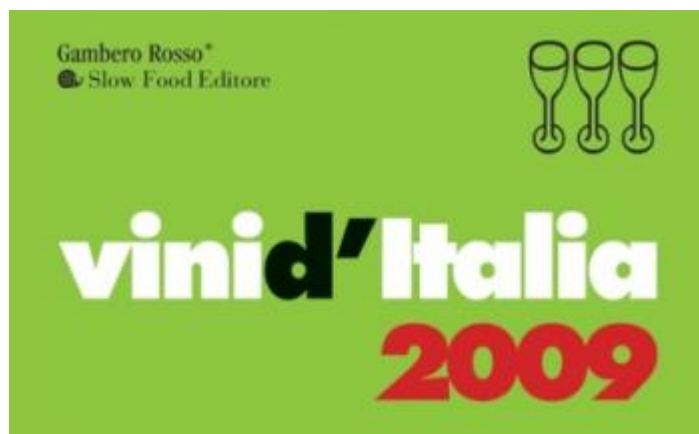


9 top Tre Bicchieri wines



Gambero Rosso

Yesterday was the annual Tre Bicchieri tasting here in San Francisco. Each year, the Italian publisher Gambero Rosso does a U.S. road tour of sorts for the winners of the top award -- Tre Bicchieri ("three glasses") -- in its well-read annual wine guide. It's run in conjunction with Slow Food USA, much as the Italian Slow Food takes a part in publishing the annual Gambero Rosso wine guide.

Though some quibble with its stylistic preferences, the Gambero Rosso guide remains a comprehensive snapshot of Italian wine, and unlike many wine guides, it takes a relatively egalitarian approach to its extensive tastings. Though there's always that extra interest in big red wines, it has been possible over time for more humble wines -- Soave, Verdicchio, Friulian Sauvignon Blanc, puzzling blends from the Maremma -- to grab the coveted three glasses.

A road tour of these winners inevitably means quality is high, since it's the result of an extensive tasting process. And there's a chance to taste wines that don't come across the transom so often. This year's was no difference, though among the 122 stations, it seemed a bit harder to root out the extraordinary from the very good. No dis to any of the wines there, but a good number of the 2004 Barolos, for instance, were showing more flashy wood than you might want from such a generally excellent vintage.

Though the San Francisco tasting has come and gone, the show continues tomorrow in New York. (More info [here](#).)

To wit, then, my nine most memorable wines from Tre Bicchieri:

1) 2005 Nino Negri Valtellina Sfursat: Not to sound like a broken record, but Nino Negri's Valtellina made from dried grapes once again hit the top of my Tre Bicchieri chart. The 2005's even better than the 2004, which in turn was better than the higher-end 5 Stelle bottling for that year. Gorgeously earthy flowers and wild strawberry. Big, hearty, swoon-worthy profile (and that's without seeing it's 15.5 percent). An extraordinary wine.

2) 2007 Abbazia di Novacella Praepositus Alto Adige Valle Isarco Sylvaner: This historic Alto Adige estate never fails to impress, but this year it was the depths of what they accomplished with the usually simple Sylvaner that made a mark. Fresh with orange peel, white flowers and ginger, it's darn precise in its mineral texture and just a bit honeyed.

3) 2006 Hilberg-Pasquero Nebbiolo d'Alba: Amid lots of Barolos and Barbarescos, this was the most Nebbioloish of the lot. One of the few proper Nebbiolo noses -- No wood, no vanilla, just leather, tobacco, dust and bell clear fruit.

4) 2004 Ettore Germano Barolo Cerretta: Not actually Germano's Three Glass wine, I believe, but showing just a bit better than the Prapo (bit more decanting might have changed that). Though the wood was showing a bit, there's more clear tar and perfume to it. A bit tough, but gorgeous and well-defined. Showing the vintage's potential.

5) 2007 Agostino Vicentini Soave Superiore Il Casale: Soave isn't exactly the wine to show backbone, but this small Veneto producer has produced a streetfighter from late-harvest fruit. There's a textural toughness to it, with nervous mineral definition atop pear and oregano.

6) 2005 Fattoria Colle Allodole Montefalco Sagrantino Colle delle Allodole: Francesco Antano's Sagrantino has both guts and refinement, finding a style of its own. A carpet of tannins defines it, but unlike the 2003 with its tough-guy pose, these are finely knit and lying under gorgeous ruby fruit and balsam.

7) 2004 Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Dosage Zero: This well-known Franciacorta producer includes an undosed bottling in its lineup, and though the style can be too severe even in Champagne, this is beautifully dialed in. 60 percent Chardonnay, 23 percent Pinot Bianco, 17 percent Pinot Noir. Precise, breezy, with polished berry and orange, and perfect balance. A revelatory rethinking of Franciacorta.

8) 2006 Ampeleia Kepos: I almost lost track trying to write down the mix of grapes here: Grenache, Mourvedre, Alicante, Marselan (a cross of Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache) and Carignane. A new project from Elisabetta Foradori (whose Trentino winery helped bring Teroldego back to the front page) and two friends, this effort places mostly Mediterranean varieties in Tuscany's Maremma, and it's the essence of why the Maremma is worth minding. With 12 months in concrete and neutral oak, this shows like an expressive southern Rhone, with rooty earth tones giving depth to gorgeous Grenache berry fruit.

9) 2003 Biondi Santi Tenuta Il Greppo Brunello di Montalcino: How in the world was the Biondi Santi station empty when I stopped by? (Update: Empty of other tasters, that is.) Worse still was when one fellow taster -- during the trade portion of the tasting, mind you -- said they'd never heard of it. It's like going to a Napa tasting and asking who Robert Mondavi is. And yes, it's '03 Brunello. And fantastic. Showing unheard-of tension and subtlety from that so-very-hot year. Ebullient, seamless bright fruit with waves of mineral nuance. Just when I think I've gotten out of Brunello, they pull me back in.

Posted By: [Jon Bonné \(Email\)](#) | March 05 2009 at 03:05 PM

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