

Wine Pairing. "What Do You Want To Drink?"

I. I. (January 19, 2016)



In an article that caused a heated debate last year, wine writer John Lenart found that restaurant critics in Chicago often avoided discussing one of the most integral parts of dining out, i.e., wine. While that may not be true in New York, American diners do tend to be better informed about (and more interested in) food than they are about wine. This despite the fact that, as the Greeks and Romans discovered a couple millennia ago, wine truly enriches a meal and, when properly paired, makes dishes taste dramatically better than they do on their own—let alone with a glass of iced tea!

This past fall acclaimed journal Wine Spectator launched an online poll asking, "Do you choose a restaurant by its wine list?" As we eagerly await the results, let us point out that asking yourself what and how well you want to drink is pivotal when choosing an Italian restaurant—wine is, in fact,

an integral part of Italian gourmet culture.

Which is why this issue features Italian restaurants in New York with distinctive wine lists that radically enhance one's dining experience. While we take responsibility for the following reviews—deliberately written for the amateur diner—the stops along the way and pairings were recommended by noted wine consultant and Italian wine expert Charles Scicolone.

Upper East Side:

[Lincoln](#) [2]

142 W 65th Street

☎ (212) 359-6500

CUISINE upscale ATMOSPHERE elegant PRICE \$\$\$

● This Italianate design-driven space at New York City's iconic Lincoln Center is home to starred Chef Jonathan Benno. Here he offers his own interpretation of modern Italian cuisine by preparing upscale dishes in a central open kitchen—the actual heart of this luxury space co-owned by the Patina Restaurant Group, run by Calabria-born Nick Valenti. Wine Director Aaron Von Rock developed a 400-bottle, Italian list to compliment Benno's cuisine with both classical and cutting-edge selections. A favorite antipasto is Trippa Brasata (tripe with spicy sausage, chickpeas, and San Marzano tomatoes), delicious with the Sicilian Cerasuolo di Vittoria Classico 2011 from Valle dell'Acate. For a pasta course we recommend Caramele con Zucca (butternut squash-filled pasta, walnuts, and smoked ricotta salata) paired with Gini's "Salvareza" Soave Classico 2011.

Midtown

[Marea](#) [3]

240 Central Park South

☎ (212) 582-5100

CUISINE high-end ATMOSPHERE elegant PRICE \$\$\$\$

● Specializing in coastal seafood, Marea (or "Tide") is the brainchild of experienced Chef Michael White, a Wisconsin native who turned to Italian while training for several years with celebrated Chef Valentino Marcattilli at Ristorante San Domenico in Imola, near Bologna. A multi-starred Chef who both respects and innovates Italian cuisine, White came to New York in the early 2000s where he established a number of Italian-inspired venues with his Altamarea (or "High Tide") Restaurant Group, including Marea, Osteria Morini, Ai Fiori, and Due Mari and Due Terre in New Jersey, as well as—with partner Ahmass Fakahany—steakhouse Costata, pizzeria Nicoletta, upscale Ristorante Morini, which has also been opened in Istanbul, Hong Kong and Washington, D.C. At Marea White is joined by Chef di Cucina Lauren DeSteno and Beverage Director Francesco Grosso, who bring experience with and passion for high-end Italian cuisine.

You should not miss their luxurious Spada (grilled swordfish with heirloom tomatoes, sunflower shoots, trout roe, and basil) or Stracci (braised short ribs, escarole, fennel, and green garlic). Pair the former with an Etna Bianco Superiore "Pietramarina" by Benanti, and the latter with a Carema Riserva from Produttori di Carema.

[Le Cirque](#) [4]



151 E 58th Street

☎ (212) 644-0202

CUISINE contemporary

ATMOSPHERE elegant

PRICE \$\$\$

Sirio Maccioni's memoir defines this family-run, yet high-end venue as "the New York restaurant where Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger reconciled and Frank Sinatra parked his limo"—but these are just two out of a long list of celebrities who might have sat in the chairs you're occupying right now. In *Sirio: The Story of My Life and Le Cirque*, read how this Tuscan-born restaurateur grew from a maître d'hôtel in the late 1960s to the founder of a unique place that blends French classics with Italian culinary masterpieces. Maccioni established Le Cirque in the mid 1970s, and moved it twice before its current location in the Bloomberg Building in 2006. Today Sirio's sons—Mario, Marco, and Mauro—as well as wife Egidiana help manage Le Cirque's multiple locations and sister restaurants around the world.

Le Cirque offers an incredibly rich wine list from regions as different as Canada and Lebanon, Macedonia and South Africa, Germany and Chile, among others. French and Italian wines, however, hold pride of place. You'll want to taste Black Truffle Risotto with Antinori's Cervaro della Sala Chardonnay 2012. For pasta, go for Chitarra con Pomodoro (cherry tomato sauce, basil pesto) paired with Feudi del Pisciotto Carolina Marengo's Frappato 2010.

West Village

[dell'anima](#) [5]

38 8th Avenue

☎ (212) 366-6633

CUISINE creative/seasonal

ATMOSPHERE casual/rustic

PRICE \$\$\$

● "Of the Soul" is the name of this small gem in the heart of the West Village. Opened in 2007 by Executive Chef Gabe Thompson, dell'anima has long been the place to go for Italian-inspired creations. We'll see what Thompson's upcoming departure will bring, but have every reason to believe dell'anima will keep its tradition of and creative menu offerings that change daily, and use of local, seasonal, and sustainably harvested produce wherever possible. Executive Beverage Director Joe Campanale will surely continue to develop his wine list based on small production, high-quality selections with an emphasis on traditional and natural winemaking. The list offers more than 150 hand-chosen wines selected for flavor, uniqueness, and tradition. Start with the unique "orange" Age- no 2008 La Stoppa from Emilia paired with Sweetbreads (corn, red onion, basil, red pepper, citrus). For a main course, try Market Squash-Ravioli (butter, sage, pine nuts, and pecorino Romano) with a Dolcetto di Dogliani "Briccolero" 2009.



Midtown West

[Barbetta](#) [6]

321 west. 46th Street

☎ (212) 246-9171

CUISINE traditional/piemontese

ATMOSPHERE elegant

PRICE \$\$\$

● Established in 1906, Barbetta is the oldest Italian restaurant in New York City and the only restaurant in America to have been named an "Historic Establishment" by the Italian association Locali Storici d'Italia. In 1962, its spectacular interior was re-furbished by Laura Maioglio, daughter of founder Sebastiano and now its owner, with Piemontese antiques. This made it the first elegant Italian restaurant in town—which, as its website states, "represented a radical departure from the prevailing but erroneous notion ... that Italian restaurants are invariably 'rustic' and that Italian food must be similarly 'rustic'." But even rustic meals can be reinterpreted in an elegant way. This is the case with typically Piemontese Bagna Cauda, a gregarious "country" dish where guests around the table dip raw vegetables into a simmering pot of an anchovy-flavored olive oil sauce. Pair it with Barbera d'Asti 2013 Cascina Castlèt—one of 1,700 different labels on a legendary wine list. If you are in the mood for a white, order Ceretto's Arneis Blangè 2013 with Veal Tonnè in a classic Piemontese pairing.

[Nizza](#) [7]

630 Ninth Avenue ☎ (212) 956-1800

CUISINE coastal/ligurian

ATMOSPHERE simple/casual

PRICE \$\$

● Nizza, Italy? Well, not exactly! Nizza is Nice, the capital of the French Côte d'Azur, but 30 minutes from the Italian border and once part of the Kingdom of Savoy. This Theatre District bistro sporting an impressive choice of gluten-free dishes and a rich wine list, is an example of the French-Italian melting pot. You can taste this by ordering its flagship dish—a crêpe of chickpea flour called socca in Nice, farinata in Genoa, and cecina in Tuscany. We recommend grilled branzino paired with a white sparkling wine such as Bisson's "Abissi" Portofino. Or try the typically Genoese pansotti—fresh ravioli filled with mixed greens, marjoram, and ricotta and dressed with butter, parmesan cheese, and walnut pesto. It's perfect with a crisp white Prima Terra "Cericò" Cinque Terre.

Chelsea

[Del Posto](#) [8]

85 Tenth Avenue ☎ (212) 497-8090

CUISINE innovative

ATMOSPHERE luxury

PRICE \$\$\$\$



● On its website Del Posto is defined as “the richest and most refined creation of Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich, Lidia Bastianich and partner/Executive Chef Mark Ladner.” With its mahogany and marble luxurious setting, with a live pianist and an elegant bar, Del Posto’s mission seems to be that of changing New Yorkers’ perception of what an Italian restaurant should be—and by extension, of what Italy itself is. But of course its main weapons of persuasion are Del Posto’s menu and wine list. If we had only one choice, we’d pick Vitello Tonnato—perfect with Zuani Collio Goriziano Bianco 2010. But we have two: so don’t forget to taste Le Virtù all’Abruzzese (rare charred wild salmon over perilla), paired with a Valpolicella Classico Superiore 2010 from Tommaso Bussola.

Midtown Cobble Hill East

[Tommaso](#) [9]

1464 86th Street

☎ (718) 236-9883

CUISINE classic

ATMOSPHERE homestyle/rustic

PRICE \$\$

● “No corporate restaurant here!” warns Chef Tom Verdillo on the website of his country-style Italian restaurant in Dyker Heights. Here he serves the dishes of his youth, those his mother prepared in their Coney Island home and based on recipes that have been passed down by his family through the ages. But he also revisits tradition, having studied classic cooking in school and traveled the world. Tom has assembled a remarkable list of medium- to high-priced Italian, French, and North American wines. Enjoy Taurasi “Radici” 2001 Mastroberardino from Campania with delicious Lasagna Napolitano, or go for grilled Costoletta di Vitello paired with Schioppettino 2003 Dorigo from Friuli.

Brooklyn

[Felidia](#) [10]

243 E 58th Street

☎ (212) 758-1479

CUISINE Lidia’s! ATMOSPHERE elegant/classy PRICE \$\$\$\$

● If you’re a fan of food icon Lidia Bastianich, chances are you watch her regularly on TV and have at least one of her many cookbooks at home. You might also meet her in person greeting guests at Felidia—her flagship restaurant established 35 years ago in Manhattan. Day-to-day operations at this “classy gem” (Zagat) are in the hands of Fortunato Nicotra, a starred chef who has been working with Lidia for 20 years.

Bastianich and Nicotra have made Felidia famous not only for food but also for wine. Don’t miss Villa Bucci’s Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi paired with Spaghetti alla Chitarra (bacon, caramelized onion, tomato sauce, and peperoncino.) And if you like calf’s liver (fegato), order it sautéed (and served a farro-based polenta) accompanied by a 2010 Castell’in Villa Chianti Classico.



Gramercy

[La Pizza Fresca](#) [11]

31 E 20th Street

☎ (212) 598-0141

CUISINE traditional

ATMOSPHERE classy

PRICE \$\$\$

● Despite being the first restaurant in New York City to be awarded the “True Neapolitan Pizza” certificate back in 1997, this is not just a pizzeria, but a full-fledged restaurant specializing in authentic Italian cuisine and wine. Chef Alessandro Cargioli is from Liguria and sommelier Massimo Vitino, from Lombardy. Their wine list is impressive and ranges from below \$50 all the way up to \$3500 (for three liters of Masseto Ornellaia, a 2001 merlot from Tuscany).

To keep your palate joyful and your bill under \$100, pair an Elvio Cogno “Pre-Phylloxera” Barbera d’Alba, 2012, with Pappardelle al Cinghiale, hand-made pasta with wild boar ragu. For a meatless meal, go for Spinaci al Parmigiano paired with a white wine—try a Vietti Roero Arneis 2013 and you will not be disappointed.

[Maialino](#) [12]

2 Lexington Avenue

☎ (212) 777-2410

CUISINE roman/typical

ATMOSPHERE rustic

PRICE \$\$\$

● In Danny Meyer’s Union Square Hospitality Group, and run by chef Nick Anderer, Maialino reflects an “Italian Dream” as Americans see it. And it does so with rare honesty—without pretending “to be” Italian, it contents itself with looking and tasting Italian. Enter Maialino and you enter a typical Roman trattoria: from the bread baskets to chandeliers, from tablecloths to the rafters. The same goes for the menu, shaped by Anderer, who spent a year cooking throughout Italy prior to working in Mario Batali’s Babbo and Larry Forgione’s American Place. We can confidently recommend such typical Roman dishes as Spaghetti alla Carbonara (guanciale, egg, and black pepper) paired with Vietti’s “Perbacco” Nebbiolo 2012; and Maialino al Forno (roasted suckling pig and rosemary potatoes) accompanied by an Amarone della Valpolicella 2011 Ca’ Rugate.

[I Trulli](#) [13]

124 E 27th Street ☎ (212) 481-7372

CUISINE southern/pugliese



ATMOSPHERE rustic

PRICE \$\$\$

● Get set for a memorable south- ern Italian dining experience at this “ristorante/enoteca” (restaurant and wine bar) just two blocks from Madi- son Square Park. “Trulli” are the tra- ditional dry stone homes with conical roofs that are such memorable sights in the region of Puglia. No wonder that founders Dora and her son Nicola Mar- zovilla choose “Southern Italian Cui- sine” as their location’s tagline. Honor their choice by picking a southern Ital- ian wine such as a D’Angelo Aglianico del Vulture, from Basilicata, and a famous Sardinian specialty like Mal- loreddus, or gnocchetti , handmade saffron-tinted dumplings with pork sausage and tomato. However, for a more classic experience, look no fur- ther: savor Agnello (roasted lamb with chicory & potato) with a glass of 2012 Massoferrato Sangiovese Domenico Valentino, from the Tuscan estate of the Marzovilla family.

Brooklyn Cobble Hill

[Tommaso](#) [9]

1464 86th Street

☎(718) 236-9883

CUISINE classic

ATMOSPHERE homestyle/rustic

PRICE \$\$

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Brooklyn Cobble Garden

[Marco Polo](#) [14]

345 Court Street

☎(718) 852-5015

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CUISINE traditional/innovative ATMOSPHERE elegant PRICE \$\$

● Recently re-opened after extensive renovations, this Carroll Gardens land- mark doesn’t feel like it’s over 30 years old. Co-owner Marco Chirico, 24, is successfully helping his Calabria-born father and partner Joseph to cater to a younger crowd of Brooklynites. Marco, who serves as head chef and also owns Enoteca next door, is also responsible for the renovated menu, which pairs traditional with more modern Italian fare, including gluten-free house- made pastas.



The new menu features traditional Venetian cuisine (after its namesake), such as black seafood risotto, as well as dishes with a Southern accent (after his family's roots), such as Barbabietola, a salad of roasted red and yellow beets with hearts of palm, watercress, and cherry tomatoes. You must try Candele N' Duja (thick, hollow pasta with shaved pecorino and housemade n'duja—a spicy, spreadable pork sausage from Calabria) paired with Lento's Magliocco 2009, also from Calabria. Also irresistible is their Carré D'Agnello (a traditional rack of lamb from an original recipe) with Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2010 Sartori.

Staten Island

[Enoteca Maria](#) [15]

27 Hyatt Street

☎(718) 447-2777

CUISINE homestyle

ATMOSPHERE intimate

PRICE \$\$

● When Jody Scaravella lost his grandmother and then his mother, he felt a urgent need to recreate the world of his Staten Island Italian childhood. He had grown up having “nonna” in the kitchen and a lot of people around her table. So he opened a restaurant advertised for real-life grandmothers to serve as rotating non-professional chefs. It was an immediate success with a grandmothers showing up at his home with their families and samples of their dishes to taste.

Add this to Scaravella's long love affair with Italian wine, and you have Enoteca Maria: a nonna-run restaurant where a different Italian grandmother pops in to cook dishes from inherited family recipes, accompanied by an impressive list of fine wines. Don't miss their Soffritto di Frattaglie di Pollo (chicken hearts, kidneys, and liver slow-cooked in an onion, garlic, and wine sauce) paired with a Baglio del Sole Inzolia 2009 from Sicily. Or choose a strong Pugliese wine like Alberto Longo Capotosto Negroamaro 2005 while eating Zampe di Porcellino — braised pigs feet served in a red sauce with cannellini beans, onions, and celery.



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