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April 2003

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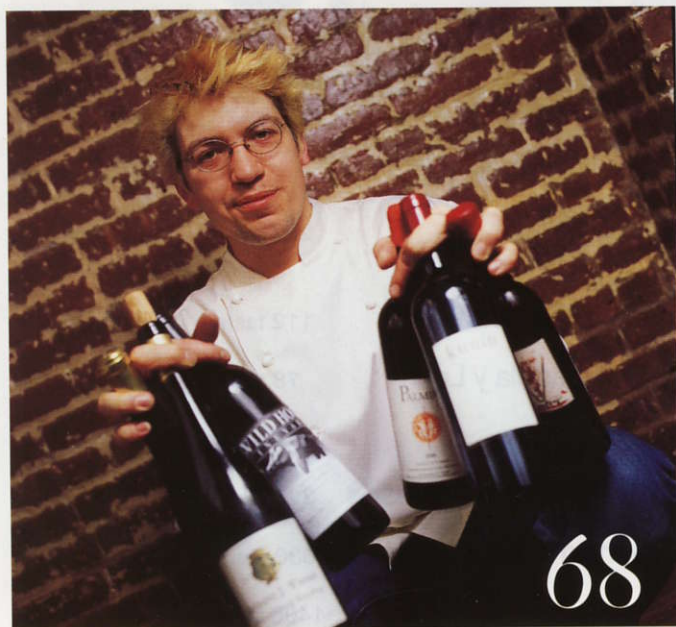


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What are the most popular wines at America's most popular restaurants? *W&S*'s exclusive annual report tracks best sellers and up-and-comers alike.

## Meritage

boasts the most focused food and wine menu in Boston. Chef Daniel Bruce and wine director Ed Costa aim to remove wine-pairing fears by grouping entrees by wine style, including poached lemon sole in Prosecco cream under Sparklers, ballottine of Cornish game hen with Full-Bodied Whites, or foie gras with pinot-cherry compote under Fruity Reds. They also offer small portions of the \$28 entrees at \$14, giving diners more chances to focus on their 50 wines by the glass and ever-changing, largely American, 28-page list. With such opportunities, it's like having the annual Boston Wine Festival all year 'round. —KEN STERNBERG



*Meritage, 70 Rowe's Wharf, Boston, MA; 617-439-3995*

## Incanto

takes Dante as its inspiration. Renaissance parchments hang in the eaves of the trattoria-style dining area, and a more intimate barrel-vaulted room is lined with wine bottles and includes a dour bust of the poet himself. Mark Pastore opened this Noe Valley restaurant to create an authentic Italian experience, and employs longtime San Francisco chef Paul Buscemi to execute a wide-ranging, pan-Italian menu that is simple, flavorful and cliché-free. But if *Incanto* has Dante as its muse, wine is his vehicle. Claudio Villani, a recent



émigré from Florence, has composed an equally pan-Italian wine list, covering ground from Val d'Aosta to Sicily. For Italian wine novices, the by-the-glass list includes four instructive flights — compare three lagreins, or take an Etruscan tour — each glass ringed with a identifying tag.

—PATRICK J. COMISKEY

*Incanto, 1550 Church St., San Francisco, CA; 415-641-4500*

## BUFFALO

### Bacchus

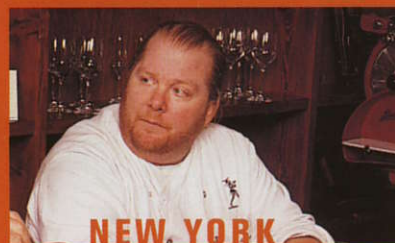
landed in Buffalo this past fall to a resounding clinking of glasses. The swank space on Chippewa Street — ground zero for late-night hanging out — says wine all over it, from its burgundy color to the wine racks lining the walls. Sommelier Mike DePue makes good on the name by offering all 200 wines on the list — including the '82 Lafite — by the glass. Those who prefer a bottle to themselves can choose from 30+ half-bottles, from Zind-Humbrecht Riesling to Quintessa Cabernet. And to encourage bacchanalia, chef Jason Pahl downsizes every dish, making it possible to check out as many wine-and-food combinations as can fit on the table. —T.Q.T.

*Bacchus, 54 W. Chippewa St., Buffalo, NY; 716-854-9463*

## Bastide

finally opened its doors to an eager city. The long-awaited restaurant from chef Alain Giraud (*Citrus, Lavande*) offers stellar Provençal cuisine, not to mention an extensive and 100-percent French wine list. Sommelier Christophe Rolland, formerly of *Aqua* at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, includes everything from pricy First Growths stretching back to the turn of the last century to curiosities from lesser-known regions, especially the southwest. Good news is that you won't need to break the bank for a satisfying bottle, as Rolland eagerly suggests wines like a '95 Chateau Montus from Madiran for just \$42. —CHRIS RUBIN

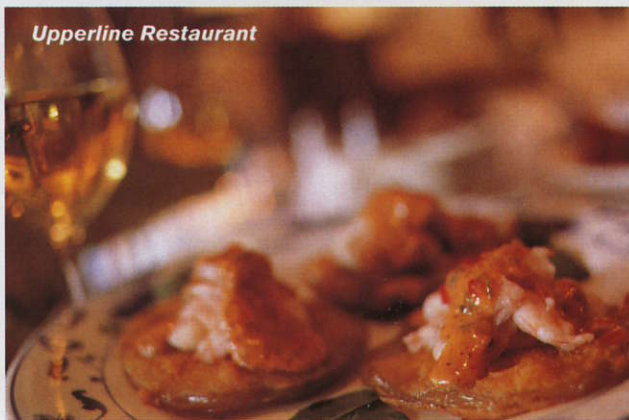
*Bastide, 8475 Melrose Pl., W. Hollywood, CA; 323-651-5950*



## Otto

means eight in Italian, which is the street to remember when looking for the newest addition to the Batali-Bastianich Italian food empire. Ostensibly, this sprawling space on 5th Ave. and 8th Street is a pizzeria, but the chewy, thin-crust pizzas are only part of the story. Check out the antipasti, like tender beans cooked in *fiasco*; salsify saturated with saba, a sweet grape must; and the best caponata on earth. Order the *fritelle* of the day and offset them with salad — fennel brightened with citrus, or earthy scungilli sliced paper-thin. And leave room for homemade charcuterie. What to drink with it all? *Babbo*-transfer Morgan Rich encourages experimentation by offering two dozen wines by the quartino (about a glass and a half), not to mention more than half the bottles on his wide-ranging, all-Italian list at less than \$50. No reservations taken. —T.Q.T.

*Otto, One Fifth Ave., NYC, NY; 212-995-9559*

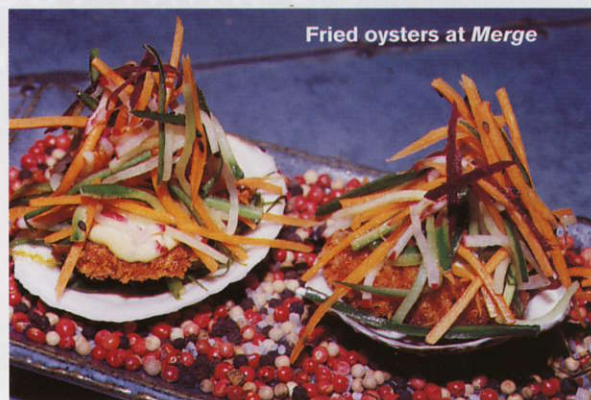


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# wine destinations

**The marriage question.** We heard it this year from sommeliers we interviewed for our 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Restaurant Poll, we heard it from chefs doffing their toques to sign up for wine classes, we heard it from friends at the tables next to us: wine pairing, the question of what to drink with what you eat, is hot.

And it's a question that dovetails with some of the year's top restaurant trends. If your stomach is growling for **HOUSE-MADE CHARCUTERIE**, for instance, be it foie gras and saucisson or lardo and testa, the sommeliers inside these pages will know what to suggest. If you'd rather experiment on your own, go **BY THE GLASS** through some of the country's most ambitious lists. But when you're puzzling over what to drink with that plate of blue corn enchiladas or crawfish etouffée, consider what the folks working in **AMERICAN REGIONAL CUISINE** have to say. Or maybe we've got you all wrong, and a cloudberry martini is your kind of drink: if so, check out the latest in **LOUNGE CUISINE**.

The twelve restaurants profiled within are tops in their neighborhoods, but don't worry if their reservation line doesn't happen to be in your area code. The 443 restaurants who responded to our annual poll are listed starting on page 94, every last one of them wine-savvy and vino-adventurous. Drop in, and find out what's new on the culinary horizon.

## [ house-made charcuterie ]



L'Auberge Chez François

## GREAT FALLS: L'AUBERGE CHEZ FRANÇOIS

Few places conjure Old World France better than the inside of a village charcuterie. The salty, gamey smell, the sausages hanging from the ceiling, the pâtés, terrines and rillettes arrayed on plates and in earthenware bowls, each hiding under a thick layer of fat, represent some of the most traditional flavors of France. While Americans once demanded French cuisine *be haute* — refined, complex sauces, on the best fish and cuts of meat — we're now packing into bistros in cities like New York, San Francisco and L.A., ordering simpler fare — steak frites, *salade Niçoise*, and, most basic of all, *l'assiette de charcuterie*.

Of course, the best saucissons, pâtés and rillettes (not to mention the best Italian cured salami, soppressatas and prosciutto) come from those tradition-minded restaurants that go to the trouble of making their own, instead of buying them, ready-made from purveyors. *L'Auberge Chez François* is one such place, a country inn on the outskirts of Washington, DC, with a homey, antique atmosphere and a decades-long reputation for fine Alsatian cuisine. In 1975, Alsace-born restaurateur François Haeringer moved here from *Chez François*, his downtown DC location, bringing his three sons and a room full of family heirlooms (grandfather clocks, hand-painted crockery, copper bed warmers). Now, François' oldest son Jacques runs the kitchen, reproducing and reinterpreting his father's recipes, none more traditional than his *assiette de cochonnailles et crudité*, a selection of three or four pâtés and rillettes made from pork, venison, duck and goose liver.

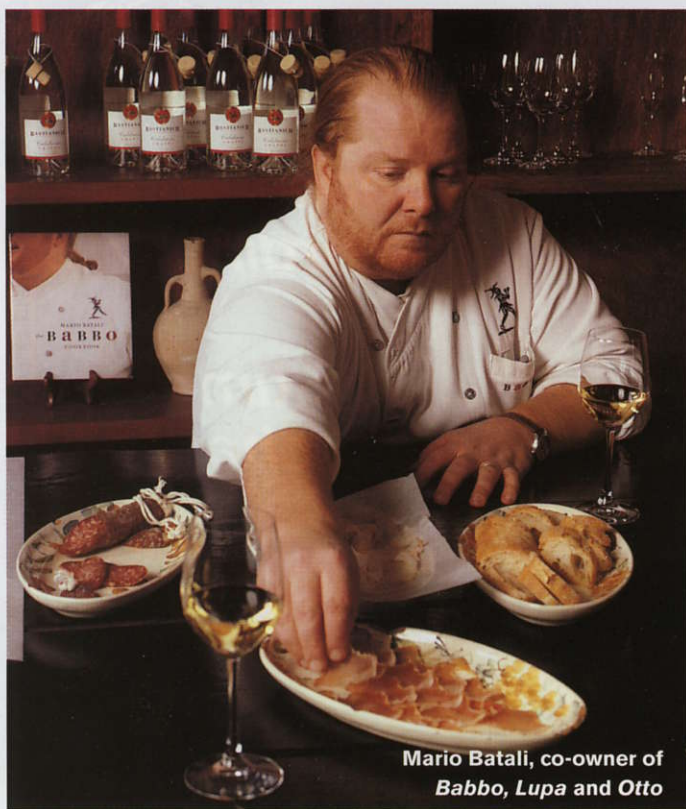


L'Auberge Chez François

"Alsace is famous for pâté," says Jacques. "It's said the region has forty indigenous varieties. And pâté de foie gras was invented by an Alsatian." That's the most refined version of the dish, a fancy cousin to the humbler, more common *pâté campagnard*, generally made from pork. Pâté means "dough" in French and was traditionally made with a crust, while terrine translates to a crust-less pâté preserved in an earthenware dish. Rillettes refers to a potted, fork-shredded meat. All three arise out of the same process, blending and slow-cooking spiced meats, then preserving them under a layer of fat. François, whose relatives owned and ran a charcuterie in Alsace, once made all the pâtés himself, and he still tastes and corrects each one, pinching and dashing a spice rack's worth of seasoning into the mix.

The wine list at *L'Auberge Chez François* leans heavily on Alsatian whites, from grand cru riesling to simpler sylvaners and pinot blancs. Paul Haeringer, François's youngest son and the restaurant's sommelier, favors the latter with pâté. "You don't want to get complicated," he says. "Something fresh and light, not too sweet." Uncomplicated food demands uncomplicated wine: a useful rule of thumb for anyone sitting down to a good plate of charcuterie. —TAYLOR ANTRIM

*L'Auberge Chez François*, 332 Springvale Rd., Great Falls, VA;  
703-759-3800



Mario Batali, co-owner of Babbo, Lupa and Otto

NEW YORK: BABBO, LUPA, OTTO

Three heads are better than one: If you order the *testa* — or head cheese — at one of the three Greenwich Village restaurants run by Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich, you'll find that each one is different. But all are variations on Batali's basic recipe for cooking the head of a pig:

"You take your head. You boil it. Everything falls out, the eyelids, the teeth, everything. You remove the jaw and bone and chop up everything else. You season the liquid, put the meat in a mold, then pour the liquid over it. Put it in the fridge and let it set. Then put it on the slicer. It's an easy recipe." And it takes easily to variations.

At *Babbo*, just west of Washington Square Park, Batali creates a meaty *testa* by dry-rubbing the heads with salt and pepper. He poaches them, pulls them apart and packs them into molds. Once set, he slices the *testa* thick to serve with potato, mustard seeds, thyme vinaigrette and shallot pickles. Batali's *testa* is rustic, meaty, fatty and rich, like a pork brisket.

At *Otto*, just to the north of the Park, chef Zach Allen creates the most spice-driven *testa* of the three — Batali calls him "The Manipulator." Allen brines the pigs' heads for four days in salt, brown sugar, cloves, black peppercorns, chili flakes and bay leaves (and a little Instacure to keep the color in the pork), then poaches them slowly for eight hours with whole oranges, three per head. Then he pulls off the meat, breaks up the oranges, adds gelatin and forms them into a cylinder. The result is richly textured with a slight crunch from the orange, the oiliness of the pork cut by the citrus and spice.

At *Lupa*, just a few blocks to the south, chef Mark Ladner uses the same spices for the brine, but poaches the heads with carrot, celery and onion. That *testa* is served slightly warmed, with fennel pollen; it tastes soft and plump, with a gentle spice.

Batali has found that the less you remove, the better the *testa*. "Our first mistake when we started was to pull the fat out. That's part of it. And we learned that chopping bigger is better for the texture."

He's also learned a thing or two from his father, Armandino, a retired Boeing engineer who's established a second career as a salumist in Seattle. Batali senior helped develop the recipes that his son and Dan Latham now use for their cured meats at Italian Wine Merchants, supplying the three Village restaurants.

Latham cures *lonza* (pork loin with fat), *coppa* (the shoulder muscle, called butt), *guanciale* (the jowl), *lardo* (fatback) and *salumino picante* (from blade meat, the trimming off the top of a butt). Tasting the different meats, Bastianich suggests a Scarbolo Tocai from Friuli, and Batali explains how to do it: "Taste them from the least to the most salty. When you put it in your mouth, before you chew it and mix the salty outside with the unsalty inside, put it on your tongue like a communion host. The top of your mouth starts to get whatever the animal ate, then the fat melts and becomes washy, then the salt kicks in. Then chew." Try it at the bar at *Lupa* or *Otto*, where you can order a selection of the meats, all made from specially selected free-range pigs.



Dan Latham of Italian Wine Merchants

"The problem with pigs in America," Batali explains, "is that they started breeding them thin. If you go to a store, you get fatback that's three-quarters to an inch thick. We keep the pigs longer, fatten them up outside in the cold, and the fatback gets to be four inches thick. It cures down to about two and a half." The pigs come in to Latham, who butchers them, using the various parts for the various cures, then hangs them to age at the back of the Italian Wine Merchants. Then he'll wrap the head in newspaper, drop it in a shopping bag, hail a taxi and run it over to *Lupa* or *Babbo*. There, if you order a plate of *testa*, *lonza* or *guanciale*, Bastianich would suggest a rustic regional wine.

"Anywhere you've got a cured meat culture, you can go region by region with the classically styled indigenous wine," he says. "The vegetal styles of refosco and merlot from Friuli that people won't drink here, if you taste them with the raw style of salami that's soft as ground meat, cut by hand, smeared on bread, there's nothing better together. Montepulciano d'Abruzzo with *salumino picante*...Vermentino with *lardo*...Lambrusco with *prosciutto di Parma*..." And what Bastianich drinks: his and his friends' *tocai friulano*. —JOSHUA GREENE

*Babbo*, 110 Waverley Pl., New York; 212-777-0303  
*Lupa*, 170 Thompson St., New York; 212-982-5089  
*Otto*, 1 Fifth Ave., New York; 212-674-2044