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A Taste Worth The Wait: One Step Beyond A Good Wine, Villa Bellentani Balsamic

By James Zeller

Just a little beyond a good wine is an aged vinegar. In Modena it's revered as balsamico. Gourmet chefs seem to have embraced the allure of balsamic vinegar in the last two decades, but it was tradition passed down in Italy from father to son over centuries that resulted in the large scale acceptance of the finest vinegar condiments the world has ever known.

"Italy, and the spring and first love all together should suffice to make the gloomiest person happy." - Bertrand Russell

The strains of classic Italian folk music are heard in the distance as the doors open on something new, yet something altogether regal. The villa in Carpi is one of Italy's national historic landmarks and the Villa Bellentani sits as one of its crown jewels. Built in the 18th century, the Villa Bellentani harkens to an era of rich heritage and rural sensibilities. Now, this same villa is a perfect blend or uncommon historic beauty coupled with state of the art facilities for aging balsamic vinegar for yet another appreciative generation.

It's plain to see that the world has discovered a special love affair with Modena balsamic vinegar, yet it is also true that two other facts are equally evident. 1) There doesn't seem to be enough quality balsamic vinegar to meet growing world demand and, 2) while inferior vinegars are easily obtained they spoil the pristine image and taste of true, aged balsamic vinegar. The Italian producer Villa Bellentani is making efforts to offer some of Modena's best vinegar, yet preserve the integrity of the balsamico heritage.

It was with a deep respect for the thousand year history of balsamic vinegar that Italian vineyard growers join with producers at Villa Bellentani to develop quality aged balsamic vinegar that holds to the timeless traditions of Italy's finest producers.

Americans discovered balsamic vinegar in the 1980's, but it was tradition passed down from father to son over many centuries that resulted in the `overnight success' of the finest vinegars the world has ever known.

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The same country that brought you such notable artists as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci as part of the Renaissance also provides a culinary artistry that offers incomparable quality and taste – the wonderfully adaptable aged balsamic vinegar, aceto balsamico di Modena.

It is certain that such taste has value far beyond the purchase price. Long standing Italian history comes into focus when the balsamic vinegars of Villa Bellentani are tasted and found worthy to attain the ranks of the 'world's finest'.

Producers around the world have attempted to duplicate the Modena balsamic vinegar, but few pay regard to the tradition and taste that find customers willing to pay hundreds and even thousands of dollars for well aged blends. It is a shame to see something so precious treated in such a common way by many who will claim a product of comparable quality. In truth, much of what sells as balsamic vinegar is little more than common vinegar mixed with caramelized brown sugar. Yet in Carpi there's a wooden cask of balsamic vinegar that has aged for more than a decade, and one day some of the

precious liquid inside could find its way to your table. Your eyes will close and you take in an appreciative breath, for the taste was worth the wait.

The pace of life in Carpi is a world removed from most urban cultures. Perhaps it is that slower pace that is beneficial when you discover the difference in well aged balsamic vinegar in the grand tradition of Italy. Villa Bellentani a family estate producer seeks to fill that void.

James Zeller writes for gourmet gift related websites and blogs. Here is a selection of gourmet gifts that he found, culinary gourmet gifts.

<http://www.cruets.com>

Marinades, Sauces And Dressings: Balsamic Vinegar Compliments More Than You May Realize

By James Zeller

A balsamic vinaigrette dressing can turn a nominal green salad into a refreshing mixed fresh Spring salad with a zest of Italian flair. Using aged balsamic adds a bit of gourmet into anyone's kitchen. Send a bottle to a friend for a gift and you may turn their culinary world upside down.

"The keynote to happiness within the four walls that make any home is plain, wholesome, well cooked food, attractively served." — Louis P. De Gouy

Balsamic Vinegar has an almost other worldly flavor that enhances nearly any food it touches. You can see a visible change on the face of someone who is trying Italian balsamico for the first time. Their face is transformed by awe and delight.

Cost and Quality

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The cost of balsamic vinegar is tempered by the fact that a little bit goes a long way. Typical recipes use little more than ¼ cup of balsamic vinegar, so the cost of the bottle is generally offset by the long-term usefulness and good taste of the product.

Cooking Tips

You may be interested in knowing that balsamic vinegar is used for much more than an ingredient in salad dressings. For instance, many will no longer eat fresh strawberries if they can't apply a bit of aged balsamic vinegar.

If you are a fan of fresh vegetables you should know that balsamic vinegar can make a perfect marinade for grilled veggies such as bell peppers and eggplant. That same marinade can be used when grilling fish and chicken. Red meats can also gain a complimentary taste using an Italian balsamic like Villa Bellentani.

When cooking with balsamic vinegar it is important to note that it may be best to apply the vinegar after the dish is fully cooked. Adding balsamic vinegar to your favorite dishes will, in fact, enhance the flavor, but heat mellows the taste and may be best applied after the cooking is finished.

When used in a balsamic vinaigrette, the blending of this famed Italian vinegar and extra virgin olive oil results in an incredible accent to fresh seafood as well as asparagus and artichokes.

There are even exclusive ice creams that use balsamic vinegar to create a one of kind desert. Drizzling a small amount of thick balsamic vinegar over vanilla ice cream is a popular dessert in Europe.

Supply is Shorter than Demand

It may surprise you to know that only 3,000 gallons of Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale balsamic vinegar is released to the public each year. This has brought about a new group of modestly priced balsamic vinegar that varies widely in price. The reduction in price may generally be attributed to limited aging. It is this type of balsamic vinegar that may be best suited to marinades, sauces and dressings.

Beware of the very inexpensive varieties due to the fact that they are often developed using caramelized brown sugar (to add color and sweetness) and common vinegar. They may also include preservatives that many are allergic to.

Balsamic Vinaigrette Made Easy

Should you desire a homemade bottle of balsamic vinaigrette the instructions are as follows:

One part balsamic vinegar Four to five parts olive oil Season and pepper to taste A teaspoon of mustard (Dijon is often preferred) per half cup of dressing

Additional Ingredients

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The following should be used only when desired.

Chives and sage - or other favorite complimentary herbs Finely chopped shallot of ginger root

(Please note that many find garlic to be incompatible with balsamic vinegar.)

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<http://www.cruets.com>

Online gourmet gift shop has oil and vinegar gifts. A selection of kitchen gifts can be found here.



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