

This past Monday was a fun adventure at Jimmy's. We took a quick fantasy trip to Rome. The way we did it, airport security was no problem and there were no lines. Good food and wine are a great way to travel.

There were so many new guests that our "Chardonnay time" was longer than usual. It took a while for everyone to get acquainted.

When we got to table, we were treated to fresh lasagne. Soft thin squares of pasta were layered with tomato, fresh mozzarella and pesto. They were topped with more tomato, cheese and a basil leaf.

This was an exciting way to open our Italian feast. The sauce was made from oven-dried and fresh tomatoes. The flavor was rich and intense. The softness of the fresh cheese was a delight as well. This was a light way to enjoy lasagne flavors without a heavy casserole approach.

The wine was Villa da Filicaja Chianti Superiore. This wine, made from the Sangiovese grape, was perfect with the tomato-rich lasagne. This particular Chianti is a very nice one and is worth seeking out. It is much nicer than many at a similar cost.

Course number two was crab and artichoke risotto. Made from Arborio rice and rich chicken stock, a risotto is real comfort food. It was served in bowls and topped with jumbo lump crab. The sliced artichoke hearts had been stirred in toward the end of cooking and final binding was done with Parmesan.

This was a luscious dish. The surface glistened and the flavors popped. The textures were a great combination. The interplay of the bite of the artichoke and sweet of the crab was really fun.

Cantina Valdadige Pinot Grigio was our wine. It is a little more assertive and flavorful version than a typical wine from this grape. It paired just right with the risotto.

For our next course we had stuffed eggplant. Eggplant is a very popular vegetable all over Italy and particularly in Rome and parts south.

Our eggplant had been sliced vertically and partially cooked. A mixture of seasoned ground pork and chicken was placed at one end and the eggplant rolled around it. The bundles were then simmered in a tomato-laced chicken stock scented with basil and oregano.

This was really sumptuous. It was tender and so flavorful. When served on a lettuce leaf, it was mighty good looking, too.

The wine for the eggplant was Koiné Primitivo Di Manduria. Primitivo is the forerunner of Zinfandel. This version had all the fruit of a California style Zin but not the jamminess we are accustomed to. This is a very nice wine at an affordable price.

Now it was time for the main course. It was classic Saltimbocca (sahl-teem-bow-ka). Thin slices of veal leg topped with Prosciutto pinned with a sage leaf and quickly sautéed. After that the slices were set in a slow oven covered in a sauce of butter, stock and white wine.

This typical Roman version of Saltimbocca was so good. The aroma of the Prosciutto and sauce filled the room.

On the same plate were tomatoes with a stuffing made from breadcrumbs, Parmesan, pesto, olive oil and white wine. There were also slices of grilled zucchini.

For a wine we had a real winner - Sterza Valpolicella Ripasso. Ripasso is the younger brother of Amarone. It's always a rich wine and a real bargain compared to Amarone - less than half the price. The Sterza can be purchased for no more than \$30.

Even though this wine was great on its own, it shined with the food. It had the rich luster of velvet and a full flavor. It was a great experience.

Zabaglione (zah-bah-leeoh-neh) - the great Italian custard was served for dessert. Unlike like Crème Brûlée, this mixture is looser and eaten at room temperature.

The eggs, cream and sugar were blended with Madeira and lemon zest. This gave it multiple flavors that lingered on. In the classic Roman style, the zabaglione was served topped with fresh figs.

Our wine was Ca' Michele (mee-kay-leh) Prosecco. This was a full round sparkling wine with great fruit flavors like honeydew. The bubbles were light and foamy on the tongue.

This was a simple, classy dessert with a wine to match. The touch of lemon made it just right.

So our evening in Rome was a good one. We had great food, nice wine and outstanding company. And the plane ride back was over in the blink of an eye.

You can re-live visits or create ones you haven't made by doing what we did. Pick a place and experience it with food and wine. It will be fun to get recipes for dishes you read about. The food magazines are full of them. And these recipes are designed for your home kitchen.

You can do it all yourself or share the tasks around. A party for eight with four folks making things is lots easier.

If you don't want to prepare things, get a favorite chef to do it for you. Tell him what you want or let him design the package and sit back and enjoy the trip. You can go to the restaurant or have the whole thing catered at your home. No matter what, you will have a fun evening. We sure did.

If you want a taste of Italian, New Orleans style, stop by and see us at AU football games inside the stadium in section six. As my friend John Denson said, "I'll bet a Muffoletta is way better than a hot dog."