



Robert Parker's

Wine Advocate

The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine

RATING SYSTEM

Robert Parker's rating system employs a 50-100 point quality scale. It is my belief that the various twenty (20) point rating systems do not provide enough flexibility and often result in compressed and inflated wine ratings. THE WINE ADVOCATE takes a hard, very critical look at wine, since I would prefer to underestimate the wine's quality than to overestimate it. The numerical ratings are utilized only to enhance and complement the thorough tasting notes, which are my primary means of communicating my judgments to you.

96-100	An extraordinary wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.
90-95	An outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.
80-89	A barely above average to very good wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor as well as character with no noticeable flaws.
70-79	An average wine with little distinction except that it is soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.
60-69	A below average wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.
50-59	A wine deemed to be unacceptable.

TASTING NOTES AND RATINGS

When possible all of my tastings are done in peer-group, single-blind conditions, (meaning that the same types of wines are tasted against each other and the producers' names are not known). There are exceptions to this policy with respect to (1) all barrel tastings, (2) all specific appellation tastings where at least 25 of the best estates will not submit samples for group tastings and (3) for all wines under \$25. The ratings reflect an independent, critical look at the wines. Neither price nor the reputation of the producer/grower affect the rating in any manner. I spend three months of every year tasting in vineyards. During the other nine months of the year, six and sometimes seven-day workweeks are devoted solely to tasting and writing. I do not participate in wine judgments or trade tastings for many reasons, but principal among these are the following: (1) I prefer to taste from an entire bottle of wine, (2) I find it essential to have properly sized and cleaned professional tasting glasses, (3) the temperature of the wine must be correct, and (4) I prefer to determine the time allocated to the number of wines to be critiqued.

The numerical rating given is a guide to what I think of the wine vis-à-vis its peer group. Certainly, wines rated above 85 are very good to excellent, and any wine rated 90 or above will be outstanding for its particular type. While some have suggested that scoring is not well suited to a beverage that has been romantically extolled for centuries, wine is no different from any consumer product. There are specific standards of quality that full-time wine professionals recognize, and there are benchmark wines against which others can be judged. I know of no one with three or four different glasses of wine in front of him or her, regardless of how good or bad the wines might be, who cannot say, "I prefer this one to that one." Scoring wines is simply taking a professional's opinion and applying some sort of numerical system to it on a consistent basis. Scoring permits rapid communication of information to expert and novice alike.

The score given for a specific wine reflects the quality of the wine at its best. I often tell people that evaluating a wine and assigning a score to a beverage that will change and evolve in many cases for up to 10 or more years is analogous to taking a photograph of a marathon runner. Much can be ascertained but, like a picture of a moving object, the wine will also evolve and change. Wines from obviously badly corked or defective bottles are retasted, since a wine from a single bad bottle does not indicate an entirely spoiled batch. Many of the wines reviewed have been tasted many times, and the score represents a cumulative average of the wine's performance in tastings to date. **Scores, however, do not reveal the important facts about a wine. The written commentary that accompanies the ratings is a better source of information regarding the wine's style and personality, its relative quality vis-à-vis its peers, and its value and aging potential than any score could ever indicate.**

Here then is a general guide to interpreting the numerical ratings:

90-100 is equivalent to an **A** and is given only for an outstanding or special effort. Wines in this category are the very best produced of their type. There is a big difference between a 90 and 99, but both are top marks. As you will note through the text, there are few wines that actually make it into this top category because there are not many great wines.

80-89 is equivalent to a **B** in school and such a wine, particularly in the 85-89 range, is very, very good; many of the wines that fall into this range often are great values as well. I have many of these wines in my personal collection.

70-79 represents a **C**, or average mark, but obviously 79 is a much more desirable score than 70. Wines that receive scores between 75 and 79 are generally pleasant, straightforward wines that lack complexity, character, or depth. If inexpensive, they may be ideal for uncritical quaffing.

Below **70** is a **D** or **F**, depending on where you went to school. For wine, it is a sign of an imbalanced, flawed, or terribly dull or diluted product that will be of little interest to the discriminating consumer.

In terms of awarding points, my scoring system gives every wine a base of 50 points. The wine's general color and appearance merit up to 5 points. Since most wines today are well made, thanks to modern technology and the increased use of professional oenologists, they tend to receive at least 4, often 5 points. The aroma and bouquet merit up to 15 points, depending on the intensity level and dimension of the aroma and bouquet as well as the cleanliness of the wine. The flavor and finish merit up to 20 points, and again, intensity of flavor, balance, cleanliness, and depth and length on the palate are all important considerations when giving out points. Finally, the overall quality level or potential for further evolution and improvement-aging merits up to 10 points.

Scores are important for the reader to gauge a professional critic's overall qualitative placement of a wine vis-à-vis its peer group. However, it is also vital to consider the description of the wine's style, personality, and potential. No scoring system is perfect, but a system that provides for flexibility in scores, if applied by the same taster without prejudice, can quantify different levels of wine quality and provide the reader with one professional's judgment. **However, there can never be any substitute for your own palate nor any better education than tasting the wine yourself.**

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imprinting displayed by the **2009 Chianti Classico Gran Selezione Colonia** given the many years this wine has had to integrate. The wine is made from 100% Sangiovese, but much of the varietal purity is masked by heavier notes of spice, tar and coffee. The wine is slow to open and seems to hold back in the mouth as well. Fruit is sourced from the Colonia vineyard, which is located at the highest point of Poggio a Rancia. The vineyard has reddish soils, rich in magnesium and iron that are unique in the Felsina holdings. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2025. Made with Trebbiano, Malvasia and Sangiovese, the

2005 Vin Santo del Chianti Classico opens to a brilliant amber color and thick viscosity that hugs to the rim of the glass. Oak-driven tones of vanilla and caramel are immediately apparent, but quickly followed by candied fruit, butterscotch and orange peel. Clusters undergo a natural drying process on mats until February of the following year. The must is transferred to sealed oak casks containing the "mother," or gelatinous remains from previous vintages. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2028. Importer: Polaner Selections, Mount Kisco, NY; tel. (914) 244-0404; www.polanerselections.com

FATTORIA LA MASSA 2012 LA MASSA

TUSCANY (unknown) RED 93

FATTORIA LA MASSA 2011 GIORGIO PRIMO

TUSCANY (unknown) RED 91

Giampaolo Motta's **2012 La Massa** wraps clean around the palate, imparting sassy tones of Mexican spice, tobacco and dark berry fruit. The blend is 60% Sangiovese with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Alicante. The wine shows luscious dark concentration with equal billing to both the dark fruit component of the wine and its spicy, oak-driven spice. There's firmness to the tannins that should soften with time. I love that the bottle still shows a roasting chicken on the back label to poke fun at the Gallo Nero Chianti Classico logo. Anticipated

maturity: 2015-2024. The **2011 Giorgio Primo** is the latest edition of one of my favorite Tuscan blends. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot are the three pillars of this broadly textured red. Soaring aromas include dark cherry, marzipan and even a touch of chocolate cookie dough. Its texture is chewy, rich and syrupy and you definitely feel that 15% alcohol on the close. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2024. Importer: T. Edward Wines, New York, NY; tel. (212) 233-1504; www.tedwardwines.com

FATTORIA POGGIOPIANO 2011 CHIANTI CLASSICO LA TRADIZIONE SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA (unknown) RED 89

The **2011 Chianti Classico La Tradizione** opens to deep color saturation and density with oak-forward aromas of spice, leather and cigar box. The fruit displayed is ripe and slightly on the cooked side with dried cherry skin and dark prune. You also get a generous dose

of dark chocolate and baking spice. It's almost too much of a good thing with bright acidity backed by thick, syrupy texture. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2020. Importer: Vinifera Imports, Ltd., Ronkonkoma, NY; tel. (631) 467-5907

FONTODI 2012 PINOT NERO

TUSCANY (unknown) RED 91

FONTODI 2011 CHIANTI CLASSICO VIGNA DEL SORBO

CLASSICO (unknown) RED 94

Following the glorious performance of Fontodi in 2010, I had lowered my expectations with regard to 2011. The 2010 Flaccianello della Pieve was one of my favorite wines tasted last year. Although the 2011 vintage does indeed result in softer, plusher wines, the Fontodi magic is delivered in droves nonetheless. The big news is that Fontodi's Vigna del Sorbo has now taken on classification as a Chianti Classico Gran Selezione. The prestigious wine represents an enormous legitimization of the new category.

steps with lingering traces of spice and sweet almond. The whole experience is delightful. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2024. The plush and ripe **2011 Chianti Classico Vigna del Sorbo** shows a Type-A personality with bold nuances of black cherry, sweet espresso and baking spice. It is comprised of 95% Sangiovese and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon and ages for two years in French barrel (half the wine) as well as two months in large oak cask. The opulence and richness definitely stand out (the label registers 15% alcohol). Sweet tannins and rich extraction make up the finish. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2028. Importer: Vinifera Imports, Ltd., Ronkonkoma, NY; tel. (631) 467-5907

The **2012 Pinot Nero** is a gorgeous red wine from Tuscany that sings high praise for the grape. Rosewater, jasmine and tea leaf open the lady-like bouquet. Those delicate aromas come forth in tiptoe

ISOLE E OLENA 2011 CHIANTI CLASSICO

BARBERINO VAL D'ELSA (\$27.00) RED 87

ISOLE E OLENA 2011 CEPPARELLO

TUSCANY (\$90.00) RED 94

ISOLE E OLENA 2008 SYRAH COLLEZIONE DE MARCHI

CHIANTI (\$60.00) RED 92

ISOLE E OLENA 2005 VIN SANTO

CLASSICO (\$55.00) WHITE 94

Ripe cherry and strawberry give the **2011 Chianti Classico** warm climate appeal. There's a sweet note of fruit on the close, backed by the fresh acidity you can expect from Sangiovese. This wine is best for near-term consumption. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2017. The **2011 Cepparello** is a big wine that moves over the palate with authority and determination. It reveals thick layers of tobacco, spice, red cherry, grilled herb and pretty ashy-mineral accents. This 100% Sangiovese also imparts a sense of austerity that is especially evident in the tight, but polished tannins. Cepparello needs another five years of bottle aging. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2030.

and aged in barrel for 18 months (30% is new oak and 5% is American wood). You get a great sense of the grape here with spice, ripe fruit, tobacco, crushed granite and toasted espresso bean. Toasted notes flow from the bouquet as well as Spanish cedar, ash and sticky tar. This is large-framed wine with dark extraction and soft tannins. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2026. The **2005 Vin Santo** shows subtle signs of a warm vintage with candied orange peel, caramel, canned peach, honey and blanched almond. It spreads with thick intensity over the palate, offering sweetened, syrupy thickness. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2035. Importer: Importers: Petit Pois Corp., Moorestown, NJ; tel. (856) 608-9644

The **2008 Syrah Collezione de Marchi** ferments in steel and oak

LA BRANCAIA 2012 TRE

TUSCANY (\$23.00) RED 87

LA BRANCAIA 2012 ILATRAIA

TUSCANY (\$60.00) RED 93

LA BRANCAIA 2011 IL BLU

TUSCANY (\$85.00) RED 94

LA BRANCAIA 2011 CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA

CHIANTI (\$40.00) RED 87

Winemaker Barbara Widmer characterizes the 2012 vintage as hot and dry, especially at the peak of summer. This led to reduced yields (of about 15% overall) and thicker skins on the grapes. High polyphenolic levels and supple extracts are impossible to miss in the two wines made that year: Ilatraia and Tre.

tannins are supple, soft and seamless. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2025.

Mostly Sangiovese with 20% Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, the **2012 Tre** is reminiscent of a Chianti Classico in terms of appearance and aromas. It shows a bright ruby color with layers of tilled earth, blue flower and cherry fruit. I found the 2012 to be softer and less focused compared to some of the highly energetic vintages of the past like 2007 and 2010. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2019. The **2012 Ilatraia** is a blend of 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Petit Verdot and 20% Cabernet Franc that sees an 18-month oak regime with new and used barrique. This is a massive wine that smiles bright with Tuscan sunshine. Its appearance is dark and dense and the bouquet peels back with thick layers of black fruit and integrated spice. The

A landmark wine on all levels, the **2011 Il Blu** really seems to love the heat of the vintage. Barbara Widmer says that heat spikes followed by intermittent cool spells helped to establish complexity in her wines. Il Blu is 50% Sangiovese, 45% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. The nose is painted in broad strokes of espresso bean, black cherry, baking spice and moist tobacco. The mouthfeel is infinitely soft and supple. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2028. The **2011 Chianti Classico Riserva** does not fully live up to Brancaia's famously high standards. There was some bottle variation in my tasting, but I found less dimension here with heavy notes of sun-dried cherry and black olive that are too monothematic. The mouthfeel is pleasantly plush and supple once you get past the hefty bouquet. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2018. Importer: E. & J. Gallo Winery, Modesto, CA; tel. (209) 341-3111; www.ejgallo.com

LA PORTA DI VERTINE 2010 CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA

GAIOLE (\$49.50) RED 92

LA PORTA DI VERTINE 2010 SASSI CHIUSI

GAIOLE (\$49.50) RED 89

The organic **2010 Chianti Classico Riserva** is a bold wine with a level of aromatic muscle and power that is almost unmatched. This expression will appeal to those who appreciate extra heft and muscle in Sangiovese. The nose is redolent of saddle leather, prune, dark fruit and pipe tobacco. It imparts a big sense of structure and sweet

tannins. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2024. The **2010 Sassi Chiusi** reveals an amber-brown tinge in its appearance and evolved aromas of cigar smoke, candied fruit and tiled earth. The tannins are laced with a touch of tight astringency. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2014. Importer(s): The Vine Collective, www.thevinecollective.com