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Michele Manca Wins Italy’s Best Sommelier Title for 2026

The Veneto educator and consultant prevailed in a Florence final that tested tasting, service and communication

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Michele Manca, a sommelier from Veneto, was named the Italian Sommelier Association’s Best Sommelier of Italy 2026, taking the Trentodoc Prize at the national final in Florence.

The result was announced on November 15 during Vitae in deguStazione at Stazione Leopolda, an event where the Associazione Italiana Sommelier, or AIS, also presented its 2027 Vitae Guide, one of the country’s major wine guides. Manca, who represents AIS Veneto in the Rovigo area, was recognized for his work in promoting wine culture and helping train hospitality professionals.

The final brought together three competitors, who were tested before a jury made up of previous winners, AIS representatives, wine journalists and members of the Trentodoc Institute. The panel assessed technical knowledge, tasting ability, communication skills and table service.

Manca is a co-founder of Sommelite, a consulting company that works with the restaurant industry. He also teaches dining room service and sales at the hotel and hospitality school in Adria. According to AIS, his professional training includes work in major hotels and in venues linked to Cipriani and Harry’s Bar in Venice, Ibiza and Abu Dhabi.

Within AIS, Manca works as a taster, course director and lecturer, including in English-language programs. He had already won the title of Best Sommelier of Veneto in 2022, a distinction that marked him as one of the stronger candidates in this year’s national competition.

Stefano Fambri, president of the Trentodoc Institute, presented the award. In comments released after the ceremony, he said the sommelier plays a central role in connecting wine, the territory it comes from and the people who choose it. He said that role goes beyond tasting and service and includes explaining producers’ work and helping the public build a deeper understanding of wine. Fambri also pointed to the partnership between the Trentodoc Institute and AIS, which has been in place since 2016, as a way to support training and professionalism in Italian wine.

AIS President Sandro Camilli said the title is one of the most important goals for professionals who dedicate their careers to wine culture. He said the competition rewards not only technical preparation but also the ability to communicate knowledge and tradition to the public. Camilli described the contest as part of AIS’s broader mission to invest in education, recognize talent and strengthen the level of Italian wine service.

The competition was divided into a semifinal and a national final. In the first stage, candidates completed written tests that included blind tasting, correcting a wine list and identifying food and wine pairings. The finalists then moved to practical and theoretical exercises, again including blind tasting and pairings, as well as service tests.

The final also required competitors to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language and show public speaking ability, two skills that have become increasingly important for sommeliers working in restaurants, education and wine promotion. The format was designed to measure versatility as well as technical precision, reflecting the broader demands now placed on wine professionals in Italy’s hospitality sector.