

ON THE LIGHTER/SWEETER SIDE*

With the Spaghetti Sauce and Biscotti Cook Off coming the first week of August, I thought it might be a good time to talk about some lighter and sweeter wines. It's not difficult finding a wine to go with spaghetti sauce (okay, "gravy" to a lot of you), but Italy doesn't have a lot to offer in sweet wines (at least not that you can get locally – if you are willing to go to the Bay Area or even to Sacramento there are more to be found). However, there are several lighter and fruitier varieties that lend themselves nicely to dessert. Keep in mind that there is only one rule in choosing a wine – IF YOU LIKE IT, DRINK IT.

VIN SANTO is a delightful sweet red wine from Tuscany and is the traditional dipping wine for biscotti in Italy. Like the famed red wine Amerone (from the Veneto region), Vin Santo is made by hanging the grapes until "semi-dried" before crushing. The result is awesome, but the lower production per ton of grapes makes it more expensive. It may be a little harder to find locally, but it is well worth the effort. I've seen Vin Santo as well as a "Tuscan Dessert Wine" both from Cantina Bellini winery.

ASTI and MOSCATO D'ASTI are produced as both still and sparkling wines made from Moscato grapes around Asti, in Piemonte. They are deliciously sweet and low in alcohol, with pronounced fruity and floral flavors. Most are non-vintage, but freshness and youth are essential to their quality. Armani, Mauro Sebaste, Marchese dell Elsa, Rinaldi, Sant'Orsola, Morando, and Soria all make nice Astis and Moscatos, available locally in the \$10 to \$20 range.

PROSECCO is a sparkling wine mostly from the Veneto region. Generally slightly drier than Moscato, but the level of sweetness varies, so you have to try a few to find one you like. I love Dolce Vita Prosecco with appetizers, but it would work with many desserts. Val de Brun makes a Prosecco as well as a sparkling Brut Rose that would be delicious on a warm evening. Good Proseccos run around \$15 to \$20. I've tried some in the \$5 to \$10 range and think they lack complexity and don't have much to offer a dessert, but if they fit your taste, drink 'em.

LAMBRUSCO is most commonly a sweet, fizzy wine with delicious, grapey flavors, made from Lambrusco grapes usually from the Emilia-Romagna region. Dry and sparkling styles also exist. Sei Amici Lambrusco comes in both red and white versions available locally for only about \$7 a bottle.

LIGHT AND FRUITY WHITE WINES – While not particularly sweet, several white wines are light-bodied with fruity notes and would go nicely with a dessert that is not too overly sweet – something like a refreshing semi-freddo or biscotti (depending on the flavor). Best thing is to try some to find something best suited to your taste. Here are a few to look for:

Frascati: From the Frascati area, south of Rome, and made mainly with Trebbiano grapes. They are dry or slightly off-dry, light-bodied, and un-oaked with crisp acidity and subdued flavor.

Gavi: Dry, medium-bodied wine from Cortese grapes in the Gavi area of Piedmont. Typically crisp and un-oaked (sometimes slightly oaky) with delicate notes of honey and apples.

Orvieto: A generally medium-bodied wine made mainly from Grechetto grapes around Orvieto, in the Umbria region. Dry, crisp, with flavors of pear and apple and a pleasantly bitter finish.

Soave: From the Soave zone in the Veneto region, made mainly from Garganega grapes. Generally dry, crisp, un-oaked, and light or medium-bodied, with subdued flavors of pear, apple, or peach.

Cent' anni,
richerino (aka Dave Rich)

***NOTE:** There are several excellent Italian liqueurs that pair perfectly with dessert (things like Limoncello, Amaretto, Sambucco Romano, Strega, etc.), and after dinner wines like Port, Marsala, Madeira, or Vermouth, to name but a few, from other countries are delicious. Also, many people like to dip biscotti in coffee. But this is a column on Italian wines so I leave it up to you to research those alternatives. – richerino