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Silver Club July 2026

Masseria Li Veli 2023 “Passamente” Salice Salentino Celino, San Marco, Italy

About the wine: Passamante is 100% Negroamaro from Masseria Li Veli, a restored 19th-century estate on Puglia's Salento peninsula, purchased in 1999 by the Falvo family (previously of Tuscany's Avignonesi). The wine is named for "Bosco Passamante," the pine-and-myrtle wood next to the vineyard, historically known as a spot where secret lovers snuck off together — hence the name, roughly "pass the lover." Somewhat racy provenance for a \$21 bottle. Aged six months in barrique, it's Li Veli's entry-level expression of the grape that defines the region.

About the Region: Salice Salentino sits deep in Puglia's heel, where the Adriatic and Ionian seas nearly meet and the sun does not hold back. Negroamaro — literally "black bitter" — is the local hero grape, thriving in the calcareous clay soils and heat that would wilt more delicate varieties. It's historically a workhorse grape for hearty table wine, though estates like Li Veli have spent the last few decades convincing everyone it deserves more respect than that.

Tasting Notes: Vibrant ruby in the glass, with plush red cherry, ripe plum, and blackberry up front, joined by Mediterranean herbs, dried rose, and a touch of licorice from the oak. Medium-to-full bodied, silky, and ripe, with gentle tannins and bright acidity keeping things lively rather than jammy. Approachable and easy drinking, but with enough spice and structure to keep it interesting past the first sip.

Food Pairing: Built for rustic Italian food: eggplant parmigiana, bucatini in red sauce, or grilled meats all work well. It also loves aged sheep's cheese and hearty stews — anything with a little fat and a little funk to meet its fruit and spice.

Bernabeleva 2025 “Camino De Navaherreros” Vino Tinto Madrid, Spain

About the wine: Bernabeleva — meaning "bear's forest" — sits in San Martín de Valde Iglesias, west of Madrid, founded in 1923 and revived in 2006 by great-grandchildren Juan Diez Bulnes and Santiago Matallana Bulnes. Camino de Navaherreros is their entry-level red, blended from Garnacha (with a touch of Tempranillo and other native grapes) across all estate holdings and aged in large neutral oak vats — essentially the estate's warm handshake before you meet the fancier single-vineyard bottlings.

About the Region: The vineyards sit at six hundred–830 meters in the Sierra de Gredos, on decomposed granite soils that keep old-vine Garnacha lean and lively rather than jammy. High-altitude, biodynamically farmed, and increasingly hailed as Spain's most exciting up-and-coming zone — Gredos Garnacha is basically the anti-Priorat: pale, perfumed, and refreshingly restrained.

Tasting Notes: Bright, almost fuchsia in color, with aromas of wild berries, rose petals, and dried herbs over a stony mineral core. Medium-bodied, with fine tannins and lively acidity that keep it snappy rather than syrupy — proof that Garnacha doesn't have to shout to be heard.

Food Pairing: This wine's bright acidity and herbal lift make it a genuine chameleon at the table. Classic options include roast chicken, grilled steak, or lamb, but don't stop there: it's equally happy alongside mushroom risotto, goat cheese, or grilled vegetables, and its savory, peppery edge holds up surprisingly well against spiced fare — think chorizo-stuffed peppers, paprika-rubbed roasted fish, or even a mild Indian-style lamb curry. It's also a fine partner for charcuterie boards and tapas spreads, which feels appropriate for a wine that's essentially Madrid's best-kept secret. And if all else fails, it's genuinely happy on its own with nothing but a snack and good company — the wine equivalent of low maintenance.

Cantina del Morellino 2024 Cala Civetta Vermentino Scansano, Italy

About the wine: Cala Civetta comes from Cantina del Morellino, a true cooperative near the Tuscan coast where profits are shared among 170 participating families, each farming modest plots averaging just three hectares. Sustainable farming is the guiding principle here — this is Tuscany's answer to a neighborhood potluck if the potluck produced award-worthy wine. It's an unpretentious, affordable bottling that punches well above its price point.

About the region: The vineyards sit just inland from the Tuscan coastline in the Maremma, a sun-drenched stretch better known for reds like Morellino di Scansano but increasingly proving its worth for crisp, coastal whites too. Vermentino here benefits from sea breezes and mineral-rich soils, giving it the kind of salty freshness that makes you feel like you're already halfway to the beach.

Tasting notes: Pale and lively, with bright citrus and green apple leading the way, backed by subtle floral notes and a distinct saline edge. Light-to-medium bodied with lively acidity and a clean, refreshing finish — this is a wine that doesn't overthink itself, and neither should you. A porch pounder if there ever was one!

Food: Vermentino was practically built for seafood, and this bottle doesn't disappoint: think grilled shrimp, steamed clams, or a simple whole branzino with lemon and olive oil. Its saline minerality also makes it a natural with oysters or a crudo platter. Beyond the sea, it's equally at home with light pastas (a lemon-herb linguine or pasta al pesto), fresh cheeses like burrata or ricotta, and summer salads with a citrus vinaigrette. Cured meats and antipasti work nicely too — prosciutto, a simple bruschetta, or marinated olives all play well against the wine's brightness. This is a wine for warm-weather eating, ideally outdoors, ideally with more napkins than the meal strictly requires.