$40 Tasting Notes

**Sportoletti, Assisi Rosso, Umbria Italy, 2018**

**50% Sangiovese, 30% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon**

**Umbria**

Italy’s green heart, Umbria is a land unto itself, the only Italian region that borders neither the sea nor another country. This isolation has kept outside influences at bay and ensured that many of Italy's old-world traditions survive today. Travel here and you’ll still see grandmothers in aprons making pasta by hand and front doors that haven't been locked in centuries.

The region is best known for its medieval hilltop towns, many beautifully preserved and dramatically set. The Etruscans, Romans, feuding medieval families and Renaissance artists have all left an imprint, from Orvieto’s great Gothic cathedral to Assisi’s fresco-clad basilica. But nature has played its part too, contrasting the wild beauty of the Monti Sibillini with the gentle fall and rise of green hills and wildflower-flecked meadows.

Foodies are in their element here, with *tartufi neri* (black truffles), fine cured meats and full-bodied local wines finding their way onto regional menus.

**Background**

The DOC Assisi was founded in 1997 to confirm the viticultural vocation of the area, initially known for the production of extra virgin olive oil.

Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, even if in lower percentages, give great drinkability and softness to the wine, which is appreciated for its versatility.

**Winemaking**

The vineyards, located at about 400 m above sea level, within the DOC area of Assisi, of an average age of about 18 years, are characterized mainly by shallow soil with a high presence of skeleton deriving from limestone rock of Monte Subasio.

The harvest began in early September with the Merlot, then the Cabernet Sauvignon and finally the Sangiovese. The grapes, immediately destemmed, are placed in thermo-conditioned fermenters for about 10-15 days of maceration with regular pumping over and delestage. The grapes are vinified separately for the best development of the characteristics of the individual varietals.

The progress of malolactic fermentation is then monitored. The wine ages for a few months in French oak barrels, then for about 6 months in bottle.

**ABOUT THE WINERY**

The Sportoletti family has been passionately dedicated to producing wine in Umbria for generations. In the late 1970s, brothers Ernesto and Remo turned their attention exclusively to winemaking. With great reverence for the teachings of their father Vittorio, they began to bottle wines under their own label. From that point on, they began a long journey in pursuit of the perfect balance between innovation and tradition, endeavoring to unleash the full potential of their terroir – situated on the hills between Spello and Assisi – where they now own 20 hectares of vineyards from which they produce an average of 200,000 bottles per year.

In 1998, the company decided to join forces with the highly esteemed agronomic and oenological consultant Riccardo Cotarella, thus marking the start of a highly successful professional collaboration as well as a valued friendship. They regularly replant their vines and cultivate them using the spur pruning system and high density planting. With 5,000 vines per hectare, they are able to control the number of buds and consequently the productivity of the vines. For the reserve wines, a first harvest of the grapes is carried out while the grapes are just beginning to ripen, in order to obtain an average yield of 1 Kg of grapes per plant. Vines currently cultivated include the indigenous Grechetto, for which they chose the G5 clone, a lower yielding yet more characteristic strain. The Merlot they grow is a particular massale clone that was selected and propagated from an old vine that had been on the property for fifty years and which, over the years, has given rise to one of their most successful wines. Specific clones of Sangiovese that provide a lower yield but are much richer in color were also chosen, the same holding true for their Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

**Tasting Notes**: *Ruby red with purple tones. It expresses freshness, with fruity note soft cherries, raspberries, sweet spices and chocolate. Consistent on the palate, with savory tannins and a complex finish*

**Food Pairings**: Pair this wine with spicy chorizo, tomato sauces, roasted venison, and beef carpaccio

**Nortico, Alvarinho, Portugal, 2019**

**(Albariño from Portugal)**

**Nortico . . .**

Ask anyone for the best Alvarinho in Portugal and people will point to the extreme north in the sub-region of Moncao and Melgao, right on the border with Spain. Nortico Alvarinho is a superb example of the grape's hallmarks: fresh citrus, peach and tropical aromas paired with clean, juicy fruit and vibrant minerality. Nortico is produced on the south bank of the Minho River in plots so small they are called "Jardins", gardens in Portuguese. Soils here are granite and schist, and although it rains a lot (2,000 ml annually) the inland area is a little warmer than the coastal plantings, which allows for perfect ripening. In the words of Rui Abecassis, founder of Obrigado, “Nortico Alvarinho is one of those projects that has been in the making for quite some time. It started in the family's small tile atelier. The traditional ceramic tile atelier was more a labor of passion and tenacity than business, as it always seemed to be on the brink of bankruptcy! To this day, tiles are produced exactly like in the 18th century, each 14 x 14 cm tile shaped from scratch and painted by hand. Walking the streets of Oporto or Lisboa you may encounter tiles on both modest and important buildings, in churches, hospitals, and stores, in private houses and public gardens. Tiles are a durable building material, and an early form of storytelling and graphic design. The Nortico label captures that spirit and Portuguese aesthetics.

Nortico is from tiny vineyard plots in Moncao and Melgao, on the northern border with Spain's Galicia province - the best Alvarinho growing area in Portugal. Unlike others from the area, Nortico has no added CO2, making for a richer, fuller, well-balanced wine.

**Portuguese Wines**

Best known for intense, impressive and age-worthy fortified wines, Portugal relies almost exclusively on its many indigenous grape varieties. Bordering Spain to its north and east, and the Atlantic Ocean on its west and south coasts, this is a land where tradition reigns supreme, due to its relative geographical and, for much of the 20th century, political isolation. A long and narrow but small country, Portugal claims considerable diversity in climate and wine styles, with milder weather in the north and significantly more rainfall near the coast.

While [Port](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/port/7155-155) (named after its city of Oporto on the Atlantic Coast at the end of the [Douro Valley](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/douro/7155-107019)), made Portugal famous, Portugal is also an excellent source of dry red and white wines of various styles.

The Douro Valley produces full-bodied and concentrated dry red wines made from the same set of grape varieties used for Port, which include [Touriga Nacional](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/touriga-nacional/7155-180), Tinta Roriz (Spain’s [Tempranillo](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/tempranillo/7155-169)), Touriga Franca, Tinta Barroca and Tinto Cão, among a long list of others in minor proportions.

Other dry wines include the tart, slightly effervescent [Vinho Verde](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/vinho-verde/7155-107020) white wine, made in the north, and the bright, elegant reds and whites of the [Dão](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/dao/7155-107021) as well as the bold, and fruit-driven reds and whites of the southern, [Alentejo](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/alentejo/7155-107018).

The nation’s other important fortified wine, [Madeira](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/madeira/7155-154), is produced on the eponymous island off the North African coast.

**The Grape**

Bright and aromatic with distinctive floral and fruity characteristics, Albariño has enjoyed a surge in popularity and an increase in plantings over the last couple of decades. Thick skins allow it to withstand the humid conditions of its homeland, [Rías Baixas](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/rias-baixas/7155-106814), [Spain](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/spain/7155-106806), free of malady, and produce a weighty but fresh white. Somm Secret—Albariño claims dual citizenship in Spain and [Portugal](https://www.wine.com/list/wine/portugal/7155-107017). Under the name Alvarinho, it thrives in Portugal’s northwestern Vinho Verde region, which predictably, borders part of Spain’s Rías Baixas.

**Tasting Notes** This is a young, fresh white wine with the characteristic bright acidity and aromas of peach and grapefruit. Nortico is light and delicate, lovely as a "porch-sipping wine" to drink on its own.

Creamy citrus oil, lime and yellow apple notes are nicely spiced and detailed with saline mineral and floral underpinnings through the long finish. — Gillian Sciaretta

**Food Pairing**: Have it simply with corn bread and butter like country folks do in Portugal. Also a terrific seafood wine, particularly with salty, fattier dishes like fish tacos or broiled oysters. Recommended serving temperature is 50F (10C) so the citrus and fruit aromas are well present.

**Merlo Family Estate Vineyards, Blackbird Red Blend, Trinity County**

**50% Syrah, 50% Zinfandel**

**About Merlo Family Vineyards:** Tucked away in the far reaches of rugged Northern California lies Hyampom Valley. Merlo Family Vineyards is located along the banks of the wild and scenic South Fork of the Trinity River that runs through Hyampom. This wholly unique setting helps create wines that speak to the power and beauty that is Hyampom Valley. Influenced by the idyllic growing season and climate of this small pocket valley, the fruit produced in the Merlo Family Vineyards expresses a strong sense of place. Based on the concept that quality wine is grown in the vineyard, a minimalist approach is taken in the cellar, allowing the wines to clearly reflect the varietal character and distinct terroir of Hyampom Valley.

Merlo Family Vineyards produces a rare collection of richly flavored and expressive wines. Unlike many California wines, these deep, complex wines are not high in alcohol, nor overripe in flavors. Rather, the wines are naturally big and bold, yet refined and beautiful.

Unlike most California wines, MFV wines are deep and complex yet not high in alcohol, nor overripe in flavors. Rather, the red wines are rich, dark and bold with very smooth tannin structure. The white wines display bright vibrant flavors with crisp natural acidity.

Blackbird is the name for our Mediterranean style red wine blend. The base of this blend is Syrah from our estate vineyard in Hyampom Valley , blended with the high-toned fruit notes of our estate Zinfandel. The result is a very rich and full-bodied wine with notes of cedar and spice, and a very complex finish.

**Tasting Notes:** The estate Syrah and Zinfandel combine to become a rich and full-bodied red with notes of black cherry, cedar and spice, and a very complex finish. Truly a Mediterranean style red table wine.

The Blackbird is the perfect accompaniment to richly flavored foods like stews and cassoulet or at casual gatherings with BBQ ribs, pizza, or burgers on the grill with family and friends.