

66° Anno

N. *es*

L'ECO DELLA STAMPA

(L'Argo della Stampa: 1912 - L'Informatore della Stampa: 1947)

UFFICIO DI RITAGLI DA GIORNALI E RIVISTE
FONDATO NEL 1901 - C.C.I.A. MILANO N. 77394

Direttori: Umberto e Ignazio Frugiuele

VIA GIUSEPPE COMPAGNONI, 28

MILANO

Telefono 723.333

Casella Postale 3549 - Telegr.: Ecostampa - Milano
Conto Corrente Postale 3/2674

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MILAN DAILY AMERICAN - MILANO

11 610. 1968

The lowdown on Italian wines from Italy's top gastronome

By JUDITH HARRIS
Staff Reporter

ROME, June 10 — My father, who is an intrepid vacation traveller with an absolute non-talent for languages other than his own, maintains that he can get by in any country by learning only two phrases: how how much does it cost, and how to order wine.

For Italy, his entire vocabulary is "Quanto costa?" and "Un quartino di bianco secco." (He occasionally says "merci" at the end of the conversation, like a tip.)

Italy's top gastronome, Luigi Veronelli, would turn up his nose at this, for Veronelli maintains that wines are important enough not only to study and enjoy, but

even, occasionally, to adapt the food to the wine rather than vice-versa.

In his new book, "Il Vino Giusto" (The Right Wine), published by Mondadori, Veronelli sets down four cardinal rules for wines.

First wines should move from light to heavy during the meal, with the progression white-red-white. If this does not accord with the dishes, then the order of the food may be changed.

Secondly, water is not for drinking at meals, but for sipping between wine courses, along with a good chew of bread, to clean out the mouth in preparation for the next wine event.

Thirdly, some wines should never be served with any food. Aperitif wines — ver-

bouths, etc. — are one type. Then there are special wines just "for mediation," as Veronelli puts it.

Much more complex is the last rule, that some food should never be eaten with wine.

Wines should never be served, he says, with citrus fruits, consomme' (which should have a touch of some fine wine in it at any rate), fatty fish, ice cream, salmon and food with a strong lemon or vinegar-based sauce.

Chocolate dishes (souffles, tortes) can be eaten only with champagne, never with any old wine.

The marriage of wines and foods will be more harmonious if both come from the

same area. The climate and soil which produce both will automatically help to bind the two: risotto milanese, for instance, would go with a "fiery red country wine" from Oltrepo such as Buttafuoco.

On the other hand, a certain promiscuity is occasionally acceptable: the same risotto mixes ideally with a Chateau-Chalon.

For frutti di mare, served raw and with no lemon or pepper, he suggests a Muscadet or the Capri white Hemingway so loved (if the real thing can still be found); for figs and prosciutto, a Salento rose; for a heavier, traditional Italian antipasto, a Rosé d'Anjou sec.