



Anteprima Amarone: Amarone 2016 in the glass

February 19, 2020



VERONA

Amarone is undoubtedly one of Italy's greatest symbolic wines. It has seduced the most refined palates in the world, with its iconic bold, powerful dried fruit aromas and unique personality. It is the kind of wine that people buy and sit on –some would patiently wait for years, only open on special occasions, or when they send their kids off to college.

Let's take a quick recap –Amarone originates from Valpolicella, in the Veneto region of north-eastern Italy. It

has three primary zones: Classico, Valpolicena, and Est (despite the fact that only Classico is more familiarized to the world, I've uncovered myriad fantastic producers from the other two during this trip, we will get to that later). There are four main grapes of Amarone: Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella and Molinara. While the appassimento tradition carries a long history here, Amarone's creation was accidental. Legend has it that Amarone came in being when a neglected barrel of Recioto over-fermented, yet the resulting juice was surprisingly joyful. Over the years, Amarone has won over Italians and continues to gain international recognition.

What is Anteprima Amarone

Anteprima Amarone is an annual event organized and promoted by the Valpolicella Wine Protection Consortium –takes place in Verona at the Palazzo della Gran Guardia where the latest vintage of Amarone are to be tasted. It is considered the flagship event of the Veronese denomination, as it sees the "Grande Rosso della Valpolicella" as its exclusive protagonist.

This year, 54 producers joined Anteprima Amarone to tell their stories about the 2016 vintage –18 already



bottled, the rest 26 were barrel samples. The two-day event typically starts with D1 opening to trade-only, D2 to the public. I would highly recommend any Amarone wine lover to participate, as learning from the winemakers helps form a deeper understanding of the vintage as well as a broader insight on the winemaking.

An overview of what to expect from 2016

Overall, well-balanced and elegant.

The year 2016 experienced a cold but dry winter, rainy and cool spring, reasonably hot summer. Like a great many other wine regions, Valpolicella is also fighting against global warming. Luckily in 2016, there were 49 days over 30C, yet 0 day over 35C. Fall was pleasant –especially in the months decisive for optimal technical-phenolic maturation. As a result, grapes ripened more evenly, showing a higher level of sugar while preserving good acidity –an important factor for long-term aging.

So how does it all translate into the juice? Personally, I found a more complex and focused structure in the

glass. The spice and fruit spectrums were both present –mainly dark fruit and sweet spice; refreshing mouthfeel, solid acidity to hold up, balanced alcohol content; rich but not overwhelming or cloying; some showcasing more mint flavors and herbal notes.



A fun comparison with New World

It never occurred to me to compare Amarone with the wines with similar characteristics (from both organoleptic and market perspectives) from the New World. That was a fun blind tasting hosted by Peter McCombie MW! We had two flights with 5 wines each, from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. Although picking out the Amarones wasn't too hard for me, determining the regions and vintages of the rest was a true headache. To me, the giveaways of the Amarones were: dried fig, crunchy tannins (they were all young Amarones), warm spice, beautiful acidity. The others –despite the similar aromatic profiles as Amarone, all had overly evident vanilla notes and lacked the acidity to back the sweetness/boldness. Acidity is the soul of Amarone which people often overlook. An Amarone would certainly be disqualified as a great one without the remarkable acidity to lift it up.

Best of show

54 Amarone della Valpolicella DOCG wines from 2016 Vintage Tasted February 1st, 2020, at Anteprima Amarone Palazzo della Gran Guardia:

- Albino Armani –rich and intense, scents of ripe red fruit and spices, round palate, tamed by balance
 - Ca'Rugate –pleasantly fresh, abundant floral and strawberry cake aromas, bright acidity
 - Corte Figaretto –distinctly floral aroma, not too heavy on the palate with a whiff of mint
 - Dal Cero In Valpolicella –intense cherry notes, rich but also elegant, delicate freshness reduces the heat
 - Guiseppe Campagnola –sweet spice and balsamic notes, dense, tight in the mouth but balanced by the fruits
 - I Tamasotti –alive, graceful, beautifully structured –should age well
 - Le Guaite Di Noemi –voluptuous spicy notes, quite complex, well-balanced
 - Novaia –intense aromas of dark fruits and warm spices, alluring floral notes, one of my favorites
 - Roccolo Grassi –ripe tannins, extremely concentrated with notes dark chocolate and berries, this is meant to be aged
 - Santa Sofia –expressive, fine juicy tannins with some delicious cherry cake flavors
 - Sartori –another beautifully made Amarone with a fine tannic backbone accompanying good acidity.
 - Zeni 1870–loaded with warm spice, surprisingly some hints of tertiary notes –balsamic, forest floor, mushroom
 - Zyme –another favorite! This was the last one we tasted and I was so glad we finished strong –sappy berries, chocolate cake, smooth tannins –it has plenty to offer!
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