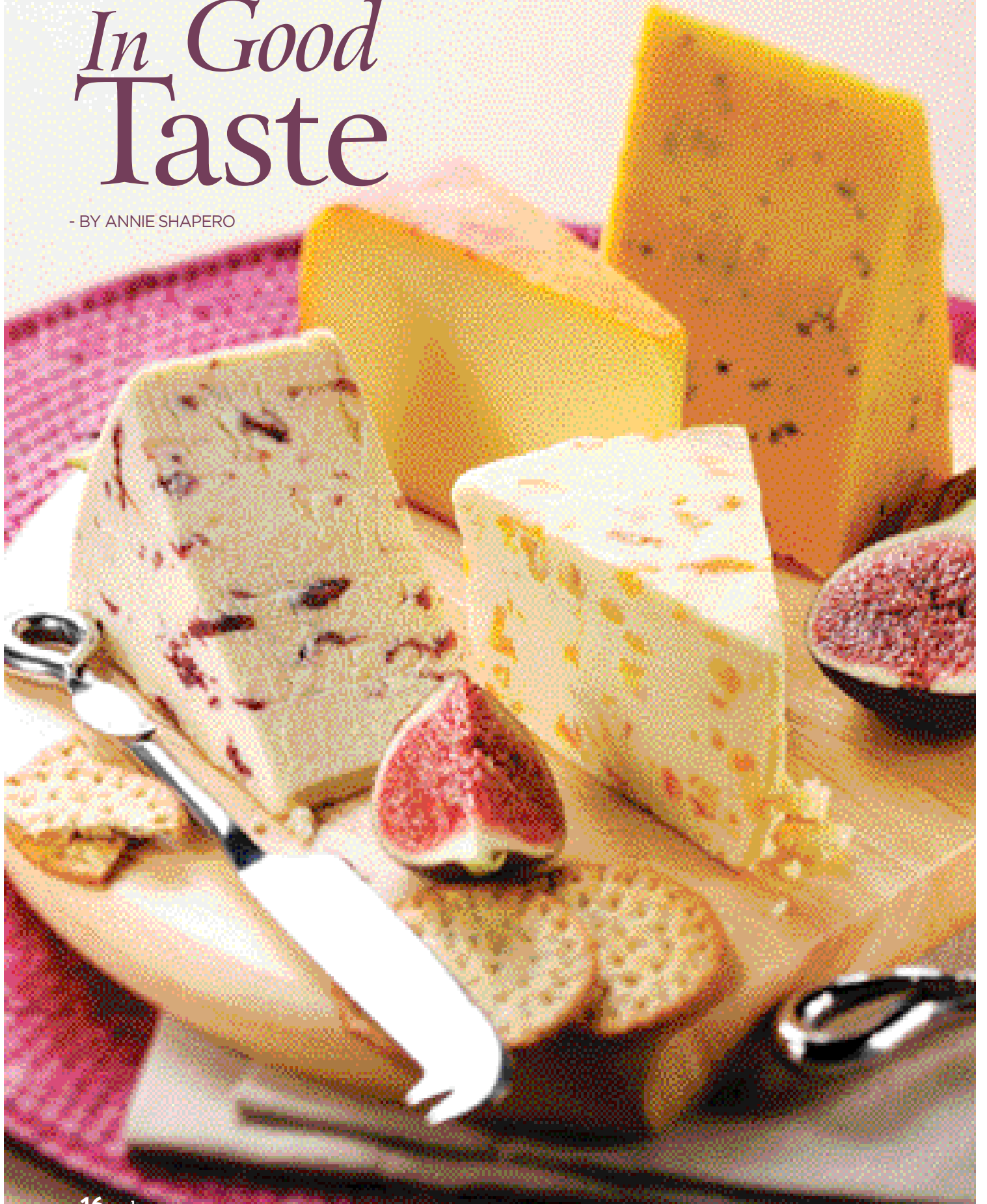


# *In Good Taste*

- BY ANNIE SHAPERO



Aged to perfection applies as aptly to the city's gastronomic offerings as it does to its layers upon layers of antiquity. For true connoisseurs and enthusiastic would-be gourmets, the vast assortment of edible pleasures presents a daunting itinerary. Rome's central location has historically attracted all regions of Italy, enriching local menus and cultivating a taster's paradise. Sample the country's best in wine, cheese and cured meats at an *enoteca* - mini-restaurant - that places an emphasis on wine and all the trimmings. In recent years *enoteche* have sprouted up all over town, each offering myriad wines as well as distilled liquors by the glass and sumptuous salami and cheese plates, not to mention a coffee and chocolate trend on the rise. For die-hard epicures in search of innumerable options and a knowledgeable staff to accompany them along the voyage of flavor, the following establishments excel in both quality and quantity, offering a taste of the nation and well beyond. *Buon Appetito!*



**ENOTECA FERRARA**  
Via del Moro, 1/a  
Tel 065803769

18 years old this year, Enoteca Ferrara has come of age. Situated in Rome's own SoHo - the Trastevere neighborhood, a once bohemian paradise turned dusk-to-dawn trendy - the wine bar flaunts a personality all its own, and an enthusiastic following...with a healthy appetite. Request a sampling of red, white or sparkling from over 1,200 Italian wine labels. Cheese platters to accompany a fine bottle ought not be overlooked; choose à la carte, or have the staff slice you up a selection ranging from aged and spicy to smooth and creamy. While Ferrara proudly serves strictly Italian wine and cheese, their *caffetteria* menu comes handpicked from the world's reigning coffee lands (roasted in Italian tradition of course). Sample Central and South American blends, Caribbean brews, and aromatic Indian varieties.



**SIMPOSIO & ENOTECA COSTANTINI**  
Piazza Cavour, 16  
Tel 063211502 or 0632111131

With nearly 300 bottles of fine wine ranging the regions of Italy and the world over, Simposio and resident wine bar Costantini offer vast tasting menus. 25-35 Italian cheeses vary by season, to be ordered à la carte, or suggested by a knowledgeable staff according to wine selection. Simposio also caters to carnivores, offering an extensive list of salami, *lardo d'Arnad* and foie gras. Set amid bustling Piazza Cavour, the intricately wrought-iron exterior is an invitation to relaxing elegance. A sumptuous spread and around 30 bottles top the bar, which begins serving aperitifs at 6 pm to a packed house. For a more intimate experience and full access to the impressive menu (which includes six cru arabica coffee blends), it's best to book a table.



**CUL DE SAC**  
Piazza Pasquino, 73  
Tel 0668801094

Ask a Roman where to go for wine and cheese; he'll send you straight to Cul de Sac. A city favorite for years, this tiny restaurant spills into Piazza Pasquino, three minutes from Piazza Navona and near the beginning of hipster-fashionista mecca, Via del Governo Vecchio. The *cantina* contains 1500 bottles of wine, distilled liquors, and liqueurs from all over Europe and beyond, available for tasting on a weekly rotation. The cheese and salami plates come with homemade fruit reductions and locally produced honey - all served to compliment your chosen beverage. Once a month a visiting winemaker shares his techniques and the "fruits" of his vineyard on site alongside cheeses and salami, all compliments of Cul de Sac. Should your sampling leave you wanting more, take home your favorite bottle at a discounted price.



**ARANCIA BLU**  
Via dei Latini, 55/56  
Tel 064454105

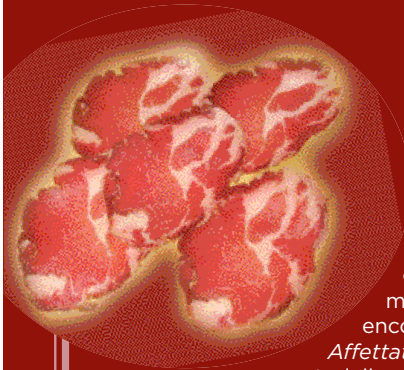
Revered about town for their clever take on vegetarian cuisine, Arancia Blu is often overlooked as a veritable *enoteca*. Over 400 bottles in the cellar, 10 of which are available by the glass, and over 20 cheeses hailing from Italy, France, England and Spain, are available for the serious and curious gourmands. For liqueur lovers there's an enviable collection of independently distilled single-malt whiskeys. Located in the hip university district of San Lorenzo, where variety is the spice and diversity the rule of survival, Arancia Blu distinguishes itself with a selection of coffees and chocolate from the world over. The rich aroma of Indian Sumatra practically pleads for a cacao companion, along with Brazilian, Ethiopian and Puerto Rican blends.



**CAVOUR 313**  
Via Cavour, 313  
Tel 066785496

One of the founding fathers of the Roman wine bar scene, this popular place welcomes customers to order a glass of wine and stay for hours...minus the shifty glances and shuffling past of servers poised to take your dinner order. With over 1,100 bottles in the cellar, it's the perfect spot to do just that. While Italian wines make up the majority of the selection, Chile, Portugal, Australia, Israel and others are well represented. 30-35 bottles available by the glass along with 15-20 Italian cheeses and up to 20 varieties of savory salami to be ordered à la carte or selected by the expert staff. Just minutes from the Colosseum and Roman Forum, this *enoteca* is a monument in itself.

## Know Your Salami



Salami tops the list of Italian foods we all know and love, having infiltrated national cuisines the world over (pepperoni pizza anyone?). Its chubby cousin, the *salsiccia* (sausage) has also enjoyed smashing success, in various metamorphoses, including Chicago's Polish dog, the classic wiener, English bangers, and the ballpark frank...to name a few. Etymologically speaking, salami (*salume*) derives from *sal* - the Latin word for salt - and includes all salt-cured meats. Italian *salami* refers to the ground, seasoned, encased, and aged meat products of the same name in English. While generally pork-based, you'll encounter *salume* products made of venison (*cervo*) and wild boar (*cinghiale*). *Affettati* (cold cuts) include whole and ground cured meats such as prosciutto and mortadella. A traditional sampler platter will likely include the following:

- ▶ **Bresaola** Characterized by its deep red color and savory and compact flavor.
- ▶ **Lonza** Cured pork loin.
- ▶ **Lardo** Delicately seasoned strips of pork fat, often served on hot toasted bread. For true gourmets, *Lardo di Colonnata* and *Lardo d'Arnad* are widely considered delicacies.
- ▶ **Mortadella** A precursor to American bologna, this smooth, seasoned meat was first produced by Bolognese monks during the Middle Ages, and is characterized by wide circular slices and a vibrant pink color.
- ▶ **Prosciutto** Increasingly trendy outside of Italy, foodie hipsters are no stranger to this dried and cold cured pork. One of the purest sliced meats you'll encounter: it is 100 % thigh meat.
- ▶ **Salame** The general term for what we know of as salami. Traditionally ground pork, seasoned principally with salt (and other herbs and spices including hot red pepper and fennel) and aged for up to a year.

## Cheese Wiz

Wine and cheese, the quintessential match made in gastronomical heaven, display an enviable complicity. A balanced assortment of cheese should offer both aged and fresh varieties, ranging in flavor from mild and creamy to hard and spicy. In addition to the right bottle, many cheeses wed successfully with honey and fruit preserves. Here's a quick guide for the cheese-challenged, yet keep in mind that the possibilities are endless.

▶ **Gorgonzola** Made from whole cow's milk, it is notable for its bluish-green mold deposits and comes in both a sweeter milder, version (*dolce*), and a firmer, spicier one (*piccante*). Request a full-bodied red wine, or for *gorgonzola piccante*, a dessert wine such as marsala or port.

▶ **Grana** Cheeses in this category include Parmesan (*Parmigiano*) as well as *grana padano*. Both are categorized for a thick crust, yellowish color and grainy consistency; Parmesan must be aged for a minimum of two years. Choose a complex red wine like Barolo or Brunello di Montalcino.

▶ **Pecorino** Derived from sheep's milk, this cheese comes in smooth, fresh varieties, as well as a whole range of harder, spicier aged versions. Highly-regarded *pecorino Sardo* hails from Sardinia, while *pecorino romano* is produced right here. Tuscany produces a popular *pecorino* as well; in fact, try it with a glass of Chianti riserva.

As in successful human pairings, keep in mind that cheese and wine should compliment one another. While some sommeliers recommend a wine with corresponding characteristics, the majority will encourage contrasting flavors. For those forgoing wine, enjoy your *formaggio* with fresh fruit, honey and preserves.



## The Dark Vices



Coffee and chocolate enjoy a whole array of flavor, all depending on the bean itself and the roasting technique. Thanks to their aromatic and stimulant qualities both herald a legacy of great popularity and resulting indulgent reputation. Chocolate was first discovered in Central and northern South America, and later cultivated in parts of west Africa and south Asia. Coffee consumption originated in Ethiopia and soon spread to the Arabian peninsula and Asia. Both reached Europe in the early 17th century, where roasting and production developed rapidly. Italian chocolatiers have been perfecting chocolate confectionery since, limiting sugar and cocoa butter additives to respect the standards of chocolate purity.

For the connoisseurs: high-quality chocolate shines subtly, and dissolves with a velvety finish on the tongue. Bittersweet chocolate (50 % minimum cacao mass) is best paired with a merlot or marsala wine, while premium chocolate (70 % minimum) is best enjoyed with cognac or armagnac.

Italians pride themselves on their roasting technique and Arabica blends. In fact, most of the world brews Arabica coffee, which thrives throughout much of South America, the Caribbean, and parts of Africa. India, Indonesia and Africa produce Robusta beans, which yield a more intense flavor with greater caffeine content.

