

Indian Wine Academy

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Alba Wine Festival Ends with Optimistic Note

The 4-day long wine fest at Alba, Piedmont organised by Albeisa to showcase the red docg wines of 167 member producers from Barolo, Barbaresco and Roero ended Thursday on an optimistic note for the latest vintages tasted from these areas, reports Subhash Arora from Alba.

The annual *anteprema* event showcased 2005 vintage for Barolo, 2006 for Barbaresco and Roero. A total of 279 wines from different parts within these docg appellations were tasted blind by over 100 trade professionals from Italy and other parts of the world.

This was the 14th edition of the Alba Wine Festival organised from May 10-14 by Albeisa in which 167 producers presented their wines not only at the formal tasting with each taster provided his own table, but the participants had an opportunity to visit the regional enotecas of several wine producing regions, including Barbaresco, Neive, Roero, Barolo, La Morra and Serralunga where the coveted 1999 vintages and 2004 and several other Riservas were also available for tasting from some of the participating producers. It is also a tradition to drink wines from these producers at dinners hosted in different trattorias and restaurants every night with local cuisine.

Barbarescos were tasted from the villages of Barbaresco, Alba and Treiso on one day followed by those from the Neive village the next day; with Roero district also taking part from its various villages. Barolos were grouped into Barolo; Verduno, La Morra, Grinzane Cavour, Castiglione Falletto in the second group followed by the group of Monforte d'Alba, Serralunga d'Alba and other villages from the Barolo appellations.

This year the participations was marked with a noticeable participation by the American buyers' contingent which comprised of around 20 indicating the importance attached by the producers to this market, especially at this juncture when the economic meltdown has started to affect this part of the wine producing world too. A surprising omission was the Russian contingent.

Albeisa Who?

Albeisa is a private non profit organisation of proud producers from the region of Alba that was formed in 1973 to promote the wines from the region surrounding Alba with 16 producers- Batisole, Giacomo Bogogno, Calissano, Cavallotto, Cerretto, Elvio Cogno, Gaja, Marchesi di Barolo, Marchesi Fracassi, Bartolo Mascarello, Mauro Mascarello, Oddero, Produttori del Barbaresco, Renate Ratti and Francesco Rinaldi and Terre del Barolo joining hands.

Today the group has 200 members which include Casetta (imported in India by Global Tax Free), Michele Chiarlo (importer-Ace Beveragez), Pio Cesare (imported by Sovereign Impex, Prunotto (imported by Sonarys) and Rocche Costamagna (Sovereign Impex). Several prestigious producers like Brezza, Cascina Ballarin, Cascina Luisin, Carlo Giacosa, DaMilano, Fontanafredda (who has reportedly tied up with FinewinesnMore), Germano, Gianni Gagliardo, Luciano Sandrone, Malvirá, Luigi Einaudi and Gianni Voerzio.

The genesis of the organisation goes back to the beginning of the 18th century when the producers of the Alba district wanted to be different from the other producers of Piemonte and started using a different shaped bottle which they named as Albeisa. Unfortunately, this bottle was gradually replaced by Bordeaux and Burgundy styled bottles after the Napoleon invasion. These were cheaper to make and were more uniform in size due to the blow moulding process they used.

When founded, Albeisa worked for the bottle with an Italian company Vetrerie Italiano de Dego, now taken over by the French Saint Gobain and known as Saint-Gobain Vetri. Over 10 million bottles are being produced exclusively by this bottling company annually.

'The bottles cost less than 40 cents and are not the cheapest because of the lower volumes,'

says Pietro Ratti, the current President of Albeisa. 'But for every bottle purchased 5% of the money is set aside for our organisation to conduct events like this,' he adds. He also owns one of the founding wineries Renato Ratti and his father was a vocal supporter of the Albeisa bottle.

Rosso Giovanni- a Committed Producer

Like Ratti there are many committed supporters of these bottles. One such producer is the Serralunga based Rosso Giovanni whom I visited yesterday. The small winery is being run by Davide Ross and his parents for over 20 years now and makes only 55, 000 bottles of very good quality Barolo including one from the prestigious Cerretta vineyards.

Davide has been named as the most upcoming winemaker of Piemonte by Decanter in their May 2009 issue. One parcel from the vineyards they own in Serralunga is surrounded by Gaja vineyards from which Sperss is reportedly produced. Their wines are being exported to Berry Bros and Rudd in London and have been winning top awards in Italy.

Davide was off to London for a press presentation when I visited their vineyards and winery shown to me proudly by his mamma who confirmed that they used only Albeisa bottles. As I checked out, all the bottles in the cellar, including the magnums, double magnums and Jeroboams had Albeisa embossed all around the main body near the neck.

The Wine Festival

The Albeisa event, the Alba Wine Festival was conducted quite professionally with the sommelier service at the Palazzo Mostre e Congressi being about the best one has seen at such tastings.

The main drawback was the tannins that kept on building up on the palate made the tongue numb and almost burning-all the wines tasted were red and young Nebbiolos- which have a strong presence of tannins.

Perhaps the organizers would consider giving the tasters a periodic short break during the tasting of 70 wines in 4 hours, by showcasing some of the bubbly from the region which were quite impressive as one discovered during the 'cocktails' on the pre-opening welcome evening where only sparkling wines were served from different producer members who were a part of this interesting annual event-the Alba Wine Festival.

Subhash Arora
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