



Amarone Bertani is celebrating 50 harvests and the return to the market of the historic 1967 vintage with a unique parterre and six outstanding samples

by Alessandra Piubello

On these pages the 50 harvests, the first from 1958 and the last from 2008, of Amarone Bertani, which also celebrated the half-century of the historic 1967 vintage: the label has not changed since 1958, always recognisable, always an expression of the highest quality. In 1959 oenologist Ernesto Barbero, now 86 years old, was called by Guglielmo Bertani to create the style of Amarone

ITALY (CELEBRATIONS IN VALPOLICELLA)



Double-anniversary legend

Bertani. From the barrels that contained Recioto, the traditional Verona dessert wine made from dried grapes, which, however, had turned into a dry wine (the sugars turned into alcohol because of unblocked fermentation at the right moment), an 'amaro' or bitter wine emerged, hence the name Amarone. The importer into Hong Kong is Sino Vantage Asia Ltd. (sinovantagewines.com).





It is an epic moment for Amarone Bertani with a double anniversary: 50 vintages (from 1958 to 2008) and the return to the market of the historic 1967 vintage (another fifty years, 1967-2017). It's a shame that I, too, am not fifty years old, it would have made the en plein. Six glasses stand ready to welcome the blood of Valpolicella, that unique land in the hills a few kilometres from Verona. The backdrop to the top event is Milan, but on the podium there are the famous faces of the winery: Emilio Pedron, the 'old' (affectionately) sage of Valpolicella, CEO of Bertani Domains, and Andrea Lonardi, operations director of Bertani Domains. In the middle, the journalist Luciano Ferraro, chosen for the narration. A hundred and sixty years of history, true to its roots. Custodian and ensign of a territory that profoundly contributed towards its birth. "It was 1857, three years before the unification of Italy," relates Ferraro, "when, after a few years in France where they learned the techniques of professor Guyot, still today considered one of the most important experts in viticulture, the brothers Giovan Battista and Gaetano Bertani founded the winery."

They are pouring the first wine, an Amarone from 1958. I sniff, and here comes the rustling gown of the lady in red, my Valpolicella, taking me by the hand and leading me back to my land. Come with us, let's go. Here is Tenuta Novare: a theatre of vineyards, a painting to dive into, such beauty of nature does it express. Woods in the background, carefully tended vineyards in the foreground stretching as far as the eye can see. There are about 70 hectares of vines, but the natural amphitheatre opens to the south onto around 200 hectares. Come, we shall stroll together through the vines until we glimpse the two lakes, to arrive at one of the

seven fountains dotted around the estate, to find the shafts iron was once extracted from. We shall walk the land, with its alternating soils, from clay to limestone to basalt-rich earth. We are in a magical place with a strong vocation for wine. Interweaving culture, history and nature declined in the expressiveness of Amarone that speak the language of emotion and touch man in his intimate soul as he experiences the curves of the universe. Subtle music insinuates into the ear, and breathing the mild air in the vineyard, it transforms into that symphony that carries notes of rigour and far-sightedness, of brave entrepreneurial spirit, of adherence to identity and essential authenticity, consistency and stubbornness, of origin of a myth, that Amarone that is born here. If tradition is the beginning of a story, Amarone Bertani is the soul of a legend that symbolises the reality of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The lady in red beckons us: now she leads us into a Bacchic temple, the treasure hoard with over 120,000 bottles, from 1958 to 2007, worth 25 million Euros. The wine is covered by the dust of time; witness to a reality that has become iconic. It is a slice of history that communicates the immutable value of identity and its supreme essence. The largest historical archive of an Italian winery! We are stunned, amazed, for the umpteenth time. Still with 'wow' written all over our faces and the past in our eyes, we follow the traces of our scarlet guide, opening another world, opening a door of Tenuta Novare. Here is the historic fruit store! For fifty years the grapes have been laid down here, always with the same method. Carefully selected bunches of Corvina and Rondinella are placed on the classic arele, as they are called in the

Above, a vista over the 70 hectares of vineyards of Tenuta Novare in Arbizzano di Negrar, the heart of Valpolicella Classica: with Grezzana it is one of the two historic Bertani wineries and the cradle of great reds like Amarone and Valpolicella Classico Superiore. Adjoining page, at repose in the fruit store, bunches of Corvina and Rondinella on the classic arele: drying lasts 120 days.

Verona dialect, the wooden frames with bamboo cane slats, arranged in tiers. They will remain here to wilt for 120 days with the windows open, suitably oriented to favour maximum ventilation, as has always been done.

No technology; just free air caressing the grapes, fundamental for proper drying. Wood and wisdom, bamboo canes and patience, cosmic air and the actions of man, and we find the result in the bottle. Barrique? Who said barrique? Chez Bertani, after fermentation which takes place in cement, the wine relaxes, snoozing for seven years in the arms of large 600-litre barrels made from Slavonian oak. It will emerge to reflect for another year in the bottle, the same bottle with the same label since 1958, the year it was first put on sale. Recognisable, always consistent. A living legend. A clinking of glasses calls me back



to reality. I make out the voice of Ernesto Barbero, 86 years old, the oenologist from Piedmont called by Guglielmo Bertani in 1959 to create the style of Amarone Bertani. From those barrels that contained Recioto, the traditional dessert wine of Verona made from withered grapes, which, however, had turned into a dry wine (the sugars had turned into alcohol

because of unblocked fermentation at the right moment: from the sweet Recioto, an 'amaro' or bitter wine emerged, hence the name Amarone), Barbero found the expressive medium for this unforgettable Amarone. He remained with the winery for thirty years before retiring in 1989. Men count in Bertani, and Bertani makes a point of valorising them, Barbero knows. I fully agree with his phrase: "Amarone Bertani is an over-the-top wine. But without exaggerating." 🍷

❧ SIX EXCITING GLASSES TRACING 50 LONG YEARS ❧

A common thread underlies the entire tasting: beyond fashions, Bertani has always chosen consistency of style, made of measured potency, agility and freshness. And these six vintages are proof and testimony

96 **Recioto della Valpolicella Amarone Classico Superiore 1967**

The purity of the fruit is surprising: crisp and whole cherry in spirits. Then cinnamon, cinchona, and tamarind. In the glass the olfactory texture is completely captivating in its complexity, leading us sniff after sniff to a timeless time, which overcomes natural laws to reach the essence of dream. An intimate, profound wine that whispers its intense vitality, calling to be drunk for its inner dynamics. Epiphanic wine, it is the Amarone of true tradition, with all the history of its land condensed into lightness: this is my personal squaring of the circle. And perhaps it is yours, too.

94 **Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2008**

Great on the palate for touch, energy and progression: a spectacular cordate ascent of freshness and warmth, the aromatic diffusion is a compendium of the fruit of the bouquet (cherry, dried fig), spices (crisp black pepper), and balsamic herbs. Territorial, precise, and identity in its elegant gait, and restless in its full-bodied balance. Undoubtedly holds an even more stunning future in store.

93 **Recioto Secco Amarone Vino della Valpolicella 1958**

Notes of ginger, bergamot, and pot-pourri follow each other almost seeming to graze oxidation.

The sip flows in contrast between the sweet attack and the drier finale, which is still discreetly savoury. This wine reminds you of Sherry. Sublime uncertainty at the outset: tasting this rarity is a unique privilege.



93 **Amarone della Valpolicella Classico 2009**

Notes of prune, sweet spices, and citrus fruit. The opening thrusts calibrated on sweetness and richness, the progression is sustained by enviable savoury verve, and freshness that keeps pace with the structure. Potent and juicy, even in its callow youth, it can bring luminous joy to the palate. Material substance and rarefaction of the dream in a glass that enraptures the senses.

90 **Recioto della Valpolicella Amarone Classico Superiore 1975**

A rather odd personality: notes of walnut husk and pepper, and a touch of fumé. Compact, pulsating and vital, it seems much younger than its years. Fine hold in the tannins and on the palate, which reveals savouriness and structure, warmth and energy. Noble and concrete, finesse without frills, vibrant elegance.

90 **Recioto della Valpolicella Amarone Classico Superiore 1986**

The cold and very rainy vintage left its mark on this wine's slightly fuzzy silhouette. Aromas of undergrowth, aromatic herbs and spices. On the palate it is full but not broad, the sweetness is less suggested and there is a lot of freshness. Surprising for its youth, the tannins have yet to loosen. Time will improve it.

Above, the liquid treasure of the Verona winery. Top of page, from left, Emilio Pedron, chief executive officer of Bertani Domains; Ernesto Barbero, the oenologist who created the style of Amarone Bertani; Andrea Lonardi, operations director of Bertani Domains. Right, barrels for ageing. Contact: Cav. G.B. Bertani Srl, Via Asiago 1, Grezzana (Verona), Italy, ph. +39.0458658444, bertani.net.

