Campania is a region of many contrasts: the thriving city of Naples, Italy’s third-largest, with its insane traffic; the breathtakingly beautiful Amalfi Coast, with its grapefruit-sized lemons; and the romantic, chic island of Capri in the Bay of Naples. Then there’s Mount Vesuvius and the city of Pompeii, destroyed by a volcanic outburst in 79 A.D. and still being restored; and the quiet, dramatically stunning wine regions, such as the Avellino area, surrounded by mountains.

About a two-hour drive south of Rome, Campania has actually been producing wine since pre-Roman times—when Greek settlers brought their vines and populated the area 2700 years ago. For hundreds of years, the region provided wines for the Romans, and was their vacation playground (Capri; Pompeii). It’s ironic, therefore, that we are now talking about Campania as a new area for discovering potentially great wines.

While the wines of most Northern Italy regions—Piedmont, Tuscany, the Veneto, Friuli, Trentino-Alto Adige, Emilia-Romagna, etc.—attained international recognition and success during the technological wine revolution which swept the world during the 1970s and ’80s, Southern Italian regions, always more economically
Caserta

Benevento

Salerno

Torre del Greco

Naples

Tyrrenian Sea

Campania

depresse and lacking industry, languished, producing mainly wine in bulk, which was trucked to Northern Italy and neighboring countries.

In 1970, only three wineries in Campania were making wines commercially, and only one, Mastroberardino, produced significant enough amounts of wine to be known outside of Campania. Today, Mastroberardino is still going strong, but the region there now boasts 120 wineries.

I made a visit to Campania in May, first stopping at Naples, partaking of its wonderful pizza (Naples is its birthplace) and mozzarella di bufala; and then the Amalfi Coast—where there is an estimable winery, Marisa Cuomo, whose wines are sold in the U.S. But my primary vinous destination on this trip was the mountainous province of Avellino (about 20 miles east of Mt. Vesuvius and Naples), made famous recently on TV as the birthplace of Tony Soprano's family.

Avellino (locally known as Irpinia) is one of five provinces in Campania, and the region's most important wine area.

White Outshines Red
Campania's location in Southern Italy might lead you to think that red wine plays a more important role than white, but in fact most of the leading wineries, at least in Avellino province, produce more white wine than red. The reason is simple: the Apennine Mountains, which include several active volcanoes, cover more than half of the region. Although the Mediterranean coastal area is quite warm much of the year, the high altitude of the inland hillsides, where most of the better vineyards are located, is fairly cool, and more conducive to white wine production. Also, since Roman times, white wine has been more the custom in the region. Almost all of the wines are made from native grapes, or grapes which originated in Greece 3,000 or 4,000 years ago.

Before focusing on Avellino, I'll first summarize the wines and wineries of Campania's other four provinces:

Caserta: In northwest Campania, closest to Rome, this is the home of an ancient Roman wine, Falerno, which is made primarily as a white wine, Falerno Bianco (from the Falanghina variety). The red, Falerno Rosso, is made chiefly from two indigenous varieties, Aglianico and Piedirosso. Villa Matilde, the leading winery in Caserta, has singlehandedly kept Falerno alive (most of it was wiped out a century ago); this winery also has a fine lineup of indigenous varietal wines in its portfolio.

Benevento: In northeast Campania, north of Avellino. Falanghina is the major wine of the province; the main wine zones are Sannio and Sant’ Agata dei Goti. Azienda Agricola Mustilli, a champion of the Falanghina variety, is located in Sant’ Agata dei Goti, and one of the region's top wineries.

A handy cheat sheet for your files:

• Shoot the Reposado.
• Sip the Plata.
• Savor the Añejo.

Now take the time to sit back and imagine the possibilities. Nice work, we like the way you think. You are officially prepped and ready, the rest should be cake.

Hornitos™ A fine line of tequila.
**Campania**

**Naples:** On the coast, this province encompasses the city of Naples, the town of Amalfi and the Sorrento Peninsula, Campi Flegrei (the coastal area east of Naples), the islands of Capri and Ischia, and the Pompeii-Vesuvius area. White wines, which go with the wonderful seafood in the area, dominate; they’re made from the Falanghina, Biancolella, and Coda di Volpe, and occasionally Greco varieties. The local red wines are made from the native Piedirosso, Aglianico, and Sciascinoso varieties. Two leading wineries in Naples province are the aforementioned Marisa Cuomo and D’Ambra Vini d’Ischia.

**Salerno:** The southern part of Campania, south of Naples and Avellino. The leading wine zone, Cilento, has three important wineries: De Conciliis, Luigi Maffini, and Montevetrano. Aglianico is the major red variety here; Fiano and Moscato are important white varieties. Montevetrano, which has received much critical acclaim for its wine, is an exception. Its red wine is internationally styled, and is made mainly from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

The Wines of Avellino

The people of Avellino have had to live with their share of natural disasters. The nearby and very much alive Mt. Vesuvius last erupted in 1944, causing much damage over a wide area. Even worse, an earthquake in 1980 destroyed many villages and wineries in the area, and killed over 3,000 people. Today, the villages and wineries have been re-built, and Avellino wineries are leading the way towards international recognition of Campania’s wines.

Three large wineries dominate in Avellino: Mastroberardino, Feudi di San Gregorio, and Terredora di Paolo (aka Terredora). Mastroberardino, established in 1878, produces 2.4 million bottles annually; Feudi di San Gregorio, now the largest winery in Avellino, with over 3 million bottles a year, was founded just 21 years ago, and sold its first wines in 1991. Terredora, the newcomer of the three, began in 1993-94, and now produces 1.2 million bottles annually. Right now, all three wineries sell 70 to 75 percent of their wines in Italy (mainly Rome and Campania), and the USA is the most important export market of all three.

About 70 to 75 percent of Feudi’s and Mastroberardino’s wines are white; Terredora makes a bit higher percentage of red—45 percent, with 55 percent white. All three produce basically the same types of wine (in different styles). Their four main white wines are Greco di Tufo, Fiano di Avellino, Falanghina, and Larcyma Christi Bianco (made from the Coda di Volpe variety). The major reds are Taurasi (Aglianico wine from Taurasi village area), other Aglianico red wines, and Larcyma Christi Rosso (made mainly from Piedirosso and Aglianico).

Feudi di San Gregorio definitely makes the most “modern” wines of the three, and has also been growing the fastest. Its winery is a remarkable state-of-art facility on top of a hill, near the village of Sorbo Serpico, close to the town of Avellino. Feudi (as it is commonly known) makes liberal use of French barriques to age its red wines. Internationally famous Ricardo Cotarella is Feudi’s wine consultant. Even though all three wineries use barriques to some extent, Feudi’s red wines, which are the most polished, show more evidence of barrique aging than Mastroberardino’s or Terredora’s.

Feudi did something very uncharacteris-tic of a winery in Campania; it opened a second winery, called Vigne di Mezzo, in another region, nearby Basilicata, where it’s producing Aglianico in the Monte Vulture area.

Mastroberardino, long the face of wines from Campania, is located in the small town of Atripalda, outside of Avellino. In the late 1950’s and early ’60s, Antonio Mastroberardino rescued Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino from near extinction (caused by phylloxera and World War II) by re-planting these now-thriving varieties. Although white wines now make up the bulk of its production, Mastroberardino is probably most renowned for its red Taurasi. Its 1968 Taurasi is a legendary wine—still very much alive and still great today, but only available at auctions and in private cellars. It was the one wine which drew attention to the then practically unknown Aglianico variety—just as the Biondi-Santi Winery made Brunello di Montalcino world-renowned.

In 1996, Antonio Mastroberardino and his son Piero began an exciting new project in Pompeii; they re-planted the same grape varieties in the resurrected parts of Pompeii that had been growing there 2,000 years ago. By analyzing the DNA of grape seeds buried in the volcanic ashes, the Mastroberardinos discovered that eight varieties had grown in Pompeii, five white: Greco, Fiano, Coda di Volpe, Falanghina, and Capronetta; and three red: Aglianico, Piedirosso, and Sciascinoso. Through trial and error, Antonio Dente, Mastroberardino’s viticulturist, ascertained that two red varieties, Piedirosso and Sciascinoso, seemed to grow best in the relatively warm Pompeii vineyards. Mastroberardino’s first “Pompeii” wine was the 2001 Villa dei Misteri (85 percent Piedirosso, 15 percent Sciascinoso). The 2002 Villa dei Misteri is now available in the U.S. in limited quantities for about $185 a bottle. I have tasted it, and it’s very good. Worth $185? Well, you are buying a piece of history.

The Mastroberardino brothers, Antonio and Walter, ended their partnership in 1993—a not uncommon occurrence with brothers in Italian wineries. Younger brother Walter, whose wife Dora and her family owned many of Mastroberardino’s prime vineyards, kept these vineyards in the split-up. Antonio kept the winery in Atripalda and the winery name. Walter opened his

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**RECENT VINTAGES IN CAMPANIA**

**White Wines**

Most of Europe experienced very hot weather in 2003, Campania included. Avoid 2003 whites; 2004, 2005, and 2006 are all fine.

**Red Wines**

Both 2000 and 2003 were hot years; red wines, especially the ‘03s, were quite ripe and alcoholic. The best red wine vintage in the region is 2001; it is powerful, balanced, and will be long-lived. The 2002 vintage was rainy, producing light, short-lived wines. The 2004 vintage looks to be very good, second only to 2001 of recent vintages. The 2005 vintage also looks quite good.
The following are some of the wines I tasted on my recent trip to Campania:

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

**White Wines**
- 2005 Marisa Cuomo Furore Bianco, Costa d’Amalfi
  Gran Furore, the name of the Marisa Cuomo Winery, is the leading winery on the Amalfi Coast (Sorrento Peninsula). It is located in the village of Furore, but grapes are also sourced from Ravello. This wine, made from Biancolella and Falanghina, is unoaked, dry, and minerally, with flavors which suggest white peaches. *Panebianco LLC*

- 2006 Mastroberardino Fiano di Avellino “Radici”
  Mastroberardino’s finest vineyard is most probably its Radici. This wine is dry, spicy, and delicate; it has enticing aromas of white flowers, mint, and eucalyptus, with great concentration of citrus and mint flavors, and lively acidity. A lean, sleek wine, with good aging potential. *Wilson Daniels Ltd.*

- 2006 Terredora Fiano di Avellino Terre di Dora
  Terre di Dora is one of this winery’s two very special Fiano wines; it’s made from Fiano grapes grown in Terredora’s Lapio an Montefalcone vineyards. The ‘06 Terre di Dora is dry and crisp, with fresh fruit aromas resembling pineapple. It has great length on the palate, with a long, rich finish. *Vias Imports*

- 2004 Terredora Fiano di Avellino CampoRe
  This is Terredora’s version of a Reserve Fiano; released later, it is firm and structured, with more complex flavors than the unoaked Fianos. Not at all woody in flavor, with a touch of honey on the finish. *Vias Imports*

**Red Wines**
- 2002 Feudi di San Gregorio Taurasi, Selve di Luoti
  100 percent Aglianico (like all Taurasi wines), it was aged for three years, one of which was in oak; the ’02 Feudi Taurasi is fresh, surprisingly rich and concentrated, with aromas of violets, soft tannins, ripe, fleshy flavors, and very good length. And it is currently available. *Palm Bay Imports*

- 2003 Feudi di San Gregorio Serpico, IGT Irpinia Aglianico
  Made from Aglianico grapes in three different vineyards, Feudi’s Serpico is one of the great, long-lived Aglianico wines of Campania. This wine is very rich and ripe, and has enormous concentration of fruit. *Palm Bay Imports*

- 2000 Mastroberardino Taurasi Riserva, “Radici”
  A very refined wine, with tart cherry, herbal aromas and flavors, great concentration of fruit, along with substantial acidity. This 2000 Riserva is only now opening up; a wine made for long aging. At $39 retail, it is a great value, when you compare it to Barolos or Barbarescos of similar quality. *Wilson Daniels Ltd.*

**RECOMMENDED**

**White Wines**
- 2006 Feudi di San Gregorio Falanghina del Sannio
  This ‘06 Falanghina from the Sannio zone is dry, with ripe, fruity, floral aromas and flavors. It is earthy and mineraly, with good depth and a delicious, fruity finish. *Palm Bay Imports*

- 2006 Mastroberardino Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio Bianco
  Probably the best-known white wine in Campania, and in the hands of a good producer such as Mastroberardino, it’s a solid, substantial wine. Made from the Coda di Volpe variety in the Mt. Vesuvius area, the ’06 Lacryma Christi is dry and lean, with mineral notes on the finish. *Wilson Daniels Ltd.*

- 2006 Villa Matilde Falanghina del Sannio, “Rocca di Leoni”
  Villa Matilde’s ‘06 Falanghina is made in a clean, fresh, dry, delicate style; it has minerally, floral aromas and substantial acidity. The perfect wine with seafood pasta. *Empson USA*

**Red Wines**
- 2005 Terredora Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio Rosso
  Terredora’s red ‘05 Lacryma Christi is dry, with dark, plummy fruit and dried herb flavors and medium tannins. A gutsy, rustic red from the Mt. Vesuvius area, made mainly from Piediroso, with some Aglianico. *Vias Imports*

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**The Unique Styles of the Big Three White Varietals**

By common consent, Fiano di Avellino, Greco di Tufo, and Falanghina are the most important varietal wines in Campania. They differ, for me, in the following ways:

Falanghina—Generally the fruitiest and most aromatic of the three, with the broadest flavors; usually rich and minerally; appears to be at its best in its first three years or so, although Mustilli has made successful aged versions.

Greco di Tufo—An earthy, rich, viscous wine; showy, with real personality; the most flavorful of the three when young; ages well for six to eight years. The best vineyards grow around the village of Tufo.

Fiano di Avellino—The most noble of the three varieties; floral, delicate, and very elegant, often with aromas and flavors of hazelnuts. The most long-lived of the three, ages 12 to 15 years; needs about three years to develop.