

Food & Motors: ITC Brings Italy to Saratoga

Simona Zecchi (September 23, 2009)



September 10-12. Gala dinners, Wine Tastings, gourmet food and dozens of Ferraris of every age... This and much more at this year's edition of the "Wine and Food Festival" in Upstate New York. The Italian Trade Commission sponsored a wide number of conferences and seminars focused on Italy's excellency in the field, including the final "Grand Tasting"

Before arriving in Saratoga Springs, New York, we would have never imagined that in this quiet and residential town a joyful and lively event could completely brighten up the everyday life of its inhabitants. The Italian Trade Commission, indeed, had brought a bright touch of "Italianity" to town.

Since May, Saratoga has been hosting a consistent number of initiatives, from horse and car races to



music and ballet shows. They have been all organized by the [Saratoga Center for Performing Arts](#) [2], which is located in the homonymous National Park, and organizes a huge series of events for the million people living in the three cities of Albany, Shenectady, and Saratoga.

This year, the North American Division of the [Italian Trade Commission](#) [3], led by its director Mr. Aniello Musella, has been supporting SPAC in organizing the Wine and Food Festival right from the moment it was first conceived, along with many side activities and manifestations. This three-days event is now at its ninth edition, and, as Mr. Musella pointed out during the press conference held just before it started, "the ITC is honored to sponsor the Saratoga Wine Food and Ferrari Fall Festival that represents a merging of two Italian excellencies". He introduced the full program of the event to us by defining it as an "endless adventure in tasting", the heart of which would consists of the Grand Food and Wine Tasting at the huge pavilion.

Some data on importation, which Mr. Musella highlighted during the various presentations, help us better understand the increasing interest that food farming items have been acquiring as of late. This is mostly true, considering the fact that even though the Euro value played a strong role into the US market, thus disabling American buying power, Italian valuable products resisted and didn't pay a big price. Furthermore, the Italian wine industry reinforced its presence regarding the table wine sort that stands out according to quality and quantity.

During the first pre-inaugural evening at "[Chianti Il Ristorante](#) [4]" of Saratoga on Thursday, restaurant owner Mr. David Zecchini delighted our stomachs with some 'Cannoli di Ricotta' right through the 'Millefoglie di Stracchino e Mele'. Together with the variety of wines served, the oeuvre-d'art was complete. The wines were offered by the [Castello Banfi estate](#) [5], whose vineyards are based in Tuscany. The starting dinner worked as a welcoming evening that hosted all the protagonists of the festival, such as wine and food importers or Ferrari collectors, mechanics and professionals in general as well as cars and wine's lovers. All of them scattered throughout the whole town of Saratoga in a range of 30-50 people per restaurant.

On the following day about 20 Ferrari models from the mid 1950's to the latest models were present and took us for a ride towards Lake George, the core of the Adirondack Mountain region. During the race we had the chance to speak with Mr. Bob Bailey, Founder and Chairman of the [Trustees Board Automobile Museum of Saratoga](#) [6], which for the first time this year has joined the Festival. He affirmed the importance this new synergy contains, and the pleasure the board of trustees had in joining their forces so transforming it into one unique happening. He also stated the importance of the recent agreement between the US Government and the FIAT management team, notwithstanding the job opportunities this partnership could bring into both countries.

The race allowed us to experience incredible views of the villages surrounding the Adirondack Mountains. We were chauffeured to and from Saratoga by powerful engines: one Testarossa Old Version on the way to the lake, and one yellow Ferrari 360 Modena (Bob Baileys' car).

The long day continued with a lunch at the historical "[Lake George Club](#) [7]" right on the shore of Lake George, while the Great Evening 'Serata Italiana' was waiting for us to start.

The Gala was held into the SPAC headquarters, where every single detail was well thought out: from the 'aperitivo' at the entrance in which sparkling 'Mionetto' was served, to the huge ballroom spread out with cuisine spaces, wine and dessert corners all over.

A vast area of SPAC was also dedicated to Italy's prizes and successes as reported by local newspapers such as the [Times Union](#) [8].

In the middle of the Gala, a small wine auction took place in order to raise some funds and contributions to benefit classical programming at SPAC and the educational programs of the Auto Museum. The bids went from \$200,00 up to nearly \$2,000 which entertained people who on their turn were also enchanted and amused by the spirit of the auctioneer who lead the bids.

During the night some of the event's foremost participants, introduced by Mrs. Marcia J. White President and Executive Director of SPAC, addressed the guests by stating the importance of the



Italian contribution to American culture and production. Among them were Joseph L. Bruno, Sen. Roy McDonald, both members of the Senate of New York and the Saratoga mayor John Zeiger. In particular, Stefano Acunto, the honorary Italian Vice Consul of Upstate New York, addressed a special speech also by attesting to the excellence that the Italian Chianti wine has attained. He also thanked the work of the Italian Trade Commission for its strong adhesive role between the Italian entrepreneurial world, its production quality and the success of Italian products in the United States. The entertainment continued with some live music through out the evening.

The following day the Grand Tasting event occurred, which held the utmost relevance. Two specific seminars took place: the Ferrari seminar, with some participants coming from the Ferrari world who were part of Luigi Chinetti's Ferrari team, such as Francois Sicard, Dick Fritz, Denise McCluggage (the first woman to enter the racing world as a journalist 55 years ago), the driver Sam Poisey, Tom Burnside and many more. Shortly afterwards the Food and Wine Seminar took place, driven by Lou Di Palo, the fourth generation operator of [Di Palo's Fine Foods](#) [9] in New York .

Through the moderation of journalist Ed Lucas, the Ferrari team told stories about their common experiences at Chinetti's Ferrari together with his son Luigi Chinetti's Jr., a former driver of the North American Racing Team (N.A.R.T.). Chinetti Sr. is very well known in the automobile racing field as being a racecar driver who has won several events, first with Alfa Romeo and then with Ferrari. He then opened the first Ferrari factory agency in the United States, making a deal with Enzo Ferrari, the founder of the Scuderia Ferrari Grand-Prix motor racing team. His son now operates Luigi Chinetti Motors which designs and builds racing cars.

The Food and Wine seminar offered a lunch in which every single product was explained by Lou Di Palo himself, who is a fine connoisseur of Italian American food and wine, as well as Italian history and culture. His store has been selling specialty Italian cheeses, meats and other fine Italian imports in New York City's Little Italy since 1925.

During the tasting even ordinary people entered the Festival and had the pleasure of tasting all the specialties on display. Upon listening to their very voices, all of them had a peculiar reason to come and join the Grand Tasting on Saturday the 12th. Nancy, for example, has always loved Italian wines, especially those with Tuscan origins. Therefore she deliberately attended this event.

Joey, on the contrary, didn't know wines at all and stopped by just to experience the occasion. On the other hand, Jack and his family participate in the Saratoga Wine and Food festival every year to taste all kinds of food and wine presented, and this year they were also thrilled to view the exhibition of Ferrari and Maserati cars, too.

For several years now, the American palate has been undergoing a dramatic change in food and drink choice. This change seems be growing from a heightened interest in Italian culture, as Gary Grunner from "[Grapes on the Go](#) [10]" explained to us. Grapes on the Go is a wine management consulting company with over 20 years of experience; its brands have been involved in elegant wine tasting events. This company represents some important Italian brands such as Ferragamo, that merged fashion industry activity with that of wine branding as well. "Grapes on the Go" focuses on wine packaging and quality taste: as far as Mr. Grunner's experience is concerned, the factors of packaging and taste affect Americans' consumption, which was in the past largely provided by California wines.

Another interesting story for the future will concern a special deal between an American Wine estate and a very famous Italian branding firm, Pininfarina.

This new American trend of growing interest in Italian products is evident from people that crowded the Italian section of the pavilion, regardless of the bad weather that unfortunately and suddenly put a damper on the day. As one famous Italian intellectual and writer affirmed many years ago, "Wine is made up of various grapes so as to signify unity" (Ignazio Silone, Bread and Wine - 1937). On this occasion, water played its part but could not hamper the events' success!



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