

Best Italian Red Wines of the Year – Part Two

[January 24, 2012 at 10:50 am](#) [Leave a comment](#)



In my last [post](#), I listed a few of my choices as the Best Italian Red Wines of 2011, focusing on Amarone as well as Barolo and Barbaresco. In part two, I will look at some other wines from Piemonte as well as several from Tuscany. Again, this is a partial list; for more information about all my selections, see the end of this post.

2008 Elio Grasso Barbera d'Alba "Vigna Martina" - While this great estate in Monforte d'Alba is best known for their cru Barolo, this selection, named for Elio's wife, has become one of the finest examples of Barbera d'Alba. Light purple with inviting aromas of black plum, blackberry and violets, the wine is matured in half-new French barriques, but unlike too many examples of Barbera these days, the oak sensation here does not overwhelm. The 2008 bottling is especially accomplished with lively acidity and excellent persistence; it's also quite delicious. This is fine now, but it will be better in a year when it settles down and should drink well for another 3-5 years. **\$30**

2009 Vietti Barbera d'Alba "Scarrone Vigna Vecchia" – This is arguably the most famous version of Barbera d'Alba; it's also one of the most famous red wines in all of Italy. Vietti owns this vineyard, planted on a steep hillside in Castiglione Falletto and produces two wines from here. The regular Scarrone Barbera is from the section of the vineyard that averages 60-65 years of vine age. That's pretty impressive, but this "Vigna Vecchia" (old vine) bottling is sourced from the vines on this hill that are approximately 85 years old! Now imagine how small the yields are and how concentrated the wine must be and you have some idea of how spectacular this wine

truly is! Deep ruby red-light purple with aromas of boysenberry and black plum, this has excellent concentration and a generous mid-palate with layers of fruit. The acidity, though not as high as a more traditional Barbera is still very good and there is a powerful finish with excellent persistence. This is, in a word, hedonistic. A modern Barbera that is as captivating and as well made as any on the market, this is a beautifully made, exquisitely balanced wine that will impress you like few red wines made from any variety. If you haven't had this wine in the past, you owe it to yourself to find a bottle of this wine, as the 2009 is a memorable a version as any in some time. This is so appealing now, but this will improve and drink well for another 7-10 years. **\$75**

E. Mirafiore Dolcetto d'Alba 2009 - The Mirafiore line of wines, produced at the venerable estate of Fontanafredda in Serralunga d'Alba is a special set of wines that harkens back to the origins of this firm in the late-1800s, when it was known as Mirafiore. Made from grapes grown in Serralunga, the wine was aged in medium and large-sized oak casks for two months, resulting in a wine of beautiful variety purity. Displaying aromas and flavors of cranberry, black raspberry and violets, this is medium-ful with moderate tannins and a lengthy, satisfying finish. What a lovely Dolcetto on its own or served with duck, rabbit or pork tonight or over the next 2-3 years. A lot of character here for only **\$20**.

2007 Selvapiana Chianti Rufina Riserva "Vigneto Bucerchiale" - Under the guidance of Francesco Giuntini A. Masseti, this estate has risen to the top of a very small group of the finest wine estates in Tuscany. This wine is produced from a single vineyard on the property that was planted back in 1968. The lovely aromas of wild strawberry, Bing cherry and rose petals are simply intoxicating and there is beautiful texture and structure with medium-weight tannins, ideal acidity and excellent persistence. An outstanding offering – this is what great Chianti should taste like! Appealing now, this will drink well for 10-12 years. **\$35** (and worth every penny.)

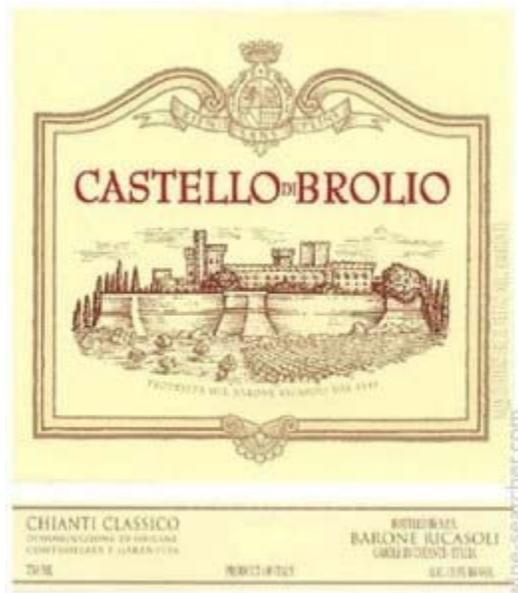


2009 Isole e Olena Chianti Classico – You can never go wrong with a wine from this estate, one of the most consistent in Tuscany for more than 40 years. The 2009 Chianti Classico offers aromas of red cherry, thyme and red roses with very good depth of fruit, a beautifully defined mid-palate and excellent structure; the oak is subtle and there is very good acidity. Beautifully balanced and such a lovely food wine, enjoy this over the next 5-7 years. **\$20**

2009 Felsina Chianti Classico- Here is another great producer that produces first-rate wines across the board. While probably best known for their Riserva bottlings (both a regular and the exquisite "Vigneto Rancia" offerings), their Chianti Classico *normale* is noteworthy as well.

100% Sangiovese, aged in medium-sized Slavonian oak casks, the wine offers textbook varietal aromas of red cherry along with notes of red roses and thyme and has a beautifully defined mid-palate, lively acidity and excellent persistence. Approachable now, but at its best in 5-7 years.

\$20



2008 Barone Ricasoli Chianti Classico “Castello di Brolio” - This is the famous Brolio estate where the recipe for Chianti Classico was formulated back in the 19th century. Today Francesco Ricasoli oversees production at this magnificent site, which features one of Tuscany’s most splendid *castelli*. While this is labeled simply as a Chianti Classico, it could be designated as a Chianti Classico Riserva. But Ricasoli does not use that term; indeed, this is the finest wine of his estate each year and wants the consumer to know the wine simply as Castello di Brolio, much like Lafite or Latour and other top chateaux in Bordeaux. A blend of 80% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Merlot matured for 18 months in *tonneaux* and barriques. Offering excellent concentration and perfectly tuned acidity and beautifully integrated oak to go along with the sumptuous red cherry and black currant fruit, this is an accomplished Chianti Classico – one of great breeding and class! This 2008 version- from a very underrated vintage in Chianti Classico – is one of the best; it will be at its peak in 10-12 years and may drink well for several years after that. At **\$50**, this stands up to the finest of all Tuscan reds.

This is a partial list of my selections for the best Italian red wines of 2011. In my next post, I will focus on Brunello di Montalcino along with several choices from Campania, Sicily and Puglia.

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