

## Wine News: Fawning over Amarone

### Italian wine made from dried grapes is finding devotees around the world

May 2, 2012

By John & Helena Baker



Amarone is produced by setting out the best bunches of grapes for three months.

The official presentation of the newly released 2008 vintage of the fine wine known as Amarone della Valpolicella was held recently in Verona, the regional capital in the northeast of Italy.

This fascinating style of red wine has suddenly begun to take the world by storm. According to statistics from the Italian wine-merchants' association, Vinarius, the typical non-Italian Amarone lover is male and between 35 and 50 years of age, while at home it is women of all ages who have taken this type of wine to heart. Let us not dwell on what all this really means. Suffice to add that U.S. President Barack Obama, no less, is said to be among Amarone's greatest fans.

With demand going through the roof, mainly on American and European markets, production of Amarone has surged in what had otherwise been a relatively tranquil backwater for low-end red-wine production. In 2000, 5 million bottles were sold; by 2011, the figure had reached 12 million, which goes against the trend for lesser Valpolicella wines from the same region, whose sales have dipped 50 percent from 50 million to 25 million units over the same period.

This increase has been enabled by investment on a grand scale in cellars, vineyards and storage facilities, all geared toward improving quality and, of course, quantity. As well as existing producers, many wineries that were simply not on the scene at the start of the millennium have set up shop, being either established winemakers from elsewhere or moneyed enthusiasts spotting a gap in the market.

As for the wine itself, Amarone is produced by setting out the best bunches of grapes on racks in well-aired grape-drying buildings called fruttai for some three months until January, during which time they lose up to 45 percent of their volume, after which they are pressed and fermented through to dryness. Although the grape-drying vinification method (appassimento in Italian) has been practiced for centuries, Amarone as we know it only appeared in the 1950s. Prior to this, such wines had been sweet in character the way most straw wines are.

Corvina is the grape variety inextricably associated with the region, generally constituting the greater part - sometimes as much as 90 percent - of the blend, with Rondinella and Corvinone taking up the rest.

With regard to the newly released vintage, following a series of very hot summers, 2008 was a rather average year with much lower than usual sugar content in grapes at harvest. Generally, there was much higher humidity throughout the growing season, with heavy rain coming in November that could well have spoiled the entire drying process had there not been air-conditioning activated inside the drying buildings.

Amarone wines have a relatively high legal minimum 14 percent alcohol level. They typically evince a bright crimson color, with an elegant nose replete with ripe cherry fruit and a rounded full-bodied palate supported by chocolate undertones, often ending with a certain tartness (amaro meaning bitter). Wines can be appreciated already as they are released, although they have a great ageing potential of up to 20 years and more.

Winery of the month: Vinařství Nechory

After a career selling agricultural and viticultural machinery, František Hnidák opened his new winery as an offshoot of his company HM s.r.o. in 2008. The cellar is thoroughly up-to-date, kitted out with all the latest technological conveniences, and located in the picturesque Nechory wine settlement, which is attached to the south Moravian wine commune of Prušánky. With František's son Lukáš, who deals with the business and marketing, the company cultivates a full range of 12 grape varieties on 14 hectares of their own vineyards in the immediate vicinity. Among these are such stalwarts as Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Traminer and an unusual grape for this part of the world, Muscat Ottonel. Black cultivars include Cabernet Sauvignon, Zweigeltrebe, Pinot Noir and Dornfelder. There are also very pleasing rosés that will go down well during the upcoming summer season. Today's production stands at around 20,000 bottles, though in the near future this should reach 35,000. More from [Vinarstvinechory.cz](http://Vinarstvinechory.cz).

Wines of the month:

Red: Amarone della Valpolicella Classico "Il Bosco" 2005

Producer: Cesari, Cavaion Veronese, Quinzano, Veneto, Italy

Deep, almost opaque in appearance, having a pale ruby rim, a testament to its age. Nose is elegant, featuring a concentration of dark-fruit aromas underlined by spice and a marked raisiny edge. Palate is mellow, yet highly structured with an upright backbone. At 15 percent alcohol, the powerful body will surely knock your socks off. Among the very best representatives of the Amarone style on the Czech market. Decant for best results due to the sediment, which by no means constitutes a fault. (1,290 Kč)

White: Muscat Ottonel late harvest 2011

Producer: Nechory HM s.r.o. Prušánky, south Moravia

Vines with a highly reduced yield were used for the production of this wine. It has a nice pale straw appearance with a powerful floral nose evocative of lilac and jasmine. The palate is typical for the Muscat family, which, unlike all other grape varieties, gives wines that actually smell and taste of grapes and this example is no exception. One for those who like their wines highly fragrant. (125 Kč)

## Events diary

In keeping with the season, Růžový ráj - a festival celebrating rosé wine - will take place Saturday, May 5, on náměstí Jiřího z Poděbrad, Prague 3, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Opportunities aplenty will present themselves for pairing the wines with Czech delicacies, while live Moravian folk music and also "cultured" jazz will be performed throughout the day. Proceedings are tied in with an exhibition of local handicrafts and a traditional farmers' market, which opens for business at 8 a.m. the same day. More from [Farmarsketrziste.cz](http://Farmarsketrziste.cz).

John & Helena Baker can be reached at  
[features@praguepost.com](mailto:features@praguepost.com)