



IL COLLETTIVO AN INVIGORATING DIVE INTO THE OBSCURE

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Walter Speller
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Il Collettivo – an invigorating dive into the obscure

TASTING ARTICLES ITALY

As the annual giant Italian wine fair Vinitaly is in full swing in Verona, we publish Walter's thoughts on a rather more modest showing of Italian wine in London.

I regularly worry about the airtime Italy's most popular and best-selling wines get in the UK, because I fear it reinforces the general idea that Italy is all about the cheap and cheerful and especially the cheap. In my former days as a broker, I had countless meetings with importers who were interested in Italy, but only in those wines that were dirt cheap. What I thought was an endless appetite for low-priced Italian wines that could sell for under £6 retail, the iron UK supermarket price ceiling then, was also the consequence of very little knowledge of Italian fine wine and how to sell it.



There are now plenty of UK importers with expertise in the higher end of Italian fine wine, albeit with a heavy emphasis on Barolo and Tuscany, the latter often in its international, Bordeaux-blend form. For years the Definitive Italian Wine Tasting, an annual event coralling many UK importers of Italian wine, provided a multi-layered view of Italy's offerings and its demise has left a void.

Since last year (see [Jancis's report](#)) that void, I am glad to say has been filled in a most convincing way by five UK importers – Astrum, Flint, FortyFive10, Sommelier's Choice and Swig – who teamed up under the name Il Collettivo. March saw their second annual presentation, called 'The Italian Wine Tasting'. Modesty would have been misplaced, because the quintet convincingly managed to show the length and breadth of Italy without any supermarket fodder near or far.

While there was plenty of the 'pooh stuff' – Barolo, Barbaresco, Brunello and Amarone – I made quite a few discoveries too, some of which were delightfully obscure, such as the 2017 Fieno di Ponza. It was the first time I had ever seen a wine from the tiny island of Ponza off the Lazio coast near Latina. Priced at over £20 a bottle, a wine like this from a non-Italian specialist importer would have been unthinkable in the UK only five or six years ago, but the fact that it is now available is an indication that at long last in Britain the image of Italian wine is changing.

Il Collettivo also honoured its name by emphasising regions over individual importers, with producer stands sensibly organised from north to south. Elvio Coglio's winemaker Valter Frasso of Barolo, for example, was positioned next to Valcellina's newcomer Giuseppe Guglielmo of the Bollalera estate, both from different importers – and there was a great sense of camaraderie in the big white room (a photographic studio usually, I believe).

The tasting was clearly geared towards improving knowledge of Italian wine, something the UK market desperately needs, with regions clearly marked out, a tasting catalogue supplying attendees with an exact description of each denomination, while revealing the grape variety or varieties of each wine, as well as a map. All of this may seem common sense, but hardly any importer gets this right (see, for example, [my complaints about this Armit tasting](#)). Apparently, Italian wine still equals rocket science.

A separate table with 'featured wines' representing each region allowed for a fast self-pour overview of Italian grape varieties and styles, including Verdicchio, Fiano, Timorasso, Falanghina, Nebbiolo, Albarola, Palagrello Nero, Silvaner, Schioppettino, Nascetta and Nerello Mascalese, either in pure or blended form. It made for an invigorating dive into the often obscure.

I spent a big chunk of the afternoon at Il Collettivo tasting my way through a range of wines that were both original and of high quality. While initially and briefly I sensed the organisers' worry that the tasting would not attract the London trade's attention, a packed room by the time I left showed that there is more to Italy than cheap and cheerful wines. To judge from the success of Il Collettivo, the UK is now a market that is truly interested in Italy's fine wine, which, justifiably, comes at a cost.

The 53 tasting notes are grouped geographically then presented by colour and then alphabetically by producer within those groups but you can change this.



Elvio Coglio, Anas-Cëtta 2016, 17.5.

Straw yellow. Unusual, complex and fascinating nose of waxy lemon fruit. A little saline too. Quince and grapefruit beautifully intertwined with acidity. Gorgeous texture. Needs more age to show its true potential.



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