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## WINE GIFTS: ITALY

The Best Wine Gifts for 2013

December 17, 2013 By **Gregory Dal Piaz**SHARE: Like  Tweet    Spring 

So far I've worked my way through a pretty impressive set of wines that would make for some splendid gifting. I've covered Cabernet, Pinot Noir, the wines of France and today I turn my attention towards Italy. Without a doubt my favorite wine producing country; Italy is home to more variety and styles of wine than anyplace else on the planet.



As much as I would love to run through all of those wines today, the truth is that gift giving will generally focus on but a handful of famous wines. This of course makes perfect sense, gifting being about buying something that someone might not buy for themselves or buying something that is particularly noteworthy and special. With this in mind I will spread my attention a bit more liberally throughout the country. I've got my suggestions for Nebbiolo and Sangiovese of course but there are simply so many noteworthy and special wines being produced in Italy today that to ignore them would do a disservice to them and to you, our potential gift giver.

I will however start here with Nebbiolo, my favorite grape and when placed in the hands of one of the top producers, a grape capable of producing wines that marry power and elegance. At once hugely structured, yet so aromatic with delicate perfumes of violets and roses, leather, tar, red fruits and licorice all wrapped up in an age worthy package that can evolve for decades. Barolo and Barbaresco, they are two of the world's greatest wines. Dare I say the greatest? Having said that they also generally require a fair amount of cellaring, which can pose a problem for pouring whatever vintage is on the shelves at this moment. Here is a very brief rundown of vintages to help guide your purchasing.

**2010** Just a few Barbaresco from this vintage have hit the shelves as of yet. A vintage that seems to be better in Barolo, where it is spectacular, than in Barbaresco, where it is merely very good. A classic vintage that might have some early appeal but is structured for the long haul, and is not the best option for early consumption.

**2009** The current release for Barolo and a lovely one at that. Big, rich with the fruit of a warm vintage yet quite structured as well. These should drink well enough today and for the coming year before closing down.

**2008** A very aromatic and smaller scaled vintage that is bright and austere with an almost lacy, yet firm structure. Not a hedonistic vintage but one that is remarkably complex and has that delicate/powerful thing going in spades.

**2007** A warmer vintage; plump with ripe fruit yet many wines are not very well balanced. Still drinking well enough though and as a generalization, with an approachable character that makes them good for gift giving.

**2006** Tough as nails, but a great vintage.

**2005** Similar to 2008 in style though many wines have shut down.

**2004** A very good vintage with fairly classically styled wines, though some are a touch dilute. Still approachable today.

**2003** The product of a very hot vintage, easy drinking and plump if neither terribly complex nor particularly structured.

**2002** A washout best avoided with one notable, and expensive, exception.

**2001** A great vintage that is shut down hard, as evidenced by [this recent tasting](#).

**2000** A warmer vintage that yielded plump, generous wines that do not represent the pinnacle of what Nebbiolo can achieve but these wines are drinking terrifically today and would make a perfect gift this holiday season.

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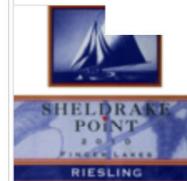
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### Dessert wines

After weeks of writing about wines for the holidays I've realised that I haven't even mentioned dessert wines. It might seem odd to finally do so here, while recommending the wines of Italy, but the truth of the matter is that Italy is packed with dessert wines from North to South. Some of the most famous grapes in Italy got their start as famous dessert wines, Sagrantino and the grapes used for Amarone, while many are made exclusively into dessert wines, Moscato Rosa and Zibibbo for example, and don't even get me started on Vin Santo and Vino Santo! The bottom line is that Italy is a fantastic resource for amazing dessert wines, virtually all of which are not fortified, making them an easy and delicious way to cap of the perfect holiday meal.

#### Girland Pasithea Rosa Moscato Rosa Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy \$37/375ml

Moscato Rosa is a rare specialty from the Alto-Adige. Red muscat, redolent of roses, red fruits and subtle baking spices is a wonderful dessert wine and seeing as it's a rare find it also makes for a wonderful gift. Girland is a great producer, also responsible for the greatest expression of Schiava from the Alto-Adige, the ancient vine bottling from the Gschlier vineyard which is seldom available at retail here in the States. The Pasithea Rosa is a passito style wine, modest in alcohol at about 12.5% but quite sweet, if well balanced with fine, juicy acidity.

#### 2010 Donnafugata Ben Rye Passito di Pantelleria, Sicily, Italy \$32-\$50/375ml

Coming from Pantelleria, an island off the coast of Sicily that is closer to Tunisia than Sicily, it seems quite obvious that Ben Rye should be a sweet wine. Produced from the local Muscat of Alexandria, known as Zibibbo, the grapes for Ben Rye, Arabic for "son of the wind", are in fact air dried for about a month after harvest, after which they are slowly fermented, with new dried grapes added to the must periodically, until the wine achieves about 14.5% alcohol. It is then briefly aged in stainless steel before bottling, capturing its unique blend of peach, dried fruit, orange rind spice, and wind swept herbal perfumes.

#### 2004 Felsina Berardenga Vin Santo Chianti Classico, Tuscany, Italy \$36-\$50/375ml

Vin Santo is a totally misunderstood wine. There is plenty of inexpensive Vin Santo that is in fact best used for dipping biscotti in, but that hardly does justice to the genre. Felsina's Vin Santo adheres to traditional guidelines, blending Trebbiano, Malvasia, and Sangiovese grapes that have been air dried on trellises, this Vin Santo undergoes a typical slow fermentation before the wine is aged in small 100 liter oak casks for seven years. The resulting wine is plenty sweet, with enough acid to balance the sweetness of course, and is full of honied pineapple, peach and dried citrus flavors layered with the subtle spice of its oak ageing. It's a rare Vin Santo that really needs a few years in the cellar to reach perfect harmony but at the age of about 15 years it really starts singing. It is the perfect end to a holiday dinner, or a list of Holiday gift suggestions!

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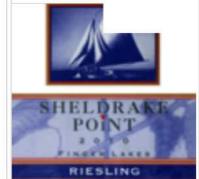
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