silky and mellow, but with a final zip of freshness. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 14%



### Cantine Lunae Bosoni, Numero Chiuso Vermentino, Colli di Luni, Liguria 2019

POA Armit

The personal project of Diego Bosoni, the new generation at the biggest estate in Liguria, a few kilometres from the sea - the best Vermentino grapes from two vineyards are reserved for longer ageing in large oak vessels. Precise and intensely floral, with peach aromas and a remarkable savouriness. Woven in texture, silky and weighted, it has long, crisp acidity with no rough edges. A broad Vermentino, great potential for ageing. **Drink** 2023-2029 **Alc** 14%



### Bellavista, Convento Santissima Annunciata, Curtefranca, Lombardy 2017 92

£45.99 Hedonism, Petersham Cellar

This Chardonnay is from a walled clos of 28-year-old vines below the Santissima Annunciata monastery at the southern end of Monte Orfano. Fermented in used oak barrels and aged 12 months in oak, it's then matured for two more years in bottle. Despite the heat, 2017 has produced a vibrant Chardonnay, leesy on the nose, developing an apricot juice flavour and a cappuccino-like, toasty finish. If not a concentrated vintage, it's nonetheless refreshing and finishes with great precision and length. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



### Cantina Terlano, Rarity, Alto Adige 2010 97

POA Astrum Wine Cellars

2010 is the new release of this 100% Pinot Bianco. Slowly fermented in stainless steel, it ages on its lees in large wooden barrels for 12 months, then rests on lees in steel tanks for 11 years. Restrained lychee, apricot kernel, vibrant citrus and rosebud with a lifted, tingling structure; lively, polished and savoury. It's not easy to describe the filigree, sober elegance of wines such as this, but it is unarguably one of Italy's best whites. **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 14% ▶

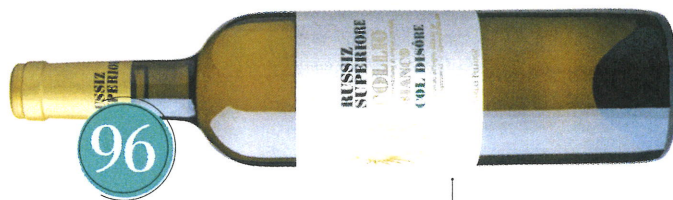


†Ex-UK stockist, see note p121

### Russiz Superiore, Col Disòre Bianco, Collio, Friuli Venezia Giulia 2018

£79.50/magnum The Great Wine Co

Pinot Bianco, Friulano, Sauvignon Blanc and Ribolla Gialla blend from the ponca or flysch marl soil of Collio, which brings to the wine a marvellous vibrancy and minerality that matches well with the wine's concentration. Subtle toasty aromas with rose and peach skin, a marine influence and bright fern scents. Soft, smooth, dense and rich, supported by elegant lifted acidity. The finish is still oaky, but your patience will be rewarded. **Drink** 2024-2040 **Alc** 13.5%



### Prà, Monte Grande Soave Classico, Veneto 2020

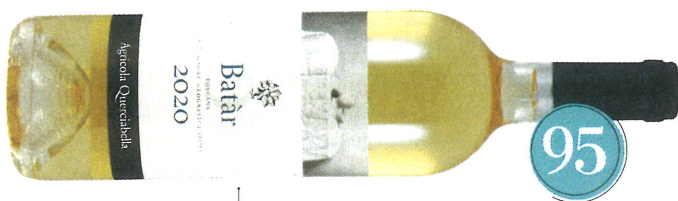
£26.95-£29.50 Boutinot, Field & Fawcett, JN Wine, Must & Lees, ND John

From 40-year-old vines on volcanic soil, a blend mainly of slightly late-harvested Garganega with Trebbiano, intended to preserve the acidity. Both are fermented in 30hl Allier oak vessels and aged for 10 months on the lees. Vibrant and mineral, it's full of lemongrass, wax, seaweed and lemon candy with peaty depth and hints of noble rot. Concentrated, acidic at first then wrapped up in a woven structure, with a youthful, biting finish: a palate that defies time. Impressive price-to-quality ratio. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 13%

### Cantina San Biagio Vecchio, SabbiaGialla, Ravenna, Emilia Romagna 2020

[cantinasanbiagiovecchio.it](http://cantinasanbiagiovecchio.it)

After one day of maceration on the skins, this organic Albana is fermented in stainless steel and aged for 12 months on its lees. It's sometimes slightly affected by noble rot, but apparently not in 2020. Macerated flowers, Golden Delicious apple and an assertive leesy character. Appley and savoury, it shines for its rustic, almost tannic, fiercely refreshing structure. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 13.5%



### Querciabella, Batàr, Tuscany 2020

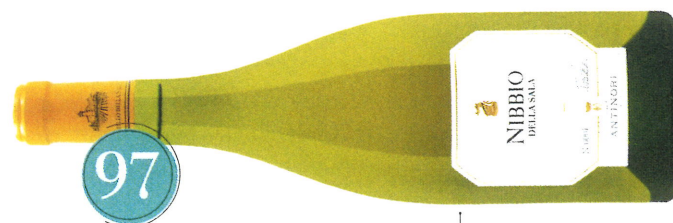
£85-£86.68 Armit, Hic

One of the most sought-after white wines of Italy, with proven ability to age, Batàr is from biodynamic vineyards in Greve in Chianti, some of which reach 600m. The Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco grapes are fermented and aged for nine months in French oak. It's a very classic white superTuscan with a stylish Corton-Charlemagne attitude. The 2020 shows sage, thyme and a citrusy character, then its typical peach kernel core. Concentrated, silky and textured, yet vibrant on the finish. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 14%

### Antinori, Castello della Sala, Nibbio, Umbria 2019

POA Berkmann

Nibbio is the latest wine from Antinori in Umbria. Since 1985, Piero Antinori has produced the celebrated Cervaro della Sala, a blend of Chardonnay and Grechetto. 'We continued to refine the wine, minimising Grechetto in favour of Chardonnay. But in 2019, we decided to vinify a northern vineyard of pure Chardonnay by itself.' A wild fennel aroma melds with grapefruit and minerality in depth. Smooth rather than zesty, it's an astonishing Chardonnay with Montrachet-style appeal. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 13.5%



### Pievalta, San Paolo Riserva, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico, Marche 2020

£31 Tannico\*

From sandstone and limestone soil at 400m, this organic Verdicchio is fermented with indigenous yeast in concrete then aged in big oak vessels. The 2020 is a generous vintage – lime peel character with sage, spring flower freshness and assertive youthfulness. Bone-dry on the attack, with firm acidity as expected from a great Verdicchio, it's then tightly woven with fruit in a chalky, mineral finish. This is a wine you have to wait for, which I like! **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 13.5%



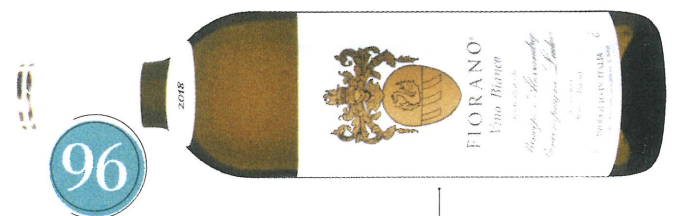
### Valentini, Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, Abruzzo 2018

£91.67 (ib)-£150 Asset Wines, Christopher Keiller, Crop & Vine, Cru, Mann Fine Wine, Petersham Cellar, Starling Wines, The Salusbury Winestore, The Solent Cellar 'Uncork it a couple of hours before you drink it – a slow awakening,' said passionate viticulturist Francesco Paolo Valentini, whose Trebbiano from Abruzzo is renowned for its ability to age. The 2018 is a leaner vintage, but no less elegant, full of intensity and details: lemony minerality, sweet yellow grapefruit, a lot of fern and subtle briny savouriness: a signature of this wine. It's flinty and elegant, silky-textured with refreshing, delicate acidity and amazing length. With proper balance and concentration, it's a major success for a vintage of mostly lean wines. **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 12.5%

### Tenuta di Fiorano, Fiorano Bianco, Lazio 2018

tenutadifiorano.it

Old vintages of 100% Semillon Fiorano Bianco are a kind of myth among wine collectors. Today's Grechetto-Viognier blend, aged sur lie in 10hl oak and chestnut barrels, is staging a comeback, with an extraordinary texture and concentration. This 2018 exhibits apricot, peach kernel and a Corton-Charlemagne-like richness; wood well integrated, acidity brilliant, but it's the full, super-mellow concentration which impressed the most. **Drink** 2023-2038 **Alc** 13%



### Agricola Vinica, Lame del Sorbo Sauvignon, Molise 2020

agricolavinica.it

This organic Sauvignon Blanc is pretty classic and detailed. Fairly reductive at first, it then focuses on lychee and lemon essential oils, with green apple and minerality. The body is lean, the acidity crisp and the overall structure biting with a slight grip on the finish. Vines at 600m, spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel tanks and no temperature control. Aged for 12 months on the lees. Best enjoyed with some Italian cheese. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 12%

### Paternoster, Vulcanico Falanghina, Basilicata 2020

£13.89 (2021) Roberts & Speight

Basilicata is a red wine region, but from its volcanic soils can spring some deliciously drinkable whites, too. Here, the Tommasi family of Valpolicella fame shows the potential for Falanghina, which has much affinity for volcanic soils, whether in Basilicata or in Campania's Campi Flegrei. The wine is lean and lemony, juicy with a subtle smoky vibrancy and delicate acidity, leading to a precise finish. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 12.5% ▶



### Benvenuto, Zibibbo, Calabria 2021

cantinebenvenuto.it

Southern Italy's affinity for Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria) is well known, and Benvenuto has here pulled out of the hat a great dry version offering precise aromas of lychee and rosewater with a marine whiff, followed by a very floral palate sustained by electric acidity combined with some savouriness. Despite its aromatic character, the wine does not tire and the slightly bitter finish introduces another layer in the experience. An impressive surprise with great personality. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



### Michele Biancardi, L'Insolito, Puglia 2021 88

michelebiancardi.it

Based on Fiano Minutolo harvested in the Gargano promontory facing the Adriatic sea, with Puglia being such a warm region the grapes are chilled before vinification at controlled temperatures, in order to preserve their freshness. The result is an intense apricot and peach tea aroma with a vibrancy of delicate yet savoury acidity. Textured enough, it falls somewhere between wine and fruit juice, such is its drinkability! Organic. **Drink** 2023-2025 **Alc** 12%



### Luigi Maffini, Pietraincatenata Fiano, Cilento, Campania 2021

£32 (2020) WoodWinters

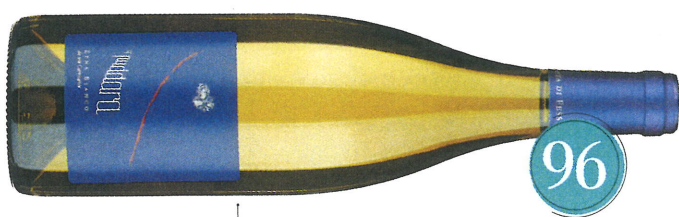
What I like from Cilento DOC Fiano is the influence of limestone soil (compared to a volcanic soil), which gives a more silky texture and elegance on the palate, with no smoky character. This 2021 vintage is a preview, since the 2020 only arrived in the UK in late September 2022. It features Mirabelle plum on the nose, with candied banana, fern and lemon peel notes. Vibrant, concentrated, with weight and long acidity allied to discreet and well-integrated oak. A great wine in a great vintage. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 13.5%



### Tenuta di Fessina, A' Puddara, Etna Bianco, Sicily 2020

£35.11 (2019) Christopher Keiller

100% Carricante from 2ha of south-facing vines planted in 1950 in Biancavilla, at 900m on Mt Etna. The wine is fermented in 3,500L oak vessels, where it ages for up to eight months. A stunning complexity assaults the nose, with cedar, flint, rich passion fruit and grapefruit pith. The body is lean, not vibrant but tense, filigree and silky. The acidity is zesty but well integrated. A good demonstration of elegance in a white wine. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 12%



### Giuseppe Sedilesu, Perda Pintà, Barbagia, Sardinia 2021

giuseppesedilesu.it

One of very few whites made from Granazza – not Grenache Blanc but much closer to the Guarnaccia Bianca of Calabria. Vinification in 30hl oak vessels with about 10 months' ageing produces a soulful, powerful white that's on the edge of an off-dry style (4g/l residual sugar). Baked apple, angelica and seaweed peep out from its alcoholic density, showing all the warmth of the high Mamoiazza region. Mellow, refreshing, with a full and grippy finish. An old-fashioned wine of great personality. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 16%

