

Drinking good wines for less than 8 euros is possible. Here are 16 unmissable labels

ENGLISH VERSION

SPIRITO di VINO

la rivista per meditare centellinando

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We can't end without mentioning **cannolo**, maybe the best known recipe. Delicious and not too expensive, they have to be made with sheep cottage cheese and home made wafer.



Here beats the real heart of the Island

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From the latomia stone quarries start seven unmissable routes to discover the splendid light that Selinunte reverberates. The myth says it all started when Selinunte appeared in his mother Latomia's dream. She was tenacious and strong as the toughest stone, this is why in her honour Faith, from that moment on, wanted to give that same name to the quarry where only the best stone was mined. All starts from these quarries and you should follow the path that the sun, for about 2.400 years, has been tracking on the valley. Every year, on the third day of December, the first sunrays light for a moment just the Greek capital that Zeus wanted to lay on a bed of wild myrtle at the beginning of the Cusa mine. Any time the sun burns above the latomia (quarry) stones strewn between thousands of olive trees, while the Selinunte acropolis scratches geometrically the view and Pantelleria and Carthage stand out on the horizon, Emerico Amari's face warms, it's like erasing a quarter of century spent in the finance between London, New York and Milan. How comforting is to lay in the shadow of centuries-old trees, while herons, wild ducks and storks circle above you; to hear but the noise of olives falling on webs during the harvest days; how welcoming it makes you to stroll every day on grounds that have been walked by the most different peoples for millenniums, as "Sicilians have always been conquered, now it's our time to conquer", Amari lights up. His conquest strategy starts from the olives the Amari Cusa family has harvested for six generations, as don Domenico Amari started in 1795.

The old Villa Sicilia's oil mill is one among the many temples to Sicilian culture erected by the progenitor. In 2005 a five-years-long refurbishment ended: now the antique dwelling is atypically charming, with a great rural appeal. The works have been inspired by an admirable architectural idea, very coherent with Amari's pan-Sicilian vision. «It's a hymn to the spirit of these lands, with all nowadays' functionality and comforts». Outside you immediately notice the basement windows to shelter from the heat and the brigands. And there's a certain continuity between outside and in: Sicilian terracotta tiled floors with no interruption sort of erase any threshold between nature and home. Inside, excellent taste finishings and antique furniture that followed the family for generations. The rooms' names talk about millenary epic deeds: Cartagine, Lilibeo, Megara, Iblea, Mozia, Segesta, Siracusa. Eight beds, with a majolica kitchen, antique terracotta floors, a stone bricks fireplace and tuff steps. There's an antique oil tank under a narrow vaulted roof, old times entries built to roll barrels in, Caltagirone's china with typical symbols as the omen to fertility pomegranate. And as a matter of facts Nature is lush in this place, with centuries-old olive trees, vineyards, white and red mulberry-trees. There is a hidden kitchen beside the terrace with an Eraclea stone fountain: beyond the steaming barbeque you can peep the hands of Assunta, extremely talented and gentle woman who cooks and offers the guests lazing about in the shadow and wind blowing from the sea, her best Sicilian tradition dishes. And more, there's a salt water pool viewing the extra-fine sand beach down there, on that crystalline expanse of sea -so dear to Enea, as it recalled the Dardanelles and soothed

the memories of Troy», so the cultured Amari. And just that same longing is what visitors feel after leaving these lands, after days spent loafing about olive trees and splendid tours to such amazing natural and cultural treasures. A wonderful trip leads to the magnificent Cusa quarry and its giant stone columns, chiselled both by human hands and the wind, that give shape to the temples of distant Selinunte, itself an incomparably charming archaeological park.

Baglio di Villa Sicilia
Selinunte (Tp)
www.villasicilia.com



His hands create emotions out of simplicity

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It's hard to find the La Madia restaurant, in the road crowded with many other small shop windows. But it's worth a visit: here the chef Pino Cuttala's whole work is based on his passion and his mind, an efficient method: raw materials he finds every day are the centre of recipes and dishes, visible and recognizable. Cooking and presentations are never banal, sauces and seasonings are never «covering», never just one colour, never just one texture in mouth. Three cutlery, often all required – but this doesn't mean multiplying the recipe's elements: often they are three as well, a main ingredient sided by two contrasting sauces. The result is a very modern, essential cuisine, rarely found elsewhere on the island.

The best octopus of our lives (and the most beautiful as well) comes rolled up and decorated with a «panelle». Octopus and chickpeas: there's tradition, territory, the whole Sicily and its popular food in the background. This is boiled first, and then tentacle are incised with a sharp knife, barbecued and laid on a chickpeas cream in spiral, so that it opens in a flower shape. The sweet flavour of chickpeas flour is smartly contrasted by a rosemary sauce: a marvellous dish made of three elements, octopus, chickpeas and rosemary. And what about tuna? This is another new emotion Pino provides. He uses ventresca (tuna belly), the fattest, most juicy part of tuna fished in the front sea. He cuts some cubes he puts on a tiny movable barbecue in front of guests, just like some use to do with stone of lava. But he uses a special almond charcoal, not stinking nor smoking, on the contrary giving tuna its perfumes and intense aroma. Here is the emotion: reinterpreting such a banal dish, with a hint of originality that makes the recipe unforgettable. Then again, let's talk about his raw fish, so different from any sashimi, so intriguing and solar. A sliced sea bass (not too thin, to preserve a fleshy texture) slightly smoked on pines, sided with an baby onion sauce and orange slices mixed to oil drops, making a seasoning of almost the mayonnaise texture. Crispy bread rolled up on top dries excessive humidity. The result goes far beyond usual crudité, it's rather a complex recipe, full of suggestions and flavours. Eggplant roll is mandatory: a typical pale eggplant, at once tasty and elegant: Pino fills it with an eggplant and fresh cottage cheese mousse, wraps it with thin spaghetti and refreshes it by a tiny tomato with basil sauce. The result is aesthetically superb, but above all of great taste, a light and harmonic synthesis of traditional eggplant «parmigiana», here completely revisited. Cornucopia with cottage cheese cream and marmalade, is pretty similar to the traditional cannolo: here we particularly appreciate the execution, light and fragrant fried wafer, all but greasy, and cheese cream with no trace of the sugary note so frequent

elsewhere: we recognize it's still a marvellous cottage cheese! The orange sauce, too, preserves the right sourness of season fruits. We really can't but suggest a visit to this still not famous genius, whose tranquil rhythm let him reach perfection in his work.

Ristorante La Madia
Licata (Ag)
www.ristorantelamadia.it



Will Champagne cross the English Channel?

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It's generally accepted that the Romans have introduced viticulture in Great Britain: the Romans really could not live without wine, anywhere they arrived as conquerors, and soon they surrounded themselves with vineyards. The Empire's fall is the most difficult phase for the very survival of viticulture: northern populations, more inclined to nomadism than to sedentary life, little suited to the time and care which vineyards call for. Europe's vineyards resist just around monasteries and abbeys, where wine is a fundamental element of Christian ritual. In Great Britain, between the dominations of Saxons and Vikings, viticulture basically disappears, and it expands again only between the 9th and the 11th century, from King Alfred to William the Conqueror. Between 1348 and 1370, black plague decimates population and brings a substantial change in agriculture, forcing to turn cultivation to more certain and immediate yields. The dissolution of monasteries in 1536 is the crucial event that caused the end of viticulture and wine making in England. At the same time, British climate has slightly changed, becoming generally wet and therefore really deterring wine production. Moreover, in the 12th century Aquitaine becomes an English duchy, due to the marriage of Eleanor d'Aquitaine to king Henry II. This enormously increases the trade of Bordeaux wines, in fact writing off more reckless English emulations. Between the 14th and 18th century, after an average temperature rise that helped a development of wine production in traditionally rigid areas, European climate undergoes a drastic cooling: the effect on viticulture is dramatic. A slow recovery starts just after the Second World War, when the arrival of brave pioneers disproves the theory that wine can't be made from grapes grown on this latitude. The key elements of the relaunch are a combination of new varieties, more suitable and wiser cultivation techniques, and consumers' curiosity and support. But first of all it's the trials and convictions of Ray Barrington Brock, Hyams Edward and George Ordish, who have in many ways promoted the first English commercial vineyard of modern times, carried out in Hambledon, Hampshire, in 1951. Today the 200 British vineyards are mostly located below the line connecting Birmingham to Norwich, along the Eastern and Southern coasts. Geologically similar to the calcareous fault of Northern France and after the temperature's rising, this area seems particularly proper for white grapes tilling, so that production of sparkling wines with champenois method has recently vertiginously grown in the UK. Global warming seems to suggest that from now on these lands could give quality wine comparable to the most valuable productions of France, starting from Champagne. Carr Taylor and Lamberhurst have good results since the Eighties, and recently Nyetimber Vineyard and Ridgeview Wine Estate have been so praised for their sparkling wines to become the production model for several other British companies. An easy forecast is that British sparkling wine's consideration and popularity will follow this increase, too.