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Authentic Italian pizza and wine pairings

Wine and pizza may seem like an obvious match, but which styles go hand in hand? Discover Decanter's Italian pizza and wine pairings and top picks of the best pizzeria in Italy (and one in London).



Raffaele Mosca
September 1, 2022



Credit: viscontiart.com / AVPN (True Neapolitan Pizza Association)

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One of the culture shocks visitors to Italy face is discovering that Italians don't drink wine with pizza too often.

Matching pizza with wine seems rather obvious, yet when visiting historical establishments across the country you will always find fridges filled with beer.

Beer has long been the best-selling beverage in the Italian pizzeria – and that is mainly due to its affordability and successful marketing strategies pursued by industrial breweries.

However, the tradition of pairing wine with pizza predates the upsurge of beer sales in Italy and the rise of gourmet pizza is bringing this habit back to life – an ever-greater number of connoisseurs are matching wine with slow-leavening dough and high-quality ingredients. Wine lists in pizza restaurants are improving, too.

The origins of Italian pizza

Like many Italian classics, pizza was created to feed peasants and workers. In the 16th century, the Neapolitans started oven baking the flatbreads they had been eating since the Middle Ages.

In the following centuries, they developed more sophisticated procedures and began topping the preparation with tomato sauce and mozzarella.

Pizza surged in popularity after the unification in 1861. Named after Queen Margherita di Savoia, pizza Margherita became an emblem of the newly founded nation, mimicking the colours of the Italian flag with the above-mentioned ingredients plus basil.

However, before the 1960s few pizzerie existed north of Rome. If anything, chefs from the wealthier north contributed to the success of gourmet pizza. Veneto-born Simone Padoan was one of the first to propose complex toppings, elevating this preparation to an art form.

What is authentic Italian pizza?

Pizza Napoletana is a Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) product, regulated under European law. The 'Art of Neapolitan "Pizzaiuolo"' is also included on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

The TSG means that authentic Pizza Napoletana can be made anywhere in the world, as long as it meets the requirements laid out by the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana (True Neapolitan Pizza Association):

The pizza must be obtained by rolling out a 200 to 280g dough by hand, topping it with tomato sauce, hard cheese, fior di latte or mozzarella, and basil ('Margherita'), or tomato sauce, garlic, olive oil and oregano ('Marinara'). Ingredients are recommended to come from the Campania region of Italy.

The pizza must be cooked in a wood-fired oven with a cooking surface temperature of 380-430°C for 60-90 seconds .

It must be no larger than 35cm in diameter, and should be thin (around 0.25cm), with a 1 to 2cm high 'cornicione', or crust. The cornicione should have a soft texture, with very few bubbles or burns.

Best Italian pizza and wine pairings

Scroll down to see Raffaele's wine recommendations

Lighter wines are preferable with pizza, but every style has its match. The only general recommendation is to avoid big tannins and heavy oak imprinting.

Margherita

The quintessential Italian pizza may be the most challenging to pair with wine. Most whites are too lean to cope with the tomato sauce, and most reds too structured.

Dark rosé such as **Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo** represents the best compromise, possessing judicious acidity, light tannins and enough palate weight to withstand – and even empower – the ingredients.

Pizza frita

The easiest pizza to pair with wine, fried Neapolitan pizza comes in different styles, ranging from Montanara (with tomato sauce and Parmigiano) to calzone (stuffed with meat and provola cheese).

All you need is a refreshing, high-acid wine: locals recommend Asprinio di Aversa, a white wine from an historical district in northern **Campania**.

Pizza with cold cuts

While Naples is the cradle of pizza tonda (thin-crust pizza), Rome is best-known for pizza al taglio (pizza by the slice), often topped or stuffed with salumi (cold cuts).

You cannot leave the eternal city without having tasted crunchy pizza Romana with mortadella, better if paired with bottle-fermented sparkling wine such as **Franciacorta**, the mousse of which resets the palate by dissolving the fats.

Capricciosa

Capricciosa boasts several ingredients, including tomato sauce, mozzarella, cooked prosciutto, artichokes, mushrooms and sometimes even boiled eggs.

Easygoing reds such as Piediroso from the Campi Flegrei area near Naples work best in this case. Piediroso balances the richness of the topping with its bracing salinity while refreshing the mouth with peppery and herbal flavours.

Diavola

Authentic Italian pizzerie don't serve pepperoni pizza. Instead, they serve Diavola ('devil'), the original spicy salami pizza.

Diavola pairs well with fruit-forward red wines such as unoaked **Barbera**, the plump red fruit appeasing the piquant flavours, while crisp acidity cleans the palate.

Boscaiola

The name Boscaiola derives from the Italian word for 'woods' and refers to a pizza with sausages, mushrooms and mozzarella.

This pizza pairs well with medium-bodied **Tuscan** reds, especially Morellino di Scansano from Maremma, which has enough acidity to counterbalance the sausage fat, along with velvety tannins that avoid clashing with the mushrooms.




Lo Sparviere, Cuveè Bio n.7, Franciacorta, Lombardy NV


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An excellent entry-level Franciacorta from certified organic Chardonnay grapes, spending approximately 30 months on the lees. Nectarine, lemon curd, and zesty herbs mingle with hints of roasted almonds and flint. On the palate, it...

Points 92

Lo Sparviere, Cuveè Bio n.7, Franciacorta, Lombardy NV

 MY WINES

 SINGLE TASTING

92

Tasted by: Raffaele Mosca
(at Rome, 20 Jul 2022)

Part of Authentic Italian pizza and wine pairings

Drinking Window: 2022 - 2025

An excellent entry-level Franciacorta from certified organic Chardonnay grapes, spending approximately 30 months on the lees. Nectarine, lemon curd, and zesty herbs mingle with hints of roasted almonds and flint. On the palate, it offers an enticing mix of creamy toastiness, crisp acidity and zingy mineral tones, all energised by the fine mousse.



Producer	Lo Sparviere
Brand	Cuveè Bio n.7
Wine Type	Sparkling
Colour	White
Country	Italy
Region	Lombardy
Appellation	Franciacorta
Sweetness	Brut
Closure	Natural Cork
Alcohol	12.50%
Body	Medium
Oak	Unoaked
Grapes	100% Chardonnay