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A Tradition of Excellence Never Fails to Impress at Gambero Rosso "Tre Bicchieri" Wine Tasting

By Heidi Schooley

I suppose tasting the best wines from all over Italy, all the while sampling artisan ch harvest olive oils and fresh fruit, isn't such a bad way to spend an afternoon. In fact exciting and educational afternoon. On Wednesday, March 16th I had the pleasure Gambero Rosso's Tre Bicchieri Wine Guide 2005 tasting at the Herbst Pavilion in S. This event showcased all Italian wines that received "tre bicchieri", or "three glasses and food publication Gambero Rosso's 2005 guide.

The event was overwhelming from the start. Wine journalists from the Bay Area and more distant points, along with professionals from the trade, restaurant owners and winery owners were among the tasters. I stood in awe of the 104 wine producers there to showcase their best, and the piles fresh fruit, cheese, and breads, beautifully displayed as a bounty of palate-cleansing intermezzos to the wines.



But, I couldn't stand frozen in my shoes for long and started tasting one by one. Of were all good--they wouldn't be a part of such a prestigious guide if they weren't. H: Tuscany myself, I am partial to their wines. But there were also many bold and strol the South, as well as smooth and persistent ones from the North.

Gliding through the room as if on a cloud, I enjoyed the pleasant conversation with as well as replying to dark, handsome Italian wine growers in my garbled impression language. The event inspired me to be more artistic and open in my future wine chc out of the box and discover diamonds in the rough.

Below are some of my favorites:

Whites

- Leonildo Pieropan – Soave Classico La Rocca '02 around \$32
Soave, from the town of the same name east of Verona, is such a happy, fre wine. The volcanic soil and late harvest (but not sweet!) of this wine gives it (with remnants of exotic fruit and nuts, spice and vanilla on the soft palate. Its harmonious array of flavors evolves well over time, and I believe it must be s

delicious with grilled fish.

- Lis Neris – Tal Lùc '02 around \$63

This wine enthralled me; I've never tasted anything like it. This mysterious white wine from Friuli uses a blend of Verduzzo and Riesling grapes that give it a brilliant pale yellow color and aromas that are intense, clean and pleasing. Hints of dried apricot and peach jam are followed by quince, litchi, melon and honey. The crisp taste corresponds well to the nose and the finish has long flavors of honey, jam and almond. A very well made wine.

- Tenuta J. Hofstätter – A.A. Gewürztraminer Kolbenhof '03 around \$30

This wine reflects the character of its producers, a perfect blend of German and Italian traditions. It was once described as the vinous equivalent of an oxygene. This wine does give a head rush, it is very good--huge, exotic aromas of fruit flowers, namely peach and jasmine. You won't be disappointed with this one.

- Feudi di San Gregorio – Greco di Tufo Cutizzi '03 around \$18

Greco di Tufo is quickly becoming my favorite white wine, and this production explains why. The soft volcanic ash in the soil yields fruit that brings the wine of minerals and earth, pleasantly complemented with scents of ripe apricots, and mint. It has a lively acidity and fruity finish, and goes great with pastas and risottos, especially those with fish ingredients. The sweet meat of crab and other shellfish would be a combination to swoon over.

Reds

- Mastroberardino – Taurasi Radici '00 around \$31

This winery sits on land that has been cultivated for thousand of years. From the province of Ipernia in Campania, its rich tradition is still tasted in the soil. This wine has a brilliant ruby red color, a complex and intense bouquet of berries and vanilla and an elegant taste with notes of black pepper, plum, strawberry jam. A very pleasant start to my day, I would definitely pair this spiced dishes, truffles, or cheese.

- Villa Vignamaggio – Vignamaggio '01 around \$17

I was happy to see this winery on the list because I've visited it before and it is a wonderfully beautiful place run by a family that takes pride in their work and their wines. The estate, located in Greve in Chianti, has an interesting claim to fame: Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa is an ancestor of the owners. This particular wine has rich flavors speckled with blackberries, the taste is full-bodied and warm. A well-balanced wine suitable for virtually anything, from grilled meat to pizza.

- Braida – Barbera D'Asti Bricco dell'Uccellone '01 around \$45

In the famous wine-growing province of Asti in the Piedmont region, this adorable winery is named after the nickname of its founder, Giacomo Bologna. Quirky and proud, this Barbera D'Asti they produce is the best one I've yet to try. It's made from 100% Barbera grapes, a deep garnet color. The aroma is concentrated with hints of orange and vanilla throughout its fruity bouquet. Dry but well structured, it is a great combination of tastes of vine and wood.

- Tenuta di Valgiano – Colline Lucchesi Tenuta di Valgiano '01 around \$26

From the famous Tuscan province of Lucca, this wine surprised me with a great taste albeit a bit young. A blend of Sangiovese, Syrah and Merlot, its aroma is refined with hints of minerals and spice amongst a bouquet that is intense and enduring. The taste is dense and textured, with soft tannins and a slight sweetness. This wine should develop longer over the next twenty years.

- Feudi di San Gregorio – Patrimo '02 around \$96

My favorite of the event, a great investment. This winery in Campania is the epitome of modern elegance meeting centuries-old tradition. It's made from a grape variety thought to be a clone of Merlot, and the flavor backs up this theory. Deep ruby color, the smell of blackberries and truffles danced around my nose as I inhaled the spicy bouquet. The vineyard's mineral-rich soil comes out right away, along with a velvety taste, with sweet fruit and a lingering finish. This wine will stand up well

flavorful cheeses.

· Foradori – Granato '02 around \$42

Granato is named after the Italian word for pomegranate, a fruit as indigenous to the soil of Trentino as the Teroldego grape that makes this wine. The flavor of pomegranate embraces the mouth and nose with this dense and complex wine, creating an elegant body and distinctive character.

· Tenimenti Luigi D'Alessandro – Cortona Il Bosco '01 around \$49

Most everyone in the world has heard of this pristine little Tuscan hill town of Cortona in some context or another. But this winery is famous in its own right for producing not only Syrah, and a well made one at that. The low yield per vine, encourages concentrated flavors with deep fruity tones, and hints of spice and pepper. I have also detected a taste of blackberry liqueur, vanilla and sandalwood. As sumptuous as I've ever had.

· Poliziano – Nobile di Montepulciano Asinone '01 around \$20

Nobile di Montepulciano, from the Tuscan province of Montepulciano, is always a favorite of mine because it is so versatile and a good bargain. This one from Poliziano is no exception. The flavors of rich plum and chocolate are concentrated in this full bodied wine. A good pair with filet mignon or any type of grilled meat or game or aged cheese.

Dessert

· Avignonesi – Vin Santo '93 around \$130

This is the type of dessert wine you treasure and break open for an extremely special occasion such as your daughter's wedding. It is rare and should be slowly sipped from large, wide glasses to open up its powerful aroma. Very dark amber color and taste is thoroughly unique, as most Vin Santos are. Should be consumed on perhaps after a light dessert.

Heidi Schooley is a graduate of the California Culinary Academy. She has cooked at the Badia A Coltibuono in Chianti and now lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she writes about wine and food.

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