

CORSICA



CHEVALIER

MAY 2019

CORSICA

I first set foot on the island in 1980. I remember looking down from the airplane window seeing alpine forest and lakes and thinking, uh oh, I got on the wrong plane. Then suddenly I was looking down into the beautiful waters of the Mediterranean. Corsica is a small, impossibly tall island, the tail of the Alp chain rising out of the blue sea.

—KERMIT LYNCH



◆ **K**ermit's first trip to the island proved fruitful, with his discovery of Clos Nicrosi's Vermentinu. More than thirty years later, the love affair with Corsica has only grown, as we now import wines from ten domaines that cover the north, south, east, and west of what the French affectionately call l'Île de Beauté.

Corsica is currently experiencing a renaissance. Interest has never been higher in its wines, and much of this is due to growers focusing on indigenous and historical grapes found on the island. Niellucciu, Sciaccarellu, and Vermentinu are widely planted, but it is now common to find bottlings of Biancu Gentile and Carcaghjolu Neru as well as blends with native varieties like Rossola Bianca, Minustellu, and Montaneccia.

As Kermit described, Corsica has a strikingly mountainous landscape. The *terroir* consists of poor, rocky soils of predominantly granite, with schist in the northeast and small pockets of limestone in Patrimonio in the north and Bonifacio in the extreme south. Other poignant elements of Corsican *terroir* are the brambly aromatic maquis, with its wild myrtle, *immortelle*, and juniper bushes, and the winds that batter the island from all sides, including the *maestrале*, *libecciu*, and *sciroccu*. The wines pair wonderfully with the local charcuterie, often made from the black *porcu nustrale*, a local breed of pigs, as well as *brocciu*, a soft goat's milk cheese comparable to ricotta.

Corsica's wine is intrinsically tied with its history—a turbulent affair of invasions, revolutions, and the gradual forging of a strong, proud national identity. Throughout extended periods of Italian and French rulership, Corsicans have embraced their local culture and language, maintaining a fierce desire for autonomy in the form of an at-times violent struggle for political sovereignty. Similarly, its wines today are the result of an endeavor to express Corsican *terroir* in the face of the French authorities' almost imperialist approach to l'Île de Beauté. Treated like subjects of a colony throughout history, Corsicans are eager to demonstrate what their land is capable of: something completely unique relative to wines from the French mainland, Italy, or anywhere else. Through indigenous grape plantings in top sites, with a renewed focus on traditional (organic) farming, the island's vigneroni are brilliantly showing off the unparalleled combination of sea, sun, stone, wind, and maquis that defines their home. Opening a bottle of Corsican wine is a journey to a beautiful, rugged land and a window into a culture and identity that can be found only in this small Mediterranean paradise—there is nothing else quite like it.

—ANTHONY LYNCH

2017 CORSE CALVI *BLANC* “E PROVE”

◆ **DOMAINE MAESTRACCI** \$19.95

BALAGNE, the area of northwest Corsica around Calvi, is distinguished by craggy granite hillsides, olive trees, plentiful maquis, glittering turquoise waters, and, of course, great wines. Among its finest estates is the Raoust family farm, planted on a plateau among the *haute garrigue* known as “E Prove.” The Vermentinu in the granite of Balagne takes on characteristics unknown elsewhere in Corsica. Out of this rugged *terroir*, *vigneronne* Camille-Anaïs coaxes its unique flavors of herbs, stones, and orchard fruits. It is fresh, salty, and citrusy all at once—an instant crowd pleaser, and one of Corsica’s top value whites.



2013 VIN DE FRANCE *BLANC* “CUVÉE KERMIT LYNCH”

◆ **ANTOINE ARENA** \$49.00

OVER THE LAST DECADE OR TWO, growers have been getting reacquainted with the long-lost, native Bianco Gentile grape, figuring out its strengths and weaknesses and how to tease out its greatness. Vermentinu, by contrast, has been around uninterrupted in the Mediterranean just about as long as the wheel. Its charms—the saltiness, the verve, the island essence—have been known to all for ages. Bianco Gentile has been on a learning curve, and in wine, that process can take years (generations, even), so we are watching it unfold as we speak. A key to understanding Bianco Gentile’s past may be hidden here in this blend. Kermit noticed early on Bianco Gentile’s tendency to veer toward the plump, round, rich side of the spectrum. So he and Antoine Arena decided to blend together a tank of Vermentinu and a tank of Bianco Gentile: half and half, as one isn’t superior to the other, they’re simply so different. Like a great bassist or a great guitarist, or a world-class tenor compared to a soprano. Neither is better per se, but the two performing together perhaps provides the richest experience. The two grapes work so well together we have to wonder if this was the way things were done back in the day.

Given Antoine’s enthusiasm, we may well see a lot more of this blending in the future. Notice the new label, too, which is fittingly inspired by a label Antoine’s father once used. To show his appreciation of Kermit for encouraging the blend, Arena has named it “Cuvée Kermit Lynch” and given us full exclusivity on the wine. The only place you can try it is here—or maybe at the domaine, if you have the good fortune to go there, and if they haven’t drunk the last of their personal stock already.



2017 ÎLE DE BEAUTÉ ROUGE

◆ DOMAINE DE MARQUILIANI \$27.00

VIGNERONNE ANNE AMALRIC of Domaine de Marquiliani, an old olive mill on Corsica's east coast, specialized in rosé (and olive oil) until crafting her first red in 2015. Her third vintage has much in common with her delicate, ethereal rosés: both feature aromas of fresh berries and wild herbs, and both go down oh-so-smoothly. Anne's remarkable *terroir* certainly holds some responsibility: sandwiched between snowcapped peaks on one side

and the inviting Mediterranean on the other, the area experiences a fresher climate than other parts of Corsica, with cool breezes coming down from Monte Rinosu, one of the island's tallest summits. The persistent ventilation facilitates sustainable farming, ensuring top-quality raw materials. Tank aging and an unfiltered bottling are the final steps to creating this red you will have trouble setting down.

2017 VIN DE FRANCE ROUGE "FAUSTINE"

◆ DOMAINE COMTE ABBATUCCI \$40.00

JUST SOUTH of Corsica's capital, Ajaccio, Jean-Charles Abbatucci is something of a hero, much like his ancestors who fought alongside native son Napoléon Bonaparte. As a painstaking defender of Corsican *terroir*, Jean-Charles has led the charge to preserve some of the island's native grape varieties. He champions biodynamics, a much more labor-intensive form of organic farming that treats the vineyard like a living system. His bright, juicy Cuvée Faustine consists of old-vine Sciaccarellu and Niellucciu (plus a splash of Carcaghjolu Neru) from decomposed granite soils, and saw only stainless steel *cuves* before bottling. This medium-bodied, yet incredibly flavorful red is rich in aromas of smashed raspberries and resinous maquis herbs like myrtle, with soft tannins that provide an especially succulent finish. Serve it slightly chilled with fish, meat, tacos, barbecue, pizza, and everything in between.



2016 PATRIMONIO *ROUGE* ♦ YVES LECCIA \$38.00

RECENT DNA STUDIES have shown a close genetic link between Corsica's Niellucciu grape and Tuscany's Sangiovese. The variety was likely brought to the island during the Genoese rule between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, and after hundreds of years of mutation and adaptation to its Corsican *terroir*, it now produces wines with a unique character quite distinct from any Tuscan Sangiovese. Cultivated all over Corsica, Niellucciu reaches its greatest

expression in the Patrimonio appellation, where slopes of limestone and schist just a stone's throw from Mediterranean waters give rise to the island's most complex, structured reds. Yves Leccia is one of Patrimonio's leading producers, with vineyards in the celebrated *lieu-dit* of E Croce.



This full-blooded red has all the savory, earthy nuances bestowed by its noble *terroir*, and the long herb-infused finish will certainly leave something to think about—and something to chew on.

2017 CORSE FIGARI *ROUGE* "AMPHORA"

♦ CLOS CANARELLI \$92.00

SINCE TAKING OVER the family domaine in 1993, Yves Canarelli has been testing the limits of what can be done in the southern appellation of Figari. From single-parcel, ancient-vine, native-grape field blends to the revival of heirloom grapes like Biancu Gentile and Carcaghjolu Neru, the Canarelli portfolio is full of delicious surprises. Yves's latest experiments are with amphora-fermented red and white—the first such wines crafted in Corsica since Roman times. Being fairly porous, these terra-cotta vessels provide a textural signature of supple, inviting tannins, effectively taming the somewhat wild character of young Niellucciu. After a roughly six-week vinification in these amphorae, Yves ages the wine in a combination of stainless steel and neutral barrels, a formula he settled on after several years of testing. The wine is then bottled unfinned and unfiltered with no added sulfur. Once it has had the chance to open up—an hour or two uncorked should do the trick—this striking red sings a sensual tune of deep, soft fruit, roasted herbs and spices, and an iron-like, meaty element. Enjoy it with a rich, herb-laden roast or stew to best match the bold, brooding flavors.



<p>2017 Corse Calvi <i>Blanc</i> "E Prove" <i>Domaine Maestracci</i></p>	<p>Vermentinu</p>	<p>25-year-old vines Clay, sand on granite</p>	<p>Serve <i>cold</i> 46–52° F Do not decant</p>	<p>White flowers, exotic fruit, sea mist, citrus Crisp, vibrant, bright, briny</p>	<p>Drink now</p>
<p>2013 Vin de France <i>Blanc</i> "Cuvée Kermit Lynch" <i>Antoine Arena</i></p>	<p>50% Vermentinu, 50% Bianco Gentile</p>	<p>25-year-old vines Clay, limestone</p>	<p>Serve <i>cold</i> 48–54° F Do not decant</p>	<p>Stone fruit, beeswax, maquis herbs Fleshy, full, creamy, saline</p>	<p>Drink now through 2025</p>
<p>2017 Île de Beauté <i>Rouge</i> <i>Domaine de Marquilliani</i></p>	<p>40% Syrah, 40% Sciaccarellu, 20% Grenache</p>	<p>Vines planted in 1964 Alluvial gravel, silt</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional</p>	<p>Ripe berries, black olive, licorice, dried herbs Medium-bodied, plush, accessible</p>	<p>Drink now</p>
<p>2017 Vin de France <i>Rouge</i> "Faustine" <i>Domaine Comte Abbatucci</i></p>	<p>60% Sciaccarellu, 30% Niellucciu, 10% Carcaghjolu Neru</p>	<p>40-year-old vines Granite</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 56–60° F Decant optional</p>	<p>Smashed raspberries, myrtle, blood orange Exuberant, lively, juicy, exotic</p>	<p>Drink now</p>
<p>2016 Patrimonio <i>Rouge</i> <i>Yves Leccia</i></p>	<p>90% Niellucciu, 10% Grenache</p>	<p>20- to 40-year- old vines Clay, limestone, schist</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours</p>	<p>Blackberry, black cherry, graphite, leather Rustic, deep, wild, grippy</p>	<p>Drink now through 2025</p>
<p>2017 Corse Figari <i>Rouge</i> "Amphora" <i>Clos Canarelli</i></p>	<p>80% Niellucciu, 10% Sciaccarellu, 10% native varieties</p>	<p>14-year-old vines Granite</p>	<p>Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant 1–2 hours</p>	<p>Smoke, black fruit, roasted herbs, warm spices Supple, pure, brooding, meaty</p>	<p>Drink now</p>

cover: Photo © Gail Skoff

inner panel: Corsica's rugged coastline. Photo © Gail Skoff

middle, top: *Vigneronne* Anne Amalric. Photo © Domaine de Marquilliani

middle, bottom: Biodynamics at work in Abbatucci's vineyards

near left: Patrimonio. Photo © Yves Leccia

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A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO CORSICA

PLAGE DE SALECCIA Perhaps Corsica's most beautiful beach, it can be accessed only by boat (ferries are offered from Saint-Florent), hike, or 4x4. Its fine white sand and turquoise waters are not to be missed!

SAINT-FLORENT This charming port town is brimming with activity in the summertime. It is also conveniently close to the vineyards of Patrimoine, home to many great producers.

CALVI With a lovely historic center, abundant shops, and nearby beaches, Christopher Columbus's alleged birthplace is well worth visiting. Don't miss the roast octopus at U Casanu (reservation required).

GR20 Renowned as one of the most scenic—and most challenging—hiking trails on Earth, the GR20 runs north to south along Corsica's mountainous spine. Plan at least two weeks to complete the full 110 miles of trail, or opt for a shorter portion. Mid-mountain *refuges* provide shelter along the way.

BAY OF PORTO A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Bay of Porto offers mesmerizing clear waters and red granite bluffs. Rent a boat (tours are offered) to see it from the water and get the full experience, and don't miss the breathtaking sunset.

AJACCIO Visit Corsica's capital for a mouthwatering morning market featuring local producers; museums; and the Maison Bonaparte—the home of Corsica's most famous son, Napoléon. Visit the Chemin des Vignobles wine shop for a superb selection of Corsican wine and other delicacies.

PORTO-VECCHIO The "Ibiza of Corsica" is surrounded by some of the island's most incredible beaches. Enjoy the sun and sea, then break for lunch and a bottle of chilled Vermentinu at one of the many *paillottes* (beachside restaurant shacks).

BONIFACIO Perched atop stunning limestone cliffs over the sea, this is Corsica's most picturesque town. Take a stroll through the old citadel and dine at Restaurant Stella d'Oro to taste local specialties done right (reservation required).

