

BEER, WINE & SPIRITS

DRINK

Veneto Vino

Discovering one of Italy's most productive wine regions.

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Since Salt Lake City's new Veneto Ristorante Italiano is the focus of this week's restaurant review (see p. 27), this seems like a good opportunity to discuss the wines of Italy's Veneto region as well. Yet, there was a time when I wouldn't have bothered.

During most of the 1960s and '70s, the bulk of wines coming out of the Veneto were less than forgettable. Mass produced, easy-drinking Valpolicella, Bardolino and Soave were made in staggering quantities, aimed at unfussy American and British wine consumers. Remember, this was the era of Boone's Farm and Annie Green Springs wines, which sold faster than a Trump supporter can say, "Build that wall!"

Thankfully, in the past couple of decades, winemakers here have stepped up

their game. Sure, you can still find those insipid, unexciting versions, but there are also great wines from the region, including some really good examples of prosecco, pinot grigio, merlot and bianco di custozza. Here are some that are worth taking the time to track down.

Years ago, the chef/restaurateur/celebrity Mario Batali turned me on to one of his favorite Italian wines, which is available at Stoneground in Salt Lake City, as well as local wine stores. **Maculan Pinot & Toi** (\$11.99) is a blend of pinot bianco, pinot grigio and tocai fruilano—now referred to in Veneto as tai—that makes for a wonderful aperitif. It's intensely perfumed, but dry and well-rounded on the palate. Try it with pasta and white clam sauce.

Acinum is an Italian wine producer imported to the U.S. by Italian wine expert Fabrizio Pedrolli. I'm a big fan of both **Acinum Valpolicella Ripasso DOP** (\$23) and **Acinum Soave Classico DOP** (\$11). The Valpolicella is luxurious and velvety on the tongue, with cherry and spice flavors that pair well with aged cheeses. As for the soave, it's quite dry with honeyed almond notes—a good partner for milder fish dishes.

Tommasi Rafael Valpolicella (\$25) is a delicious blend of Corvina Veronese, rondinella and molinara grapes, aged for 15 months in Slavonian oak casks. It's crisply

acidic with a full body and fruity cherry and strawberry flavors.

Another of my favorite producers is **Tenuta Sant'Antonio**. Their **Scaia Rosato** (\$12.99) is a killer Italian rosé made from gentle pressings of the rondinella grape, with rose and cranberry aromas—an excellent addition to your final flings of summer. Meanwhile, **Scaia Corvina Rosso**, priced at a mere \$12.99, is one of the best Italian red wine bargains on the planet. This is an extremely versatile wine—medium bodied and easy-drinking—that pairs well with pizzas, pastas, roasted vegetables, charcuterie, salty cheeses and about a thousand other foods.

An especially good value from Veneto is Italy's sparkling wine: prosecco. I like the elegant, refined appeal of **Zardetto Prosecco Brut** (\$16.99) when I'm serving a light aperitif, or for an inexpensive bottle of celebratory bubbles. It also

makes for a bodacious Bellini.

Anyone with even a waning interest in Italian wines should chase down those of the Veneto winemaker Mariano Buglioni. He's known for making wines with passion. His wines range from **Valpolicella Classico** (\$17), which is a simple, everyday red made from a proprietary blend of grapes—something to enjoy with pasta and red gravy or pizza—to his **L'Amarone** (\$55), a blend of 65 percent corvina, 20 percent rondinella and 5 percent molinara. The Amarone spends 30 months in small French barrels and is brimming with dark cherry, blackberry and cassis flavors. It's a stunning, complex wine that I'd be tempted to pair with any dish incorporating black truffles. **CW**



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