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Selling Tuscany

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It's strange that a region so loved for travel, its culture and food, is virtually nonexistent on our wine lists, but for Tuscany, the reality is clear: new world dominates our clubs.

It's a shame, because its wines are historically and organoleptically rich, offering a diversity of possibility and food-pairing pleasure.

So how can we instill interest?

Tasting flights

Tuscan-themed tasting flights are not only entertaining; they encourage guests to try something new. Tuscan appetizer platters—cheese, charcuterie and olives; little pizzas; or biscotti—paired with Vin Santo and espresso, heighten this experience, build customer satisfaction, and add F&B revenue.

Host an Italian night

“If you’re doing an Italian night,” says Babbo NYC Wine Director Michael Acheson, “that’s your opportunity to work in some of your Italian wines by the glass. Or maybe you just pick one wine that you think is really special...and then offer that by the glass. And that could be a good way to turn people on to those wines.”

Offer wine pairings at the food stations. This promotes the brands, and encourages guests to order wine when their interest is piqued.

Host a talk

Strange labeling, indigenous grapes and Italian pronunciation add barriers to the wine experience, so bridge the confidence gap by taking your staff and guests on a culinary and historical tour of the region.

Find parallels to your guests’ palates

“Be that bridge between old and new world,” advises Acheson. “When we have people who we can identify as having a new-world palate, we might find a wine that expresses some new-world qualities, but also shows off a sort of classic, old-world varietal style.”

Briefly, here are some DOCG classics.

Vernaccia di San Gimignano

About an hour south of Florence, rolling hills lead to the fortified medieval town of San Gimignano, whose towered skyline juts unabashedly into the sky.

The local wine, Vernaccia, is a remarkably fresh, vibrant and aperitif/food-friendly white. Unoaked examples have a citrus-like acidity and slight tangy salty finish, pairing well with delicate fish, seafood and white meats. Oaking adds weight and richness, and pairs well with the local young ewe's milk Pecorino Toscano cheese, cream sauces and lobster. Difficult to obtain, but look for Montenidoli, Il Colombiao di Santa Chiara, and Panizzi.

Chianti and Chianti Rufina

These are fresh, vibrant wines, with perky acidity and bright red-fruit flavours. Chianti is produced in several regions: from NW/Florence, down past Siena, and to the east in Arezzo. Look for the wines of Selvapiana and Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, and the glass-pour friendly 2015 Cetamura Chianti from Badia a Coltibuono. Pair with charcuterie, pizza or tomato-based pasta.

Chianti Classico

Not to be confused with Chianti, Chianti Classico is a separate DOCG, and the historic zone between Florence and Siena. Communes include:

Greve, a region just south of Florence, yields solid, well-made, food-friendly wines. Carpineto produces a range of tasty, reliable and affordable wines. Fontodi is a leader in **Panzano**, producing fresh, floral and modern-styled Sangiovese.

Radda is the historic home of the Chianti Classico consortium, and wines of incredible finesse. Val delle Corti and Istine produce elegant, delicate, and aromatic examples.

Gaiole gives balanced, compact Sangiovese, full of fruit and textural energy. San Giusto, a Rentennano, is a star, but stock may be limited. Riecine is a succulent, velvety pleasure. Badia, a Coltibuono, has a solid range of flavourful and well-priced wines.

Castellina gives fleshier, somewhat earthy Chianti Classico. Bring out those flavours with lamb, game or wild mushrooms. Look for Bibbiano, a historic property producing one of the area's best Riserva, "Montornello".

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

Montepulciano is a town and clay-soiled region south of Chianti Classico. Its wines are broad, fleshy, and four-square, and offer great QPR. Carpineto is solid, consistent and age-worthy. Poliziano is a modern choice, fruit-driven, slightly sweet with oaky appeal.

Brunello di Montalcino

The ancient town of Montalcino perches on a hill, its fortified walls guarding what was an important centre during the Sienese-Florentine wars. Vineyards stretch all around, where a local Sangiovese clone, called "Brunello", produces some of Italy's most collectable wine.

Brunellos are weighty and slightly alcoholic, with black cherry, plum, coffee, chocolate, tobacco, leather and balsamic flavours. Pair these with a rare T-bone or NY Strip steak: something with a little fat to cut the tannins. Poggio di Sotto is in a class of its own, producing velvety and transcendent examples; Fulignis are constantly excellent, well-balanced and elegant; and for value, try Il Poggione, whose modernist take consistently scores well with the press.

Salute!

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