

DiWINEtaste

Wine Culture and Information

International Edition

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Champagne: a Myth Fading Away?

One of the wines evoking the highest charm in wine lovers, as well as in those who occasionally appreciate wines, is certainly Champagne. A wine having a unique charm, it is probably the most mentioned one in the history of recent centuries, as well as being important and fundamental wine of political and cultural events in many countries. Chronicles of past times in fact tell us that in formal, military and politic banquets, most of the pacts signed in those occasions were then celebrated with a glass of Champagne. Emblem of luxury, of well living and the highest elegance, finesse and class, the charm of Champagne is still alive today: its bubbles make every one dream as soon as they hear its name. Champagne is also the emblem of showing off richness, carelessly uncorked just to show others a supposed wealthy life or an important social influence.

The end of the year is the time when books are usually closed, profits and sales are assessed, for wineries making sparkling wines it also represents the most important time of the year, in which the interest of consumers is focused of their products. It is no secret, in fact, the sale of sparkling wines is particularly concentrated at the end of the year holidays, when bottles are easily and frequently uncorked, even with thoughtlessness. This particular period, in which sales of sparkling wines are at their top, represents a moment of the year in which wineries making bubbles pay a lot of attention. Wine shops and malls offer a wide and considerable selection of these wines, in order to meet everyone's need, from very cheap wines to very expensive ones. Classic method sparkling wines are always part of the sale, offered in different ways and expressions, both in terms of quality and price.

Champagne is one of French wines to be very successful all over the world: it is hard to find wine lovers who do not like it or do not appreciate it. A wine that, in general terms, is sold at a higher price than the average of the other sparkling wines, Champagne has always been a rival in virtually endless and reiterated challenges. Always used as a comparison element with all the other bubbles made in the world, by comparing it in terms of price and quality, everyone in the world

wishes to dethrone this wine. Moreover, at the end of the year, thanks to the huge quantity of corks popped out in occasion of holidays, comparison is mainly focused on sales, a fierce competition fought to the very last cent. Quality of sparkling wines has undeniably grown up in the course of the last years and the qualitative distance with Champagne has been clearly shortened, while the number of good wines sold a more competitive prices grew up as well.

Lately, Champagne seems to have a hard time in its homeland, because - they say - sales of French market are going down. It is not about a concrete decay, as Champagne sales outside France are going up. In other words, it seems today the famous French bubbles are mostly appreciated outside France. After a non good period - and, it must be said, this is something concerning the wine of every area - export figures of Champagne are increasing, in particular to the United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia. This time of crisis, it is undeniable, has influenced the sales of all wines - including Italian wines - and a good number of wineries got most of their profits from export sales than in their own countries. However, it sounds pretty strange Champagne - one of the greatest prides of France - is having a hard time in its own land.

For the famous French bubbles things are changing even in Italy, a country where they have always had a good notoriety. It is hard to tell whether this is connected to economic factors and the lower availability of money in consumers, or it is because the quality of Italian sparkling wines has improved, as a matter of fact, sales of Champagne are going down. On this regard, it is now a long time the sales of French bubbles are being compared to those of Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, the latter living a magic moment in terms of sales. It seems in 2014 sales of Prosecco in Italy increased remarkably, while leaving Champagne far behind, once being among the most successful bubbles in Italy. Moreover, Prosecco is living another magic moment in term or export, in particular to United States of America, Germany, Japan and United Kingdom.

It must be said the two wines are very different one from each other, not only because of their respective production areas, but also for the grapes and wine making techniques used

Contents

Champagne: a Myth Fading Away?	1
WINE TASTING	
Contrasts of Aglianico and Merlot	2
Wines of the Month	4
EVENTS	
News	7
NOT JUST WINE	
Aquavitae	7
Wine Parade	8

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- ▷ Home Page - www.DiWineTaste.com
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- ▷ EnoGames (EnoQuiz - EnoGlass - EnoTemp) ▷ Events
- ▷ Serving Wine ▷ Back Issues ▷ Wine Place Guide
- ▷ MailBox ▷ Wine Parade ▷ Mailing List
- ▷ Tell a friend about DiWineTaste ▷ Alcohol Test

for both. I do not deny the remarkable and well deserved success of Prosecco, it is however undeniable the two wines express very different styles. The quality of many Champagnes is extraordinary and supreme, however the quality of bubbles made in other countries - including Italy - has increased as well, therefore shortening the distance with the famous French classic method wine. In other words, in the course of the last years, quality of bubbles available in shelves has remarkably increased, with a good differentiation in terms of price as well, and it was pretty predictable this would have had a direct impact on Champagne sales. I never liked competitions fought to the last bubble: I am aware of the fact each wine and each territory have quality - for better or for worse - unrepeatable elsewhere and in other wines. Each wine is a world on its own. I therefore am loyal to my passion for good Champagne, nevertheless, loyal to all the good bubbles made in Italy, something getting better and better and happening since many years now. I am also aware emotions generously given by a wine cannot be found in others and vice versa.

Antonello Biancalana



WINE TASTING

Contrasts of Aglianico and Merlot

The red grape making Campania and Basilicata great - Aglianico - compared to the most celebrated red variety of France: Merlot.

This month we are going to compare two grapes very different one from each other and not only according to a geographic point of view. Aglianico and Merlot are in fact the two varieties we are about to compare, with the main goal of revealing the remarkable differences in order to understand their respective characteristics. The first grape is famous for having made great the enology of Campania and Basilicata, considered by many as the Nebbiolo of South Italy, it makes wines of remarkable character, most of the times dividing wine lovers.

The second grape is famous all over the world and it is virtually found in every wine country, among the many varieties that from France have conquered our planet. In its home land - Bordeaux - Merlot has proved its remarkable versatility alone as well as blended to other varieties, a characteristic it proved in other countries as well, including Italy and Aglianico. Its spreading is such that it is hard to find in the world a red berried variety which was not blended to Merlot in wine making.

Expressing totally different characters, even opposed, the two varieties have very little in common, except for red color, of course. Aglianico is a variety dividing wine lovers: some love it for its particular and robust character, others do not like it both for this reason and for the fact they consider it to be somewhat "rustic". Merlot has a successful past of protagonist and is considered a miracle variety: it has been frequently used in order to "improve" wines having pretty particular characteristics and it literally charmed many wine lovers because of its famous roundness. This characteristic has also been the reason which caused - in recent times - a sort of change in trends, by many considered too strong and, as such, blamed for having standardized the taste of wine in which Merlot was used. On this regard, Aglianico was no exception and it has been blended to Merlot and, despite this did not happen that much, the meeting with the French red gave pretty interesting results.

The main areas of Aglianico undeniably are Campania and Basilicata: here the famous red berried variety of South Italy reaches its best expressions and it is widely common. A good spreading is also found in Apulia and Molise, it is then found, in marginal measure, also in other regions of Central and South Italy. The most famous wines produced with Aglianico certainly are Taurasi - in province of Avellino, Campania - and Aglianico del Vulture, produced in the area having the same name of Basilicata. The region in which are found the most varied expressions of Aglianico is Campania, in particular in the areas of Benevento, Avellino and Salerno. Thanks to the expression of Vulture, Aglianico has proved to have an excellent wine making versatility, capable of making white wines - by removing skins from the must before vinification - sparkling, rose, red and even sweet wines.

It is believed Aglianico was introduced to Italy by ancient Greeks in the seventh century BC, here it became known with the name *ellenico*, and then became, in fifteenth century - because of the Aragonese dominion in those lands and of Spanish language - *Aglianico*. It probably is the linguistic adaptation of "ellenico" in Spanish language, in particular how they pronounce the double "l". A robust grape, having a good crispness, Aglianico makes wines of remarkable body and a pretty strong character, a condition which is usually mitigated by alcohol, aging in wood and time. The most common and produced style is of course the dry red, a style which allowed Aglianico to prove all of its strength and character. According to a wine making and sensorial point of view, Aglianico has also proved to have a very good enological versatility, from the use of inert containers to wood barrels.

Originating from lands so far away from those of Aglianico, Merlot is one of the most famous and successful varieties of the wine scene. It traveled from France and conquered the vineyards all over the world, Merlot - together with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc - makes the so called *Bordeaux blend*, once including Petit Verdot and Malbec as well. Known

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everywhere in the world for its round and smooth character, Merlot has got the appreciation of wine lovers as well as the disregard of others, because of its characteristic of standardizing the taste of certain wines. This charge is in part true and - it must be said - it is the result of the abuse some made of this variety, despite this famous grape from Bordeaux is capable of making wines of extraordinary greatness and class. Its characteristic roundness however made it popular all over the world, used in wines easily meeting the taste of countless consumers.

Merlot has been capable of proving its greatness also in territories distant from its homeland, however it is Bordeaux to represent the main wine model for this variety. The evident roundness of Merlot is in fact useful in smoothing the power and strength of Cabernet Sauvignon, while noticing this variety is however excellent when vinified alone and capable of expressing wines of absolute value. Having a good body, Merlot is used in the world to smooth the harshness of some varieties and, at the same time, increase the body, a role Merlot virtually plays in every wine country of the world. Moreover, thanks to its characteristics, Merlot is particularly suited to the fermentation and aging in wood, in particular with the Bordeaux barrique, joining its organoleptic character to the one of wood.

Our tasting by contrast of Aglianico and Merlot will examine two wines produced with the very same wine making techniques, in order to ensure - as much as possible - the same tertiary organoleptic conditions. This is a fundamental consideration because the two varieties are usually vinified in cask or barrique, containers greatly influencing the characteristics of wine in different ways. As for the place of origin of the two wines, choosing Aglianico is clearly easier than Merlot, the latter widely spread everywhere and with different interpretations. While noticing every territory gives the wine its specific qualities, as well as influencing the expression of grapes, the main characteristics of the varieties will however be well perceptible. Another consideration is about the vintage of the two wines, which will possibly be the same for both and however with at least three years of aging.

Let's start the evaluation of the two wines from the first phase of wine sensorial tasting: appearance. Of the three phases making the sensorial tasting of wine, this one gives the



The color of a wine made from Aglianico grape: moderate transparency and intense ruby red.

least number of contrasting elements and the analogies are evident. In general terms, Aglianico and Merlot show the same characteristics. By observing the glass at its base, it will in fact be noticed in both wines an intense and deep ruby red color. By tilting the glass, it will be observed the wine at its edge: the differences are not many if not absent; nuances of ruby or garnet red, according to the age of the wines. Transparency is virtually the same both in Aglianico and Merlot, however it should be noticed that, in certain cases, the famous red from Bordeaux can show a lower transparency. In other cases, and according to viticultural and wine making techniques, Aglianico can show a lower transparency than Merlot.

Let's now pass to the evaluation of olfactory profiles of the two wines, an examination emphasizing the differences of the two grapes in their expression of aromas. The two wines are quite different to the nose, despite they share many olfactory characteristics, Aglianico and Merlot - in their aromas - are however distant in many aspects. Both share the richness of aromas recalling black berried fruits, sometimes red ones, however the quality and intensity of what can be perceived to the nose is evidently different. In the olfactory profile of the two wines can also be perceived flowers, as well as tertiary qualities developing according to the wine making techniques used for production. On this regard, it should be noticed the vinification of Aglianico is made both in barrique and cask, whereas the container generally used for Merlot is barrique, by following the Bordeaux school.

Let's start the olfactory evaluation from Aglianico. By keeping the glass in vertical position and without swirling, the opening offers to the nose intense and clean aromas of black cherry, blackberry and plum. Swirling the glass will allow Aglianico to express sensations of violet and blueberry. Moreover, it will be noticed a pretty *rustic* character, an absolutely typical characteristic of Aglianico and frequently dividing wine lovers, as not all of them appreciate this aspect of the great grape from South Italy. Merlot expresses a series of aromas which can be considered more linear, in which are clearly recognized black currant, black cherry and plum. By swirling the glass, it will be perceived the aromas of blueberry and violet, sometimes peony and iris as well. It should be noticed that, although this is a quality usually avoided in wines, Merlot cultivated in particularly cold areas, can sometimes express a vegetal or herbaceous aroma, mainly recalling green bell pepper.

Differences gets more evident during the gustatory evaluation of the two wines. The character expressed by Aglianico and Merlot can be considered, in many aspects, opposed and distant. Aglianico is characterized by a vibrant crispness, something reinforcing astringency, while keeping its balance thanks to alcohol and roundness given by the aging in cask. Aglianico does not lose its characteristic crispness despite time can sometime make this quality milder. On the other hand, Merlot expresses a roundness and smoothness distant from what can be perceived in Aglianico, while expressing a good body and an appreciable astringency, usually given by barrique. In both wines will be noticed the role played by alcohol in balance, usually found in significant quantity both in Aglianico and Merlot.

The final phase of sensorial tasting continues to emphasize the differences of the two varieties. The finish of Aglianico

is characterized by its typical crispness and structure, while allowing the perception of blackberry and black cherry. Merlot has a completely different finish, making of its well known roundness the main quality to be perceived after having swallowed the wine. It will also be perceived flavors of black currant and black cherry, as well as a moderate sensation of astringency, far lower than Aglianico. Varieties usually giving good quality products, wines produced with these two grapes express a good persistence and correspondence to the nose. However, they are wines different in many regards and expressing distinct qualities, one characterized by crispness and power, the other by a roundness which can also be supported by power. Nevertheless, two magnificent varieties, capable of giving great wines, controversial for some, excellent wine interpreters for others.



Wines of the Month

Score legend

◆ Fair – ◆◆ Pretty Good – ◆◆◆ Good

◆◆◆◆ Very Good – ◆◆◆◆◆ Excellent

★ Wine that excels in its category

🍷 Good value wine

Prices are to be considered as indicative. Prices may vary according to the country or the shop where wines are bought



Offida Pecorino Colle Vecchio 2013
Tenuta Cocci Grifoni (Marches, Italy)

🍷 Pecorino

Price: € 10.60

Score ◆◆◆◆

👁️ Intense greenish yellow and nuances of greenish yellow, very transparent.

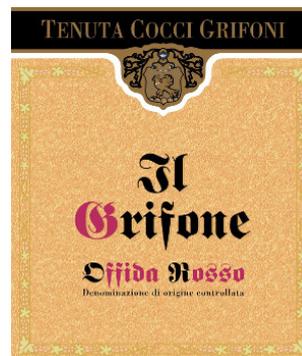
👂 Intense, clean, pleasing and refined, starts with hints of plum, apple and broom followed by aromas of pear, jasmine, hazelnut, peach, pineapple, hawthorn and mineral.

👄 Crisp attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, agreeable.

🍷 Persistent finish with flavors of apple, plum and peach.

📅 4 months in steel tanks, 6 months in bottle.

🍴 Pasta with fish, Mushroom soups, Sauteed white meat, Sauteed fish, Fried fish



Offida Rosso Il Grifone 2008
Tenuta Cocci Grifoni (Marches, Italy)

🍷 Montepulciano (70%), Cabernet Sauvignon (30%)

Price: € 19.00

Score ◆◆◆◆

👁️ Deep ruby red and nuances of garnet red, little transparency.

👂 Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant, starts with hints of black cherry, plum and black currant followed by aromas of violet, blueberry, blackberry, vanilla, tobacco, chocolate, toffee, graphite, licorice, leather, mace and eucalyptus.

👄 Tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, full body, intense flavors, agreeable.

🍷 Very persistent finish with long flavors of black cherry, plum and black currant.

📅 32 months in cask, at least 12 months in bottle.

🍴 Game, Roasted meat, Stewed and braised meat, Hard cheese



Langhe Freisa La Foia 2012
Curto Marco (Piedmont, Italy)

🍷 Freisa

Price: € 14.00

Score ◆◆◆◆

👁️ Intense ruby red and nuances of ruby red, little transparency.

 Intense, clean, pleasing and refined, starts with hints of black cherry, plum and blueberry followed by aromas of violet, strawberry, raspberry, carob, vanilla and menthol.

 Properly tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, agreeable.

 Persistent finish with flavors of cherry, plum and strawberry.

 Aged in barrique.

 *Cold cuts, Stuffed pasta with mushrooms, Stewed meat with mushrooms, Roasted meat*



Barolo Arborina La Foia 2010
Curto Marco (Piedmont, Italy)

 Nebbiolo

Price: € 38.00

Score  ☆

 Brilliant ruby red and nuances of brick red, moderate transparency.

 Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant, starts with hints of cherry, plum and raspberry followed by aromas of violet, tobacco, rose, chocolate, pink pepper, cinnamon, mace, vanilla and menthol.

 Tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, full body, intense flavors, pleasing crispness.

 Persistent finish with flavors of cherry, plum and raspberry.

 2 years in barrique.

 *Game, Stewed and braised meat, Roasted meat, Hard cheese*



Langhe Rosso Pian del Lupo 2008
Casavecchia Marco (Piedmont, Italy)

 Nebbiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot

Price: € 10.50

Score 

 Intense ruby red and nuances of garnet red, little transparency.

 Intense, clean, pleasing and refined, starts with hints of black cherry, plum and black currant followed by aromas of dried violet, blueberry, tobacco, vanilla, cocoa, mace, licorice and menthol.

 Properly tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, agreeable.

 Persistent finish with flavors of black cherry, plum and black currant.

 14 months in barrique, at least 12 months in bottle.

 *Roasted meat, Stewed and braised meat with mushrooms, Hard cheese*



Barolo Piantà 2007
Casavecchia Marco (Piedmont, Italy)

 Nebbiolo

Price: € 21.50

Score  ☆

 Brilliant ruby red and nuances of garnet red, moderate transparency.

 Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant, starts with hints of plum, cherry and violet followed by aromas of blueberry, dried rose, cocoa, licorice, vanilla, cinnamon, mace, tobacco, leather and menthol.

 Tannic attack and however balance by alcohol, full body, intense flavors, agreeable.

-  Persistent finish with flavors of plum, cherry and blueberry.
-  2 years in cask, at least 18 months in bottle.
-  *Game, Roasted meat, Stewed and braised meat, Hard cheese*



Chianti Classico 2010
Podere l'Aja (Tuscany, Italy)

 Sangiovese (95%), Canaiolo Nero, Colorino (5%)

Price: € 8.90

Score 

-  Intense ruby red and nuances of garnet red, moderate transparency.
-  Intense, clean, pleasing and refined, starts with hints of black cherry, plum and dried violet followed by aromas of blueberry, raspberry, tobacco, vanilla, chocolate and menthol.
-  Properly tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, pleasing roundness.
-  Persistent finish with flavors of black cherry, plum and blueberry.
-  12 months in cask.
-  *Broiled meat and barbecue, Stewed meat, Hard cheese*



Chianti Classico Riserva 2009
Podere l'Aja (Tuscany, Italy)

 Sangiovese (90%), Merlot (5%), Canaiolo Nero, Colorino (5%)

Price: € 12.90

Score 

-  Brilliant ruby red and nuances of garnet red, moderate transparency.
-  Intense, clean, pleasing and refined, starts with hints of black cherry, plum and dried violet followed by aromas of blueberry, blackberry, chocolate, tobacco, vanilla, cinnamon and menthol.

 Properly tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, agreeable.

 Persistent finish with flavors of black cherry, plum and blueberry.

 24 months in cask.

 *Broiled meat and barbecue, Roasted meat, Stewed meat with mushrooms, Hard cheese*



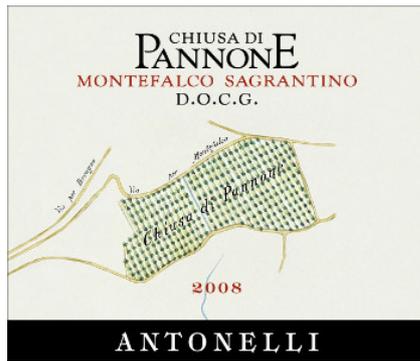
Trebbiano Spoletino 2013
Antonelli San Marco (Umbria, Italy)

 Trebbiano Spoletino

Price: € 12.00

Score 

-  Intense straw yellow and nuances of straw yellow, very transparent.
-  Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant, starts with hints of apple, citrus fruits and plum followed by aromas of pear, medlar, pineapple, broom, hawthorn, peach, grapefruit, mineral and hints of vanilla.
-  Crisp attack and however balanced by alcohol, good body, intense flavors, agreeable.
-  Persistent finish with flavors of apple, plum and medlar.
-  9 months in cask, 3 months in bottle.
-  *Cold cuts, Pasta with meat, Roasted fish, Sauteed white meat*



**Montefalco Sagrantino Chiusa di Pannone 2008
Antonelli San Marco (Umbria, Italy)**



Price: € 37.00

Score ◆◆◆◆◆

👁️ Intense ruby red and nuances of garnet red, little transparency.

👂 Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant, starts with hints of blackberry, black cherry and plum followed by aromas of blueberry, violet, chocolate, tobacco, leather, cinnamon, licorice, mace, vanilla and menthol.

👄 Tannic attack and however balanced by alcohol, full body, intense flavors, agreeable.

🍷 Very persistent finish with long flavors of blackberry, plum and black cherry.

📅 21 months in cask, 3 months in cement tanks, 2 years in bottle.

🍴 *Game, Roasted meat, Stewed and braised meat, Hard cheese*

EVENTS

News

In this column are published news and information about events concerning the world of wine and food. Whoever is interested in publishing this kind of information can send us a mail to the address Events@DiWineTaste.com.



NOT JUST WINE

Aquavitae

Review of Grappa, Distillates and Brandy

Distillates are rated according to DiWineTaste’s evaluation method. Please see score legend in the “Wines of the Month” section.



**Grappa Stravecchia di San Leonardo
Tenuta San Leonardo (Trentino, Italy)**

(Distiller: Distilleria Franceschini)



Price: € 49.00 - 500ml

Score ◆◆◆◆◆

👁️ Intense amber yellow, limpid and crystalline.

👂 Intense, clean, pleasing, refined and elegant with aromas of prune, dried fig, vanilla, chocolate, caramel, tobacco, incense, honey and licorice with almost imperceptible alcohol pungency.

👄 Intense flavors and perceptible alcohol pungency which tends to dissolve rapidly, excellent correspondence to the nose, pleasing roundness, balanced sweetness.

🍷 Very persistent finish with long flavors of prune, dried fig, honey and chocolate.

👤 Distilled in steam operated batch alembic still. Aged for 5 years in the same barriques used for the production of San Leonardo wine.



Wine Parade

The best 15 wines according to DiWineTaste's readers. To express your best three wines send us an E-mail at WineParade@DiWineTaste.com or fill in the form available at our WEB site.

Rank		Wine, Producer
1	↗	I Sodi di San Niccolò 2008, Castellare di Castellina
2	↘	Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano 2007, Arnaldo Caprai
3	↘	Pelago 2009, Umani Ronchi
4	↘	Villa Gresti 2006, Tenuta San Leonardo
5	↗	Adarmando 2011, Tabarrini
6	↗	Montiano 2011, Falesco
7	↗	Brunello di Montalcino Montosoli 2009, Altesino
8	↘	Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Capitel Monte Olmi 2007, Tedeschi
9	↘	Collio Ribolla Gialla L'Adelchi 2012, Venica
10	↗	Torgiano Rosso Riserva Rubesco Vigna Monticchio 2007, Lungarotti
11	↗	Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore Podium 2010, Garofoli
12	↘	Brunello di Montalcino Vigna Loreto 2007, Mastrojanni
13	↘	Maximo 2010, Umani Ronchi
14	☆	Brunello di Montalcino Vigneto Manachiara 2007, Tenute Silvio Nardi
15	☆	Offida Rosso Il Grifone 2008, Tenuta Cocci Grifoni

Legend: ↗ up ↘ down ↔ stable ☆ new entry