

"Alessandra Teston is on a mission to get us beyond the usual suspect when it comes to Italian wines."

Connect with winegrowers straight from Italian vineyards during online tastings



Alessandra Teston is the owner of Mosto, which hosts online wine tastings led by the growers themselves, straight from the vineyard in Italy

Alessandra Teston grew up among the sounds, smells and – crucially – tastes of her parents' Italian restaurant and deli in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert. She is now the owner and operator of [Mosto](#), an importer of artisanal Italian wine.

To get people familiar with the small, independent vineyards she represents, she hosts wine tastings. But of course that crumbled during corona. While many sommeliers are hosting wine tastings online these days, she hit upon an even better idea: Connect tasters directly to the winemakers in Italy.

Tasting events are done in English, and the next one is on 21 April. "I know the wine growers with whom I work so well, they have become friends over the years," says Teston. "The concept is quite simple. The participants receive two bottles of wine at home – one white, one red. On the day of the tasting, we connect for an hour on Zoom and have a discussion with the winegrowers themselves. I thought since we're doing it online, we should invite the winemakers on the journey. They are the real heroes of the story."

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Teston imports what she refers to as “distinctive” wines – those you won’t find in your local supermarket because they are made on a small scale in vineyards outside of the well-worn Chianti-Tuscany route.

Many of the wines are distinctive because the vintner has revived the cultivation of grapes abandoned by a sector looking to mass produce popular wines. The next tasting is a perfect example.

“We’ll be meeting Cesare Avenia from the winery Il Verro, which is located in Campania in southwest Italy,” says Teston. “It’s in the northern Caserta province, which is less well known for its wine. Cesare and his childhood friend decided they wanted to resuscitate some of the native grapes that they knew when they were children but which were almost completely abandoned in favour of more popular varieties. This is what we’re going to taste.”

Sheep’s tail

Tasters will get one white and one red, both made from a single grape variety. Both organic, the white wine is called Sheep, named after a grape called Coda di Pecora – literally ‘sheep’s tail’. The red is produced with the Pallegrello Nero.

Like all of the wines Teston sells on her website and in local delis, they are carefully selected. “It is the only estate cultivating these grapes and making single-grape wine from them. They only produce 20,000 bottles a year, so it’s really a small estate, run by friends. There is a beautiful story behind these wines. Not to mention that they are fantastic. They have unique characteristics. The grapes are grown in volcanic soil, which gives a particular freshness to the wine that is quite unique.”

If 20,000 seems like a small amount, it’s actually average for the vineyards Teston adds to her order list. “I’ve spent my entire life travelling in Italy, so now I like to visit and hunt for those little gems. By talking to people you learn how to find these small producers.”



Cesare Avenia in his tasting room at Il Verro



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Teston’s parents were Italian expats, and they ran their business on Avenue Georges Henri for more than 40 years. “My surname translates to ‘let’s test it’ in French. My father had a sense of humour, so he called his restaurant Teston les Vins. The attached delicatessen was called Maison Teston.”

The wine tastings, she continues, “started as a sort of father-daughter activity. My father is a cook, so we decided to organise wine and food pairing events. I would choose five or six wines, maybe from a specific region or winery, and he would prepare local culinary specialities that paired well with those wines.”

Her parents retired and closed the business two years ago, and now she hosts wine and food pairings at other restaurants. Besides the tastings, she tells the stories behind the winemakers and the region in which they ply their trade.

So why didn’t she just take over her parents’ business? “I’m a poor cook,” she admits. “I can only drink.”

To wit: Teston realises that, while many of us like to drink wine, we don’t know much about it. That’s perfect, she says, for one of Mosto’s tastings.

“The events are halfway between an information evening and a night out with friends. It’s really relaxed. I don’t like oenology when it’s too gentrified. We don’t get into big technical explanations. If people have more technical questions, they can of course ask them, but that’s not the focus. The point is to discover the wines of Italy without the clichés.”

She encourages people to not be afraid to speak up. “There are no stupid questions,” she assures. Tastings start with the white wine, then move on to the red. “Usually when we get to the red, people relax and ask more questions ... because they’ve already had a couple of glasses.”