

The background of the cover is a photograph of a dark wine bottle, a white bowl containing red wine, and a glass on a light-colored table. A hand is visible on the left side of the frame. The text is overlaid on the image.

# PLANET OF THE GRAPES

VOL.

1

ALTERNATIVE  
REDS

BY JASON WILSON

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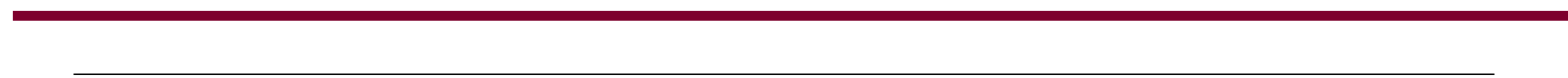
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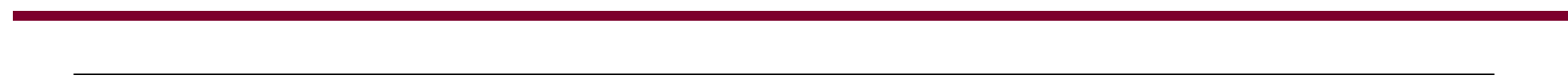


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## ABOUT THIS SERIES

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A new way to look at wine for a new generation, *Planet of the Grapes* is an ongoing series of wine guides from Jason Wilson, award-winning columnist and author of *Boozehound*, which Anthony Bourdain called “superbly informative, entertaining, and yet deeply subversive.”

Each quarter, a new volume of *Planet of the Grapes* will be released at a modest price. Each volume will focus on a specific topic or theme from the world of wine, such as Alternative Reds, Great Whites, Sweet and Fortified Wines, and Spain. Here's what critics say about Jason Wilson:

*“Wilson has never been one for 100–point scales and tasting notes. For him the best drinks are trips down memory lane.” Wall Street Journal*

*“Wilson may just be the best virtual drinking buddy you’ve ever had.” Barnes & Noble Review*

*“A natural storyteller” Wine Enthusiast*

Volume 1: Alternative Reds

**POTG Extra: When Wine Talk Gets Weird**

Volume 2: Great Whites (Coming November 2013)

Volume 3: The Old Stuff (Coming February 2014)

Volume 4: Vino Español (Coming April 2014)

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# INTRODUCTION

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## SO MANY REDS, SO LITTLE TIME

I'm a big fan of experimenting and trying new things. A parallel interpretation: I'm really not fond of rules. In my other life, I spent six years as the spirits and cocktails columnist for the *Washington Post*, occupying the right-hand side of the Drinks page, next to the traditional wine column, which ran on the left. In the world of cocktails, experimentation and new things are seen as positives. You want to toss aged tequila in a shaker with Benedictine and Lillet Blanc? Knock yourself out. You want to reinterpret the classic Manhattan with small-batch rye whiskey, Punt e Mes, and green Chartreuse? Hey, that could work. You want to mix up something with peanut liqueur and Oloroso sherry and coffee grounds? Have at it, big guy. Who's to say. It might just work out and become a brand-new classic. And if it doesn't? Well, so what? If you really don't like it, just dump it down the drain and start over. It's only a drink.

The same thing happens in the world of beer, another topic I've observed and reported on firsthand as a columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The fledgling beer enthusiast, like the newbie spirits enthusiast, tends to be open-minded and game for excitement and even a bit promiscuous in his taste. What's on tap? A wild-fermented barleywine aged for nine months in Amarone barrels? OK, pour me one of those. A strange low-alcohol German gruit beer brewed with spices, fruit, and herbs, in an ancient style that predates the use of hops? Yes, please. An American ale based on a 9th century Finnish recipe brewed with juniper berries and black tea, and wort caramelized over white-hot river rocks? Why not? If you don't like it, just follow it up with your regular white ale or hoppy IPA.

This type of devil-may-care fun and energy lies behind the buzz and popularity of craft beer, artisanal spirits — and, of course, cocktails — over the past decade. It's a big reason why so many people who never before cared about what they drank are now enthusiastic and comfortable enough to learn about their beverages.





However, when it's time to shift gears and think about another beverage — namely, WINE — suddenly things aren't so freewheeling anymore. When the talk turns to wine, the Fun Police often seem to step in, with lots of rules and hierarchies, both written and unwritten. Drinkers who aren't usually afraid to voice a preference for booze or beer become immediately anxious that they will make a Big Embarrassing Mistake with wine. Many feel they are missing something imperceptible, like a secret handshake or an unspoken head nod or a special passcode.

I empathize with their anxiety and their frustration. My editor mostly kept me happily pigeonholed in the world of spirits at the *Post*, but as I got deeper into writing and reporting on wine, he occasionally allowed me to fill in for our regular wine columnist, leaping from the right side of the page to the left (I'll let readers delve into the pop psychology implications there.) When I first started writing about wine, my early drafts were oddly conservative, tentative, and full of formality. They were, frankly, too polite. Why? I guess I felt somewhat cowed. It's true: Wine can be intimidating. But like many others, I didn't know why I felt cowed.

## WHEN THE TALK TURNS TO WINE, THE FUN POLICE OFTEN SEEM TO STEP IN, WITH LOTS OF RULES.



Maybe it's because I was not an officially-recognized Wine Critic, not in the formal sense of someone like the famed Robert Parker or Jancis Robinson or one of the critics from *Wine Spectator*, someone who sips wine blind, swishes and spits, judges, then affixes a score to that experience — a

score you often see used on retail shelves to justify prices and sell wine.

Then again, I didn't particularly want to be that kind of a wine critic. I agree with Adam Gopnik who, in his 2012 book *The Table Comes First*, writes: "The end of wine writing is to turn drinking into a metaphor for judging. Since we know this is false, we feel the falsity, and the pathos of the falsity." Further, Gopnik notes, nowhere in most wine writing "would a Martian learn that the first reason people drink wine is to get drunk." He adds: "If wine were just better-tasting grape juice, we wouldn't have the books or the background or the bards."



I quickly realized something crucial. When I wrote about spirits or beer, I wrote as a drinker, not a taster. Now, I try to always do the same when I write about wine. This is not to say that I don't have a memory library of thousands of wines, along with in-depth travel to many wine regions, and visits with many winemakers, in my head. But one of my personal mantras has been a quote from Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*: "Exuberance is better than taste." I feel it's key to experience wine in the same way as wine consumers do. While I occasionally attend industry tastings, I buy most of my wine at a store just as my readers do, and I expect experience and value for my money. And no, I don't always spit.

So I guess it will not then surprise you that I do not have a framed certificate or diploma on my wall declaring me a sanctioned Wine Educator. Nor am I a formally trained sommelier. Nor do I really desire to be. I respect that a sommelier goes through a rigorous training process, and in the end has a finely-tuned palate. But that education is not particularly relevant to writing about or even teaching people about wine. A sommelier has a different job from mine. A sommelier almost always works for a restaurant or an importer, or as an ambassador for a brand or a regional trade group. Even when he is "educating" the consumer, he is also trying to sell them something.

This is certainly not to say that sommeliers have nothing to teach us. They absolutely do. And some of my good friends of mine are somms. But the best of them understand that they now operate in a sphere where wine now competes with artisan spirits and craft beer for the attention of drinkers who enjoy fine beverages. They can see it especially among the younger crowd, especially in larger cities: These drinkers might start an evening with a classic cocktail, move on to a bottle of wine at dinner (if they don't order a large-format beer), and continue the evening drinking a small-batch whiskey or a local session beer. Everything is in play. And when everything is in play, few have patience for anything that's not novel, unique, or surprising.

Even a conservative institution like *Wine Spectator*, the industry bible, seems to recognize this.

Mark Kramer, one of the magazine's main columnists, even wrote a piece a couple of years ago entitled, "Why I No Longer Buy Expensive Wine."

"Today, more than ever before," Kramer writes, "I find myself with an almost urgent taste for emotions of surprise. Expensive wines rarely offer that element of surprise for me anymore." He went even further, calling expensive wines "utterly predictable." He adds: "Expensive wines rarely surprise. But modestly priced wines — the best of them, anyway — are endlessly surprising."

## **IF *WINE SPECTATOR'S* TOP COLUMNIST ISN'T EVEN INTERESTED IN EXPENSIVE WINE ANYMORE, WHY SHOULD A REGULAR EVERYDAY DRINKER BE?**



A lot of books and articles talk about so-called Great Wines. The one you are reading right now is not one of them. This first volume of *Planet of the Grapes* is about off-the-beaten-path red wines that I love, and that I'm betting others will, too, if only they knew more about them. These "Alternative Reds" are all very good bottles that I believe offer a drinker — whether a newbie or an experienced



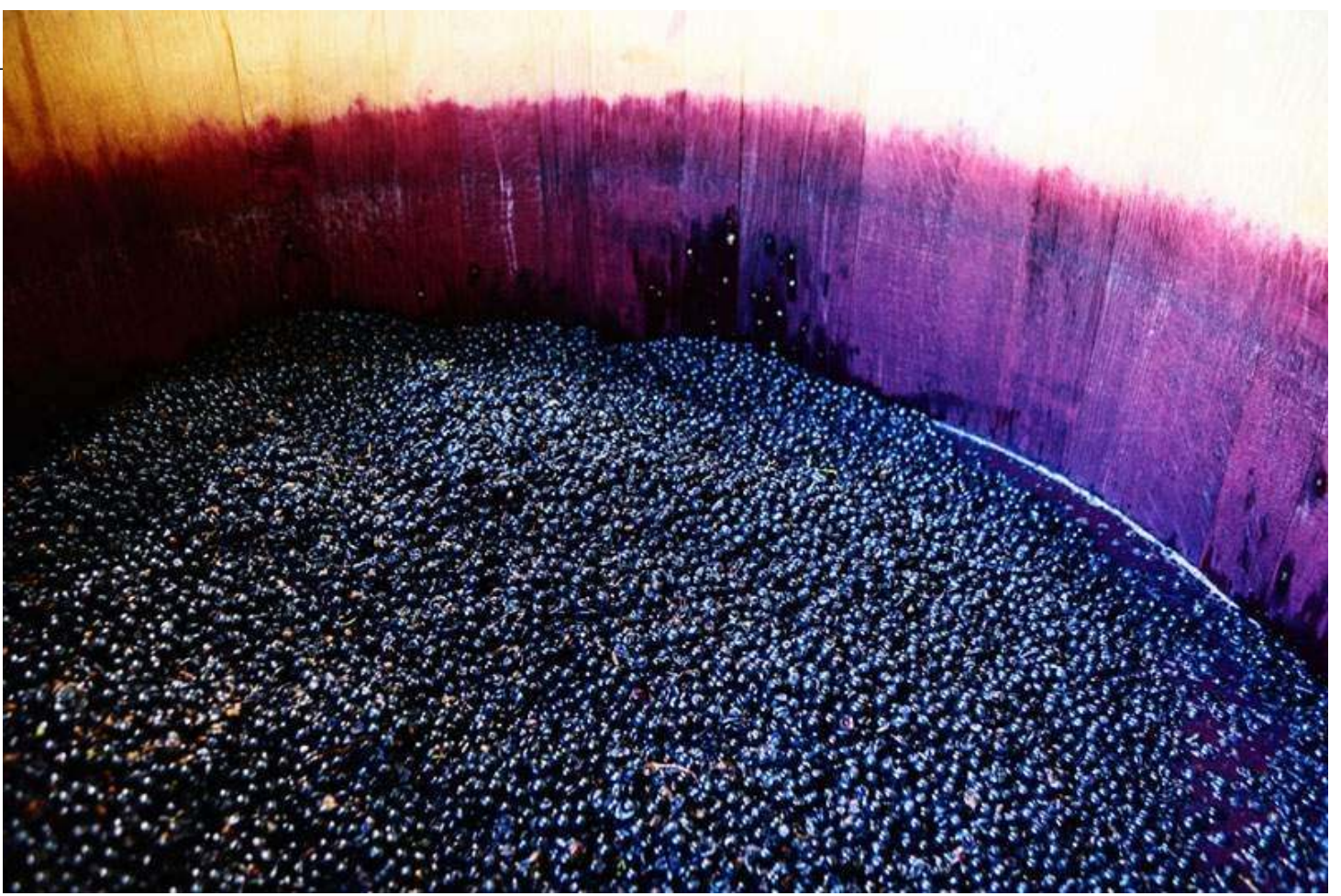
wine lover stuck in a rut — a different path into wine. I'm hoping to inspire you to try something new, push beyond the comfort zone of the usual pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon, or merlot.

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Alternative Reds are not obscure wines. I've made sure what I write about here is reasonably available in the U.S. Rather, these are wines that live in the margins of the wine shop. Perhaps they are from a place with a confusing name or geography, such as Morellino di Scansano or Côtes de Bordeaux. Perhaps they are made with a little-known grape, such as dolcetto or lagrein or carménère or sagrantino. Perhaps they were once popular, or had their moment, but have now ceased to be the flavor of the month, such as Beaujolais or lambrusco. Or maybe they've always been overlooked and underrated, such as petite sirah or Portuguese reds. In any case, their virtues include modesty, idiosyncrasy, authenticity, and everyday value. These are the wines you can open on a Tuesday night, and little by little, bottle by bottle, they will repay you with enjoyment and knowledge — even if that knowledge is simply what to look for (or avoid!) next time at the wine shop.

I know, the term “alternative” is so watered down in 2013 that it seems almost meaningless. But please bear with me, as I'm thinking of the old late 20th-century meaning of “alternative.” I came of age in the late 1980s and early '90s when the idea of “alternative music” was real and true. Sure, it seems quaint now, but bands like the Pixies, the Cure, New Order, the Sugarcubes, R.E.M., Nirvana, and Pavement were offering something very different from the so-called “classic rock” that was always played on mainstream radio. It's not that there was anything wrong with Led Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones or the Doors or Bad Company (OK, well, maybe Bad Company) or anything else that our Baby Boomer parents listened to. But we were bored, and we just wanted something different.

I believe wine is having its alternative moment. Anyone who's received a wine education over the past 20 years has been presented with the idea that wine is an aspirational ladder you must work hard to climb, and at the top of the ladder are the Serious Wines such as Bordeaux and Burgundy and Napa cabs. But for most of us, in these diminished financial times, the ladder has become unfeasible. And frankly, we're a little bored.



Wine books almost always begin with a light-hearted tale of the author's initiation into the world of wine via some crappy bottle of plonk. This is where you'll normally read an anecdote of misguided youth involving, say, Thunderbird, Sutter Home white zinfandel, Boone's Farm, Lancers, Mateus, Korbel, Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers or — for the generation of wine books soon to be written by millennials — boxes of Franzia. It's sort of like an immutable law of wine writing.

So let me begin by saying I went through a period during my senior year of high school when I was very enthusiastic about Mogen David's flavored and fortified wine MD 20/20, otherwise known as "Mad Dog." MD 20/20's Orange Jubilee was my particular tippie of choice, and the reason had more to do with how much easier it was to hide in the woods than a six-pack of beer. I vaguely remember it tasting like a mix of chalky, watered-down SunnyD and grain alcohol, but I've mostly tried to cleanse that memory from my mind, along with other, numerous suburban New Jersey public school rites of passage.

My MD 20/20 connoisseurship ended soon after I left for college in the big city. During the first week of college I professed my enthusiasm for Mad Dog and shared some Orange Jubilee with the new friends on my floor. After gagging and spitting out the MD 20/20, my new friends laughed and gave me the ironic nickname "Mad Dog," which stuck until I transferred schools at the end of my freshman year. It was an early lesson in how fraught it can be to express a wine preference. It was also a lesson in how it feels to have one's taste disapprovingly assessed.

In reality, there was no reason my first "wine" had to be MD 20/20 Orange Jubilee. My father was of the generation that, in the late 1970s and '80s, leaped headlong into an appreciation of Napa and Sonoma cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay. There were often bottles of Kendall Jackson or Robert Mondavi or Grgich Hills or Beringer opened at dinners and parties. I occasionally had a taste, but bac

then I had little interest in drinking what my parents drank.

So it wouldn't be until the summer after my sophomore year, when I was 19, that I first truly experienced wine.



I was studying abroad in Italy, living with a family in a village called Pieve San Giacomo near the Po River in the province of Cremona. Every night, Paolo, the father, sliced a plateful of prosciutto and cut a hunk from a wheel of Grana Padano. Then he uncorked and poured a fizzy red, chilled, from an unlabeled liter bottle he'd fetched from a dark corner of the barn — the same barn I'd wandered into one morning, where I saw him butchering a cow. Paolo didn't go for fancy wine glasses, but rather used what we would have called "juice" glasses back home in Jersey. Beyond slicing meat and cheese and pouring wine, he was otherwise forbidden from his wife's kitchen, so while Anna busily made us dinner and the television blared a soccer game, Paolo and I would sip our cool, fizzy red wine from our juice glasses on those hot evenings.

I had never tasted or witnessed a wine like that. The liquid was bright purple, with a thick pink foam that formed as it was poured. I knew enough to know that the Napa cabs on my parents' table back home didn't foam. Paolo's wine certainly tasted fruity, though it was more tangy than sweet, and what made it strange to me was the aroma. My father's wines smelled like identifiable fruits — plums, cherries, berries — unlike this fizzy wine. It was a little stinky, to be honest, but in a pleasant way. I didn't have the language back then, but in my memory the aroma smells earthy, rustic, fertile, alive, almost like the essence of the farm and dusty streets of the village. Back then, it simply smelled and tasted like the Old Europe I had hoped to find.

Of course, being young and naïve, I never bothered to ask Paolo anything about his wine — the grapes, where it was made, who made it. I kept in touch with the family, but since Paolo died a decade ago, and since neither Anna nor his daughter Daniela drinks wine, I didn't learn the fizzy red's provenance. Over the years, though, as my wine knowledge grew, I hypothesized that what I'd been imbibing those summer evenings long ago had been lambrusco, mainly since Pieve San Giacomo is just over an hour's drive from Modena, lambrusco's spiritual home.



As I moved further into drinking and writing about wine, I occasionally told Wine People I met at trade tastings and industry events about enjoying this fizzy red wine as a 19-year-old, and it never failed to draw a chuckle. “Lambrusco!” they’d say. “Riunite!” Cheap, sweet lambrusco had, of course, had its heyday in the 1970s, just like leisure suits and swingers and fern bars — and I can remember seeing those cheesy “Riunite on ice. That’s nice!” commercials when the babysitter let us stay up late to watch *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island*. But as Americans’ knowledge increased during the 1980s and '90s, budding wine connoisseurs didn’t want to hear about fizzy red wine anymore.

So even though the stuff I used to drink back in Pieve San Giacomo was neither sweet nor cheap, I just stopped talking about it, or even thinking about it. Like so many other aspirational Wine People my age, I dutifully learned to appreciate Serious Red Wines, which in the early 21st century mainly meant cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir from various pricey bottlings. I studiously pursued an education in Bordeaux and Burgundy and all those big California reds that my father appreciated. Instead of rustic Italian wine, I delved deeply into Barolo and Brunello di Montalcino.

## **I HAD NEVER TASTED OR WITNESSED A WINE LIKE THIS. THE LIQUID WAS BRIGHT PURPLE, WITH A THICK PINK FOAM THAT FORMED AS IT WAS Poured.**



I filed away my old “unserious” fizzy red into a similar place as my youthful Orange Jubilee. I was being schooled by wine educators and sommeliers and wine critics that, as a knowledgeable wine drinker, a Wine Person, I should be moving beyond things like fizzy reds. That is, after all, what usually happens next in traditional wine education. We’re told that wine is a ladder, with the student constantly reaching upward, leaving behind so-called *lesser* wines and climbing toward greatness, toward the profound, and toward — inevitably — the expensive.

This is why, two decades after my summer abroad, I found myself in Italy’s Langhe region, in Piedmont, visiting a bunch of producers of Barolo, the complex, elegant wine made from the nebbiolo grape — the epitome of a Serious Wine. I tasted dozens of amazing, and often profound and transcendent, Barolos, which convinced me, once again, that nebbiolo grown in this corner of northwestern Italy creates one of the world’s greatest wines.

My visit culminated on a sunny Sunday afternoon, when I attended an auction called Asta del Barolo, inside the famous castle in the town of Barolo. Bottles from prized vintages sold to collectors — some from as far away as China, Singapore, and Dubai — for thousands of dollars. One acquaintance, an Austrian banker living in Hong Kong, paid 3,000 euros for three magnums dating from the mid-1980s. I sat next to a charming producer, Barbara Sandrone, whose family’s elegant, silky, Barolos annually receive the highest scores and have been called “genius” and “breathtaking” by top critics. During the lunch, we tasted about 15 examples of the 2009 vintage. Later, there was talk among the younger winemakers about Jay-Z’s recent visit to Barolo for a weekend, where he supposedly dropped \$50,000 on wine and truffles.





*At the Barolo auction*

I won't lie: It is sexy and exciting to be part of an afternoon crowd like that. And I cannot state clearly enough how much I enjoy Barolo — it is like listening to a beautiful, challenging piece of music or standing before a grand, moving work of art. I love it so much that when people ask what my favorite wine is, I often exclaim, “Barolo!” And they nod, and say, “Ah, yes. Barolo, of course.” Who could possibly disagree with that preference?

But that afternoon at the castle was pure fantasyland. When I returned home, would I be drinking very much Barolo? Um, no, not so much. Saying Barolo is my “favorite” is very much a misrepresentation of my everyday drinking habits. How often do I drink it? Outside of professional tastings, when I'm buying wine to serve at home on special occasions or when I order it in restaurant I probably drink Barolo three or four times a year. Maybe five if I'm particularly flush. That's because the price of a decent Barolo starts at around \$60 a bottle, and quickly climbs to well over \$100 at a wine shop. Double or triple that price on a restaurant wine list. So, even though I love Barolo, it will always be a special occasion wine.

I was thinking deeply about greatness in wines when I decided to make a quick side trip to visit my old exchange family in Pieve San Giacomo. On a whim, I'd asked Daniela, Paolo's daughter, to do a little research to see where her father used to buy his fizzy red wine, and with some effort we located the winemaker. To my surprise, the winemaker was not based in Modena, but rather a couple hours in the other direction, in the Colli Piacentini — the Piacenza hills — a region I'd never heard of.

After getting lost, and refereeing an argument between Daniela and Anna, who was almost car sick in the backseat, we were finally welcomed into the garage of the winemaker, 80-year-old Antonio, and his daughter, who was roughly my age. Anna became emotional — the last time she'd visited the winemaker was in the early 1990s with Paolo. “I remember you had a goat and it used to like eating the grapes!” she said. The goat, of course, was long dead.

From stainless steel tanks, we tasted his crisp riesling and a strange, straw yellow wine made from the local Ortrugo grape. Antonio told me that most of his customers come to buy his wine in demijohns because they prefer to bottle it themselves, as Paolo did.

“What about the frizzante red?” I asked. “Do you still make it?”

He smiled broadly and fished a bottle from a corner of the garage. He grabbed a wide white bowl and splashed the purple into it, as it formed pink foam. “My customers insist on white bowls for the red,” Antonio said, “to bring out the color and aromas.”

I closed my eyes and took a sniff, and then took a sip. Sharp, fresh, tangy, earthy. Wow, the aroma and flavors were like a time machine. I was again 19, dressed in Birkenstocks and a Grateful Dead T-shirt, experiencing wine for the first time. Holding that huge wide bowl to my face nearly brought me to tears in the dark garage. “Ah, lambrusco,” I said with a satisfied smile.

Antonio laughed at me. “Lambrusco? No, no, no. This is Gutturnio!”

“Gutturnio?” I said. What the hell is Gutturnio, I thought? I must have said something wrong? Maybe I was having trouble understanding the dialect. “Is that the local name for lambrusco?” I asked.

He laughed again. “No! It’s Gutturnio. It’s a blend of barbera and bonarda.”



*Ah, lambrusco? No?*

Um...what? What the hell? By then, I was a mess of conflicting emotions. For 20 years, I’d been telling myself that my seminal wine experience was lambrusco. Now, I find out that it’s a wine called Gutturnio? And how had I never even heard of this wine? It’s not like it’s new: I later learned that the Romans drank it from round jugs called *gutturnium*, from which the wine’s name is taken. Julius Caesar’s father-in-law was famous for producing wine from here.

We sat at the table and ate cheese and meat with the wine, and Anna and Antonio reminisced about the old days. Antonio said he now sold about 4,000 bottles per year, about half what he did about 20 years ago “Ah,” he said, “a lot of my customers, they’re dying.” Meanwhile, the younger generation just wasn’t as interested in local wines like his anymore. “Nowadays, people want different tastes. There are a lot of other tastes that people seek.” Antonio shrugged. “There is an end for everything. Everything ends.”

Suddenly, the humble purple fizzy Gutturnio that I swirled around in a white bowl — which connected me to my own past, to ancient Rome, and yet at the same time represented totally fresh

knowledge — seemed more important than even the greatest Barolo. This strange experience I was having in that farmhouse in the Piacenza hills seemed to me to be the very essence of wine, the reason people spend their lives obsessed with it, an example of how wine becomes part of our lives.

Wine is not a ladder, as we're so often taught. Not even close. Wine is a maze, a labyrinth, one we gladly enter, embracing the fact that we don't know where it will take us, and that we'll never find our way out.

I'm hoping this volume, and this series, is a bit like that experience. The dozen red wines I explore in the sections that follow are by no means a comprehensive map. I offer only one idiosyncratic path into an entire world of wine. But in my opinion, there is no other way in.

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# DOLCETTO

## ITALIAN FOR "TUESDAY NIGHT WINE"

All the world's great appellations make wines from idiosyncratic, obscure grapes that offers a good value alternative to the prestige bottles. The Langhe region of Piedmont, in northwest Italy, is no different. Here, the prized nebbiolo grape, used to make Barolo, is king. But alongside Barolo, winemakers still produce pleasurable everyday wines from the humble dolcetto grape. Visit the top wineries and they almost always pour you a Dolcetto d'Alba to begin your tasting before you get to the Barbera and the Barolo.

Dolcetto is the opposite of Barolo. It's fresh, fruity, and low alcohol, with a rustic, earthy, sometimes spicy character. It is usually free of oak influences. It's not a wine you age or brood over. Even the people who make dolcetto acknowledge its lack of pretension.

"Dolcetto is the everyday wine around here, and we match it with many simple foods: pasta, pizza, a plate of meat," said Lorenzo Scavino, whose family owns Azelia winery, known for producing Barolo in the village of Castiglione Falletto.

"Dolcetto, for me, is very local. You don't find it in other regions. It feels more rustic," said Elisa Scavino, whose family owns Paolo Scavino winery, another top Barolo producer in Castiglione Falletto.

In recent years, producers around the village of Dogliani have tried to elevate dolcetto and give it more prestige. In 2005, dolcetto from Dogliani was designated as a DOCG, Italy's highest wine denomination. Dolcetto labeled Dogliani Superiore has been aged for at least one year.

"Dolcetto has always been a wine you could drink every day, but now we are getting more consideration," said Sonia Berrino, of Luigi Einaudi, one of the leading Dogliani producers. "I think dolcetto is a wine with a future."



*Most dolcetto is aged in stainless steel tanks instead of oak.*

Perhaps the future is now. Dolcetto seems to be popping up more and more in wine circles. In January, sommelier Levi Dalton elegantly summed up dolcetto in a *New York Times* article: "Dolcettos are like the off-cut of meat that the butcher keeps for himself."

Given the way most of us eat, I don't understand why dolcetto hasn't always been more popular. Perhaps it's the name, which suggests to people that it's a sweet red. It's not, by a long stretch. While dolcetto is fruity, it's balanced by light tannins and often a hint of bitter — what Italians call *amaro* — on the finish. It's great with just about anything grilled in summer and hearty soups and pastas in the winter.

"It's a must-have on our lists due to the fact that it's so approachable, so food friendly, and such a great introduction to Italian wine," said Steve Wildy, beverage director of Marc Vetri's acclaimed restaurants in Philadelphia. "It's a gateway wine for non-Italian wine drinkers who have been turned off by decades of drinking bad Chianti."

"For the non-Italian-wine drinker, Italian wine typically carries a few harsh stereotypes: high tannin, high acid, and earthier flavors, all profiles on the opposite end of the average American wine drinker's taste spectrum," Wildy said. "Dolcetto is the perfect antithesis for this, since it's usually plump, juicy, and easy-going, loaded with purple fruit, and light-hearted enough to go with almost anything."

"What kind of a person is a dolcetto drinker?" asked my friend Tim Kweeder, wine director at a.kitchen, a great wine bar in Philadelphia. "A person looking for that bottle of wine on a Tuesday night, when he or she is not looking to impress anybody and doesn't need to overanalyze anything. They can just enjoy a glass or three with some simple foods while they kick back."





# EVERYDAY DOLCETTO

## **Prunotto Dolcetto d'Alba 2012**

(12.5% alcohol by volume, \$15)

Fresh, ripe berries, balanced by a smooth-stone minerality, and a touch of amaro on the finish.

## **Pecchenino San Luigi Dolcetto di Dogliani 2011**

(13.5%, \$15)

Fresh, rich berry with great acidity and a hint of minerality, with drying tannins on the finish.

## **Ca' Viola Dolcetto d'Alba Vilot 2010**

(13.5%, \$23)

Big, rustic, lots of juicy fruit and some black pepper.

## **Poderi Luigi Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani 2011**

(13.5%, \$20)

Ripe fruit, but also significant herbal and spice notes, and a hint of bitter on the finish. Classic dolcetto and a wonderful food wine.

## **Parusso Dolcetto d'Alba Piani Noce 2012**

(12.5%, \$15)

Earthy, with tobacco on the nose and tart berries on the palate.

## **Pio Cesare Dolcetto d'Alba 2010**

(13.5%, \$20)

Dense, but balanced, with lots of dark fruit and black pepper.

## **Azelia Bricco dell'Oriolo Dolcetto d'Alba 2011**

(13%, \$15)

Bright, young, with ripe red berries and lots of acidity.

## **Fontanafredda Briccotondo Langhe Dolcetto 2010**

(13%, \$14)

Spicy nose, and dry, green tannins, with just enough fruit to balance.

## **Elvio Cagno Vigna del Mandorlo Dolcetto d'Alba 2011**

(14%, \$23)

Very purple, fruity, and aromatic. Lots of plum, blueberry, and licorice.

## **Anna Maria Abbona 'Sori dij But' Dolcetto di Dogliani 2011**

(13.5%, \$19)

Deep and dark, with baked cherry and a hint of menthol on the finish.

## **Pecchenino Bricco Botti Dolcetto di Dogliani 2008**

(14%, \$35)

Fresh, complex nose of cherry, smoke, and a hint of oak. Elegant and pure. High-end dolcetto.

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