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RICHARD FRISBIE :: A Taste of Piemonte

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Italian Truffle Dinner 2009

“My Dinner With Ivana”

I’ve got to hand it to the Italians, they sure know how to party! Every year when truffle season is in full swing, the Italian tourism folks fly in Italian dignitaries along with a couple of suitcases filled with truffles and their local wine, and the party begins. Last year’s incredible [dinner at Barbetta’s Restaurant](#) is elsewhere on Gather. This year we were at **Serafina Broadway Restaurant** (210 West 55th St) for the big event.



It was great to see so many old friends. While we milled around waiting for the tables to be set and the party to begin, there was time for hellos, introductions and a few lies. (Oh stop! They grease the skids, as in “Loved your piece in National Geographic” ”Great photos!” and “I’ll email that info to you.” All were harmless! I even meant some of them at the time.) During this the waiters poured prosecco and passed trays of Focaccia Di Sofia, a thin focaccia sandwich, crispy on the outside and filled with soft buffalo ricotta cheese accented with truffle oil. Both were delicious fuel to give us strength for the long evening.



The Regionale Piemonte is famous for cheese, wines and meats; the **Langhe**

Roero corner of it especially so. Fausto Perletto, the head of tourism for the Langhe Roero section of Regionale Piemonte, and Alberto Bianco, Mayor of Comune di Barbaresco, which is a village in the area as well as the name of the local wine, gave brief speeches about their homeland. The enthusiasm and warmth they both displayed is so typically and engagingly Italian that everyone there was captivated. That, and the aromas of their region's culinary delicacies wafting from the kitchen while luscious photographs of the countryside were projected on the wall, made me want to visit Italy again. In fact, the reason I accepted the invitation to the dinner to taste these specialties was because I'd heard how well-known for good food and wine the region was. Now I want to see it and taste it for myself!

Then Ivana Trump was introduced. She was sitting at the head table, I was not. I almost called this piece "My Dinner With Ivana" anyway, but it's really about the food and wine, not celebrity. The food and wine shined! (Ivana looked pretty good too.)



A white truffle in a large glass was passed around proudly for the best effect and fragrance. Fabulous! After the group settled down, the first course was presented. The description of "flan with leeks and toasted nuts in a 'toma' cheese fondue" does not do it justice. It turned out to be one of the highlights of the meal. It was a mild white flan with large pieces of what I at first thought were walnuts. Since Piemonte is known for their hazel nuts, as well as their wines, cheeses and meats, I'm guessing that's what they were. The fondue sauce was the rich flavorfully-thick cheese bath that pulled it all together. The wine was a 2006 Barbaresco.



The next course was described as a “whipped risotto with “Castelmagno” cheese and caramelized shallots with shaved white truffles.” Whipped implies smooth to me, but this risotto was properly crunchy in the “al dente” fashion of the region. It was creamy too, with the shredded, semi-hard cheese, made from the milk of Piemonte cows, melted into a perfect base for the covering of shaved white truffles. Their earthy fungi aroma and taste dominated the rich rice dish. For this we drank a 1999 Barbaresco.



The meat course was described as: “veal medallion encrusted with spices with polenta in a civet sauce.” The veal was more oblong than medallion shaped, piled with a spicy bread crust, and swimming in a mild liver gravy that married the bland polenta base to the rest. They were surprisingly good, especially when a 1996 Barbaresco wrangled the disparate flavors together.



I don't know what to call the next course except the best one of the evening. The menu called it a "crouton with a "Robiola" cheese and black pepper stew sauce and honey." Think of it as an open-faced bacon egg mc muffin without the egg. That's it exactly, except that it had honey drizzled over it. The sweet, salty, crunchy mouthful of goodness was gone all too quickly.



That allowed me to linger over the oldest and best of the vertical wine flight we enjoyed with dinner. The 1985 Barbaresco DOCG by Produttori del Barbaresco was the pinnacle of the decades of wine we'd been tasting. Beginning with the drinkable 2006 Orello Barbaresco DOCG by Cascina Morassino, the flight built slowly through a 1999 Bric Balen Barbaresco DOCG by Moccagatta, and a 1996 Camp Gros Barbaresco DOCG by Tenuta Cisa Asinari to really display the depth of flavor and quality the region's top wine is known for. Taken as a whole, the Barbaresco wines definitely did not disappoint.



No meal would be complete without a dessert. Here the menu description failed completely. The “cream pudding and stewed pears with zabayone cream” neglects to mention the variety of the pear whose subtle flavor was enhanced in a wine bath, then served still half crunchy with a rich silky vanilla cream. A chilled and sweetly delicious muscato (La Caudrina Moscato d’ Asti DOCG by Romano Dogliotti) drew more flavor (if that’s possible) out of the warm fruit. I liked that it wasn’t too sweet, and that all the elements of the course melded perfectly, as a dessert course should. You want your guests to leave the table with the memory of perfection still on their palate. The “cream pudding and stewed pears” didprecisely that!

[Serafina Broadway Restaurant](#)



Thanks again to the The Italian Government Tourist Board and the North American Director, Riccardo Strano, for their kindness and generosity. I am always available for their invitations.

The Italian Government Tourist Board
www.italiantourism.com

Langhe & Roero "*the land of truffles and Barbaresco*"

www.langheroero.it

NOTE: For a dinner in New York City I have to close my bookshop around 2:30 in the afternoon, shoot home to change into slacks and a jacket, and drive 50 minutes to the Poughkeepsie Metro North train station for a 107 minute ride to Grand Central Station. I arrive about 6:30. By the time I get back home it is 3 AM. Total roundtrip cost is approximately \$40 (plus lost business.)

RICHARD FRISBIE is published twice a month to Gather Essentials: Food. It is a food junkie's take on growing, raising, preparing and - above all else - eating food. Together we'll explore the trends, addictions, equipment and regional specialties that make up the sometimes mundane and sometimes sublime cooking and dining experience. You can keep up with my other postings and Gather activity by joining my Gather network -- I look forward to hearing from you.

You can read all of my articles <http://rfrisbie.gather.com/> or find them with those of the other Food Correspondents, plus celebrity chef content and plenty of other Foodies at <http://foodtalk.gather.com>

BIO - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE Publications, GoNomad, Globalfoodie and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.

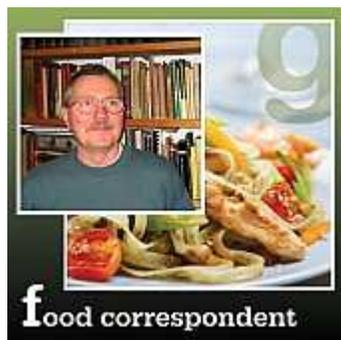
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Comments: 30

[Katrina Hall](#) Nov 21, 2009, 4:21pm EST

Yum! Another delicious evening described beautifully, Richard! I hope you sent it to the Italian Tourism group - clearly they could use a new translator for that aromatic menu.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 21, 2009, 4:37pm EST

I did think about offering, not to translate from Italian - I can't do that - but to dress up their translations. Good idea (especially after complaining about their translation!) Thanks!

[Linda K.](#) Nov 21, 2009, 4:41pm EST

Wow! I had many "firsts" in Italy..Barola, panacotta, truffles and spinach sauteed with garlic and raisins. I LOVE Italy. BTW, I thought you didn't like dessert ?-) What a wonderful evening.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 21, 2009, 4:50pm EST

I'll always eat a little fruit for dessert (shrug) HA!

Thanks Linda - glad you liked it. My first Barola (also a Piemonte wine) was at last years truffle dinner - fantastic! When we talk about Italy, we talk about food.

[Sonia M.](#) Nov 22, 2009, 11:47pm EST

OMG....each dish sounded even better than the previous if that is at all possible...the flan sounds to die for, Richard. I KNOW I was Italian in another lifetime....amo tutto italiano

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 27, 2009, 10:32am EST

I think we are all Italian when we sit down at the dinner table - thanks Sonia!

[Sonia M.](#) Nov 27, 2009, 12:12pm EST

;-) You're probably right.

[Digital Diva S.](#) Nov 24, 2009, 9:34am EST

Oh my, everything looked and sounded delicious. What a treat to look at and I'm sure a treat to taste.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 27, 2009, 10:33am EST

See, taste, and smell - the dinner has all my senses working overtime. Glad you liked it Di!

[Dorine H.](#) Nov 27, 2009, 1:10am EST

Your writing is always a joy to read, for both subject and style.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 27, 2009, 10:34am EST

Dorine, you are so sweet, Thanks! It is good to see you here on gather again.

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:09pm EST

The description of "flan with leeks and toasted nuts in a 'toma' cheese fondue" does not do it justice. I am drooling! This is an incredible description. This is as far as I've gotten...omg. Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:20pm EST

You should have been there!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:11pm EST

"crouton with a "Robiola" cheese and black pepper stew sauce and honey."

Ohhhhhh someone please fan me - I am about to pass out...this sounds so yummy and I'm visualizing this whole dinner - of course, Ivana is Ivana but the rest of the crew sound divine...skids and all...but the dinner omg - each of these dishes have me reading with my mouth wide open...more...Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:19pm EST

not too over-the-top yet? read on . . .

You know how much fun I have at these events, but I have more reliving the meal as I write about it!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:14pm EST

The "cream pudding and stewed pears with zabayone cream" neglects to mention the variety of the pear whose subtle flavor was enhanced in a wine bath, then served still half crunchy with a rich silky vanilla cream.

"keys covered with drool"...Richard, why do you do this to me - a wine bath - oh now that does sound good - hummm this is a sensual post here...silky vanilla cream...sounding pretty good - Verrrrrrrrrrrrrry good, in fact...now, how do I make this with what's in my house right now>! Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:18pm EST

Dry whole wheat toast - it is the only safe thing to eat after a day or so of extravagance called Thanksgiving!

Your enthusiasm and exuberance are so infectious - I thank you for being!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:23pm EST

My dear - you are right I should have been there - but I was there - I am always wherever I read - just a few weeks later - what's time anyway when it comes to good food - we are still making delicacies from old recipes so I can be "there" whenever my palate dances to one of these lovely things and I want to thank YOU for so much. I need to write an article about the things I've actually and seriously honestly (no skid b.s.) from you...more on that later. I'll just surprise you someday! Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:28pm EST

When I'm actually in Piemonte eating this food when it is local, scoping out the home of the Slow Food movement, I'll think of you and raise a glass to your good fortune. Thanks so much, Mariana.

[donna f.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:21pm EST

I so enjoy dining vicariously through you, Richard. The meal looks fabulous.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 1:29pm EST

There is still a danger of too many high calorie words consumed, but it is safer to read me than actually join me at the table. Thanks for the kind words, Donna.

[David C.](#) Nov 28, 2009, 8:19pm EST

OK Richard, next time I read something about a truffle dinner in Italy I want it to be an invitation!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 28, 2009, 8:33pm EST

Ditto on the wine tasting in Boston!

Seriously - I'm allowed to invite someone who is a published food & wine writer, both to the NYC truffle dinners and to the Italian events.

I MEAN Italian events in Italy.

[Kathryn E.](#) Dec 6, 2009, 3:27am EST

Wow, the food looks fabulous and Ivana's hair color is just perfect. ...

[Richard Frisbie](#) Dec 6, 2009, 8:37am EST

Thanks Kathryn - she looks fabulous in that photo and so does the food - but while I tasted the food, I never got closer to her than that shot. The room was too crowded, and while my vantage was perfect, my mobility was not. too bad . . .

[Diana Raabe](#) Dec 7, 2009, 7:42pm EST

Worth every penny! The dinner must have been amazing - what an array (and combination) of flavors. I'm saving notes on the wines, too.

When I read the title, I did not think you meant THE Ivana - but how fun!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Dec 7, 2009, 8:06pm EST

THE Ivana - and the combination of flavors was amazing! Thanks Diana!

[Mariana T.](#) Dec 13, 2009, 3:00pm EST

This post has been featured in Chateaux Gatheraux along with one of your other fabulous articles. Thank you so much Richard. Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Dec 13, 2009, 3:28pm EST

sweet - Thank you so much Mariana.

[Valley Natural Foods Co-op](#) Dec 22, 2009, 3:31pm EST

Gotta love the Italians! Wonderful article and scrumptious photos!

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