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Amarones by the score

11 Feb 2009 by Julia Harding MW

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The Amarone producers who submitted their wines to the preview (*anteprema*) tasting of the just released, or soon to be bottled, 2005 vintage in Verona on the last day of January in the grand but rather chilly surroundings of the Palazzo Giardino Giusti seemed pretty pleased with the results.

At the press conference prior to the tasting, oenologist Daniele Accordini outlined the characteristics of the vintage, one 'promising longevity': thick skins, ideally suited to the drying process (dried Corvina grapes pictured above); sugar concentration at the end of the drying period was generally high; acidities started high but dropped (due to respiration) during the drying to a little above average; final pH generally lower than average; tannins ripe and colours intense, with higher than average anthocyanin levels.

(The press conference and my subsequent discussions with producers also touched on the question of maintaining quality as volumes increase, and I will be considering this in a separate article.)

The official prediction of freshness was certainly borne out by the tasting. The range of styles and alcohol levels (from 14.5% to 16.5%) was quite marked but the overall standard was very good. Observant readers will notice the absence of certain well-known producers such as Quintarelli and Dal Forno. Their wines were not included in the tasting because this was a strictly Consorzio affair, and some producers choose not to join.

The Palazzo warmed up later in the day with the arrival of vast numbers of eager consumers, who had paid a mere 10 euros for the chance to taste a huge range of Valpolicella in all its forms, from the light, refreshing early-drinking version, via the hybrid ripasso to the strong Amarone and sweet Recioto wines. Free aprons were thrown in for good measure, though I didn't see anyone wearing theirs as protection from poor spitting, perhaps because there was more drinking than spitting.

I focused exclusively on Amarone, tasting the wines blind in what turned out to be alphabetical order. Each producer was allowed to submit one wine to the blind tasting; some showed their basic Amarone, some their top cuvée. This is generally evident from the wine names.

Many but not all the wines listed below are exported. Those with UK importers are listed at the end of the tasting notes (though not all the producers responded to a request for this information).

Stefano Accordini, Acinatico Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2010-20

Plenty of spice and cherry, alcohol evident in the nose. Very juicy and fresh. Tight, firm but supple tannins. Finishes dry and sustained. 16% (JH)

Aldegheri Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 15.5 Drink 2010-15

Strong vanilla nose. Pretty thin for Amarone. Fresh and lively but lacks stuffing. Juicy dry finish, already supple. 15% (JH)

Aldrighetti, Le Bignele Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16 Drink 2010-16

Attractively perfumed bramble fruit. A little more meaty on the mid palate but fine and fresh. Moderate, rounded tannins and quite soft and a little sweet on the finish. 15% (JH)

Antolini, Moròpio Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 14.5 Drink 2010-14

Pretty volatile on the nose and in an oxidative style. Same oxidative-style ripeness on the palate. Fresh acidity but fruit lacks freshness. 16% (JH)

Arduini Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 15 Drink 2011-16

Not very expressive at the moment but a little oxidative in its sweetness on the nose. Dry rather chalky tannins, acidity a little too pronounced for the fruit weight. 15% (JH)

Armani, Cuslanus Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Fresh and a little spicy. Cinnamon and lovely sweet bright fruit. Not light but elegant and fresh, though it is a little sulfidey. Firm but smooth. Not if you want a blockbuster but lovely to drink and probably better with food than many with a lovely dry but fresh texture. Beautifully balanced. 14.5% (JH)

Benedetti, Croce del Gal Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Sweetly oaky and lots of oak spice but the damson fruit is not overwhelmed. Restrained by the oak on the palate but dark and fine. Firm grip and fresh finish. Concentration makes it very slightly bitter at the moment but I like that savoury aspect. % (JH)

Bertani, Villa Arvedi Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Valpantena 16 Drink 2010-16

Fragrant fruit but also a little meaty, maybe a touch of Brett? A bit hard on the palate. 14.5% (JH)

Bixio, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-19

Extreme cherry aromas, vaguely medicinal. Lots of pure fruit, fine tannins and long and fresh on the finish. Well balanced. 15% (JH)

Carlo Boscaini, San Giorgio Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 15.5 Drink 2010-16

Very dark and slightly raisiny oxidative nose. Quite raisiny on the nose. Firm dry tannins and surprisingly fresh on the finish. 15.5% (JH)

Bolla, Le Origine Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-22

Very dark. Inviting intense nose – deep damson and cherry fruit but not overly sweet. Palate matches those first impressions: firm, deep ripe fruit but also savoury and a little stern at the moment. Firm tannic grip but in balance. Long and powerful. 15.5 % (JH)

Buglioni, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 13 Drink 20??

Rather strange nose, pretty sulfurous – rotten egg not just SO₂. Very firm and dark and embryonic but those sulfides are worrying, hence no drink dates. Very dry finish. N/A% (JH)

Ca' La Bionda, Vigneti di Ravazzol Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 18 Drink 2012-25

Powerful sweet and dark cherry aromas. Good fruit depth on the palate but tannins are fine grained though quite deep pile. Dense chocolatey texture. Bold but not brash. Alcohol shows a little though there is immense richness (19g/l of glycerine, I found out later). 16% (JH)

Ca' Rugate Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 16 Drink 2010-16

Meaty notes but also some bright fruit. Fine fluid texture makes it already approachable but length is moderate. Tastes more like a ripasso. Fresh and easy. 14.5% (JH)

Campagnola, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16 Drink 2010-18

Dark and slightly lifted on the nose. Lots of peppery spice. Fine and dry. Correct rather than exciting. 15 % (JH)

Cantina di Soave, Rocca Sveva Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 16.5 Drink 2010-15

Vanilla-laced ripe cherries. Fragrant. Fresh, juicy and relatively light tannins. Lighter than many but nicely balanced and elegant. 14.5% (JH)

Cantina Sociale della Valpantena, Torre del Falasco Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 15.5 Drink 2010-15

Pretty toasty on nose and palate. Juicy and dry and pretty supple but unexceptional. 15% (JH)

Cantina Valpolicella Negrar, Domini Veneti Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17- Drink 2012-20

Rich dark and ripe and intense on the nose. Tangy and not overly sweet. Firm, chewy but not tough. Slightly rubbery

reductive note that might disappear with age or go in a more negative direction. Hard to tell but definitely needs time. 15% (JH)

Cesari, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16 Drink 2010-17

Sour cherry and slightly meaty on the nose. More meaty on the palate, maybe a little Brett but that's quite attractive at the moment. Fresh and fluid and really tangy and juicy on the finish – like most of those with this lower level of alcohol. Could do with a bit more stuffing. 14.5% (JH)

Contra' Malini, La Cà Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2011-17

Solid dark coloured. A touch raisiny and oxidative on the nose. Powerful sour cherry aromas. Much fresher on the palate than the nose suggested. Supple tannins, and juicy and intense, though there is still a raisiny note. Very good freshness to the end. Moreish. 16% (JH)

Corte Rugolini, Crosara de le Strie Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2010-16

Delicately aromatic (relative to Amarone!), with fresh red fruit. Extremely supple and mouthwateringly fresh and long. Elegant and long if not archetypal Amarone. NA% (JH)

Valentina Cubi, Morar Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-17

Very slight rubbery reductive note. Juicy and sweet with a vanilla spice sweetness in the middle. A bit spicity on the nose. Firm, dry but warm finish. 16% (JH)

Degani, La Rosta Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2010-17

Fine pure cherry and plum fruit aromas. Ripe but not overripe. Fine peppery note. Fresh, chalky dry tannins but flows with freshness across the palate. Elegant, balanced and long without being a blockbuster. Shows real finesse in a slightly lighter style. 15% (JH)

Farina, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-18

Black and inky. Dark, savoury aromas. Butch but still perfumed. Firm but supple with a mildly sour note of youth on the finish. A touch reductive at the moment but long and fresh if not very welcoming at the moment. Needs time. 14.5% (JH)

Fabiano, Nicola Fabiano Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-17

Sweet cherry and meaty aromas. Balanced, supple and elegant. Finishes firm and dry. Good, straightforward and well made. 14.5% (JH)

Fraccaroli Domenico, Grotta de Ninfeo Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 17.5 Drink 2012-20

Dark, spicy and savoury first impression. Firm but velvety tannins. Very good depth of fruit without any heaviness. Excellent balance with a lovely sour cherry finish. NA% (JH)

Galtarossa, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 17.5 Drink 2012-20

Sweet ripe and very slightly meaty. Vanilla and cassis. then terrific juicy freshness and bright fruit on the palate. Great verve and zest. Firm grippy tannins are well proportioned at youthful moment. 15.5% (JH)

Gamba Gnirega, Campedel Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17- Drink 2011-17

Strong sweet oak spice. Toasty. But also plenty of vanilla-infused fruit. Moderate fruit depth, supple and fresh and bright even though there is a quite a firm grip at the end. Maybe a little too oaky for me, hence the minus. 15.5% (JH)

Gnirega, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2011-20

Lifted plum and cherry fruit with delicate peppery spice. Lovely juicy bright freshness on the palate – alcohol very well hidden. Firm dark fruit and tannins on the finish. Excellent balance. 16% (JH)

Guerrieri Rizzardi, Calcarole Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2012-20

Dark and inky. Sweetness of perfectly ripe fruit and oak spice. Freshly baked cherry pie. Very attractive until you get to that sweetness on the finish, as if there were just a little too much RS. Sweet and velvety and powerful but finishes just a touch too sweet to get a higher mark. Manages nevertheless to retain the freshness of the vintage. NA% (JH)

Ignio Accordini, Le Bessole Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2011-19

Almost black to the rim. Rich dark fruit and much more cassis-dominated than any other wine so far. Even a slight cedary herbaceousness of Cabernet Sauvignon or Franc. Deliciously dry and chalky on the palate. Fresh and long though at the moment the tannins are a little drying on the finish. Unusual style but it works. One for those who prefer Bordeaux to Barossa Shiraz. 15% (JH)

Latium, Campo Leon Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 18 Drink 2012-22

Ripe, dark sour cherry. Lots of vanilla and cinnamon. Could only come from Italy! That intense sour cherry bite. Then a darker more savoury firmness on the palate. Rich and powerful but still harmonious. Tannins present but just as they should be at this stage – dry and firm. Classic and very well executed. NA% (JH)

Lonardi, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 15 Drink 2011-15

On the nose, a strange combination of sweet vanilla and meatiness. And a mineral reductive note. Perhaps a little too

meaty at this stage (Brett?) and finishes perhaps too fresh for comfort. 15% (JH)

Marchesi Fumanelli, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16 Drink 2011-16

Fresh fruit and fine cinnamon spice, just a slight earthy note. Very firm grip and much less fragrant on the palate. Fresh but perhaps a little too dry and crisp on the finish – a little more fruit flesh needed to balance. NA% (JH)

Margonole, Campo Rocco Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Ripe damson fruit and fine sweet baking spice. Very well balanced between ripeness and freshness and although there is power, it flows well over the palate and the alcohol is well hidden. Chewy finish rounded out by sustained fruit. 16.5% (JH)

Monte Cariano, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Very ripe raisiny fruit but still fragrant and that fragrance carries through to the mid palate. Rich but also fresh. Very long and moreish. NA% (JH)

Monte dall'Ora, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-19

Sweet cinnamon spice and ripe damson. Dark, savoury and firm but finishes soft in texture and fresh in flavour. 15.5% (JH)

Monte del Fra', Tenuta Lena di Mezzo Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2010-16

Strong vanilla aromas over black cherry. Sweet and juicy and approachable. Dense fruit but fluid though present tannins. 15% (JH)

Monte Zovo, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 16 Drink 2011-16

Meaty and slightly sulfidey. And then toasty and vanilla flavours. Rather an odd combination though much purer and fresher on the palate. Smooth tannins and marked acidity, not sure how this will settle down. NA% (JH)

Monteci, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-22

Struck match reductive notes, then a savoury, cooked mushroom aroma and plenty of cherry fruit. Firm and dark and very young, with plenty of cool spice. Very embryonic, tight but promises a lot more. 16% (JH)

Giacomo Montresor, Castelliere delle Guaitte 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-22

Sweet cherry oak. a little dusty. Dense but fresh, firm but not tough. Fresh and fluid in the mid palate and fragrance starting to emerge. Juicy long finish. NA% (JH)

Musella, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 17.5 Drink 2012-25

Rich and alluring with that lovely sweet/sour combination of Amarone varieties and winemaking. Fresh and juicy and with a lovely finely built structure of acid and tannins. Deep pile but fine. Delicious and – amazingly – the alcohol is not too noticeable except in a gentle warmth at the end. 16.5% (JH)

Angelo Nicolis, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-18

Notably oaky nose. Sweet baking spice and vanilla overlay on dark cherries. Oak dominates the palate too but there is enough fruit to cope. There's a fresh tangy finish but just not very distinctive because of the oak primacy. 15% (JH)

Novaia, Selezione Corte Vaona Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17+ Drink 2012-20

Opulent and spicy, hedonistic on the nose. Then much more savoury and firm on the palate. Tannins very dense and impenetrable at the moment but not tough. Way to go. 15% (JH)

Pasqua, Terre di Cariano, Cecilia Beretta Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2012-20

Sweet vanilla and Victoria plums on the nose with a peppery spice. Dry, dark and firm but very fine tannins. Excellent fresh finish. Very young but fine. 15.5% (JH)

Recchia, Enorama Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 18 Drink 2012-25

Both sweet and meaty. Rich, perfumed, pure fruit combines with finely managed tannins that are firm but very fine and the whole is long and finishes fresh and moreish. Very good indeed. That lovely sour cherry tang and very well structured for the long term. 15.5% (JH)

Sant' Antonio, Campo dei Gigli Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 16.5 Drink 2012-18

Sweet vanilla and toasty oak covering the fruit at the moment. Sour cherry flavours fill the mouth. Very firm and just a little bitter on the finish, otherwise a higher score. NA% (JH)

San Rustico, Gaso Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2012-19

Enveloping sweet dark cherry on the nose. Sweet oak spice but this does not cover the pure fruit fragrance. Concentrated and dark and just a little bitter on the finish but in a way that balances the sweetness of the fruit. Very fresh and piquant and long. 15.5% (JH)

Santa Sofia, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Colour more evolved than many. Restrained on the nose, giving very little away at this stage aside from a hint of black

cherry. Thick, dense and rich but still finishes fresh. Needs time but has very nice potential to become more expressive and perfumed. Juicy long finish. Big structure. 15% (JH)

Santi, Proemia Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 16.5 Drink 2011-18

Smoky and a little reductive. Juicy and rich and supple but a little too sweet on the finish even though the acidity is very crisp. Somehow they seem to stay separate rather than counterbalancing each other. 16% (JH)

Sartori, Reius Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 14.5 Drink 20??

Very surprising honeysuckle aroma. Something a little odd here – that carnation compound. Fresh acidity but rather hard / bitter on the palate. something not quite right? 14.5% (JH)

Speri, Vigneto Monte Sant'Urbano Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-25

Dark toasty char aromas. Like the skin of baked potatoes filled with cherry pie filling. Dark and savoury and darkly spiced on the palate. Rich yet tightly corseted at the moment by oak and firm tannins. Needs more time but has the ingredients for a fine future. 15% (JH)

Tedeschi, Capitel Monte Olmi Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2011-25

Remarkably floral and a little cedary. Sweet fine dark fruit but perhaps a tiny bit herbaceous. More marked herbaceous note on the palate – fresh rather than green. Dry and firm. Fresh acidity but just not quite enough flesh to bring it all into balance at the moment but I think it will fill out in the next couple of years. Very very diff from the sweetness of their 2004. 15% (JH)

Terre di Leone, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 18 Drink 2011-22

Intense and fresh, ripe sour cherry. Then delightfully, rich sweet and smooth on the palate. Dense tannins enveloped by sweet fruit. Delicious. Full of life and long. 16.5% (JH)

Tezza, Corte Majoli Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 15.5 Drink 2011-16

Quite closed and slightly reductive. A touch smoky. Dry and lacking flesh so that the acidity is almost painful. But it may round out with time. 15.5% (JH)

Tinazzi, La Bastia 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-20

Sweet cherry pie with cinnamon and nutmeg with an overlay of spiced oak! Toasty oak dominates the palate, though. Fine, fresh combination of tannin and acidity promise a long future. Rich, dense and long and showing finesse and balance even in youth. 15% (JH)

Tommasi, Ca' Florian Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16.5 Drink 2011-20

Very ripe and raisiny on the nose. With similar raisiny ripeness on the palate. Rich, soft and firmly Amarone with that counterpoint of sweet fruit, tangy acidity and very firm structure. This may be more classic Amarone style but I prefer a little less of the raisin flavour. 15% (JH)

Odino Vaona, Pegrandi Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 15 Drink 2011-16

Fresh and dark fruit with fragrant herbal notes. Rather flat in the middle and lacks flesh. Eyewatering acidity. 15.5% (JH)

Massimino Venturini, Campomasua Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17.5 Drink 2012-25

Smoky, reductive aromas. Fine, dark and darkly spiced. Very firm and dark on the palate. Very nice build and likely to open up to be a really delicious wine. Needs plenty of time and making little effort to please at the moment, and why should it? 16.5% (JH)

Villa Monteleone, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2012-22

Deep and dark with a fine – almost hidden – fragrance of dark cherries and damsons. Just very slightly bitter on the palate but this gives it a fresh bite and zest rather than being unpleasant, though it's a fine line. Firm, chewy and densely textured. 15.5% (JH)

Vigneti Villabella, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 14.5 Drink 20??

Lifted sour cherry. Flat on the mid palate. It doesn't smell corked but that flatness on the palate makes me wonder? Finishes almost bitter though there some nice black cherry fruit in there too. 15% (JH)

Zardini, Corte Zardini, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 17 Drink 2011-20

Vanilla and that sort of sweet spice of baking biscuits that entices you into the kitchen. But there's also something slightly floral. and citrus. Complex and hard to describe. Simpler on the palate but showing marked elegance even at this young age. Juicy and full of life and promise. 15.5% (JH)

Zenato, Amarone 2005 Valpolicella Classico 16 Drink 2012-19

Lots of meat (beef extract) and pepper. Really savoury – toasty too. Very very oaky on the palate and hard to taste the fruit – it's there but will it emerge? Still pretty moreish and tannins are well managed, 16.5% (JH)

Zeni, Barrique Amarone 2005 Valpolicella 15 Drink 2012-16

Fragrant and lightly floral dark fruit, then sour black cherry on the palate. A little hard and bitter probably due to the oak,

though the fruit is there underneath. Really not sure how his will age with such harsh tannins and marked acidity. NA% (JH)

Producers from the list above who are represented in the UK:

Ca' La Bionda

Meroni
Santi – Giv
Bolla
Tenuta Sant'Antonio
Igino Accordini
Valentina Cubi
Nicolis
Gamba Gnirega
Bixio
Musella
Accordini Stefano
Aldegheri
Sartori
Aldrighetti Luigi, Angelo e Nicola
Boscaini Carlo
Farina
Cantina Valpantena
Monteci
Buglioni
Campagnola Giuseppe
Tommasi
Cantina Valpolicella
Monte del Frà
Speri
Pasqua
Tinazzi
Tezza Flavio Vanio e Federico
Guerrieri Rizzardi
San Rustico
Tedeschi
Vaona Odino
Cà Rugate
Bertani
Zeni (molto poco)
Corte Rugolin
Vigneti Villabella
Cantina di Soave

Tags: [Veneto](#)

[2 comment\(s\)](#)

Comments



Unfortunately it was not in the tasting as Allegrini is not a member of the Consorzio. A real shame. As I mentioned in the intro above, there are several stars missing because the annual anteprima tasting is set up by the Consorzio for its members.

18 Feb 2009 12:10 by Julia Harding

Where was Allegrini's sensational Ammarone?

18 Feb 2009 09:00 by Peter Shaw

Add a comment:

See [tasting notes on 2005 Amarones by the score](#)

To judge by production and sales statistics, the Veneto's richest red, Amarone, seems, at least for now, to be surviving the various crises described in [Angelo Gaja's recent article](#).

Total production of grapes in the Valpolicella region continues to rise, reaching 71.8 million kg in 2008, with a value of 90 million euros; grape production specifically directed to Amarone and its sweet 'father' Recioto has risen to 29.8 million kg, and bottles of Amarone sold has reached an all-time high – more than 5.5 million bottles in 2008. However, last year the average price paid for Amarone and Recioto grapes dropped to 1.8 euros per kilo, compared with 2 euros per kilo in 2007, and some producers are concerned that the steady growth in popularity and volume could lead to a reduction in quality: the sweet temptation of success and an enthusiastic market, particularly in Norway, Denmark, Russia and Eastern Europe.

The Valpolicella Consorzio (regulatory and marketing body) are very proud of their recently launched trademark seal for Amarone – represented by the new paper strip and supported by comprehensive quality controls and traceability for all vines and wines (including chemical and organoleptic analysis). This is their seal of authenticity and hopes are high that the increased controls on production will help to maintain quality levels. Dr Sabrina Tedeschi of the excellent and very reliable family-owned and run Fratelli Tedeschi also told me that the number of inspectors from the ministry of agriculture in the Veneto region has increased since [Brunellogate](#). (Put Brunellogate into the site search for the many and various articles chronicling this saga.)

One of the key issues in the production of dry to dryish Amarone and the sweet Recioto is the control on the amount of this wine that can be produced from the Valpolicella vineyards. The [official regulations](#) state: 'Recioto della Valpolicella and Amarone della Valpolicella must be made from the traditional vineyard selection of grapes, which must not exceed 70% of the total yield'. The trouble is, this is an overall percentage and the regulations do not restrict the selection to specific vineyards best suited to grapes for Amarone (typically, hillside vineyards producing lower yields and thicker-skinned grapes). The best producers of course select the best vineyards for their Amarone but there is nothing in the regulations to stop them from using 70% of the grapes from less good vineyards too.

This is one of the main reasons the Consorzio's request for DOCG status was denied, because DOCG has to be applied to specific vineyard areas *in toto*.

Alessandro Castellani of [Ca' La Bionda](#) in Marano, who produces excellent, terroir-driven Amarone, notably the **Amarone Ravazzol**, from grapes grown on limestone soils, as well as a remarkably long-lived Valpolicella (see below), emphasises that 'Amarone is a selection not a process'. The process of drying the grapes confers very distinctive characteristics on the wines – richness and power and sometimes a certain sweetness that can dominate any notion of grape provenance – but it's not the key determinant for quality, which is, as always, the vineyard.



While many producers have invested in huge temperature- and humidity-controlled drying rooms, such as Tedeschi's pictured here, other producers prefer not to use this technology. Tedeschi points out that these controls, critical in keeping at bay the botrytis that lurks on these late-picked grapes, have made a significant difference to the fruit quality of Amarone, which in past decades was often compromised by botrytis.

Castellani, on the other hand, prefers wooden drying racks and sees humidity- and temperature-control equipment as simply an insurance policy, to be used as rarely as possible. Grapes dried naturally, he believes, produce more complex wines, especially in their aromas, because the drying process tends to be slower, allowing the grape sugar to concentrate more slowly and the malic acid to be fully respired at the same time. This also means that his wines do not go through malolactic fermentation because there's no malic acid left in the grapes. As the malic acid is respired, pyruvic acid is created, contributing to this aromatic complexity.

Sabrina Tedeschi, Alessandro Castellani and Carlo Meroni (of the very traditional Azienda Agricola Meroni in S

Ambrogio) spoke, I am sure, for the majority of producers in highlighting the importance of producing a range of Valpolicella wines, not just Amarone – partly because they could not do this under the current legislation but also to avoid putting all their eggs into one basket and to enjoy the fact that the region and its varieties have much more to offer the consumer than just the Amarone style. Interestingly, of these three, only Tedeschi produces a Valpolicella ripasso (a hybrid made by refermenting Valpolicella dry wine on the sugar-rich, not fully pressed, marc of Amarone). Neither Castellani nor Meroni like the style but all emphasised that it should be a superior Valpolicella not a baby Amarone.

All these issues - not to mention the hot topics of guyot v pergola training (as discussed [here](#) by Walter Speller in relation to the neighbouring Soave region), size and age of barrels for ageing, level of residual sugar – are the subject of regular debate in the region, as is the question of what labelling changes will be needed when the [EU wine reform](#) is implemented. The press conference held in Verona before the 2005 *anteprima* tasting provided no answers to this last point, and I had the strong impression that many were doing their best to ignore the issues that may be raised for the region's classification system.

It seems that neither DOC regulation nor market response will be able to guarantee the quality of Amarone. This can be maintained only when producers follow the example of Tedeschi and Ca' La Bionda in taking a long-term perspective, retaining pride in the diversity of Valpolicella – *normale* as well as Amarone – and continuing to exercise rigorous selection rather than trying to jump on the Amarone bandwagon.

A note on the DOC: Just in passing, and for lovers of detail, it may be helpful to point out that the DOC is Valpolicella pure and simple. Within the Valpolicella DOC regulations, there are geographical subcategories (Classico, Valpantena) as well as what might loosely be called 'style' categories (Superiore, Amarone, Recioto, etc.) with their own specific norms, particularly in relation to winemaking and ageing. To try to avoid making the wine name more confusing in [Amarones by the score](#), I put the word Classico at the end of the wine name, even though it is not part of the actual appellation name. Full details of the DOC regulations can be found on the Consorzio's very useful [website](#).

A note on the ageing potential of Amarone: Some of the 2005 wines I tasted were already remarkably approachable, others still rather stern despite the time spent in barrel and bottle. Sabrina Tedeschi suggested the following general guidelines: 'Amarone Classico, which usually has a high level of polyphenols (more than 2,200 mg/l), has a high ageing potential, more than 20 years in a good vintage and with a strong structure. The lighter style could age a little bit less, but still 15-20 years. Amarone usually reaches a peak 5-7 years after bottling and after that there's a plateau for 10-15 years or longer. 2005 is a vintage with good ageing potential, thanks to a high content of phenols and good total acidity.'

The **Tedeschi, Monte Olmi 2000** that I enjoyed with slow-cooked beef the day after the tasting was really at a perfect stage for maximum pleasure.



Alessandro Castellani (left) concurred with Tedeschi, with a few more thoughts along the way: 'There are many things to consider: acidity, alcohol, sugar, pH (it depends on the kind of soil), kind of grapes. From my experience the cooler vintages such as 2005 normally have a longer life: they are not ready immediately, but after they come out, they give you nice surprises (eg the 1999).

'This is because in cooler vintages the acidity is higher and pH normally lower, and the oxidation processes go really slowly under these conditions. Second, our grapes such as Corvina and "big Corvina" (Corvinone) give wines with a high capacity to age (like Nebbiolo in Piemonte). In addition, Amarone wines have a long life because the alcohol level is high and preserves the wine.

'Another important thing is the quantity of residual sugar: the lower the sugar, the longer the wine will live (sugars absorb oxygen, oxidation is faster).

'On Monday I tasted some of our old Amarone: 1998 was wonderful now, and the same for 1999. They were really fresh and nice to be drunk: acidity sensation was lower, very noble like a Pinot Noir from Burgundy.

'It's my opinion that the best moment for the greatest Italian wine is after 10 or 15 years from the vintage moment, though not for hotter vintages such as 2003.'

I tasted the **Ca' La Bionda Valpolicella Classico Superiore 1999 Campo Casal Vegri**. It was wonderfully scented with red cherries, a note of undergrowth and it was amazingly fresh and silky, still not at the end of its life. The aromas were

complex: cherries in alcohol, leather and mint. With time in the glass, a strong mocha, roasted aroma emerged. The tannins were melted but still providing a framework for all that lovely fruit. However, I wouldn't recommend ageing most Valpolicellas for 10 years!

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