



DAVINCI.

Culinary Arts

EMBRACING THE FOOD AND WINE OF MONTALBANO
BY JANELLE MAIOCCO

Wine

DaVinci® Wines are to be celebrated. And not just because they are 1) Authentic wines hailing from the northern region of Tuscany; 2) Meticulously made according to high regional standards; or 3) Simply divine on the palate. In my opinion, DaVinci® Wines should be embraced because of the people, passion and culture behind the wines.

As part of a weeklong journey to Vinci, Italy, (where myself and three other lucky souls were invited to experience everything behind the DaVinci® brand): we met growers, winemakers, chefs and employees of DaVinci® Wine. We made lifelong friends, enjoyed countless food—and—wine pairings, and soaked up the Tuscan landscape.

Most importantly: We genuinely experienced the timelessness of sitting at a table with friends, good wine and course after course of brilliant food. It was simultaneously unrushed, delicious, poignant, carefree, soothing, simple and good. We should all enjoy long meals at big tables with dear friends and family, scrumptious food and memorable wine.

And just because you weren't on this journey with us to Vinci, Italy, doesn't mean you cannot soak up all that a Tuscan-inspired table has to offer. In fact: I am here to help. With photos that are worth a thousand words, recipes directly from our experience and a little primer on Chianti—you are on your way to slowing life down and enjoying authentic Italian food and wine. Of course: The cooking, setting a large table and inviting friends and family are up to you.

PASSION



CHIANTI WINES

Chianti wines aren't as simple to understand and appreciate as you might imagine (unless you are in that moment when wine is swirling around your tongue). In fact the Chianti region of Tuscany is broken into eight smaller regions, each with their own set of standards and requirements for making Chianti. Each region is intimate with its microclimate, wine-makers, multi-generational growers, old traditions and new technology.

The eight districts in the Chianti region are: Classico, Ruffino, Colli Fiorentini, Colli Aretini, Colli Senesi, Colline Pisane, Montespertoli and Montalbano. DaVinci® Wines—and the town of Vinci—are in the Montalbano region of Chianti. Located in the northeast quadrant of Tuscany, Montalbano is nestled between Florence and Pisa—just 60 meters above sea level. DaVinci® Wines are the result of a cooperative of 230 members hailing from 78 vineyards. The cooperative, Cantine Leonardo da Vinci, was formed in 1961 and is celebrating their 50th year.

Chianti is a dry red wine, medium bodied, with notes of cherries and violets. In general, Chianti wine includes a minimum of 70% and up to 100% sangiovese. In addition to sangiovese (there are 12 varieties of sangiovese across Tuscany), tradition puts the black Canaiolo and white Malvasia and Trebbiano grapes into the Chianti blend. Commonly, Chianti includes its requisite sangiovese and a blend of reds—including merlot, syrah, and cabernet—to round out the wine.

Aging, blending and bottling requirements vary from region to region. Chianti Superiore and Chianti Riserva wines are aged longer—and have more to prove—than straight-shooting Chiantis. Additionally, there are three categories that qualify Italian wines: IGT, DOC and DOCG. IGT states the basic information: the region, varietals and vintage. DOC requires specific aging, barrels, varietals and processing.

DOCG increases those aging and quality requirements; the entire Chianti region enjoys the possibility of DOCG status. A cooperative will often produce a combination of IGT, DOC and DOCG wines.

TUSCAN FOOD

“Localvore” may be a term we use in other parts of the world; in Italy, eating local is so normal, applying the term “localvore” would be both useless and redundant. Each region of Italy has its specialties—or shall I say vehement preferences? In Tuscany you eat pecorino, Parmesan hails from the Emilia-Romagna region and mozzarella di bufala is farther south than you realize. When we first arrived in Vinci, we enjoyed “bistecca Fiorentina,” which is a famous cut of steak (T-bone) cut thick (up to three inches), drizzled with oil, salt and pepper then cooked to perfection. Tuscany alone owns the “bistecca” bragging rights.

Ragus are made differently in each region (all claim to be the best, the original), many Italians include seafood in their diet (their country is surrounded by coastline), and not all olive oil is created equal. Tuscans eat a lot of wild boar, seafood and beef. Different regions clamor to their unique pasta specialty; near Vinci, we ate a lot of ravioli, papardelle and pici pasta. Tuscan salami is considered sweeter than salami that hails from Bologna. And the list goes on and on.



Even in our short time in and around Vinci, Italy, we ate a lot—a LOT—of food. These ingredients/foods were common to our experience and are traditional to the Montalbano region (though this is far from an exhaustive list):

Basil. Parsley. Sage. Rosemary. Bay Leaf. Thyme. Pancetta. Prosciutto. Salami. Wild Boar. Rabbit. Beef. Chicken Liver. Shrimp. Mussels. Squid. Clams. Pecorino. Ricotta. Truffles. Olives. Radicchio. Arugula. Spinach. Zucchini blossoms. Tomatoes. Mushrooms. Eggplant. Asparagus. Artichokes. Cantaloupe. Watermelon. Canellini beans. Garbanzo. Pici pasta. Paparedelle. Ravioli. Risotto. Polenta. Unsalted Bread. Baguettes. Olive oil. Sugar. Eggs. Cream. Mascarpone. Honey. Flour. Salt. Wine. Grappa. Vin Santo. Espresso.

THE RECIPES

To fully embrace the Montalbano region: First, buy some DaVinci® Chianti and then make some of these recipes. And don't worry if you aren't used to zucchini flowers, haven't cooked with rabbit and can't find wild boar. I've got you covered. You can substitute beef for boar, zucchini flowers are easier than you think, and to Italians: eating rabbit is as normal as eating chicken or pork. Are you in?

ANTIPASTI. We routinely started a meal or rounded out our lunch with a plate of thinly sliced prosciutto, salami and pecorino cheese. Pecorino cheese could be young and soft or aged, hard and sharp. The salamis and prosciutto are from pigs, wild boar or la cinta senese (a pig/boar mix) from Tuscany.

The second most common appetizer was a plate of crostini. I tasted four to six different versions of chicken liver pate smeared across toasted, garlic-rubbed baguette rounds (my favorite was at ADRIANO→, a restaurant in Cerreto Guidi). When we weren't eating chicken liver, our crostini was piled high with diced tomatoes, chiffonade of basil and a liberal sprinkling of salt.

Whether blessing your guests with chicken liver or garden fresh tomatoes, you need to know how to make crostini the way the Italians do: Slice day-old baguette into ¾ inch slices. Heat broiler. Place slices on sheet pan, brush with olive oil, salt and pepper. Broil for 1-3 minutes until lightly browned around edges. While still hot, rub face of each crostini with raw garlic clove (one clove for every few crostini).

Antipasti | Chicken Liver Crostini.
Zuppa & Insalata | Ribollita (Bread Soup). Panzanella (Bread Salad).
Primi | Zucchini Flower Risotto. Gnudi. Chianti Meat Ragù with Pappardelle.
Secondi | Wild Boar Stew. Rabbit with olives. Mussels in wine & garlic.
Contorni | Cannellini.
Dolci | Chef Anna's Jam Tart. Tiramisu.



CHICKEN LIVER CROSTINI (ONE WAY)

3 tablespoons olive oil (preferably: 2 tablespoons olive oil and 1 tablespoon bacon fat)

1/4 cup minced shallot

1-2 teaspoons fresh thyme

KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)

1 cup fresh chicken livers, chopped

1/4 cup brandy (or vin santo)

1 salt-cured anchovy fillet, finely chopped

1 teaspoon brine cured capers, rinsed, drained and finely chopped

Rinse livers, trim off connective tissue and pat dry. Roughly chop livers. Heat fat over medium low heat and sauté shallots, thyme with a few good grinds of salt and pepper. After a few minutes, up heat to medium and add livers. Sauté for two to three minutes, then add brandy. Lower heat and barely simmer for 20 minutes. If pan dries, add a little water. Remove from heat. Finely chop livers. Add back to pan with chopped capers, anchovies, a little water and salt, pepper. Simmer a few minutes, or until mixture becomes a thick, moist spread.

Note: I fabricate whole chickens at home, using the pieces for entrees, the bones for stock and the livers for chicken liver pate. I collect chicken livers in my freezer until I have enough for a round of pate.



Basil. Parsley. Sage. Rosemary. Bay Leaf. Thyme. Pancetta. Prosciutto. Salami. Wild Boar. Rabbit. Beef. Chicken Liver. Shrimp. Mussels. Squid. Clams. Pecorino. Ricotta. Truffles. Olives. Radicchio. Arugula. Spinach. Zucchini blossoms. Tomatoes. Mushrooms. Eggplant. Asparagus. Artichokes. Cantaloupe. Watermelon. Canellini beans. Garbanzo. Pici pasta. Paparedelle. Ravioli. Risotto. Polenta. Unsalted Bread. Baguettes.

CHICKEN LIVER CROSTINI (ANOTHER WAY)

3 tablespoons olive oil or bacon fat
1/4 cup minced shallot
1-2 teaspoons fresh thyme
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
1 cup fresh chicken livers, chopped
1/4 cup brandy (or vin santo)
5 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature

Rinse livers, trim off connective tissue and pat dry. Roughly chop livers. Heat fat over medium low heat and sauté shallots, thyme with a few good grinds of salt and pepper. After a few minutes, up heat to medium and add livers. Sauté for two to three minutes, then add brandy. Lower heat and barely simmer for 20 minutes. If pan dries, add a little water. Remove from heat. Combine liver mixture and butter in food processor and purée—it take less than a minute. Spread on toasted crostini.

WINE PAIRING: A plate of crostini pairs seamlessly with DaVinci® Wine's Pinot Grigio.

ZUPPA E INSALATA. The soup and salad course is not to be missed: salads are home to seasonal greens plus seafood and all the trimmings—or simply lettuces with high quality olive oil, salt and pepper. A quintessential soup of Tuscany—and born out of a peasant's kitchen—is called ribollita. Ribollita can take on many forms, from thin and broth-like to thick like stew. Its signature ingredients include day-old bread, cavalo nero (black cabbage), usually white cannellini beans and some tomato element (paste, sauce, pulp, fresh, etc.). I just planted black cabbage in my garden, as an endless supply is quintessential to my ribollita obsession.



“You need to know how to make crostini the way the Italians do...”

CULTURE



The most memorable bread salad I have ever had in my life was in Vinci at the estate of grower Rossetti. We ate lunch on his estate, under a portico with bottles of DaVinci® Wine. The entire lunch was memorable, with plates full of cured meats and pecorino, chicken liver and tomato crostini, panzanella (bread salad), watermelon, and in the end he brought out his own vin santo for us to enjoy with cantuccini (cantuccini look like miniature biscotti).

RIBOLLITA.

1 cup cooked cannellini beans (recipe in Contorni section)
1/4 cup olive oil
1 onion (red or yellow work), 1/2 inch dice
3 carrots, small dice
2 celery, small dice
Optional: 1 medium waxy (not mealy) potato, 1/2 inch dice
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 sprigs thyme
1 sprig rosemary
1 bay leaf
1 pound cavalo nero (Italian for: black cabbage),
kale or collard greens
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
2 tablespoons tomato paste
10-12 crostini (recipe in Antipasti section)
Optional: top with grated Parmesan or pecorino

Heat olive oil over medium; add onion, carrots, celery, potato, garlic and herbs. Cook for 5 minutes then add chopped cabbage, salt and pepper. Cook 10 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook another 3 minutes. Reduce heat to low, add water to cover by 1 inch and simmer 15 minutes. Add cooked beans and



AUTHENTIC



cook another 5-10 minutes, just to heat through. Place crostini in bottom of soup bowl and ladle soup over top. Add another good grind of salt and pepper, and fresh grated cheese.

WINE PAIRING: A light soup and I would go white wine, but truth be told, if I am faced with a hearty, winter-vegetable version of ribollita, you know I am pulling down DaVinci® Chianti. And if it is a special lunch? I wouldn't flinch: DaVinci® Chianti Riserva.

PANZANELLA

Makes 8 servings.

3 red/yellow bell peppers
2-3 assorted summer squash
1 medium red onion
1 baguette
Extra virgin olive oil
1 head garlic
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice (or orange)
2 tablespoons balsamic (or red wine vinegar)
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
5 Roma or sweet cherry/Sungold tomatoes
1/2 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
1/4 cup mixed chopped herbs: basil, oregano, thyme, mint, etc.
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)

Cut baguette through the middle, the long way like you are making a huge sub sandwich. Brush with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and broil or grill entire baguette. Rub with raw garlic while still hot (remember the crostini?). Meanwhile: chop peppers, squash and onion into bite size pieces; chop garlic

head in half through equator and toss both garlic-head halves with all vegetables on large, parchment-lined sheet tray. Toss with olive oil, salt and pepper. Roast in 400-degree oven for 20 minutes or until it begins to caramelize.

Make dressing: Place lemon juice, balsamic, herbs and salt and pepper in bowl. Whisk in olive oil. When vegetables are done roasting, squeeze out five to six cloves of the softened garlic, mash to a paste and add to dressing.

Make salad: Chop tomatoes into bite size pieces, discarding pulp and seeds. Place in large bowl. Add to bowl: baguette torn into bite-sized pieces, roasted vegetables and roasted garlic dressing. Toss to blend. Salad tastes perfect after it has had a chance to 'marry' flavors. A good hour should do it.

Note: *Tuscan bread is typically unsalted. It started out as a must due to wars, rivalries and cost, but unsalted bread stuck around even when Tuscans could afford salt. There are a number of reasons why, including that as unsalted bread stales it doesn't mold (it hardens), and when it is added to soups and salads it doesn't become soggy like salted bread does. This is important, since Tuscany's "Soups and Salads" are synonymous with day-old bread. To that end, when using day-old bread in classic Tuscan dishes (and I don't have Tuscany's unsalted bread): I grill/broil/toast them before introducing them to broth or vinaigrette.*

WINE PAIRING: I associate Panzanella with "summer salad for lunch," which means I will order up a glass of DaVinci® Pinot Grigio.

"...simply divine on the palate."



“In Italy each course is deserving of its own plate.”



PRIMI. The “first course” is generally a starch. Italians spread out their courses, so no two things go on a plate. Contorni are the sides, salad is separate and pasta stands alone. No piling multiple things—in Italy each course is deserving of its own plate. The Primi course includes everything from pasta (with ragu, seafood or just garlic and oil) to risottos, polenta, gnocchi and gnudi. Gnocchi are olive-size potato dumplings; gnudi are spoon-size ricotta and spinach dumplings. I made a few rounds of gnudi, giving you the most traditional.

GNUDI

Serves 4.

- 1 large bag fresh spinach
- 2 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 1 cup ricotta
- 1/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
- Semolina for dusting
- 1/3 cup unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons chopped sage

Boil water; add spinach for 30 seconds, remove and place in water bath for 30 seconds (water bath: bowl of ice water). Remove and squeeze dry, then roll spinach in paper towel to continue squeezing dry. Roughly chop. Combine spinach, egg yolks, ricotta, cheese, nutmeg, and grinds of salt and pepper. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and allow to rest in fridge for a couple of hours.

Flour your hands and use two small spoons to 'cup' gnudi dough into football-shaped rounds (spoon handles each facing one hand). Roll with semolina (or flour). Place in fridge until ready to cook. For the butter sage sauce, melt the butter in a small saucepan until bubbly, add sage. Let cook two to three minutes then off heat. Brush gnocchi with half the sage butter. In a 400 degree oven, bake gnudi on parchment-lined baking sheet for 10-15 minutes. Feel free to broil two to three minutes at end to crisp. For service: drizzle with remainder of butter mix (reheat if necessary).

Wine pairing: This is where "personal choice" comes in. Gnudi may be best served with DaVinci® Pinot Grigio, but if you already opened a bottle of Chianti by all means: proceed.

ZUCCHINI FLOWER RISOTTO

Serves 4.

1 cup arborio rice
About 6 cups chicken stock (bonus points for homemade)
1/4 cup white wine
1/4 cup shallots, minced
3-4 cloves garlic, minced
2-3 tablespoons olive oil (and/or bacon fat)
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
Herbs: 2 teaspoons dried thyme or Italian seasoning
1/4 cup shredded Parmesan
3 tablespoons butter

Gather all ingredients. Gather all tools and pots you will need (one for stock, one for the risotto, a skillet for the zucchini, a

PEOPLE



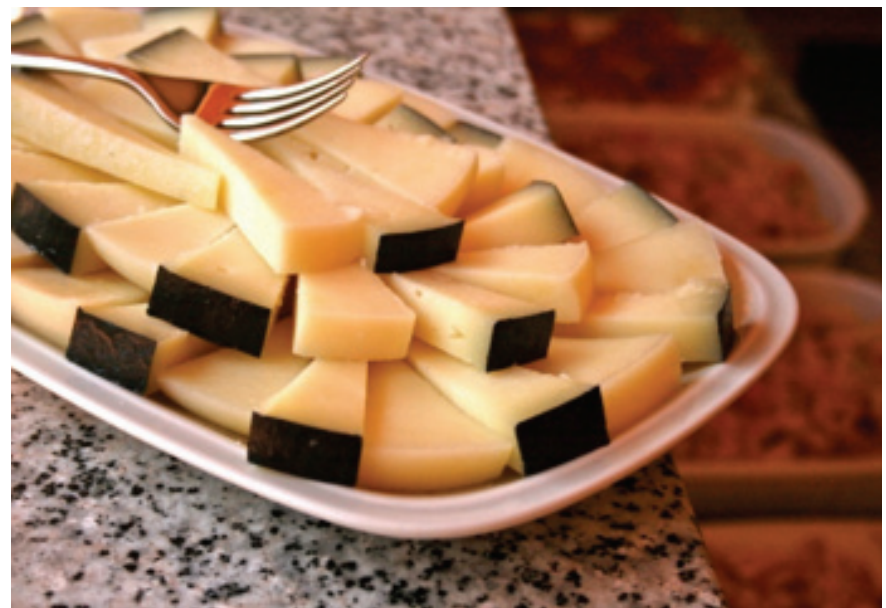
knife and cutting board, wooden spoon, cheese grater, ladle). Place stock in a small pot on stove and heat to a simmer. Meanwhile, dice shallots, garlic, and zucchini. Grate Parmesan. In large pot, heat oil/fat over medium low; add shallots/garlic/seasoning and cook for five to eight minutes. Add arborio and stir to coat for one to two minutes. Add the wine (I often toss in a bit of brandy or sherry, too). Let cook a few minutes, then add one to two ladles of chicken stock. Let simmer until stock is almost all absorbed and you can run a spoon along the bottom of pan to create a trail. Add next round of one to two ladles. Stir occasionally.

Small note: Just after you add the second round of stock, add some oil/butter to a skillet, just hotter than medium to sauté the zucchini. Toss once in awhile, cooking for about five minutes. Take off heat.

A third time: Add one to two ladles to stock, making sure it doesn't stick to bottom of pan. Stir occasionally. On the fourth addition, only add one ladle. At this point you are going to start deciding how much more liquid you do/don't want to put in. Once it is almost completely absorbed, get some grains on your spoon and taste. A little chewy? Perfect. If it is really too chewy, you can add a little stock at a time until you are happy with the texture. At home I like my risotto 'moundable' but in Tuscany it has more liquid and slightly spreads on your plate. When risotto is done cooking, off heat, add Parmesan and butter and stir. Adjust seasonings.

WINE PAIRING: I like drinking red wine with risotto—I find it cuts through the cream and starch to refresh my palate. A risotto hailing from Tuscany? It begs for Chianti.

PLACE





"We experienced the timelessness of sitting at a table with friends, good wine and course after course of brilliant food."

CHIANTI MEAT RAGU WITH PAPPARDELLE

Serves 4-6.

1/4 cup olive oil
1 pound beef, trimmed of fat and cut into 1/4 inch dice
2 small shallots, minced
2 carrots, minced
1 celery, minced
Seasonings: 1 teaspoon dried thyme, 2 teaspoons chopped parsley, KS&CP TT
3 tablespoons tomato paste
1 glass Chianti
Stock (bonus points for homemade) or pasta water (from boiling your papardelle)

Heat oil over medium low; add carrots, onion and celery. Add seasonings and sauté for seven to nine minutes. Up heat to just north of medium, add beef and stir occasionally, cooking for five minutes. Add tomato paste and stir into mix. Cook three minutes. Pour in Chianti and let simmer 30 minutes. Add stock or pasta water and let simmer another hour. Adjust seasonings, and add stock if need be for desired end consistency.

After you cook the papardelle pasta (wide ribbon noodles), remove from water and place directly into ragù pan. Off heat and stir to blend. Serve immediately.

WINE PAIRING: Ragù and pasta? You already know the answer: a hearty glass of DaVinci® Chianti Riserva. No question.



“The second course is the main course of the meal...”



SECONDI. The second course is the main course of the meal: the protein climax. This is where you pull out the big forks and knives to dive into wild boar stew, tuna steaks, and fish or sausage nestled in a bed of cannellini beans with garlicky tomato sauce. This was when we were already happily stuffed to the gills with big samplings of salami and pecorino, chicken liver pate, a salad or soup and a glorious plate of pasta with ragu. More you say? I can always find room for more boar, especially if it is reminiscent of the wild boar stew we had at the Goose and Wild Boar Feast at Cerreto Guidi.

WILD BOAR STEW

Serves 4-6.

- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced.
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 carrots, coarsely chopped
- 1 celery stalk, coarsely chopped
- 1 1/2 pounds wild boar, 1 inch chunks
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian parsley/thyme/oregano (Italian seasoning)
- KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
- 1 cup red wine
- 1 cup puréed tomatoes or homemade basic tomato sauce (puréed)
- 1 cup beef broth (bonus points for homemade)

Heat up the extra-virgin olive oil in a large stewing pot. Add the onion, carrot, and celery. Cook 5 minutes; add garlic, cook another 3 minutes. Up heat to medium and add boar—with all seasonings—browning sides. Cook four to six minutes then

add wine. Reduce to a low simmer, cook 45 minutes. Add the tomato purée, beef broth, and salt. Lower heat a bit more, cover with lid and cook for two hours at 'barely a simmer'.

Note: I made this with Wild Boar stew meat, which I was able to purchase in Seattle. Ask your local butcher to order wild boar for you. However, if you want to make this stew—boar or no boar—substitute beef tri-tip or stew meat. That should do it.

WINE PAIRING: For this deep and wide of a dish, you have to go long with your wine: a robust, complex red is in order. I suggest DaVinci® Brunello di Montalcino. I DID say climax after all.

RABBIT WITH OLIVES

Serves 6.

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 pounds rabbit, cut into 10 pieces
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
1/2 cup red wine
1/2 onion, minced
2 carrots, minced
1 celery rib, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
2 rosemary sprigs, tied into 2 bundles with kitchen string
2 cups chicken stock (bonus points for homemade)
2/3 cup black olives (I used crushed black Spanish olives, no pits)

In a large, deep skillet, heat one to two tablespoons olive oil; season the rabbit with salt and pepper. Working in two batches, brown the rabbit over moderately high heat, turning occasionally, until crusty all over, six to eight minutes. Transfer the rabbit to a large plate.

MEMORABLE



DELICIOUS



Add the wine to the skillet and cook over moderately high heat, scraping up any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Pour the wine into a cup; wipe out the skillet.

Skillet to medium low, add remaining olive oil, onion, carrots, celery and begin to caramelize—about six to eight minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook two to three minutes, stirring. Add rosemary sprigs, rabbit plus accumulated juices, wine. After a few minutes, add half the stock, S&P, bring to low simmer and add lid (just askew); cook 30 minutes. Add olives, remaining stock and cook until the sauce is slightly reduced and the rabbit is tender, 20 minutes. Discard the rosemary bundles. Serve the rabbit in shallow bowls.

WINE PAIRING: This dish deserves a special red---I would pull out DaVinci® Chianti Riserva.

MUSSELS IN WINE & GARLIC

We had an impressive variety of seafood while dining at the WINE LOFT in Vinci, Italy. Located at the base of Casale di Valle (where we stayed), it is a gem of a restaurant. Both outdoor and indoor seating is teeming with ambience. They are known for their seafood dishes, and we simply couldn't get enough of the mussels.

4 cloves garlic
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for the bread
2 shallots, coarsely chopped
1 2/3 cups white wine
1 1/2 pounds cultivated mussels, scrubbed
2 tablespoons chopped, fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley
2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter

Optional: One baguette, halved lengthwise, rubbed with olive oil, sprinkled with KS&CP then grilled or broiled (when still hot, rub face of bread with raw garlic).

Sauté garlic and shallots in olive oil over medium low heat; add salt, red and black peppers. After six to eight minutes add white wine. Let simmer a few minutes, then add scrubbed mussels and cover pan. Cook seven to nine minutes. Open pot, discard any mussels that failed to open and put just-mussels in serving bowl(s). Swirl parsley and two tablespoons butter into wine sauce then pour over mussels. Serve grilled baguette alongside.

WINE PAIRING: Mussels with white wine broth pairs well with DaVinci® Pinot Grigio.

CONTORNI. Meals are often accompanied by a plate of tenderly cooked garbanzo or cannellini beans, a dish of sautéed-with-garlic spinach or grilled mixed vegetables (tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini and asparagus are common). At nearly every meal, we enjoyed a plate of cannellini beans, perfectly cooked then seasoned with the best-quality olive oil and liberal grinds of salt and pepper. I tried my hand at making this white-bean side—and now you can too.

CANNELLINI

Serves 2 – 4.

1 cup dried white beans (cannellini, great northern, navy)
2-3 tablespoons of olive oil
KS&CP TT (Kosher Salt & Coarse Pepper, To Taste)
1 sprig of fresh sage
1 head garlic, cut in half on its equator

Optional: thin slice of bacon or pancetta

“You are on your way to slowing life down and enjoying authentic Italian food and wine.”



Soak beans in cold water for eight hours or longer, drain. Rinse and drain again. Preheat oven to 350 degrees; combine beans, oil, sage, half head of garlic (most of papery outside removed) and pancetta if using. Add approx. 6 cups of water, making sure to cover beans. Cover dish and bake 1.5 hours and check for doneness—you don't want beans to start to fall apart/become mush/separate from skins. When they are just done, remove and drain. Season with salt and pepper; serve the beans warm with olive oil.

DOLCI. Dessert in Tuscany is often a simple cake, a fruit tart or cookies. Chocolate shows up too, but my experience with dessert is beverage-forward: grappa or vin santo (sweet white wine) and always espresso. Once you have the drink down and are wholly satiated on the aforementioned multi-course meal, dessert is more of an excuse to stretch time and good conversation than showcasing multi-tiered dessert cakes or layers of specialty sauces. In fact, dessert is often a simple citrus or olive oil cake, peaches in wine or a humble tiramisu. And sweet is not always the goal; desserts may angle toward creamy (panna cotta, tiramisu, crème brûlée) or simple (cookies, gelato, sorbet or watermelon). Add some grappa, some espresso and your meal lingers that much longer.

CHEF ANNA'S JAM TART

1 cup sugar
3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons butter, room temp.
2 eggs and 1 yolk
2 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
Pinch salt
Zest of one lemon
Jar of favorite jam (I used apricot on one, and plum peach ginger on another)

"Dessert is more of an excuse to stretch time and good conversation."



Blend sugar and butter until double in volume and light yellow (by hand takes awhile; you can use a kitchen aid). Blend in eggs. Add flour, lemon zest, salt and baking powder, mixing just to blend. Set 1/3 of dough aside; press 2/3 dough into greased and floured baking pan. Pour or spread jam over, about 1/3 inch thick. Add a few tablespoons flour to remaining 1/3 of dough, then roll out dough on floured surface. Cut into long strips and apply lattice to top of tart. 375-degree oven for 25-30 minutes.

TIRAMISU

Serves 8.

500 grams Mascarpone (quality)

5 egg yolks (fresh, organic)

5 heaping spoons sugar (eyeball it—mine were probably tablespoons)

Espresso (I added a little liquor to my espresso: brandy, rum or Grand Marnier)

Pavesini Biscuits OR ladyfinger cookies, enough for two single layers

Bittersweet chocolate sprinkles/powder (I shaved bittersweet chocolate over mine—make sure it is 70% bittersweet, the contrast is worth it)

Whisk yolks and sugar until it becomes creamy (and you can no longer feel grains of sugar; I whisk about five to eight minutes). Add mascarpone and whisk until smooth and light (if it is good mascarpone, it will blend nicely without pebbles/chunks). Make espresso (add liquor if desired). Very quickly dip biscuits/ladyfingers in and out of espresso. In bowl or serving dish (about an 8×8 square or round/oval equivalent) place one layer of biscuits, followed by layer of mascarpone mixture. Repeat. Sprinkle with chocolate and chill in fridge for 2 hours or overnight. (I just spooned out portions into bowls for serving).

TIMELESS



“DaVinci® Wines should be embraced because of the people, passion and culture behind the wines.”



HELPFUL URLS:

1. <http://www.talkoftomatoes.com/2009/12/what-you-should-know-about-chianti-wines-and-vines/>
2. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/talkoftomatoessets/72157627167211218/with/5925422600/>

THANK YOU. I adored absorbing this holiday in Tuscany, courtesy of DaVinci® Wines. Each of the Storytellers experienced the food, wine, people and tours through a different lens. My lens is ‘Culinary Arts’; I am a Seattle-based cooking instructor, urban farmer and food blogger (Talk of Tomatoes). Piles of recipes plus photos are how I hope to extend this experience—and the spirit of DaVinci® Wines—to each of you.

AND as a special thanks to DaVinci® and a fun bonus to you (and because I really couldn’t help myself), I attempted to capture the essence of this journey in a jar. (I like to visualize a video of DaVinci® Chianti being poured into a jar ... then turning into this exquisite jelly).

CHIANTI JELLY

- 3 1/2 cups DaVinci® Chianti
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 package Certo liquid pectin
- 4 1/2 cups white sugar

Combine wine, lemon juice, and sugar in a large saucepot. Bring to a rolling boil, stirring frequently. Add pectin, stirring to blend. Return to a rolling boil. Boil hard 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim foam off top, if necessary. Ladle hot jelly into hot, sterilized jars, leaving 1/4 inch headspace. Tighten 2 piece lids. Process for 10 minutes in boiling water bath.

Note: Chianti jelly is ideal on crackers with goat cheese, alongside a hearty Cambozola cheese or with sliced pork or lamb.