

THE BEST OF ITALY

With the great diversity that Italy's wine regions have to offer, the Wine Experience seminar "The Best of the Boot" set a lofty theme for a single tasting. *Wine Spectator* senior editor Bruce Sanderson and 10 Italian panelists were up to the task, leading audience members through a journey that ranged from sparkling wine to big Barolo to rich Amarone.

"The wines we'll taste are among the top-quality wines in their respective regions. Some are relatively new, some represent tradition, others innovation, but all are benchmarks by which their peers are measured," said Sanderson.

For a country best known for its reds, the tasting got off to an unexpected start with a distinctly Italian version of sparkling wine, made in the traditional Champagne method, from the Ferrari estate in the northeastern Trentino region. Winery president Matteo Lunelli's family has owned the brand since 1952, having bought it from Giulio Ferrari, one of the first enologists to recognize the potential of Chardonnay in Italy, particularly for bubbly.

A rich, creamy white from Jermann's vineyards in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, bordering Slovenia, was presented by Michele Jermann. Like the Ferrari, the 2009 Vintage Tunina illustrated an ability to add new context to familiar ground, blending Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc with local varieties such as Ribolla Gialla, Malvasia and Picolit.

The tasting then entered more familiar territory for most wine lovers—Piedmont. Bruna Giacosa showed her family's



Back row, from left: Tancredi Biondi Santi of Biondi-Santi; Marco Pallanti of Castello di Ama; Matteo Lunelli of Ferrari; Raffaele Boscaini of Masi; *Wine Spectator*'s Bruce Sanderson. Front row, from left: Alessia Antinori of Antinori; Bruna Giacosa of Bruno Giacosa; Piero Incisa della Rocchetta of Tenuta San Guido; Gaia Gaja of Gaja; Leonardo Raspini of Tenuta dell'Ornellaia; Michele Jermann of Jermann

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- 1 **FERRARI** Brut Trento Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore 2001
- 2 **JERMANN** Venezia-Giulia Vintage Tunina 2009
- 3 **FALLETTO DI BRUNO GIACOSA** Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto Riserva 2007
- 4 **GAJA** Nebbiolo Langhe Conteisa 2008
- 5 **CASTELLO DI AMA** Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista 2007
- 6 **BIONDI-SANTI** Brunello di Montalcino Tenuta Greppo Riserva 2006
- 7 **ANTINORI** Toscana Tignanello 2008
- 8 **TENUTA SAN GUIDO** Bolgheri-Sassicaia Sassicaia 2008
- 9 **TENUTA DELL'ORNELLAIA** Bolgheri Superiore Ornellaia 2009
- 10 **MASI** Amarone della Valpolicella Classico Mazzano 2003

2007 Barolo Le Rocche del Falletto Riserva, explaining, "Our winemaking method is very traditional, [because] we have a lot of responsibility to the soil." She added, "When I drink my Barolo, I feel like I'm in Serralunga d'Alba." The Falletto made a fine foil to the Nebbiolo-based 2008 Conteisa from Gaia Gaja, who likewise stressed the importance of *terroir*; Conteisa's grapes come from an 8.5-acre plot in La Morra's renowned Cerequio *cru*.

Five wines came from one of American wine-drinkers' favorite regions: Tuscany. Castello di Ama enologist Marco Pallanti

spoke about his decision many years ago to label the wine with the vineyard—the high-altitude, rock- and clay-laced Bellavista—an atypical decision for a Chianti Classico at the time. Tancredi Biondi Santi, the fifth generation of his family and finishing his viticultural studies, shined the spotlight on the clonal selection for the estate's Brunello di Montalcino, BBS-11, which can only be used by Biondi-Santi and was developed for its resistance to the phylloxera louse.

Next to be poured were releases of three iconic wines that needed little introduction:

Antinori's Tignanello, presented by Alessia Antinori; Tenuta San Guido's Sassicaia, represented by Piero Incisa della Rocchetta, and Ornellaia, offered by winemaker Leonardo Raspini. Tignanello blends Tuscany's native Sangiovese with Bordeaux varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, while Sassicaia and Ornellaia rely on Bordeaux types alone. These producers' innovative vision for Tuscan wine has met with great success.

The seminar concluded with a traditional Amarone della Valpolicella from the Masi estate. This bold red from northern Italy's Veneto region gains richness from drying the grapes prior to fermentation. Marketing director Raffaele Boscaini, a member of the family that owns Masi, explained that the effects of this *appassimento* process are complemented by the character of the Mazzone vineyard, which never produces fruit that botrytizes, resulting in wines with more austerity and structure than sweetness.

— Alison Napjus