Does Made in Italy still matter to us?

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 3 Giugno 2026



An article on Islands.com reviews six New England wineries by systematically comparing them to Italian wine regions – from Piedmont to Trentino, from Tuscany to Friuli. The piece reveals a stark paradox: abroad, Italy remains the gold standard for quality and authenticity in wine culture, while at home we increasingly take that reputation for granted and invest little in protecting it.

It has been a long time since anyone has seriously talked about the value of the “Made in Italy” brand. I am not sure whether this is coincidence or the result of a growing distrust in a label that, for a long period, we considered perhaps the key factor behind the success of our products in international markets – and the essential ingredient for projecting our image to the world.

I came to this reflection after reading an article published a few days ago on an American travel outlet (Islands.com), titled “6 New England Wineries That Feel Straight Out Of Italy.” It is exactly what the title promises: a review of six wineries scattered across Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island, presented to American readers through a single, recurring frame of reference. Italy.

And this was no passing rhetorical nod. The hills of Vermont “recall Piedmont.” A sparkling wine from Massachusetts is “reminiscent of the bubbly varieties of Italy’s Veneto region.” A Connecticut white is compared to Seyval Blanc “found on the hills of Lombardy.” New Hampshire promises to transport visitors “to the gradient hills of Trentino-Alto Adige.” Maine evokes a Moscato d’Asti. Rhode Island boasts wines “reminiscent of a Tuscan vintage” and, as if that were not enough, a Cabernet Franc compared to a Super Tuscan. The closing note is anthology-worthy: in Providence, you can take gondola rides, “Venetian” style, just in case the message had not landed yet.

Six wineries, six places, six different stories, one single cultural reference used to give them all prestige: ours.

The Italian paradox

After reading the article, I asked myself what its real message was, and one word came to mind immediately: reputation. There is no doubt that this is a surgical piece of marketing – written by an American journalist for an American audience – that takes one enormous thing for granted: that evoking Italy automatically communicates quality, experience, authenticity, refinement, slowness, landscape, conviviality. This is the brand in its purest form. The same brand that we, at home, struggle even to recognise as such.

While New England presents itself to the world dressed as Piedmont, in Italy we continue to act as though our food and

wine heritage were a natural given, something that exists by virtue of itself and requires no storytelling. The result is plain to see: extraordinary wineries with outdated websites, denominazione territories that cannot communicate the difference between one sub-zone and another even to already motivated tourists, consortia producing brochures while America shoots vertical videos on TikTok, tasting experiences still organised with the logic of a 1990s guided tour. **The narrative of "they already know us, they'll choose us anyway" is a complacency that costs us a larger market share every year, because what is left untold today simply does not exist tomorrow.**

In the meantime, in Vermont, a winery called Domaine La Garagista sells "apero in wine cave" experiences and "alla piemontese" dinners. In the United States, the word "apero" means nothing. It does not matter. It works because it sounds Italian.

What this article tells us

For this reason, I believe this article tells us three things above all.

The first: the perceived value of Made in Italy in food and wine holds, and in fact grows as an international benchmark for quality. It is no longer just Tuscany, no longer just Chianti, today an American travel journalist knows how to distinguish and cite Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Montepulciano, Asti, Lombardy. This is a broadening of knowledge that, fifteen years ago, belonged only to a handful of sommeliers.

The second: we know how to build this differentiation into our products, but we do not know how to transfer it into storytelling. Wine tourists who come to Italy still too often find a fragmented offering, poorly signposted, with no integration between winery, dining, accommodation, and

landscape. American, New Zealand, and South African wine roads were designed from scratch after literally studying our model. The point is that they apply it better.

The third, the most uncomfortable: **those who imitate us are surpassing us in the ability to build experience.** An Adirondack chair in front of the hills of Maine, a glass in hand, and a well-told story, that is a finished tourism product. Our hills, objectively more beautiful, remain, too often, merely a landscape, and only rarely an experience.

The proposal

No new national plan is needed. What is needed is to stop treating territorial communication as a residual activity, something done with whatever budget is left over.

Three concrete things come to mind, actionable immediately.

First: give consortia genuine storytelling units of three, rather than press offices. The difference between the two is worth millions of euros per year in organic international visibility. New England is not richer than us in history. It is richer in storytellers.

Second: integrate the wine supply chain with food and hospitality, and stop treating them as separate silos. The "Domaine La Garagista" model — winery, dining, event, storytelling, direct sales — is exactly what our small producers could do better than anyone, if only administrative constraints stopped turning it into an obstacle course.

Third: study seriously how the rest of the world talks about us. That American article is not a compliment — it is a map. It tells us which regions carry credible reputations — brand equity, in industry terms (Piedmont, Tuscany, Veneto, Trentino, Friuli, Lombardy) and which still do not. It tells us which words work (rolling hills, sun-drenched, family-owned, generations). It tells us what experiences the Anglo-

Saxon market expects to have when it visits us and too often does not find.

We can keep marvelling, with a hint of good-natured pride, every time someone abroad mimics us. Or we can finally start taking ourselves seriously. New England has already chosen who it wants to look like. It is up to us to decide whether we want to remain the original, or whether we are content to be someone else’s reference point.

Key points

1. **The Made in Italy food and wine brand still holds strong internationally** as a benchmark for quality.
2. **American communicators use Italian regions as credibility markers** more effectively than Italians do.
3. **Italian wine territories lack integrated storytelling connecting wineries**, dining, hospitality and landscape.
4. **Competitors abroad are surpassing Italy in turning beautiful landscapes into polished tourist experiences**.
5. **The solution requires dedicated storytelling teams**, integrated supply chains, and close study of how Italy is perceived abroad.