

The Amarone Families and the 2001 Vintage for Amarone

Charles Scicolone (November 16, 2011)



Getting to Know Amarone

Twelve wineries from the Valpolicella area of the Veneto Region of Italy have joined together to promote in international markets the tradition and quality of what they feel is one of the finest red wines of Italy: Amarone. They call themselves the Amarone Families and recently came to New York to promote Amarone with a seminar and walk around tasting.

Stefano Cesari of the Brigaladara winery is the official spokesperson for the Families. He began the seminar by citing the criteria for membership:

Must be a family owned winery, hence the name: Amarone Families



Must be producing Amarone for 15 years
Must be a producer and not just a bottler
Must export to several major markets

They also have their own rules and as Stefano pointed out these are stricter than those allowed by law:

Their Amarone must be 16% alcohol (the law 15%) and aged 30 months (law 20 months)
They will not produce Amarone in off vintages, e.g. 2002

Mr. Cesari said that weather conditions during the growing season and the drying of the grapes, known as appassimento, are equally important. In fact a cold winter is very good for the appassimento.

He said that the 2001 vintage was like the 2011 vintage. Flowering took place around June 5th which is very early because it was a hot spring. He also found it very strange and could not explain why Easter was early in the season and so was the flowering. June, July and August were very dry and there was rain the first week of September. They began harvesting on September 10 which is early.

He said the 2001 was a very good vintage. Since 2011 had the same weather conditions he hoped it too would be a very good vintage but they would not know for sure until after the appassimento.

The grapes used in making Amarone: The Primary grape is Corvina 40% to 80%. Corvinare may be substituted for Corvina for up to 50% of the amount. Rondinella between 5% to 30% and other authorized and recommended varieties up to 15% of the total, of these no more than 10% of any single variety. A few producers use Oseleta which is a new addition to Amarone. In the past Amarone for the most part was made from Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara. Other varieties that are sometimes used are Rosrignole, Negara and Dindarella.

There were 12 wines at the tasting, one from each of the Families. There was also at least one member from each family to speak about Amarone in general and their own wine.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC "Casa Vecie" 2001- Brigaldara (Stefano Cesari). The wine is made from 40% Corvinone, 30% Rondinella and 20% or other approved grapes. It is aged in barriques for 24 months and 24 months in barrels made of oak and six months in bottle before release. This was the only wine that did not have any Corvina in it. Even at 16% alcohol it was a very elegant wine with aromas and flavors of dry fruit, hints of cherry and spice, good acidity and a nice finish and aftertaste.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC "Vigneto Monte Sant' Urbano 2001-Speri (Luca Speri). It is made from 70% Corvina Veronese, 25% Rondinella and 5% Corvinone. Manual selection of the grapes takes place the first two weeks in September. The grapes wither and dry in "fruit drying rooms" for 120 days. It is done in ideal conditions of humidity and ventilation. The grapes lose 41% of their initial weight and there is a considerable increase in the amount of sugar. The pressing of the dried grapes took place on January 8th 2002 with a roller crusher-destemmer. Maceration took place in stainless steel tanks for 35 days with periodic pumping over and délestage. On February 5 there is the separation of the skins from the juice and complete alcoholic and malolactic fermentation take place in 50HL oak barrels. The wine was then aged in 500 liter oak cask for 36 months and in bottle before release. There were deep dry cherry aromas and flavors with a hint of oak, good acidity and a nice mineral quality to the wine. The finish and aftertaste had the sensation of dry cherry skins.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC 2001- Tommasi (Pierangelo Tommasi). The wine contains 50% Corvina, 15% Corvinone, 30% Rondinella and 5% Molinara. The grapes are dried for four months prior to a gently pressing and then vinified. It was aged 35 hectoliter Slavonian oak barrels. Tommasi



has always been one of my favorite Amarones. This is classic Amarone at its best with a great finish and aftertaste.

Pierangelo Tommasi explained the appassimento in more detail and why the Amarone Families dry their grapes at least one month longer. He said that the drying of the grapes during the winter was as important as the flowering and the maturing of the grape during the spring and summer. The "Families" decided to dry their grapes one month longer than required by law until January 1. The colder the weather the better it is for drying the grapes. The grapes used for Amarone are thick skinned and can take a long drying period. This longer winter drying makes the resulting wine more concentrated. Only after the drying period takes place do they know if the juice is good enough to be made into Amarone. They only make Amarone in the best vintages.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico "Ambrosan" DOC 2004 Nicolis (Mariella Nicolis and Martina Fornaser) 70% Corvina 20% Rondinella and 10% Croatina. After the grapes are harvested, they are placed in small boxes and transferred into a large room where the grapes will be dried. The grapes wither and naturally lose weight and gain a high concentration of sugar. After 3 months of drying, the withered grapes are softly pressed. Due to the low temperature, the process of fermentation is long and slow and maceration can take a month or more. The wine is aged for 30 months partially in medium-sized Slavonian oak casks and partially in small oak barriques. The wine remains in bottle for 8 months before release. Their 2001 did not arrive in time for the tasting. This was a little different and it might have been because the wine was 2 years younger than most of the other wines. There were touches of vanilla and toasted oak but this did not mask the character of the wine.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC "Monte Ca Bianca" 2001 Begali (Bruno Bullio) 40% Corvina 35% Corvinone, 20% Rondinella and 5% Oseleta. The grapes are left to dry during the months of September and October. After a careful selection the grapes go to the "fruithouse" to dry where they stay until January. The wine is aged for 40 months in French oak barrels and 8 months in bottle before release. This was a very approachable wine. It has good fruit, and soft tannins, a wine to drink now.

Bruno Bullio spoke about the differences between Corvina and Corvinone and that they are two different varieties.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC 2001 Venturini (Ilenia Pasetto) 70% Corvina, 25% Rondinella and 5% Molinara. Traditional drying and fermentation in bunches. Maceration is for 40 days with daily remontage. The wine is aged for 24 months in oak barrels and for 6 months in bottle before release. This was very aromatic elegant wine with a lot of tannin and good subtle fruit.

One of the speakers made the point that there is volcanic soil in the area and the roots of the vines go very deep so that even in dry conditions the plants can obtain water.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico DOC 2001 Allegrini (Silvia Allegrini) 75% Corvina Veronese, 20% Rondinella and 5% Molinara. 18 months in new French barriques and 7 months in Slovenian oak barrels and 14 months in bottle before release. Silvia Allegrini said that they do not produce a single vineyard Amarone. This wine was a little too modern for me and I wish they would go back to making wines like they did in the past.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Riserva Classico "Sergio Zenato" DOC 2001 (Nadia Zenato) Zenato 80% Corvina, 10% Rondinella, 10% Oseleta and Croatina. The grapes are picked by hand and become raisin like after 3-4 months of drying in small trays with one layer of grapes well spaced out to allow good air circulation. Maceration lasts between 15 to 20 days. This is a good restaurant wine, ready to drink and a little on the modern side.



Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico "Mazzano" DOC 2001 Masi (Raffaele Boscaini) 75% Corvina , 20% Rondinella and 5% Molinari. Masi has the best description of the traditional appassimento, the drying of the grapes. Beginning at the end of September or the beginning of October the best grape bunches are laid on bamboo racks in the lofts in farmhouses in the vineyard, where large windows permit natural ventilation. By the middle of February the grapes weight 35-40% less. They are partially affected by botrytis (noble rot) due to the cooler climate of the high hills after a delicate pressing. The dry grapes, still on their stalks, ferment for 45 days in large Slavonian oak barrels at low natural temperatures (the season is very cold). Then the wine continues to ferment until the sugar has been totally transformed into alcohol and malolatic fermentation takes place. Masi ages their wine for 3 years in Allier and Slavonian oak barrels of 600 liters of first, second and third passage. The wine is then aged for a minimum of 6 months in the bottle before release. I have been a fan of Masi wines for a long time. This is a big, elegant wine but dry plum aromas and flavors, good acidity and a dry finish and aftertaste.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico "Capitel Monte Olmi" DOC 2001 Tedeschi (Maria Sabrina Tedeschi) 30% Corvina, 30% Corvinone, 30 % Rondinella and 10% Oseleta, Negrara, Dindarella, Croatia and Forselina. They have the best description of the modern appassimento. Manual selection of the best bunches takes place in the middle of September. The drying of the grapes takes place in a fruit drying facility where they are able to control the temperature (cold temperature process), ventilation and humidity. The grapes after about 120 days lose about 40% of the original weight and so increase the sugar content and change their extract and flavor. The pressing takes place in January with a roller crusher. Tedeschi does not destem the grapes. The fermentation and maceration last about 45 days at low temperatures in stainless steel tanks with periodic pumping over. They age the wine in Slavonian oak barrels 20/30 HI for about 2 years. The wine is filtered and bottled. The wine is aged for 8 months in bottle before release. I always liked the Tedeschi wines even before I interviewed Maria Sebrina over a year ago. This wine is elegant and complex at the same time, with very good fruit, hints of raisins and a great finish and after taste. Maria Sabrina said the wine was selling very well in Asia.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico "Campo Dei Gigli" DOC 2001 Tenuta Sant'Antonio (Aldo Steccanella) 70% Corvina and Corvinone , 20% Rondinella , 5% Croatia and 5% Oseleta. The grapes are picked and double sorted by hand and laid out in wooden trays. If I understood correctly the wine is vinified in open 500 liter tonneaux-French oak barrels-in an air conditioned environment. Natural alcoholic fermentation takes place between 60 to 70 days with pumping over by hand in wooden barrels. Natural malolatic fermentation is in 500 liter tonneaux barrels. Batonnage is done once a month for the first year. Natural stabilization of the wine takes place. The wine is aged for 3 years in tonneaux and for 12 months in bottle before release. This was a little oaky but not over the top and there was a certain freshness to the fruit in the wine.

Amarone Della Valpolicella Riserva DOC 2005 Musella (Maddalena Pasqua di Bisceglie) 70% Corvina and Corvinone, 15% Riondella and 15% Oseleta. Their 2001 did not make it to the tasting so they had to show the 2005 which was a good but not outstanding vintage. The appassimento takes place on a plateau, in a well naturally ventilated loft. In January the grapes are gently crushed and after fermentation, maceration takes place in steel tanks of 100HL. Regular remontages two times a day and the wine is then transferred to French oak barrels of 2,000 liters. Assemblages are in steel tanks of 100 to 200HL. The wine is aged for 24 months in barrels and for 12 months in bottle before release. This was a 2005 and a little more difficult to judge against the 2001 vintage. Maddalena said that 2005 was a good year.

Amarone Families Event - NYC, October 2011

Wineries	Representatives
Allegrini	Silvia Allegrini
Begali	Bruno Bullio



Brigaldara	Stefano Cesari
Masi	Raffaele Boscaini
Musella	Maddalena Pasqua di Bisceglie
Nicolis	Mariella Nicolis and Martina Fornaser
Speri	Luca Speri
Tedeschi	Maria Sabrina Tedeschi
Tenuta Sant'Antonio	Aldo Steccanella
Tommasi	Pierangelo Tommasi
Venturini	Ilenia Pasetto
Zenato	Nadia Zenato

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