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A Taste of Northern Italy

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On a recent trip to Italy, I spent a good deal of time in Northern Italy, around Barolo, and on the Ligurian coast.

One of Italy's greatest strengths (and weaknesses, but more on that later) is the variety of indigenous grapes found throughout the country. Even within a small area, a wide variety of different grapes are grown, yielding an equally wide variety of very good wines. I discovered the truth in this statement while there by sampling a great many of the wines on offer.

Barolo DOCG is made from the Nebbiolo grape, and is one of the most famous & well-known regions in Italy. It's beautiful, too – the region is tucked beneath the Alps and consists of rolling hills covered in vines, with little castles and villages perched on the top. Aesthetic beauty aside, the wine produced here is fantastic.

Barolo wines are characterized by their light colour (think pinot) and heavy tannins, with rich red fruit and lifted floral notes on the nose. The wines are made to age, and the best examples can last decades. I didn't, alas, have the pleasure of trying any truly old wines, but the 2004s I drank were outstanding.* Although not officially delineated, the region can be further broken into smaller 'crus', Cannubi or Brunate, for example. These smaller vineyard sites offer even more variety within the region, and are usually labeled on the bottle.

Of course, while I was there I had to stop at one of the wineries. And a great thank you to Poderi Gianni Gagliardo for taking me to visit their cellars and vineyards. Founded in 1976, the family now owns 11 vineyards spread across roughly 30 hectares. They use a mix of traditional large oak barrels and more modern French barriques to age their wines.

After my stop in Barolo, we ventured down to the coast where I had a chance to try wine from Colli di Luni DOC & Cinque Terre DOC – two places you've probably never heard of, or at least I hadn't! Made predominantly from Sangiovese, Cinque Terre Red surprised when I first

tried it. A wonderfully gracious restaurateur, Luca, (we came back) insisted that my family and I drink only the finest Ligurian wine and proceeded to pour us a bottle, well three by the end of the night. Rich and warm, pairing beautifully with the incredible food his mama - his words, not mine - made. No wonder Italy is famous for its hospitality.

Cinque Terre DOC only makes white wine from Bosco grape, blended with Albarola and/or Vermentino. Of course, we drank it with seafood as the setting demanded. Crisp, light and quite refreshing, the acidity played nicely off the fresh shellfish, langoustine, and so on we had for dinner.



Our final escapade in the wine world of Northern Italy was to Dolceaqua DOC, a region I had been dying to visit ever since I tried the wines at a tasting in Singapore last year. We stopped at Terre Bianche, a gorgeous vineyard on the top of a hill looking out over both the Mediterranean Sea to the South and the Alps to the North. Stunning.

Filippo, the owner, met us in the vineyard before we tasted a few different wines. This region produces wines from Rossese grape, another unique grape, and makes stunning wines light in colour and body with strong herbal notes on the nose, and soft but present tannins on the palate. Once again, I was very impressed with these

wines, completely unique to this tiny little slice of Italy.

I wouldn't want to sum up my time in Italy, so I'll leave it to the founder of Gagliardo:

"Good wine creates a link between people. The mask falls off!"

*2004 was an excellent vintage.

terrebianche.com
gagliardo.it

