

madison.com

Salud! Sip a little Italy with these full-bodied red wines

LINDSAY CHRISTIANS | 77 Square | lchristians@madison.com | [@LindsayC77](https://twitter.com/LindsayC77) | Posted: Wednesday, March 14, 2012 10:00 am

There are more than a thousand documented grape varieties in Italy, several dozen of which can be easily found on any wine shop shelf.

In the face of such diversity, not to mention the lingering aversion left over from the plonk in a straw basket, it's tempting to forget the whole idea and stick with France or California instead.

But to do so would be to miss out on some real deals on wines with personality. At a recent tasting, we found plenty of full-bodied reds that paired beautifully with food.

As my wine group has a fair number of graduate students and underemployed 30-somethings, we stuck to locally available Italian wines in the \$8 to \$20 range, which ruled out the super Tuscans and high-end Barolos. Still, we found some values for red wine, notably Chianti and Barbera d' Asti.



Unfortunately, the whites we tried were mostly losers. The 2010 Voga (\$9.50 at Woodman's East), a forgettable pinot grigio in a bottle with a "to go" cup as a lid and the 2010 Fontana Candida (\$7.99 at Woodman's East), a blend, offered little to recommend them. Tasters found them thin and unbalanced.

Fuller-bodied, with an almost chardonnay-like roundness, was the 2009 Lava Falanghina Beneventano (\$16.99 at Barriques Fitchburg), with an aroma like a fortified wine and a pleasant sour note in the finish.

Most of us liked the first few reds, notably the 2009 Kris Heart Rosso (\$12.50 at Woodman's East), an earthy blend of merlot (50 percent), Montepulciano and cabernet (25 percent each) with a slight sharpness in the finish.

The '07 Fattoria Montellori Toscana Rosso 'Moro' (\$21 at Steve's on Junction Road) offered some of what Italian wines do best — a dark, chocolate/tobacco flavor combination with a fresh cherry finish.

"It's a spaghetti and meatballs wine," one taster said.

The '08 Poggio alle Sughere Morellino di Scansano (\$12.50) was a mouthful in name and in practice, 100 percent sangiovese with a nice fruitiness but a short finish. It tasted a little hot; the 14 percent alcohol wasn't well balanced.

Better, and an inconvenient favorite, was a wine one taster brought from Chicago — a bright, fruity '07 Chianti called No. 1 Falorni (about \$15). It reminded us of a good Beaujolais Villages.

We liked the meatiness of the slightly sweet, easy-drinking '10 Montepulciano d' Abruzzo (\$11 at Brennan's), but it had an unfortunate harshness on the finish. (One taster said it reminded her of paint thinner or black Sharpie marker.)

Two bottles of Barbera d' Asti were successful with the group. The Pico Maccario 2010 Barbera d' Asti Lavignone (\$17 at Steve's on University) had a candy sweet, Jolly Rancher-like quality, with a light spiciness of white pepper.

The 2009 Vietti Barbera d' Asti "Tre Vigne" (\$17.50 at Woodman's East) was puckery-tart, with flavors of pomegranate and pepper.

We also liked the another Pico Maccario wine, the 2008 Cantamerli Monferrato (\$13.29 at Barriques Wine Cave), an intense, bright-red blend of cabernet and barbera. And our final wine (before a few dusty sips of a past-its-prime Lambrusco) was a hit: the 2009 Li Veli Orion Primitivo (\$13.99 at Barriques on Park), a soft, herbal red from the heel of the boot that reminded us — in a good way — of fresh spring dirt.

Prices are approximate.

Lindsay Christians occasionally pours wine tastings at Barriques.