



This article originally appeared in Issue 7 of *The World of Fine Wine* magazine. The article may not be sold, altered in any way, or circulated without this statement.

Every issue of *The World of Fine Wine* features coverage of the world's finest wines in their historical and cultural context, along with news, reviews, interviews and comprehensive international auction results. For further information, and to subscribe to *The World of Fine Wine*, please visit www.finewinemag.com or call +44 (0)20 8950 9177.

AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2001 WINE TASTING IN VERONA BY FRANCO ZILIANI

Amarone della Valpolicella has been an eminently local wine for decades now – a testament to the traditional and venerable customs and processes of the region. But having tasted a considerable number of wines from the excellent 2001 vintage, it is clear that while some are beautifully balanced and show good cellaring potential, others risk losing their identity.

Increasingly, in fact, Amarones come across as nothing more than characterless reds, produced from semi-dried grapes that reveal nothing of their provenance, which is, after all, not any anonymous vineyard but the multifaceted terroir of Valpolicella. The Amarone that one runs into all too often today is designed for tasting rather than for drinking and is so over the top that it approaches the paradoxical. Here is a wine that has been given so much new oak – for which, read French barriques – often outrageously toasted, and is so concentrated, often with the assistance of grapes entirely foreign to Valpolicella – namely Merlot, Cabernet and Syrah – that it has been turned into something else altogether. It is completely different from the wine that only a decade ago was held to be truly iconic, the expression of a small-farm way of life, exquisitely local.

Count the Amarones today that unleash every fragrance under the sun except dark cherry and prunes, that flaunt aromas ranging from roasted coffee and spices to vegetal, that exhibit an almost sickening softness, with their cloying fruit that verges on poured jam!

When we add to this the elevated alcohol of recent years and the high residual sugars (also the consequence of overlengthy drying regimes) that make Amarone dangerously close in style to Recioto, and we have here the emergence of a phenomenon that can only be a cause for worry.

Then there's the price tag. Today, a good Amarone is going to run, in the wine shop and restaurant, to something in the order of €30–50, putting it into the 'product at risk' zone. It goes without saying that a good Amarone must cost



more than a standard Valpolicella Classico. The *appassimento* certainly elevates the cost, especially now that the drying process is totally controlled, planned and even, to a certain extent, sterilised. Still, none of this should cause a speculative trajectory that makes Amarone the preserve of the privileged few.

Amarone's prospects are far from rosy, even if the quality of the best wines remains high. Among these are our own top ten tasted in Verona – but also others that were not present in this press and trade preview (Corte Sant'Alda, Dal Forno and La Ragose, to name only a few). Most of these wines are full-bodied and generous but still manage to exhibit a lively freshness and magisterial balance of fruit, acidity, tannin and alcohol, with no one element dominating the others.

With the 2005 harvest comes, at long last, DOCG rather than DOC status. But it was reported at the preview tasting that the average grape price, which in 2002 had hit a record high of €2.30 per kilo, had slumped 40 per cent to €1.40 per kilo in 2004. A sluggish market today, or one overvalued two years ago? The answer is both. The biggest problem is that too many

grapes are being put on the drying mats, the weight rising from 40,000 quintals in 1994, to 88,000 in 1998, 162,000 in 2003, and 148,000 in 2004. Bottle production soared from 3.3 million in 2000, to 4.5 million in 2002, and 6 million in 2003.

What is the solution, then? We need to heed the warning signs and remind ourselves of the absolute necessity of linking the wine to its place of origin, referring, unstintingly, to Amarone di Valpolicella rather than using the name Amarone by itself.

The European Union recently authorised the use in international markets of 17 traditional wine terms hitherto reserved for Italian wines – including Amarone and Recioto. Sooner or later, therefore, the world market will toss up 'Amarone' made in Australia, California, Argentina or Chile.

And once Amarone ceases to evoke the fragrances of Valpolicella, why on earth should the consumer, faced with a wine like all the others, Merlot-ed and overoaked, spend two or three times more on it than they would for an Amarone-style wine from the New World, Hungary, Moldova or Romania?



The Tasting

Trabucchi Amarone di Marchetto 2001

A superb wine from the east of Valpolicella. Wonderful aromatic range, with clean-edged blackberry, liquorice, dried plum, mint and thyme. Remarkably sapid, with a distinctive earthiness and minerality; dense but also crisp and lively on the palate. **17.5**

Tommaso Bussola TB 2001

Bussola-style Amarone: fat and glossy, with creamy, densely layered, seductive aromas that keep on unfolding. A polished palate with no rough edges; stunningly rich, exceptionally smooth and weighty. **17**

Michele Castellani Amarone 2001

Appealingly elegant and vivacious, showing liquorice, earth and blackberry on the nose. Lithe and supple texture, a lengthy development, with appreciable soil-infused weight, alluring crispness and a sapidity that drives throughout. **16.5**

San Rustico Amarone Vigneti del Gaso 2001

A textbook Amarone, with aromas of superlative opulence and breadth (sour cherry, dried plum, spice, *marron glacé*) and a texture that is earthy, close-knit and velvety. Builds well, through a lengthy finish. **16.5**

Roccolo Grassi Amarone 2001

Only a barrel sample available from this young producer. Ultra-dense hue, and a nice wildness on the nose, peppery and with very distinctive spiciness. Shows superb complexity; fat, rich and silky, and great length on the palate. **16**

Tedeschi Capitel Monte Olmi 2001

Remarkable aromatic suppleness, with creamy notes of ripe fruit and spice, and hints of minerally slate. Luxurious, opulent smoothness, very fine texture, and effortless finale. **16**

Le Salette Amarone 2001

Still quite young, a bit closed in, but

faultless texture, dense, rich fruit and solid structure make for remarkable potential. **15.5**

Buglioni Amarone 2001

Barrel sample, but very promising. Utterly beguiling, lively, crisp-edged fragrances; dynamic fruit in the mouth, with confident, mineral-shot flavours, distinctively earthy and sapid. One to watch. **15.5**

Amarone Bertani 2001

Surprisingly modern style for this classic house. Masterfully smooth and fragrant, classy and elegant. Admirably balanced, full-flavoured and zesty, with a touch of earth. Very long and impressively distinctive. **15.5**

Corte Rugolin Amarone 2001

Classically styled Amarone, with a generous nose redolent of preserved fruit. Mouthwatering, succulent fruit, not the most expansive, but appealing, judiciously crafted and tasty. **15** ■