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REFLECTIONS ON WINE

VIEWS ON WINES FROM ITALY, CALIFORNIA, CHILE, ARGENTINA AND OTHER GREAT REGIONS
OF THE WORLD FROM A FREELANCE WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2008

Favorite Italian Red Wines of the Year



Detail of the Sorano Vineyard of Ascheri in Serralunga d'Alba, source of one of the author's best bottlings of Barolo from this past year.

(Photo ©Tom Hyland)

This year many of my top Italian reds centered on a common theme – they were from the glorious 2004 vintage. The Barolos from that year are stunning, the Amarones are polished and the bottlings of Taurasi are wonderfully concentrated with their typical charm. Throughout the country, 2004 was a remarkable success for Italian reds.

Here are my favorites (listed from north to south in Italy):

2004 BAROLOS

Rarely has there been a collection of Barolos with such deep fruit aromas, concentration of fruit and gorgeous acidity. There are so many great 2004 Barolos that I can't list them all, but here are a few favorites: **Fontanafredda “La Villa”**, the least known, but most elegant of the three cru Barolos produced by this historic estate;


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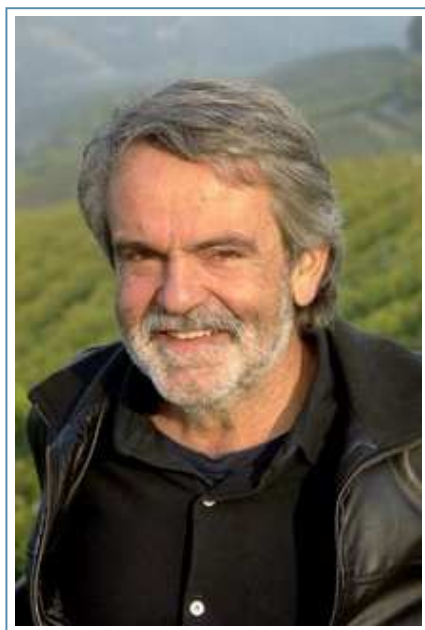
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Cascina Cucco “**Vigna Cucco**” and “**Cerrati**”, two beautifully supple bottlings from this small estate in Serralunga d’Alba; **Ascheri** “**Sorano Coste e Bricco**”, one of the most finesseful of all the 2004 Barolos and the **Ettore Germano** “**Prapo**”, a wine with vibrant spice backed by graceful tannins.

Also, the **Elio Grasso** “**Vigna Chiniera**”, a traditionally produced beauty from Monforte d’Alba; the powerful **Aldo Conterno** “**Romirasco**”, that displayed remarkable concentration and two beautifully structured offerings from **Roberto Voerzio** – “**Rocche dell’Annunziata Torriglione**” and “**Sarmassa**”. These wines are ultramodern in style as they are aged in barriques, yet the layers of fruit are the story and not the oak.

Finally, other top Barolos include **Vietti** “**Rocche**”; **Rocche Costamagna** “**Bricco Francesco**”, the finest bottling of this wine I’ve tasted to date; **Luigi Baudana** “**Baudana**”; **Cogno** “**Ravera**” from the commune of Novello and the **Damilano** “**Liste**” from the commune of Barolo.



Bruno Nada, winemaker at Fiorenzo Nada. He produced one of the author's top bottlings of Barbaresco from this past year. (Photo ©Tom Hyland)

2005 BARBARESCOS

Though less powerful than the bottlings from 2004, the Barbarescos from 2005 are equally impressive, at least for the best producers. Three wines take the top spots on my list: **Fontanabianca** “**Sori Burdin**” with its distinctive aromas of rose petals, cumin, allspice and dried orange peel; **Fiorenzo Nada** “**Rombone**” with its