

## The Wines of Sartori di Verona

Charles Scicolone (May 31, 2012)



Enologist Franco Bernabei and Andrea Sartori Join Together to Make Great Wines



Franco Bernabei is one of Italy's top enologists. Recently, he was in New York to speak about the wines of Sartori di Verona at SD26, one of my favorite Italian restaurants. I have always admired Franco's work and his honesty. Many years ago I asked him a question about the wines of Piedmont and his answer was "I do not know because I do not consult for any wineries there."

Andrea Sartori, President, [Sartori di Verona](#) [2], introduced his wines and told us the history of his families' involvement in wine dating back to 1898. He said that in 2002 they owned only 37 acres of vineyards. They purchased additional grapes from individual growers with long-term contracts. This was not enough, however since the average vineyard property in the Veneto is just 4.2 acres. Mr. Sartori was able to solve this problem by establishing a joint venture with the 800 member Cantina Colognola di Colli. The Cantina received a small percentage of shares in Sartori, and in exchange Sartori acquired exclusive access to 5,681 acres of vineyards in the Soave and Valpolicella zone. With more mergers and acquisitions, the newly named Collis Veneto Wine Group now has over 3,000 members making it the third largest in Italy.

As all of this was happening Mr. Sartori recruited Franco Bernabei as the consulting enologist. That was almost ten years ago. Franco lives in Tuscany but was born in the Veneto. He has a small consulting company which he runs with his sons. Andrea pointed out that Franco is a hands on consultant and is more than willing to share information.

## **The Wines**

Bianco Veronese "Ferdi" 2009 IGT made from 100% Gaganega. There is a careful selection of handpicked grapes from different vineyards that are partially dried in small boxes for 30- 40 days (appassimento) in order to reduce water and concentrate sugar content and color. Franco said that there is 3 grams of sugar per liter in the wine but this was balanced by the acidity. There is a light cold soaking. The pressing of the grapes is followed by a short skin maceration at a low temperature.

Part of the must is fermented in 500-liter oak tonneaux but the oak is not new. The remainder is aged in stainless steel. The wine is then left to mature on its lees for 6/7 months. Franco said that this adds mouth feel and intensity. The wine is aged in bottle for at least 3 months before release. The wine has subtle floral notes with hints of pears and apricots and good acidity. \$14

On the subject of new oak, Franco said that it was too aggressive and masks the flavor of the grape. He feels you must taste the skins of the grape in the wine, like chewing on the grape, and the acidity and tannins must be there. When you drink a wine there should be a sense of place, where the wine comes from, the climate, the soil and the grape.

Rosso Veronese "Regolo" 2007 IGT. 100% Corvina. There is a careful selection of grapes from the vineyards in the hilly area of Valpolicella north of Verona. A gentle pressing of the grapes is followed by skin maceration at low temperatures between 15/18 days. In February following the harvest the wine goes through the ripasso process, resting on the lees of Amarone. Franco said that only a small percentage of the wine undergoes the ripasso process and added that none of the grapes are dried; he did not want to make a "baby" Amarone. After malolactic fermentation the wine is aged for 18/24 months in barriques and medium to large oak casks and remains in the bottle for a minimum 6 months before release. This is a wine with red berry aromas and flavors, good structure, hints of cherry and good acidity. The wine is named for Regolo, patriarch of the Sartori family and cofounder of the company. \$19

Again Franco made the point that the barriques used are all second and third passage. He also repeated that the wine must taste like the skins of the grapes, a point that he stressed a number of times. If the wood is new you will also lose the minerality in the wine. The bottom line to all of this is that if there is too much wood all the wine begins to taste the same.

Franco said that 2007 was a great vintage in the Verona area.

Amarone Della Valpolicella 2008 DOC, made from 50% Corvina Veronese, 30% Corvinone, 15% Rondinella and 5% Cabernet. Franco said that this is the only wine that has an international grape. The 5% of Cabernet Sauvignon is reduced to 2 or 3% after the drying takes place. The grapes are



dried on racks for 100 days to concentrate their sugar content. Franco said that they do not dry their grapes in temperature-controlled warehouses but just use fans because of the humidity. There is great attention to detail and the grapes are checked every day to see that they are in perfect condition. After the drying the grapes are cold soaked to regenerate the skins like a sponge. Traditional pressing and fermentation are followed by a minimum of 3 years of aging in Slavonian oak. Franco does not want the Amarone to go over 15% alcohol. The wine has aromas and flavors of dried fruits raisins, cherry with a hint of spice in the finish. \$40

Amarone Della Valpolicella Classico "Corte Brà" 2006 DOC. 50% Corvina Veronese, 30% Corvinone, 15% Rondinella and 5% Oselta. The grapes come from the Corte Brà vineyard in the hills north of Verona. The grapes for this wine are carefully selected, placed in small crates and dried in well-ventilated rooms with fans for 3 to 4 months. When optimal dryness is reached, a hand selection of the best grapes takes place and the grapes are fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks for about 30 days. The wine is transferred to traditional tanks for malolactic fermentation. It is then aged in Slavonian oak casks and French Tonneaux for about 4 years. It remains in the bottle for another 2 years before release. Franco wants to release the wine when he feels it is ready. This is a classic Amarone that will age \$52.

Franco also said that he did not want to make jammy Amorone that tasted like dessert wine and did not go with food. All of the red wines had a good balance between fruit and acidity. He feels that all of these wines are food wines. This wine was the perfect match for the Amarone braised beef cheeks with caramelized onion & polenta taragna that we enjoyed for lunch.

Amarone Della Valpolicella "Corte Brà" 1995 \$NA. This wine was made before Franco Bernabei became the consulting enologist. The wine was still drinking but was showing too much age for an Amarone that was less than 20 years old.

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