

Decanter Archive

More Amore For Amarone

March 27, 2007

By Margaret Rand

It's still Amarone that steals the limelight in Valpolicella, but the more basic wines have improved across the region – and don't forget ripasso styles either. Margaret Rand is enchanted by the cherry-scented wines of the whole area

It's still Amarone that steals the limelight in Valpolicella, but the more basic wines have improved across the region – and don't forget ripasso styles either. Margaret Rand is enchanted by the cherry-scented wines of the whole area



To shock a wannabe lover of fine wine, say you love basic Valpolicella. Eyes will widen; eyebrows will rise. Yes, you insist; you love it: it's fresh, aromatic, delicious; the sort of wine where you want to finish the bottle. It's moreish. More wines should be moreish.

However seductive the charms of basic Valpolicella, though, it's Amarone that makes the news. Amarone is the engine driving Valpolicella's renewed popularity, the reason why there are about twice as many independent growers bottling their own wine as there were 20 years or so ago. Amarone is Valpolicella's pitch for fine-wine status, and perhaps a DOCG in the future, although the DOCG proposals are mired in politics and will no doubt emerge, if they ever do, as fudge. In between the two wines there is ripasso, for which separate regulations are under discussion. It gives the amateur of Valpolicella plenty of variety.

First, a little background. Valpolicella Classico comes from five valleys north of Verona: the region is easy to spot on any map because it's where the otherwise calm lines of roads become as hectic as a cardiogram as they tack their way uphill. And then, to the east, there is the non-Classico part of the region, sometimes referred to as the Extension, as though it were a kitchen or a garage. There is some good stuff made here – wines just as good as those from the Classico region. But there's probably more variation in quality, and a smaller proportion of producers making really good wine – so far. Valpolicella is really only at the beginning of its development, and what has changed in the region so far will be just the starting point for what might happen in the future.

Pergolas, with their high-trained, high-producing vines, are being phased out. Lower, French-style guyot training on wires is the norm for new plantings – when Allegrini (pioneer of the system, it says) started this, 'people asked us if we were planting lettuces', says export manager Paola Barberi. Density of planting has increased, around 30% of the vineyard has been planted on wires so far, and whereas in older vineyards the grape varieties are mixed up, in newer ones they are planted separately – and of course picked separately. And since Corvina ripens a good fortnight before Corvinone – which in any case is a grape better suited to wines for ageing rather than those for instant drinking – the implications for quality are already significant.

The question of what is modern and what is traditional in Valpolicella is harder to define. Many producers, having tried barriques and new oak, are edging back towards bigger and perhaps older barrels: super-concentrated and super-oaky wines never made a big impression here and now they're increasingly being left to just a few producers, notably the iconic Dal Forno.

If the quality of Amarone can already impress, in the future it should only get better.

The DOCG proposals include a restriction on what proportion of a producer's crop can be dried for Amarone: at the moment it can be up to 70%. Giuseppe Rizzardi is scornful: 'how can you dry 70% and call it a selection?' he asks. The Consorzio hopes to persuade growers on the plains, where the grapes have thinner skins and less concentration, to accept a lower maximum of 50%. The idea is to increase the maximum for hillside grapes, where yields are lower and skins thicker, to 80%. How might the growers of the plains be persuaded to accept this? I ask Emilio

Fasoletti, president of the Consorzio. It's obviously not a question he can answer: 'What a beautiful view!' he remarks.

Valpolicella traditionally gets its concentration from drying. So to give extra body to the everyday wines, you ferment (repass) the new wine over the fermented Amarone skins. This ripasso is different in style from normal Valpolicella, with often a degree or more extra alcohol, and with a touch of the baked-cherries flavour of Amarone replacing the zingy fresh cherries of the standard wine. If you want this – or if you don't because you want super-freshness and lightness – look at the back label. The word 'ripasso' is often banished from the front label, rather unhelpfully. Ripasso wines have multiplied in number over the last few years – Valpolicella Classico Superiore is almost always a ripasso wine – not least because they're rather profitable, but basic Valpol remains the bread and butter wine.

Key players in Valpolicella

Allegrini

This family company, run by winemaker Franco and his sister Marilisa, leads the modernist brigade in Valpolicella. Like many producers, they're edging back towards larger barrels and less oak. Allegrini abandoned the DOC for dense, concentrated La Grola back in 1997 – it's now an IGT – because Franco didn't want to use Molinara; and super-dense La Poja is all Corvina, so was never eligible. The Valpolicella Classico 2005 is concentrated and very long; the Amarone 2001 a sleek compote of baked cherries and plums.

Dal Forno

The palatial new winery isn't finished yet, but it keeps the new barriques tidy. Romano Dal Forno looks bemused when asked about tannin management, but since dense, silky tannins are a hallmark of these iconic wines it's worth asking. 'I don't do anything. We do everything in the vineyard: very low yields, and we start the fermentation with wild yeasts. I want lots of extraction, and the glycerine content is high.' The wines are wildly impressive and, to this palate, somewhat atypical.

Masi

Masi made its name with its Amarone: Mazzano, Campolongo di Torbe and Mezzanella Amandorlato Recioto, but president Sandro Boscaini also likes to show off his experimental winery: he has cherrywood and acacia barrels and square barriques. He also has 48 local varieties planted, but would hate to be described as a modernist. Tradition, constantly updated, takes priority here, as in the subtle, silky and deep Costasera Amarone 2003. Masi also has vineyards in Argentina and Friuli.

Quintarelli

The leader of those who favour tradition: even the labels are stuck on by hand. Giuseppe Quintarelli seems likely to hand over the reins to his energetic 27-year-old grandson, Marco Trevini-Bellini, even though they weren't speaking after Marco had his eyebrow pierced. Will he modernise? 'No! I want to be even more traditional!' There are just 6ha (hectares) of vines, and the current vintage of Amarone, 1998, spent seven years in big barrels, emerging with complex, plummy fruit. 'It's like a wine of 20 years ago,' says Marco. 'I like that.'

Tedeschi

Tedeschi wines combine muscle with elegance. Capitel San Rocco 2004, Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso is exemplary: beautifully aromatic, all roses and plums. It's fruit they want, and freshness, and they are moving away from barriques towards bigger barrels for longer, slower ageing. 'Barriques were an experiment', says Sabrina Tedeschi. She is one of three siblings – the others are Antonietta and Riccardo – who now run this company under the direction of their father, Renzo.

Tommasi

If this go-ahead family company had a motto, it might be 'Always investing': as well as accumulating 135ha of vineyards it has restored the Villa Quaranta and turned it into a hotel and restaurant, complete with spa. It has also invested in land in the Maremma. How do nine family members work together so well? Pierangelo shrugs. 'It's the most important factor in our success.' The wines are polished and modern.

Guerrieri Rizzardi

The Rizzardi family has lived in the walls of the town of Bardolino, with Lake Garda at the bottom of the garden, since 1450. Its Valpolicellas are subtle, elegant and serious. Winemaker Giuseppe Rizzardi selects around 25% of the grapes for drying, and is currently researching where the aromatics in Amarone come from – they emerge, he says, with a long drying period. Shorten the drying period and you don't get them.

zenato

This family company was started in the 1960s in Lugana, and has expanded to 70ha – 30 in Valpolicella. It continues to invest in land: the latest acquisition is vineyards in Sant' Ambrogio. The blend it favours is Corvina, Rondinella and Sangiovese, and it produces beautifully balanced wines – as in the 2004 Ripasso, lively and perfumed, or the smoky, muscular 2003 Amarone.

giv santi

A huge company that has just bought the Bolla winery from Brown Forman, and will

produce the wine. GIV is also edging back to traditional larger barrels for ageing, and has strong opinions on what makes a good Amarone vineyard: 'You can't make an elegant Amarone from the plains,' says winemaker Christian Scrinzi. You would need to reduce the yields to increase the ventilation round the vine, and the grapes will be more fragile; and it still won't be as good as an Amarone from the hills, or last as long.

New faces in Valpolicella

Antolini

The Antolini brothers, Pier Paolo and Stefano, started growing grapes on 4ha near Marano Valpolicella, and selling grapes and wine. Now they bottle some themselves, and have added another 3ha near Negrar, planted in 2004. Viticulture remains their passion, and it shows in their 2003 Amarone: it's all vivid, perfumed cherries, bright and supple, with a long, smoky finish. Their 2005 recioto is complex, grapey and coffeeish, with a streak of acidity.

Stefano Accordini

The Accordini family has deep roots in Valpolicella: first they were share-croppers, then landowners; in the last five years they have started bottling their own wines. Stefano and Giuseppina's two sons, Tiziano and Daniele, work with them in the winery, producing concentrated, bright wines from 4ha at Negrar. Another 6ha at Fumane have been planted.

Gamba

With 6ha of good hillside vineyard in the Classico area, between Marano and Negrar, the brothers Giovanni, Giuseppe and Martino Aldrighetti started bottling their wines about three years ago. Until then they had sold the grapes. They're one of the most impressive of the newcomers, balancing ripeness with freshness, as in their Le Quare Ripasso 2004, which is confident, concentrated and very moreish.

Valentina Cubi

A newcomer making hugely impressive wines of elegance and complexity. The standard Valpolicella jumps out of the glass at you; the Ripasso Arusnatico is subtle and savoury. The vineyards are situated in Fumane and San Pietro in Cariano in the Classico zone.

Zyme

Not strictly eligible for inclusion since the wines are IGT, but its innovative approach makes one bend the rules a little. Kairos is 15 different grape varieties, dried as for Amarone though for a shorter time, and aged in French oak barriques. It has 15.4% alcohol and is solid, punchy and vigorous. Harlequin is similar but even bigger, like chocolate sauce over burnt plums. There's also a varietal Oseleta. The wines are not typical of Valpolicella, but they're not intended to be. The company was founded in 2000, and the winery in 2003, by Celestino Gaspari, who spent 11 years at Quintarelli; Francesco Parisi, who was at Fratelli Pasqua for some years; and Flavio Peroni, who spent 23 years as winemaker at Bertani.

Margaret Rand's top new Valpolicellas

Domini Veneti, Vigneti di Jago, Amarone 2001 ?????

Savoury and concentrated, full of chocolate and chocolate cherries. Up to 2011. N/A UK; +39 45 601 4300

Domini Veneti, Classico Superiore 2005 ????

Fresh and structured, pungent with cherries. Up to 2008. £6.25; Maj

Lenotti, Ripasso de Crosare 2004 ????

Lovely, pungent, perfumed wine, all roses, violets and plums. Up to 2009. £10.99; LBV

Tommasi, Ripasso 2004 ????

Ripe, fresh and smoky; very moreish. Up to 2008. £11.38; Ell

Zenato, Amarone 2003 ????

Sleek, smoky, muscular and complex. Very long finish. Up to 2011. £21.17 in bond–25.85 (2001); Evy, F&R

Cantina di Soave, Rocca Sveva,

Classico Superiore 2004 ???

Perfumed, pretty wine, concentrated and faintly burnt. Up to 2008. £7.99; CWF

Nicolis, Classico 2004 ???

Fresh, elegant and concentrated; a very pretty wine. Up to 2008. £6.52; Bib

Santa Sofia, Classico 2005 ???

Very good structure, fresh and promising. Up to 2008. £7.95; Vnl

Stefano Accordini, Acinatico Classico Superiore 2004 ???
Meaty, savoury fruit, plums and prunes, mostly prunes. It veers towards soy sauce and blackcurrant flavours, and it's not very typical, but it's impressive. Up to 2010. N/A UK; +39 045 770 1733

...and best value buys

Carlo Boscaini, Ca' Bussin Classico 2005 ?????
Perfumed plum skins, complex, concentrated and fascinating. Up to 2010. N/A UK; +39 045 773 1412

Cesari, Amarone Bosan 2000 ?????
Cherry pie and cherry velvet; very silky and complex. Up to 2013. £30; Cmb, Evy, OFI, TSW
Guerrieri Rizzardi, Pojega Ripasso, Classico Superiore 2004 ?????

Closed, tight and very long, with lots of perfume and plum skin fruit tucked inside great concentration. Up to 2010. £10.13–10.95; Evy, Har

Masi, Costasera Amarone 2003 ?????
Silky complexity and very tight still; subtle, and with an enormous finish that lasts and lasts. Up to 2012. £19.99; BWC, Odd

Vaona, Classico 2005 ?????
A smoky nose and a concentrated, plum skin palate; pungent, powerful and very good. Up to 2009.
N/A UK; +39 045 770 3710

Costa Calda, Amarone 2002 ????
Lovely cherry tart nose, bright, punchy and vigorous. Up to 2012.
N/A UK; +39 045 862 0966

Lenotti, Amarone 2003 ????
Lovely nose, bright and complex; palate all smoky cherries; a slightly rustic texture but good vigorous stuff. Up to 2010. N/A UK; +39 045 721 0484

Santi, Proemio Amarone 2003 ????
Closed, but rich, deep and structured, elegant and complex. Up to 2012.
N/A UK; +39 045 652 0077

Tommaso Bussola, Recioto 2004 ????
Rich, complex coffee and spice flavours. Up to 2014. £25.99 (500cl); Bal

Villa Spinosa, Classico 2004 ????
Deep, fresh, complex wine with great concentration. Up to 2009.
N/A UK; +39 045 750 0093

Valpolicella: Know Your Vintages

VALPOLICELLA
2005 ???? Delicious now,
ripe and balanced.
2004 ???? Lighter but attractive.
2003 ????H Better balance and longer finish than many wines in this super-hot
vintage. Ripasso still going strong.
2002 ?? Light wines that should have been drunk by now.
2001 ???? Lovely balance, but now starting to show its age.
AMARONE
2003 ???? Fairly solid and low in acidity. Good but not wines to keep.
2002 ???? Elegant and bright.
2001 ???? Fewer ripe tannins than 2003, and distinctly chewy wines.
2000 ????H Very powerful wines, meaty, concentrated and muscular.
1999 ???? Mixed quality, with some dilution from September rain.

[Back to index](#)



Italian Wine & Coffee

Buy White and Red Italian Wine
Taste Coffee the Italian Way

landoverseas.com

Vineyards in Mendoza

Own A Vineyard & Make Your Own
Wine Great Location & Unique
Andean View

www.fincalosamigos.com

Great Wine Newsletter

Wines, travel, wine & food matching
& more. Free. Easy to sign up.

www.winexperience.com



Ads by Google

[Contact us](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Trusted Reviews](#)
© Copyright 2007 IPC Media Limited, All rights reserved