Untold Italy Episode 290: Modena's Black Gold - The Art of Traditional Balsamic Vinegar

What Italian food product is described as black gold? This delicious luxury condiment can be served with cheese or gelato and it's only made in a very small area near the city of Modena. Listen on to discover why traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena is nothing like the balsamic vinegar most of us know.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week, your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy Clarke:
Buongiorno, welcome friends. Today we're going deep into the Emilia region to discuss one of my favorite Italian food products, but first, today is a special milestone day and episode because I was just checking through some statistics on the podcast and realised that we've now crossed a big threshold. Drum roll, please - so far, there have been over 5 million listens of the Untold Italy podcast episodes. Wow! That's a mindblowing number and in fact a lot of people listening to my voice over many hours.

I really appreciate you all tuning in and supporting the show. Grazie, thank you. I know many of you have been listening to the show for many years and I so appreciate it and all the lovely messages you've sent through over the years from all corners and continents of the earth - even from India, South Korea and South Africa.

We've come a long way since our first episode in 2020 and never could I have imagined back then that I would be recording our 290th episode. There's been a lot of water under the bridge, lots of growth and learning and changes and now we even have an app where all the podcasts can be searched by topic and heard ad-free. It's all part of our goal to help you enjoy your time in Italy and seek out those hidden and special moments that keep you dreaming of your time there after many moons have passed.

Now, this week's episode was not planned when I knew about this celebration, but in fact, our guest today represents exactly what Untold Italy is all about. My beautiful friend and colleague Giulia Tamarri is back on the show to share one of the most uniquely Italian products that comes from the town where she lives.

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Part of my mission here at Untold Italy is not only to surface lesser-known places and experiences beyond the main tourist paths but also to shine a light on talented Italian women I've met along the way. Italy is a very traditional country where women have to fight that much harder to have their voices heard. This is compounded by the fact that most discussions about Italy and Italians that we hear or see in the English language media is predominantly fed by people who aren't Italian. I believe that we should hear a diversity of voices about all topics, but that it's especially important to hear from local people in the places that we visit.

So it's my absolute pleasure to welcome Giulia back on the show today to tell you all about the magic that is traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena.

Katy Clarke:
Bentornata Giulia. Welcome back to the Untold Italy podcast, my dear friend.

Giulia Tamarri:
Ciao, Katy. I'm so excited. Yes, I am back and I am actually excited to share a little bit about my area with you all.

Katy Clarke:
It's been a long time. I think it's been about a year since you've been on the podcast, Giulia. This is way too long.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah, I think actually, Katy. Yeah, it was maybe a year ago and it was just after I finished the Parmelier course, because if you remember, it was about the Parmigiano Reggiano topic and it was with my teacher back then. So, yeah, one year ago. Time flies.

Katy Clarke:
Oh my goodness, that was a great episode. Everyone should go back and listen to that one because it was fantastic. And now Giulia does come from the amazing area of Emilia Romagna, which is the home of Parmigiano Reggiano. And also the topic that we're talking about today, which is traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena. Giulia, I know you very well, but maybe some of our listeners don't know you so well, but could you please introduce yourself to everyone?

Giulia Tamarri:
Yes, of course. My name is Giulia and I am based in Emilia Romagna. I work for Katy on the Untold Italy tours, but I also have my little baby project, which is called Travel with Rezdora. And I offer tours of my, I would say, neighborhood area, which is the area between Modena and Bologna. So I really specialize in the unknown parts around these two cities mainly.

Katy Clarke:
Giulia is an excellent guide of her area because she's so passionate about it. And she's also a food ambassador for them, too, because she's an absolute joy and a legend in her area. And

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anyone that has been on tour with Giulia just knows how very special she is. We're very lucky to have her on the Untold Italy team. And I wanted to get Giulia on the call today to talk about balsamic vinegar because I think, you know, it's got a bit of an interesting reputation in English-speaking countries and it's probably a little bit sad because it's not what you think. Yeah, everyone thinks it's that bottle that you squirt on a salad, but this is a condiment that is steeped in tradition and it's got a beautiful history. And the process to make the traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena is very, very special. Giulia, can you give us a little bit of a background into balsamic vinegar and the history.

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, Katy, the funny part is that it's not only misunderstood by people not from Italy but also by people from Italy itself.

Katy Clarke:
Oh, no.

Giulia Tamarri:
Because what's really special about it - is that a traditional balsamic vinegar, it's so rare. And I will explain later why it's so rare that even people from Bologna don't know it as much. Okay. Or people from other regions. This is just crazy because traditional balsamic vinegar is made only and absolute only in the Modena area. So, only in this piece of land, which is exactly where I live, we keep this tradition alive. And I was just mentioning that traditional balsamic vinegar is rare. And actually it's the question that I always ask to the people, I make them taste.

Giulia Tamarri:
Have you ever tried a food that is at least 12 years old? The answer is "what? 12 years or months? Giulia, did you make a mistake?" And I'm like, no, no, no, no, no, I'm serious. We are talking about years, okay? And I'm saying minimum 12 years, Katy. So this is why obviously it's very unique. Most people also in Italy think of balsamic vinegar not as traditional balsamic vinegar. And I know it might sound confusing, but also on restaurants, on restaurant table, you would actually mainly find what's called Balsamico, which is what we call IGP Balsamico. We are talking about something different today, which is the DOP or PDO in English, traditional balsamic vinegar. So make sure that you go for that big word, traditional. I know it's confusing, but can I just explain what is mainly the difference?

Katy Clarke:
Go right ahead.

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, first of all, the taste and the consistency. The very first time you will, you will try traditional balsamic vinegar, you won't go back. Okay. In one of the podcasts, I was talking about the famous ricotta coming from the Parmigiano Reggiano. It's like, I never - it's not a coming back thing, you know, after you try that one, like, okay, bye. You know, that's the best

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ever. Sorry, I don't want to sound big-headed Katy here, but we always call Emilia-Romagna the foodie land. Okay? So for all the foodies listening to us, please trust Giulia on this one.

Giulia Tamarri:
Come and try the traditional balsamic vinegar. So basically, balsamic vinegar takes at least 12 years to, to be made up to 25 years, okay? And obviously, the taste is completely different and the consistency, we actually nickname it the black gold of Modena. The beauty of it is like when you taste wine, you know, so it's actually coming from grapes. So what's the only one and only ingredient of traditional balsamic is cooked must. The cooked must of grapes. So in Modena, if you have a vineyard, you go two ways. What do I do with my grapes? Do I go the path of wine, of vino, and obviously my area mainly Rambrusco, or do I go the path of traditional balsamic vinegar? Okay, so those, they select the cooked juice of the grapes. And there is a very special moment when we cook this must - grape must, which is October.

Giulia Tamarri:
So in October, because obviously it follows the season. Also, if you ever come to my village, which is called Spilamberto, the very first weekend of October, Katy, you would actually be able to attend our (pass me the expression) - Christmas. It's funny, because every village in Italy has a special fair. We in his pila, we have two special fairs. One about the balsamic vinegar, which I'm gonna tell you, and another one, which is called San Giovanni, our St. John's and we also have other traditions. We have loads of traditions.

Giulia Tamarri:
But let me go back to the very first weekend. So that's when we cook the grape must. And what do we do with this grape must? We put it into our set of barrels. Now, it's a little bit complicated, so let's pretend that, Katy, you win a set of barrels. Okay, so we start from scratch this year. What do we do? So, first of all, this set of barrels is called batteria. And normally a batteria has got minimum five barrels. Okay.

Giulia Tamarri:
Those five barrels are normally made of different types of wood because each wood would give a special flavor into the product. Normally, wood made for that is oak, chestnut, mulberry, juniper. I mean, these are the normal woods. If you went crazy and many people do that, they say "Okay, you know what? I really love cherry wood. I really like the flavor of cherries". So they might have a set of barrels made of only cherries, or maybe you like more of a herbal and balsamic taste.

Giulia Tamarri:
So you would only get the juniper one, which is very hard to get.

Katy Clarke:
Yes, that's very rare, isn't it?

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Giulia Tamarri:
And actually, if you ever taste the traditional made of only one barrel, you do feel the difference so much because it's completely different. Personally, Katy, I really love the cherry one because I have a little bit of a sweet tooth and I love cherries. So obviously, having a traditional balsamic made of that - it's so different. You really feel it. And so basically, going back, so Katy won a set of barrels. So this year, me and Katy go and cook the grape must. Then what do we do?

Giulia Tamarri:
With this grape must we fill all the five barrels and for at least 12 years. So for 12 years, we don't taste anything. We just work. When I have kids, I'm like, how old are you? Oh, I'm seven. Okay. You are not even a bottle of traditional balsamic, you know, for 12 years, we cannot touch it. And what we do is the juice evaporates.

Giulia Tamarri:
And the smallest barrel is the only one where we take the liquid out from. Okay. With all the other four before this one, we have to refill. So you put the liquid from the fifth to the fourth, from the fourth to the third, and so on, and you fill with the grape juice. The fifth one. Yeah.

Katy Clarke:
So it just gets more concentrated, doesn't it, as it goes on? So they're doing. Cooking some grape juice, and then they reduce it, and then they're adding some more, and then they reduce it. And so by the time that we get to the end of the 12 years, then it becomes very thick.

Giulia Tamarri:
Very thick. And this is what we call the traditional balsamic vinegar. But obviously, our tradition has been so long that we go over the 12 years. So we also have what we call extra vacuum, which is minimum 25 years. And that's also even more different than the 12. So normally we do this kind of tasting. We try the 12, we try the 25, and then we try the different barrels. So, because as I was saying, you can even think of doing a barrel of only just one type of wood.

Giulia Tamarri:
It's incredible.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah, it's a beautiful thing to see, like a batteria at a place where they make the balsamic vinegar. And they don't just have one set of barrels. They have many, many sets of barrels, don't they? And they do experiments on the different types of wood, the different aging processes. It's so interesting.

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Giulia Tamarri:
It's our life, Katy, and I'm not joking about it. So one of the things that I should mention is that in my area, we have a specific food product in each town. So in my town, Spilamberto, we are the town famous for the traditional balsamic vinegar, because we have what we call the Consorteria, the consortium. And Katy, you know it very well. We also visited during the Untold Italy tour because I like to joke about this because. Well, first of all, they are amazing. The members of this consortium are extremely passionate, obviously, about the product, and their mission is to keep this tradition alive. But not only - they want to keep the authenticity of the production, because as I was mentioning before, the traditional one is what we call a PDO product.

Giulia Tamarri:
So there is a disciplinary that has been actually recognized by the European Union in 2000, that tells you exactly about the rules about this product. So there is actually a body that tells you if you can bottle that traditional balsamic vinegar. It's something very strict, very, very, very serious. It's very hard to. To have the PDO recognition, Katy, as we know this consortium, so there are many passionate people, but there are also many volunteers. And I feel like they are my uncles because, you know, they live - the consortium is 500 meters from my little flat and they are there every day.

Giulia Tamarri:
They are these volunteers that the age range is 70s, 80s, okay? And they are dead every day in the lab to check the acidity levels, the sugar levels for a product that takes at least 12 years, but not. They have to check every day. You know, they're amazing. They're amazing. And plus, there is the grandmaster. So there are many masters that obviously look after their set of barrels. And then there is the grand master of balsamic. And by joke, I say the Pope of traditional balsamic vinegar.

Giulia Tamarri:
I hope they don't listen to this, Katy, because I don't know if they like that. But, yeah. And yeah, basically, they really do a great job in talking about the product, in, you know, keeping it alive. Because what happens is, okay, we have the consortium, but we have all the families as well in my area that keep this tradition alive. It's very, very special that each family has their set of barrels.

Katy Clarke:
Even if they're not a big producer. Every family has a set of barrels, don't they? And they have to get it checked. This is the one thing that I didn't really understand until I went to Spilamberto - is that if you want to bottle your traditional balsamic vinegar, you have to get it approved. Like Giulia said, you can't just go ahead and bottle this thing. You could call it something else, but you can't call it traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena. We do go to another producer, and he actually told us he's, you know, has been rejected, and he's had to go back and rebalance everything. And it's a big deal, isn't it? Because you're not getting very many bottles out every year because it's so concentrated. So if you make a mistake or

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something, it's a big problem.

Giulia Tamarri:
It's a big problem. And actually, as I was saying, many families have their own, or if not, maybe a couple of barrels, because in the past, what happened was it would be the dowry. So when women would get married, they would bring this as a dowry. Nowadays, we also give a set when a baby is born. It's so nice, isn't it, Katy? So, for example, my best friend, she has got two daughters. So the grandfather has got his own private. His own. And then he made one for my friend, and then he made.

Giulia Tamarri:
And they made two for my friend's daughters, you know, so in their families, they've got four set of barrels and they also do a competition. And normally, when we meet at Christmas, because I always go and meet them, we always have the tasting. Oh, what is the best? Oh, how it changed. It's also a family thing, you know, because it's so in our blood. If I would say, you know. Yeah, unfortunately, Katy, I don't have my barrel. You know why? Because my dad is from Bologna and my mum also is from Bologna.

Giulia Tamarri:
So basically it wasn't their tradition. And it's funny because if you check on the map, Bologna, Modena are only 30 kilometers apart. And in. That's why I was saying, in Bologna, they don't know it. Well, it's not that they don't know it, but they don't use it as much, you know, because it's a Modena thing, you know, it's crazy.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. It's so interesting how hyperlocal this is. Like, you can't exaggerate this because, like Giulia said, it's only 30 kilometers. And, you know, it's not very. It's like a pretty flat land in between, isn't it? Like. So I don't know. They're just doing their own thing in Modena and around Spilamberto. And it's a really beautiful tradition and it's very much worth seeking out.

Katy Clarke:
So, Giulia, can you explain to everyone what is the taste of this traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena?

Giulia Tamarri:
So imagine a thick consistency and you would feel sweet and sour at the same time. And it's the equilibrium between the two. I would say that the 25-year-old is what we call more harmonious as a taste, because obviously it has got more time in contact with these types of wood. And each wood would give an aroma. Again, it's a very complex taste. And this complex taste goes well with most things. I was asked how we use it.

Giulia Tamarri:
You would use this to enhance any type of food, apart from coffee, maybe, and anything can be enhanced by traditional balsamic vinegar. And if you are lucky, you are coming from

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Modena. You could actually use this black gold also on most common things. So, for example, imagine you are making onion frittata.

Katy Clarke:
Yum

Giulia Tamarri:
An omelette, two drops of traditional balsamic. This brings you that onion frittata. Boom. To heaven. Boom, boom! It becomes immediately, you know, something heavenly, you know, because it gives you such a more complex taste. And as I said, it can also be something very simple, you know, because you really only need a couple of drops. That's another thing. When we call it black gold, it's not by chance. It's really - you need very, very little. And Katy, you know, you know this so well.

Giulia Tamarri:
We even put it on gelato.

Katy Clarke:
Yes, that was delicious.

Giulia Tamarri:
Isn't it, Katy? I know you are very passionate about it. So, even on gelato, would you ever think of trying to put traditional balsamic vinegar? Well, in Modena, we do that. So think of a very nice crema gelato. It changes it completely. Or even on strawberries. Amazing. Obviously, on risotto, on meat, there are many, many different ways of using it - on tortellini. And you know how passionate I am about tortellini.

Giulia Tamarri:
Like tortellini alla panna. Well, obvious, not in broth, but tortellini alla panna

Katy Clarke:
That's the dish you have to try. When you're in the area, it's the absolute best. It is so amazing. You've got everything in that dish from that area. You've got the pasta, you have prosciutto, you have parmigiano, and you have balsamico. It's like the. It is like the culmination of everything Modena, isn't it?

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah, well, absolutely. It's a feast. It's a feast that has to be tried. Obviously, we do also have lighter things to try if you're worried that we would fill you. But, you know, that's our specialty. We like the rich food. Like, we love this kind of, like, super tasty, you know, and the other thing is all handmade.

Giulia Tamarri:
And really, it's like this. We are very picky. Very, very picky. So if it's not made properly, we

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won't even offer it at all, like, because we are used to have the best. The best also involves time. Actually, I mentioned before, there is only one ingredient in the traditional balsamic vinegar.

Giulia Tamarri:
Well, yeah, of course, it's the grape mask. But think about the technique, the patience, the time. I mean, thinking about all the elements that go into this product, even the barrels. It's crazy how the Coopers make the barrel. It's a very shared product by many, many hearts. So, you know, we always "Say passion into it", but think of all the hearts that are in that bottle. You know, it's crazy.

Katy Clarke:
And it's quite expensive. Like, I mean, it's not like, it's not the seven dollar one you get at the supermarket, because that is a totally different taste. And that's very acidic. And you usually use it on salads and things like that. And, you know, you can get some very delicious balsamic vinegars that are made that way, which you can find still in around Modena, too. And there, it's a very interesting process. And on the tour, we go to an Acetaia, which is what they call the people that make the balsamic vinegar.

Katy Clarke:
And they're doing a lot of experimental things with different woods and aging processes. And it's very interesting to see that tradition versus the modern interpretation of balsamic vinegar. But it's all good, right? It's. It's all delicious.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah. There is also very good balsamic vinegar. So that why it's a little bit confusing because the traditional balsamic vinegar is the one we just spoke about. Then there is IGP balsamic vinegar, which is the one that doesn't only have one ingredient because they could add other things too. It can also be very well made. So that's IGP. Okay.

Giulia Tamarri:
I would actually challenge everyone listening to check when they are at the supermarket or check what they have at home to make sure that they read what type of balsamic vinegar they have, because very, very commonly is the IGP one. Okay. So there are all obviously different standards of this IGP. It could be very good. And the Acetaia we are visiting, they do excellent IGP. But to be honest, Katy, there is also horrible. There is stuff that is basically black water with lots of sugar was really horrible to me.

Giulia Tamarri:
Sorry, Katy. Is the glaze. Yes.

Katy Clarke:
They try and make that sound like it's traditional balsamic, but it's just chock full of sugar. And that's the one that they squirt all over plates, isn't it?

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Giulia Tamarri:
Yes. That's horrible. And I see that everywhere because obviously when we do tours outside of my area, I'm like, okay, please don't think that that's balsamic vinegar. Please, please, please do me this favor. Do you know, you know, Katy, how they call me the balsamic police? I'm sorry. I am very passionate about it and, and I don't make. I am proud to be an ambassador, but I'm not the expert, okay, so please come and meet the experts that make it. And if you speak to them, it's like you're talking about their mother.

Giulia Tamarri:
It's like, oh, my God. Untouchable. You know, it's so funny.

Katy Clarke:
I have been to the consortium and they are very, very serious people. And, you know, you go up into their room where they have their barrels, and it's very interesting because it's actually quite humid up there, isn't it? It gets quite warm. And, you know, I think it helps with the evaporation process. But when I walked in there, I was quite shocked and my eyes got drawn to one set of barrels, didn't they? And I said, is that what I think it is? And they said, uhuh. And so if you're a big foodie and you know about the area of Modena where Giulia is from, you know that there's a very famous chef from that area, and his name is Massimo Bottura, and he's probably one of the most famous chefs in Italy. And I noticed that there was a, like they have an embroidered cloth over the whole of the barrel and it said Osteria Francescana, which is his famous, very famous restaurant in the area. And I said, “do you have the balsamic vinegar for Osteria Francescana?” And they said, “yes, we do!” And you know, it's managed under very strict conditions there, so it's really worth going to visit the consortium and visit Spilamberto because of this tradition. But also, it's a super cute little town, I've got to say.

Katy Clarke:
It's like, it's got a little, little castle thing happening and little turrets.

Giulia Tamarri:
Yeah, it's lovely. It's very off the beaten path because unfortunately, not many people take the time to visit these little towns. And I think it's the beauty of Italy that, of course, you need to visit the big cities, of course, but there is so much beauty just around the corner that maybe it's a little bit less accessible. But I would suggest everyone to take the time to be explorers. And by the way, Katy, you are so right about that humidity and heat, but actually, there is a reason behind it. And you just mentioned about the attic, and it's actually where we keep the battery at the set of barrels because we actually need this wide temperature variation throughout the day, but also the season, because obviously you need the Emilian heat. And trust me, it's not very pleasant. So I wouldn't come in July and August because it's really hot.

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Giulia Tamarri:
Okay. So it actually this product really needs this heat because it helps the fermentation process. But also on the other side, it needs the cold for the decanting. So you need to have these big peaks of temperature. And this is why it's the area of Modena only, because in this area we have this type of climate. In the attic, they can't have air conditioning. So please don't be surprised that if you ever come to meet us, we make you experience the humidity. I know it's not pleasant, but it's not because we are mean people and we don't have air conditioning.

Giulia Tamarri:
It's actually because of the product.

Katy Clarke:
And the other thing that I remembered about the balsamic vinegar is that it comes - the traditional balsamic vinegar is that it comes in a very special bottle as well, doesn't it?

Giulia Tamarri:
Exactly. And by the way, Katy, you know that Italians are big on design and obviously - could it be a normal bottle? Of course not. No, of course not. This bottle has been designed by Giorgetto Giugiaro, who is a car designer. But look at that, if you pay him well enough, he would also design the balsamic - the bottle. And so basically there is this very small special bottle and this is what you need to look for.

Giulia Tamarri:
If it's not bottled in that, it's fake. And unfortunately, and I actually, I must say this, and this is why I am the traditional balsamic police. Please, please, please don't be fooled by people, because there are many cheeky people that do this that tell you - it's traditional balsamic vinegar, it cannot be sold if not in that bottle. So you would know this immediately. It's the distinct thing that you would recognize straight away.

Katy Clarke:
It's kind of round, but it's got straight edges on the side as well. What we'll do is we'll find a picture and we'll put it in the show notes so everyone can see that.

Giulia Tamarri:
Good idea.

Katy Clarke:
Yeah. It's a very special bottle. Is there any particular brands that maybe people could look for or like companies?

Giulia Tamarri:
Thinking about traditional balsamic vinegar? I wouldn't say we can really talk about brands because it's all linked to families. Obviously, there are producers that are, obviously, they

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have a bigger production, but you don't really have so many, many, many bottles. Well, one big name in my area is, of course, Sereni. They do amazing traditional balsamic vinegar. And balsamic vinegar, or maybe one that you have heard is Giusti also just quite famous as well. There is one called Leonardi. Obviously these are bigger names, but the beauty is also checking out the smaller artisans. Okay.

Giulia Tamarri:
So I would say maybe they are more widespread, of course, and do try them. It's like wine, you know, try obviously different ones. So you could do the same with traditional balsamic vinegar. And the beauty is also going to little families to try their own, you know. If you start becoming passionate, it's really like tasting wine. It's exactly the same because every family puts their touch. That's the beauty.

Katy Clarke:
And the other thing, when you were just saying that, Giulia, I was thinking, like, people might think that it's alcoholic, but it's not, is it? Because they don't add sugar.

Giulia Tamarri:
No, no, no. It's, as I said, only one ingredient. So it's natural sugar, no alcohol, because it's all natural fermentation. So literally, it's also very healthy.

Katy Clarke:
Do think it's very - I mean, you can go and visit a lot of balsamic vinegar producers in the area, but if you really want to understand and have a good experience of the. The whole tradition of this amazing product, actually, is to go to Spilamberto and go to the consortium there. They've got a lovely museum there. And they will take you through. And then you can see the batteria up there as well. It's a really interesting experience. And we took the kids, didn't we? And then they had their gelato with their traditional balsamic vinegar on top, and they loved it.

Katy Clarke:
And in fact, my son is absolutely obsessed by this concept, so he's got a little bit of moderna in his heart, my son. So, yeah, it is very fascinating and ancient. It's been going for hundreds of years, hasn't it, Giulia?

Giulia Tamarri:
Hundreds of years. Actually, when I was talking about the Modena area, we have got written pieces about the traditional balsamic vinegar from the 1600. That's when the Este family was empowering Modena. Yes. They were like De Medici for the Modenese. And the very, very, very first definition appeared in the mid-1700s, just before Napoleon came to steal all the balsamic vinegar. Actually, you know what he did, Katy? It was a bit mean. Napoleon, you know, we know that very well.

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Giulia Tamarri:
So basically, when he arrived, he auctioned the Duke of Este's vinegar. But again, the proud nobles and bourgeois of Modena bought the barrels, and so they kept the tradition alive. So it actually got preserved. So with the decline of Napoleon, the estate family took over again. And actually, what happened was in the early 1800s, there was a very famous prince that came to Modena. And what they did was to make sure that he could taste the finest. They started what we call the Palio. Maybe you know this word Palio because you think of Sienna, Palio di Siena.

Giulia Tamarri:
But we also have a Palio of balsamic vinegar in Modena. So from the 1800, we have got also lots of written letters about how to make the best traditional balsamic vinegar, you know, so there was a lot of will to create again this super fine product.

Katy Clarke:
There's a lot of tradition and passion behind this product. It's a very unique product from Italy and it's really got a lovely family and community history behind it. And if you join us in Bologna or our tours in Emilia, you get to go to the consortium and meet the people there. And you, if you're very lucky, you might meet the grandmaster like I did. And you also go and you try some different ones, so you have that real local experience. And it's really, really lovely. Giulia, thank you. That was really fantastic.

Katy Clarke:
Now, I love talking about balsamic vinegar. I could talk about it for a lot longer, but if anyone wanted to get in touch with you and if you're around, take you on a little visit rounds Spilamberto and your area, how could they get in touch with you?

Giulia Tamarri:
You could go onto my website, travelwithrezdora.com. I should spell rezdora because it's a very difficult word, Katy. So it's R E Z D O R A dot com and actually rezdora actually is a dialect board from my area, which actually means the women leaders of the kitchens and of the house. Okay, so not because I feel I am a leader of the kitchen, because I don't really cook very well myself, but I like to think of myself as the rezdora of traveling. So the Rezdora are the creators of this amazing food, you know. So think about the tortellino. They go and hand-pick the best prosciutto, the best parmigiano, the best nutmeg and so on to make the food. I also feel the same about creating an amazing tour experience for my clients.

Giulia Tamarri:
So that's the idea behind it.

Katy Clarke:
And I have to tell you, if you go on tour with Giulia, you're very, very lucky. She's absolutely amazing and we love having her on the team. So, Giulia - Grazie Mille! Thank you for sharing the traditional balsamic vinegar of Modena. It is a bit of a mouthful, but I tell you what, you

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do want it in your mouth. It's one of those things that my kids say to me, "mum, where's that balsamic vinegar?" And I'm like... they want to have it, just a spoonful of it. I'm like, maybe, okay, but it's a real treat and we shouldn't really save it, actually. So I'm now going to go and see where it is. I've got to go find it because I hid it from them.

Giulia Tamarri:
The funny thing, Katy, I actually forgot to mention something, that we use it also as a medicine, you know?

Katy Clarke:
Just the thought of it makes me feel better about everything, really.

Giulia Tamarri:
Because actually the word balsami comes from balm. Balm. Because actually, we use it as well. And I think I already mentioned we are quite crazy in this area when we have a sore throat. It's the very best natural medicine you could ever have. So, yeah, keep for the taste, but also as a natural medicine, if you are into this type of natural medicine, it's for you, isn't it?

Katy Clarke:
Well, I think it's for a lot of different reasons. And you know what? I can't wait to get back into your area of Amelia. As you know, it's one of my favorite places in Italy, and I miss you. I miss everyone there. So thanks, Giulia, for joining us. Grazie Mille.

Giulia Tamarri:
Grazie Mille, Katy. Thank you all. I hope you enjoyed it. Come and try the traditional balsamic.

Katy Clarke:
Ciao, Giulia.

Giulia Tamarri:
Ciao, ciao.

Katy Clarke:
Listeners, Giulia came into my life several years ago and is one of the most generous, kind, funny and professional people I know. I am absolutely thrilled that she is an important member of our Untold Italy tours team and know that she charms everyone with her warm and bubbly personality, which she gets from her beautiful parents who I met earlier this year. They are just as lovely as she is.

The area where Giulia comes from in Emilia Romagna, close to Modena, is a special place, not just for the balsamico that you heard about today but also for its friendly people who have a

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passion for both tradition and innovation. There are many lovely towns to explore and, of course, they make some of Italy's most delicious products - what's not to love?

We visit this region and go deep into the Emilia countryside, including Spilamberto, where Giulia lives on our Untold Italy tour of the Emilia region. This is such a special experience because you meet the locals with a local, try that gelato with a drizzle of real balsamic vinegar, go exploring the beautiful towns and if you're lucky, you might meet Giulia's dad too. If that sounds like fun to you, reach out to us at Untold Italy tours.

As always, you'll find details of the tour and the complete transcript of this episode, plus the places we mentioned on our website episode show notes at untolditaly.com/290.

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. If you did, then it would be amazing if you gave us a rating or review in your favorite podcast app or decide to support us by downloading our app and upgrading to the premium ad-free version, where you'll find our podcast episodes ad-free and our curated travel guides for places across Italy.

On next week's episode, I'm sharing some of my favourite towns to visit in Italy in autumn or the fall.

But until then, it's "ciao for now".

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