# ITALY'S ULTIMATE CHOCOLATE WINE

## Rough and tumble Sagrantino di Montefalco takes on a different role when made in the *passito* style.

Most of the Sagrantino di Montefalco wines we enjoy today, known for their massive tannins, imposing structures and near necessity to be paired with red meat, are vastly different from their predecessors.

Until modern techniques were introduced in the 1970s, Sagrantino was vinified in the *passito* style, air-drying the fruit on racks known as *graticci* to concentrate sugar before pressing. Similar techniques are used in Valpolicella for Amarone and Tuscany for Vin Santo.

For those unfamiliar with sweet red wines or accustomed to cloying American versions, Sagrantino passito—still produced in Montefalco—is a revelation. While there's deep, rich sweetness, it's matched by brightness and a finish that cleanses and refreshes the palate.

"Passito has even bigger structure than dry Sagrantino," says Liù Pambuffetti of Scacciadiavoli, Montefalco's oldest winery. "We harvest earlier, so tannins are stronger and acidity is higher. It's an intense wine."

The flavor profile leans on dried fruits like cherries, prunes and raisins, but also features warm spices, cocoa and, especially in mature bottles, truffles. But it's more than a jumble of tastes. It's an evolving meditation wine, a provocative, romantic bombshell.

Historically served at feasts and celebrations alongside massive roasts of lamb, passito has only lately shifted to a dessert role, paired with fruit *crostatas*, aged cheeses and chocolate. Unlike dry red wines, whose astringency conflicts with chocolate's natural bitterness, passito is a perfect match. Look for chocolate with 50–70-percent cacao (anything higher could clash with the wine's tannins), perhaps with some dried fruits, nuts or spices added.

"On a winter night, after dinner, we love to eat some dark chocolate and drink a little passito," says Pambuffetti. "It's simple, yet so comforting." —*Mike Madaio*

### RECOMMENDED WINES

**CANTINA FRATELLI PARDI 2009**
Inky, bursting with dark fruit and baking spices. de Grazia Imports; $70/375 ml

**CÒLPETRONE 2009**
Concentrated dried fruit and polished tannins. Vias Imports; $33/375 ml

**PAOLO BEA 2008**
Complex, with layered notes of dried berries and herbs. Rosenthal Wine Merchant; $88/375 ml



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