

Best Italian Wines Of The Year



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I write about wine (and sometimes food) from around the world.

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Cantina Fratelli Pardi Montefalco Sagrantino "Sacrantino"

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It's that time again for my choices for the best Italian wines released in 2019. From beautiful white wines from regions such as Campania, Veneto and even Tuscany to brilliant reds from Piedmont, Umbria, Tuscany and several others, I've tried to organize a list that celebrates both the iconic wine types as well as others not as well known as they should be.

Whites

2018 Giovanni Almondo Roero Arneis "Bracco delle Ciliegie" - A classic offering, the 2018 is among the finest ever made; exotic aromas, pristine varietal character.

2018 Mainente Soave Classico “Tovo al Pigno” - Lovely harmony and light minerality with outstanding complexity. A little-known producer that deserves greater attention.

2018 Bibi Graetz “Testamatta” Toscana Bianco - 100% Ansonica from the island of Giglio; barrique fermented, lovely texture. A wonderful surprise.

2018 Pietracupa Greco di Tufo - Another brilliant effort from Sabino Loffredo; the champion of Greco di Tufo. Stunning varietal purity, and great aging potential.

2018 Antonio Caggiano Greco di Tufo “Devon” - Best known for his beautiful examples of Taurasi, this producer’s Greco di Tufo “Devon” is a lovely wine and is as impressive as ever in 2018. Great varietal purity, complexity and harmony.

2018 Petilia Greco di Tufo - A perfect combination of varietal character, floral perfumes and charm. Superb harmony, great elegance. This wine traditionally ages beautifully; this 2018 version should drink well for 7-10 years.

2015 Mastroberardino Fiano di Avellino “Stilema” - I love the approach Piero Mastroberardino takes with Fiano and Greco, as he is constantly experimenting. 10% of this wine was aged in used barrique; great texture and richness on the palate; melon, pear and dried yellow flower aromas. I’d love to taste this again in 10 or so years.

2018 Ciro Picariello Fiano di Avellino - From a master of the variety, a classic offering of Fiano di Avellino. Great complexity, excellent persistence and impressive texture. Peak in 7-10 years.

2018 Donnachiara Fiano di Avellino “Empatia” - A selection of the best grapes; lush, with great complexity. A new path for Fiano di Avellino that should open many eyes.

2018 Feudi di San Gregorio Falanghina “Serrocielo” - A Falanghina of uncharacteristic richness and persistence from a high altitude vineyard in the Benevento area. Simply delicious!

2017 Arnaldo Caprai “Cuvée Secrete” - From one of the best-known producers of Montefalco Sagrantino comes this beautiful white, a blend of several grapes including Spoletino, Fiano, Grechetto and Sauvignon. Barrique aged, this has impressive richness on the palate, superb complexity and outstanding persistence. A singular achievement!

2018 Alois Lageder Pinot Grigio “Porer” - Yes, there are a few examples of outstanding Pinot Grigio produced in Italy each year, and this is one of them. Lageder applies several techniques to this wine, as a portion of the grapes are pressed immediately, some are given 15 hours of skin contact, and some are in contact with skins and stems for about a year. Extremely rich with great texture, superb persistence and complexity. I’ve enjoyed this wine for several years; the 2018 is the finest I have enjoyed to date! Enjoy now and over the next 3-5 years.

2018 Ettore Germano Riesling “Herzu” - Italy’s best Riesling year in and year out. Lovely floral and fruit perfumes with ideal harmony, varietal purity and complexity. This 2018 is one of the producer’s best examples of this wine.

2018 Elvio Cogno Anas-Cetta - From the most famous producer of Nascetta in Piemonte, one of his best offerings ever of this wine. Beautiful texture, superb varietal character; this should drink well for 7-10 years.

2015 Paolo Bea “Arboreus” - 100% Spoletino from one of Umbria’s greatest producers. 22 days of skin contact, no added sulfur. Intriguing aromas of heather, honey and mandarin orange. Great complexity, lovely texture, outstanding persistence.



Paolo Scavino Bric del Fiasc Barolo 2015

Photo ©Tom Hyland

Reds

2018 Burlotto Verduno Pelaverga - Elegant and delicious, a lovely example of this distinctive Piemontese red from a great producer.

2016 Elio Grasso Barbera d'Alba "Vigna Martina" - Always one of the finest examples of Barbera each year, the 2016 is particularly notable. Aromas of blackberry, black plum and violets. Excellent persistence and super delicious!

2018 Reva Dolcetto d'Alba - 2018 is a great vintage for every varietal in Piedmont (and much of Italy). Here is a marvelous Dolcetto that offers juicy cranberry and red plum fruit, moderate tannins and excellent persistence. Great typicity!

2015 Paolo Scavino Barolo "Bric dël Fiasc" - My favorite Barolo this vintage from one of the most consistent producers of this wine type. A touch of balsamic, sour cherry and thyme in the aromas. Very rich on the palate, lengthy finish, excellent complexity.

2013 Paolo Manzone Barolo Riserva - From the producer's Meriame estate vineyard; aged an additional year in *anforae*. Powerful with a great structure.

2013 Giacomo Fenocchio Barolo Bussia Riserva "90 Di" - The latest offering of this wine from a great traditional producer. "90 Di" refers to the 90 days of maceration the Nebbiolo grapes receive. Remarkable richness on the palate along with outstanding persistence. Peak in 25 years plus.

2016 Rizzi Barbaresco "Pajoré" - A combination of a great site, a superb traditional producer and an outstanding vintage. Expressive red cherry, currant and strawberry fruit, subtle wood notes, outstanding persistence, very good acidity and notable finesse and charm. A great Barbaresco! Peak in 12-15 years.

2016 Rizzi Barbaresco "Rizzi" - Beautiful red cherry fruit along with subtle notes of oregano and red poppies. Great richness on the palate, very good acidity and amazing harmony. Beautifully managed tannins. Rizzi is always one of the reference points for Barbaresco, yet still does not receive the praise it deserves. Perhaps this will change with the release of these 2016 Barbaresco.

2018 Montalbera Grignolino d'Asti "Grignè" - Grignolino is one of Piemonte's most distinctive reds, and I love what Montalbera does with the variety. Wild strawberry fruit and plenty of spice in this version from the great 2018 vintage.

2015 Fontodi Chianti Classico Gran Selezione "Vigna del Sorbo" - Fontodi is one of the greatest of all Chianti Classico producers, and this is always one of his finest wines. Great depth of fruit and persistence.

2016 Fontodi "Flaccianello della Pieve" - A selection of the finest Sangiovese from Giovanni Manetti's Fontodi estate. This has been a great wine for more than a decade, and the 2016 displays remarkable structure and superb varietal character. A classic!



Francesco Ricasoli in his estate vineyards at Castello di Brolio. His "Ceni Primo" is one of the ...
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Photo ©Tom Hyland

2016 Ricasoli Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Ceni Primo” - 100% Sangiovese from a single vineyard at this remarkable estate in Gaiole in Chianti. Superb statement of terroir; a beautifully balanced wine structured for peak drinking in 12-15 years. A great Sangiovese! After only two releases, “Ceni Primo” is one of Tuscany’s finest reds!

2015 Rocca delle Macie Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Sergio Zingarelli” - Beautifully structured Chianti Classico with ideal structure. Lovely morel cherry and red poppy aromas with excellent complexity. Sleek and absorbing! Superb harmony, a signature of the excellent 2015 vintage.

2015 San Felice Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Il Grigio” - As pure a representation of Sangiovese as you will find. Great persistence and harmony - a classic from beautiful vintage. San Felice is as consistent a producer of Chianti Classico as there is.

2016 Felsina Chianti Classico Gran Selezione “Coloni” - Ideal ripeness, lovely harmony and great persistence, with sleek, young tannins and classic Sangiovese character. 2016 is a great Chianti Classico vintage and Felsina delivered beautifully with this wine and their “Vigneto Rancia” as well.

2016 Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore - Another stellar effort from this great Bolgheri producer. Rich fruit and floral perfumes, long, long finish, firm, but not aggressive tannins. 20 years plus.

2016 Sassicaia - Simply put, one of the finest versions ever of this wine. Tremendous depth of fruit, very good acidity, impeccable balance. Structured for 25 years plus.

2015 I Vigneti di Ettore Amarone della Classico Valpolicella - For those who believe that Amarone has to be a powerful, over the top wine, I invite you to try this version from I Vigneti di Ettore, a wine aged only in large oak casks. Beautiful harmony and impressive complexity. Plenty of staying power - peak in 15 plus years.

2016 Cantina Tramin Pinot Nero Riserva “Maglen” - Alto Adige is home to most of the finest examples of Pinot Noir in Italy; the cool climate is ideal for this variety. Just amazing perfumes of Bing cherry, turmeric, nutmeg and allspice. Excellent persistence and velvety tannins, along with great varietal purity and notable complexity. Lovely wine! Peak in 7-10 years.

2015 Fratelli Pardi Montefalco Sagrantino “Sacrantino” - Sagrantino is one of the tannic varieties in the world, so producers in Montefalco, Umbria face the challenge of taming these tannins. This special offering from a very underrated producer is about as harmonious a Sagrantino as you will find. Attractive red plum, red poppy and blackberry aromas and superb harmony with graceful tannins. Peak drinking in 15-20 years, if you can wait that long!

2013 Tenuta Bellafonte Montefalco Sagrantino “Collenottolo” - Established in 2007, Tenuta Bellafonte is one of the newest producers of Montefalco Sagrantino, and is in my mind, one of the finest. Proprietor Peter Heilbron grew up in Umbria and has loved these wines for years. He is a traditionalist, maturing the wines in large oak and crafting wines with gorgeous texture and impressive fruit persistence. The 2013 is marked by elegant tannins and excellent complexity - peak in 10-12 years.

Dessert

2009 Rocca di Montegrossi Vin Santo

2007 Felsina Vin Santo

2007 Badia a Coltibuono Vin Santo “Occhio di Pernice”

Three outstanding versions of Vin Santo from Chianti Classico. The Montegrossi is a classic, made in almost an extreme style with deep color and intense honey and apricot flavors with some oxidative qualities. The Felsina is a bit lighter on the palate, with hazelnut and almond notes that

lend superb complexity to the wine. The Badia a Coltibuono is an “Occhio di Pernice” (“eye of the partridge”) as it is produced entirely from Sangiovese, instead of white grapes (Malvasia, Trebbiano) as in most local versions. Lovely perfumes of fig and cherry.

Each of these versions of Vin Santo is an outstanding wine that are unlike almost any other dessert wine produced in Italy; they are dry to off-dry and offer excellent aging potential, from 12-15 years, or even longer.

2011 Scacciadiavoli Montefalco Sagrantino Passito - For several centuries, the *passito* version was the classic offering of Montefalco Sagrantino. At their best, as in this version from one of the great veteran estates of the area, the wines offer light sweetness with delicious fruit flavors of blackberry and red cherry, along with notes of rosemary and red poppies. Long, satisfying finish and excellent complexity.

2016 Cantina Tramin Gewürztraminer Passito “Terminum” - A few years ago, I wrote that this wine was perfection; I’ll say the same for the 2016 vintage. Bright, amber gold; heavenly aromas of dried apricot, orange blossom and honey with a hint of banana. Excellent concentration. very good acidity and an extremely lengthy finish that finishes dry. Simply amazing! Peak in 7-10 years.

Sparkling

Marcalberto Brut Nature - I did not taste as many Italian sparkling wines this year as I usually do, so I thought about not including this category in this article. However, this wine is so remarkable, I had to feature it. A blend of 85% Pinot Nero and 15% Chardonnay with no dosage, this *metodo classico* displays a distinct yeastiness in the aromas along with excellent richness on the palate, exemplary harmony and outstanding persistence. Piedmont’s finest sparkling wine producer!

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