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**29 JANUARY 2010**

Italy is the biggest wine producing country on the planet, producing more wine than France, largely due to a tradition of making wine that runs for the entire length of the country.

Up in the far north, wine areas like Trentino and Alto-Adige share borders with Austria and Germany, way up amongst the Italian Alps. Grapes like Riesling and Gewurztraminer grow here, making similar wines too.

In the very far south, in Puglia in the 'heel' of Italy and on the island of Sicily, the climate is baking hot and Mediterranean, so big, full-bodied reds are produced.

In between, almost every style of wine is possible in Italy, including famous names like Chianti, Barolo and Amarone. The result is a varied range of high quality wines that are highly sought after. Here are Tom Cannavan's top picks of Italian wines.

**Piccini, Chianti Superiore 2006, Italy, priced at £7.99 from Sainsbury's (but £5.99 until February 9th 2010)**

Chianti is arguably Italy's most famous wine, from the rolling hills of Tuscany around the cities of Florence and Siena. Made from the Sangiovese grape and given a short time ageing in barrels, this comes from the very large but still family-owned Piccini, in existence for more than 120 years.

With spicy hints and flavours of cherry jam, this pick goes well with lamb, but also roast pork, or meatballs in a tomato sauce.

**Italian wines: a touch of class**

Wine expert Tom Cannavan explains what it is about Italian wine that makes it so special.

29 January 2010 17:19 PM

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