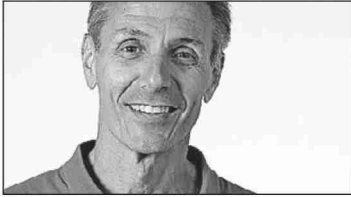


# With Chianti, think outside the straw



## AL VUONA

In the 1972 hit film “The Godfather” Don Vito Corleone, played by Marlon Brando, insisted upon respect from everyone he met, or else. Likewise, Chianti, the celebrated red wine of Tuscany in Italy, deserves far more respect than it’s gotten over the years. Simply put, Chianti has an image problem, one exacerbated by wines that at one time were rather harsh-tasting and then bottled in straw-covered flasks known as a fiasco. Often times these straw-covered bottles were used as decoration in various restaurants, further tarnishing the wine’s reputation.

This has resulted in many people assuming that Chianti is a wine that is inferior or one of lesser quality. Nothing could be further from the truth. Chianti is a rich, flavorful wine that in my opinion is one of the most food-friendly on the planet. Recognizing the problem, today most producers of Chianti bottle their wines in standard glass bottles. As for the wines themselves, most are very good to excellent. If you don’t believe me, just try a glass.

First, though, here’s a little background. Chianti is the name of a region in the heart of Tuscany, and the red wines produced there must contain mostly Sangiovese grapes to be labeled as Chianti. There are seven distinctive subzones of Chianti, the most important being Classico and Rufina. Historically speaking, Chianti Classico is where it all started. Most producers of Chianti Classico belong to a consortium that acts as a watchdog and ensures that only the highest standards are employed in the making of wine. The wines of Classico are identified by the image of a black rooster on the neck of each bottle.

Here are just a few Chiantis that warrant a closer look. And while there are hundreds of quality wines worth trying, this list serves as a starting point. Best of all, I think each of these wines represents real value. As Don Corleone would say, “It’s an offer you just can’t refuse.”

**Villa Antinori: 2012, Chianti Classico Riserva.** Aromas of blackberry, cherry and spice are readily noticeable. This wine is rich and concentrated with dark fruit flavors accented by hints of spice. The lengthy finish is complemented by silky tannins. \$32

**Castello di’Albola: 2013, Chianti Classico Riserva.** This terrific wine is full-bodied with a crimson red color and flavors reminiscent of cherries and

spice. The finish is long and flavorful with polished tannins. Try a bottle with pasta and meat sauce. \$28

**Castello di Gabbiano: 2013, Chianti Classico Riserva.** Medium-bodied and on the dry side with firm tannins for structure. Flavors of cherry, chocolate and vanilla glide over the palate with a bold finish. Pairs nicely with chicken Parmesan and basil topping. \$24

**Marchesi de’ Frescobaldi: Nipozzano Riserva Chianti Rufina, 2012.** This wonderful wine opens with dark wild berries and cherry. Immediately noticeable is the chocolate accents along with a spicy aftertaste. \$21

**Selvapiana: 2014, Chianti Rufina.** Graceful, with flavors of red berries, licorice and plum. Well-balanced with a smooth, velvety finish. \$17

**Fattoria di Basciano: 2014, Chianti Rufina.** Ruby red color with an intense bouquet of black cherry and violet aromas. Full-bodied and flavorful with hints of spice and herbs in the lengthy finish. \$15

**Wine of the Week: Cosen-tino Winery: Cigar-Old Vine Zinfandel, 2015 California.** Deep red in color with alluring aromas of pepper, spice and nutmeg. This is a full-bodied wine topping off at 15 percent alcohol. On the palate cocoa, coffee and mocha flavors. Try a bottle with a broiled sirloin steak. \$20

