



The double arcades of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II shopping mall, Milan



Sarah Lane

My Milan

Italy's fashion capital and arguably its most dynamic city, Milan has plenty of appeal for food and wine lovers, thanks to its wealth of tasty local dishes and a burgeoning wine scene, says Sarah Lane

WHAT I LOVE most about Milan is its multi-faceted character, each neighbourhood having its own well-defined personality: villagey Brera, futuristic Porta Nuova and the exclusive designer boutiques of the Quadrilatero d'Oro. I like to stroll in the Navigli canal district while the waterside cafés are still quiet before the early evening rush and when bars in the city – especially here – are loaded with buffets for the daily aperitivo ritual. The city's pulsing heart is Piazza del Duomo, dominated by the spectacular Gothic cathedral; don't miss the experience of walking among its thousands of statues and pinnacles on the roof terraces.

Fashion yes, football maybe (San Siro is Italy's largest stadium), but Milan isn't the first destination that springs to mind when it comes to food and wine. Yet the city has a rich culinary culture that's enjoying a vigorous renaissance. One story links a Milanese speciality, the saffron-flavoured risotto alla Milanese, to the cathedral. A 16th-century stained-

glass window artist, fond of adding saffron to his colours, joked he'd even put it on food. So he did, for guests at the wedding of the master glazier's daughter, and the fragrant golden-yellow rice proved an unexpected hit.

Milan has never really had a strong wine identity, but things are changing, with new wine bars appearing all the time. Italy's first city-based winery, Cantina Urbana, has recently opened in the Navigli canal district, where you can enjoy organised boat trips and find canal-side antiques stalls on the last Sunday of every month.

Although Cantina Urbana doesn't cultivate its own vines, one celebrated former resident, Leonardo da Vinci, was so attached to his city-centre vineyard that it was the only property mentioned in his will. Happily, the first wines produced from the replanted vines will be ready this year, the 500th anniversary of his death – numerous events and exhibitions are being held around the city.

About 60km south of Milan, the vast Oltrepò Pavese DOC area (with

about 13,500ha under vine, one of Italy's largest) still suffers from years of having put quantity over quality, although recent changes are bringing admirable results. The star of Oltrepò Pavese is the Pinot Nero grape, which finds the cool nights and warm days ideal. Three-quarters of Italy's Pinot Nero grows here and local winemakers enjoy its versatility, making refined reds as well as traditional-method sparkling wines, still whites and rosés.

Also featuring on Milan wine lists, the Nebbiolo-based wines (including late-harvest sforzato) from the terraces of Valtellina are widely considered the region's most noble, while the Franciacorta sparklers need no introduction for wine lovers.

May is an ideal month to visit for wine and food lovers, with Milano Food City (3-9 May 2019) and the annual Cantine Aperte winery open days (25-26 May 2019).

Sarah Lane is a freelance travel, food and wine journalist

MY TOP 10 IN MILAN

1 Cantina Urbana

Visit Italy's first city winery to try its newly released 2018 Naviglio Rosso (Barbera and Croatina) or Bianco (100% Riesling). Other wines include the intense and characterful Tranatt Rosso (Syrah-Barbera-Teroldego) and the spicy, lesser-known native from Molise, Tintilia. You can fill, cork and label your own bottle from the current wines on tap, book a blending experience or just relax at the wine bar. www.cantinaurbana.it

Photograph: Stefano Politti Markovina/Alamy



Ratanà

2 Trattoria Madonnina

Reassuring home cooking aromas and a cheerful atmosphere at this historic

trattoria dating from 1721. Take a seat at one of the check-clothed tables among historic photos and prints or under the leafy courtyard canopy, then choose from dishes such as cotoletta alla Milanese (breaded bone-in veal cutlet), pairing it perhaps with the week's showcased wine. [+39 02 8940 9089](tel:+390289409089)

3 Ratanà

An excellent contemporary eatery set in an art deco villa, with patio tables and >

a backdrop of the futuristic Porta Nuova district across the park. Responsibly sourced ingredients are transformed into dishes such as trout with barley, fennel and lemon, or traditional favourites including ossobuco with saffron-flavoured risotto alla Milanese. Don't miss the creamy mascarpone, orange and beetroot dessert. The mostly Italian wine list includes about 600 bins. www.ratana.it

4 Cantine Isola

There's a timeless and welcoming feel to this small wine bar, which stands at the heart of Milan's pedestrianised Chinatown and has been selling wine since 1896. Proprietor Luca Sarais will open anything for just a glass, even a top St-Emilion or Amarone, and encourages his vast and varied clientele to try different and lesser-known wines from the hundreds of mainly Italian and European bottles available. www.cantineisola.com

5 Leonardo's Vineyard

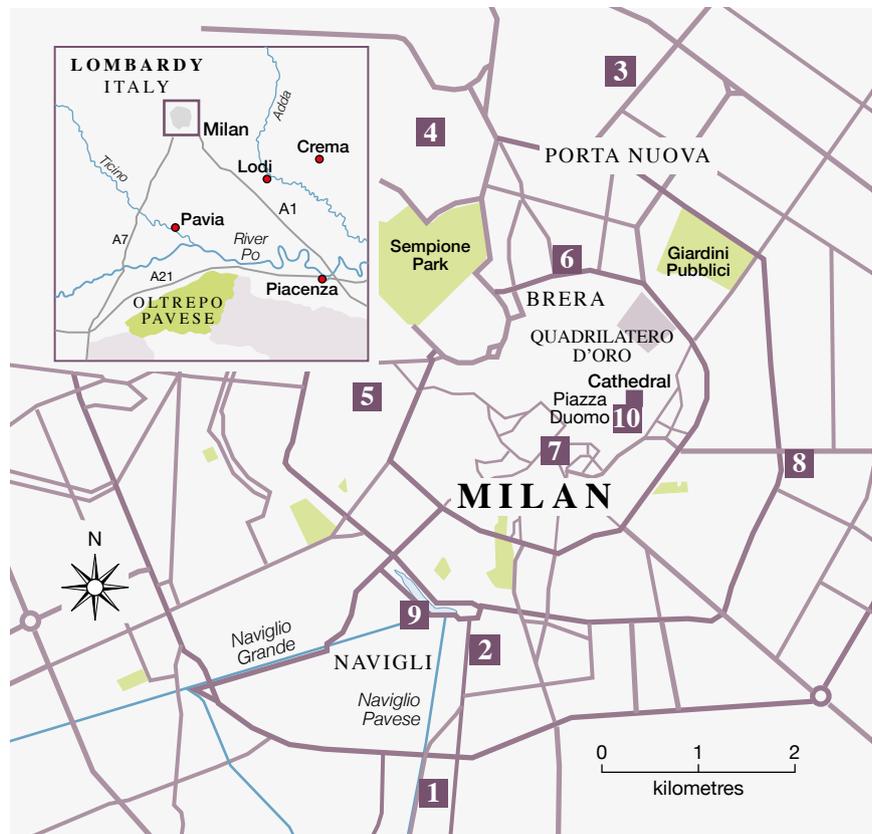
A visit to the vineyard once owned by Leonardo da Vinci (opposite the Santa Maria delle Grazie church which hosts his celebrated mural, *The Last Supper*) is an evocative experience. And while the vines, replanted in 2015, cover a substantially smaller area than they did back in da Vinci's time, and the wines are made by Oltrepò winery Castello di Luzzano, they are the same variety that the Renaissance genius grew, Malvasia di Candia Aromatica. www.vignadileonardo.com

6 N'Ombra de Vin

This atmospheric basement wine bar, set in the 16th-century Augustine refectory of the San Marco church, has original flooring and ceiling vaults as well as an ancient sarcophagus incorporated into the bar. There's a vast collection of wines (more than 3,000), plus a small and varied menu with such dishes as smoked tuna tartare with avocado and delicious Italian and French cheeses. www.nombradevin.it



Cantine Isola



Map: Maggie Neilson

7 La Vecchia Latteria

Hearty dishes such as macaroni with radicchio and gorgonzola, cauliflower fritters and aubergine parmigiana are on the menu at this long-standing vegetarian trattoria. Order a mixed special for a generous taste of everything. Open lunchtimes only, it's highly popular and the tiny white-tiled interior, a reminder of the site's former role as a dairy, has an informal and homely air. [See Facebook](#)

8 La Porta del Vino

The one-stop-shop for getting to know the Lombardy wine scene is run by the regional branch of Italy's wine tourism movement (MTV) and occupies a former customs house. Book for a tasting, come along to one of the regular themed events or producer presentations or simply pop in (3pm-6pm) for advice on winery visits. Book online to join a Saturday tour of Oltrepò, Valcalepio or Franciacorta wineries. www.laportadelvino.com

9 El Brellin

Housed in an 18th-century building with a warm yellow colour scheme and beamed ceilings, on the picturesque Vicolo dei Lavandai ('washerwoman's corner'), this



Signorvino

is one of the Navigli district's more refined dining options. The restaurant menu focuses on Milanese specialities including cassoeula (pork and cabbage stew) with polenta, rustin negàa (veal with bacon) or crispy fried risotto al salto. The ground floor, canal-side café hosts live music on Wednesday evenings. www.brellin.com

10 Signorvino

Spanning three floors and overlooking the decorative rear of the cathedral, the central Milan branch of this group of contemporary wine-bar eateries is a good option for a break from sightseeing or shopping. There's a fresh, upbeat look to the place and an impressive range of wines from across Italy to buy or enjoy here. The all-day menu of platters, salads and hot dishes includes pairing tips. www.signorvino.com **D**