

THE TOP 100 ITALIAN WINES OF 2016

Thursday, November 10, 2016

I tasted more than 3,000 Italian wines this year. No easy task for sure, but it helps that the country continues to produce some of the most evocative wines in the world. This year's list is a reflection of superb Italian wines that not only offer unique and inspiring drinking experiences but also many offer great value relative to their prices. This is more apparent near the end of the list, where you'll find exciting wines from places such as Campania and Friuli that are bargains. There's a number of Amarones on the list as well. All of these wines — whatever they cost — represent a unique character that can't be duplicated anywhere else in the world.

For our Italian Wine of the Year, I couldn't help but pick the Aldo Conterno Barolo Granbussia Riserva 2008. It's a wine that pushes the limits of a perfect score, combining incredible pedigree with a kind of character that moves you each time you take a sip. The wine is made from ancient vines that are almost a century old and is a selection of the best grapes from their best single vineyards in Bussia (70% Romirasco, 15% Cicala and 15% Colonnello). It's fermented and aged in a single large cask and then carefully bottled to make about 3,000 bottles. It's this dedication to historical vineyards and classical winemaking that makes this unique Barolo so terrific. I only wish more bottles were produced, so that all of you could try it. But for Italy, this wine will be a benchmark for years to come.

The No. 2 wine of my list is a testament to the modern renaissance in winemaking in Italy, particularly Tuscany. The Renieri Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 2010 is a truly great wine from a truly great vintage in Montalcino, made in an ultra-fine and precise style. No. 3, the Gaja Barbaresco Sori San Lorenzo 2013, is an emotional wine for me, as it represents a perfect nebbiolo and also the return of the Gaja family to using the Barbaresco appellation. No. 4 and No. 5 are two perfect Brunellos from unique single vineyards on the slopes of Montalcino: respectively, San Filippo Brunello di Montalcino Le Lucére Riserva 2010 and Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona Brunello di Montalcino Vigna di Pianrosso Santa Caterina d'Oro Riserva 2010.

I picked another wine from Tuscany for the No. 6 spot: Orma Toscana 2013. The Bordeaux blend is an incredible wine with all the intensity and power of a top red from Bolgheri, home to the likes of Sassicaia and Masseto. How much does it cost? About \$60 a bottle! At No. 7, Duemani Cabernet Franc Costa della Toscana 2013, a pure cabernet franc (biodynamically grown grapes) from the Tuscan coast attests to deft viticulture and winemaking. Rounding out the top 10 were a series of benchmark Brunellos from Valdicava, Eredi Fuligni and Casanova di Neri.

This wasn't an easy list to make. I tried to pick wines with a global market, even if only a few bottles are available in various markets like the No. 1 Aldo Conterno Barolo Granbussia Riserva 2008. After all, readers of JamesSuckling.com span the globe—from the United States to Europe to Hong Kong. I want people to try these wines, for retail stores to stock them, and for restaurants to serve them.

I encountered so many great wines full of heart and soul. That's the thing about Italian wines. It's hard not to feel and sense the great history and culture that's distilled into these bottles. Whether red or white, they are as utterly satisfying to drink and pair with a bowl of freshly cooked pasta as they are with fried rice and kimchi. Italian wines are pure wines, and in their deep drinkability, they are all the more special.

—James Suckling, CEO/Editor

| #56 | **PODERE POGGIO SCALETTE ALTA VALLE DELLA GREVE IL CARBONAIONE 2013**

Country Italy

Score

Wow. The mouthfeel, depth and length to this red are really phenomenal. Full body and ultra-fine tannins. Blueberry, blackberry and chocolate character. Goes on for minutes. The composure and substance to this wine are amazing. This is the best ever Il Carbonaione. Will improve for years, but taste it now.

Region Tuscany

97

Vintage 2013