



Iron Chevsky wine blog

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2014

Tre Bicchieri 2014



This year's Tre Bicchieri event in San Francisco continued the string of exciting annual tastings organized by the prestigious Gambero Rosso Italian food and wine magazine. I am proud to have been covering this event for many years now, as it is the top Italian wine tasting event of the year in the Bay Area. 415 wines made it into the "2014 Best Italian Wines" list out of tens of thousands sampled from across the prodigious land of Italy in the past year. For more details about Tre Bicchieri process and winners, see [here](#) (html) and [here](#) (pdf). Most of the cult names were awarded, but not present at the tasting this time. In general, the amount and variety of wines poured per winery was the lowest I had seen. The explanation I got was that producers are no longer allowed to take any left-over wine out of the building, so many were quite conservative in how much they brought in, and quite a few ran out of wine well before the end of the tasting.

2009 Barolos on display were a pleasant surprise. Based on my previous reading, I had expected flabby, hot, fruity wines associated with a warm year. However, out of ten or so 2009 Barolos, I liked at least half. Indeed they conveyed the softer warmer conditions of the year, with graceful tannins and richer fruit, but I still found them balanced and delicious. They don't have the structure of the recent cooler "classic" vintages like 2001, 2004, 2006, and 2008, but they are quite beautiful, sensuous wines nonetheless. I particularly enjoyed the 2009 Oddero Barolo Rocche di Castiglione (rich, balanced, with soft tannins and lush, silky texture) and the 2009 Giacomo Fenocchio Barolo Bussia (extremely elegant pretty sweet fruit and sensuously understated, not over-extracted mouth-feel). Other noteworthy 2009's were Pio Cesare Barolo Ornato full of tasty sweet plums on a long, slightly

hot finish, and the tasty dark rich choco-cherry G.D Vajra Barolo Baudana. Finally, 2006 Riserva Villero from Vietti with a scary looking label (see photo below) was very serious, deep, smoky and classically structured - this powerful wine is only produced in top years and will run you \$300+.



Claudio Fennocchio with a bottle of Giacomo Fennocchio Barolo Bussia 2009



Me and Isabella Boffa Oddero with a bottle of Oddero Barolo Rocche di Castiglione 2009



Pio Cesare Barolo Ornato 2009



G.D. Vajra Barolo Luigi Baudana 2009



Vietti Barolo Riserva Villero 2006

There were a good number of Amarone's - I didn't try them all, but of those I tasted, 2007 Brigaldara Amarone Riserva was impressive in an opulent style - with a mysterious nose of grains and tea, and a richly sweet, lush palate, with some bitters, smoke and tobacco creating a very complex bouquet. 2009 Speri Amarone was very good in a more traditional, less opulent style - burnt brown sugar, bitter herbs and spices, very intense but not too rich, should be classic with age.



Sparkling wines stood out as well. Franciacorta had wide representation with the likes of the solid Ca'del Bosco Brut 2009, plush Ca'del Bosco Cuvee Annamaria Clementi 2005 (less structured than the 2004), the terrific Ferghettina "Riserva 33" 2006 (rich, long, spicy pear, mint, almond, wow!).

From other regions, highlights were Ruggeri Prosecco Brut "Guistino B" - clean, intense roses and toothpasty strawberries, but also totally out of the blue, a very charming Lambrusco di Sorbara - a lighter rosé-like style as compared to a more commonly seen darker sparkling Lambrusco Grasparossa. Cantina della Volta Lambrusco Rosé di Modena Spumante was very light pink, a beautifully elegant and delicious sparkling wine with gentle fruits, very pretty strawberry and cranberry tones, intriguing juniper-like nuances, a rare Lambrusco made in the traditional champagne method (second fermentation in the bottle), retailing for mid-\$20's, an incredible bargain IMO.



Giorgio Angiolini with a bottle of Cantina della Volta Lambrusco Brut Rosé

2010 Chianti's were very strong. Wines from both Felsina and Fontodi reflected the great 2010 vintage that blessed grapes all throughout Europe, Tuscany being no exception. Very structured, with great deep fruit and echos of graphite, quality and structure-wise they reminded me of the blockbuster 2010 Bordeaux. Fontodi Flaccianello 2010 was absolute knock-out, the best I'd ever tasted of this wine - powerful tannins were totally enveloped by beautifully deep and refined Sangiovese fruit, with spice nuances that were a noticeable step up from the very good 2010 Fontodi Chianti Classico. The Flaccianello was my favorite red of the tasting - a stunning wine. Elsewhere in Tuscany, the 2007 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva from one of my favorite producers Canalicchio di Sopra was sensational too - balanced, deep, inky, dark, slightly smoky, leathery intense cherries and roses exploded on my palate like fireworks, while delivering an incredibly rich, silky smooth liqueur mouth-feel, with soft tannins eventually making a discrete appearance.



Another wine that blew my socks off was a dessert wine from the Italian island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean, half way between Sicily and Tunisia, from one of the most famous Sicilian producers - Donnafugata. 2011 Donnafugata Ben Rye Passito Di Pantelleria, made in the passito (grapes air-dried on straw mats) style from ancient Zibbibo grapes (a type of Muscat), was incredible - spicy smoky, deep, vibrant apricots for days!, slight hints of herbs and flowers, sugar and tartness joined in symphony - wow, this has to be one of my favorite dessert wines of all time!



In the still whites category, I unfortunately only had time and energy to try a few. The range of characterful Italian whites always amazes me, as does their value. Pieropan 2011 La Rocca (Soave Classico) was my favorite - a full bodied, rich, ripe, really serious Soave, aged in large oak barrels on lees, this wine reminded me of high-end white Burgundy. But unlike Burgundy of such caliber, this wine can be had for under \$30 - really quite an amazing deal.



After several intense hours of tasting dozens of wines, and having visited only a third of the selection, I felt exhausted and exhilarated at the same time, as I do every year at the end of this event. The bounty of Italian wine is amazing, as there seem to be more regions and varieties than in any other major wine producing country, with always more to discover and enjoy. Every wine awarded by Gambero Rosso with "three glasses" (tre bicchieri) is a great expression of a particular region and grape variety, a pinnacle of vinous achievement. So selecting favorites among them is more about my own taste rather than necessarily the quality of the wines. I wish I had a whole separate long dinner to focus on each one, but alas I would probably need to be Italian for that...