

Decanter

APRIL 1987

PRICE £1.80

MICHAEL BROADBENT'S TASTING NOTES

(120) An Italian excursion

I AM a claret man. But every so often I feel guilty, particularly about Italian reds of which I know, and sometimes like, too little. A vast array listed by the Winecellars Wine Warehouse in Wandsworth pricked my conscience and I ordered a mixed case from a price of

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Fielden in the February *Decanter*: Maurizio Zanella. Smart label, long cork, smart wine: a pleasing, lively ruby colour; lovely gentle fruit on the nose; crisp, flavoury, stylish, unusually attractive, great length and a powerful dry finish.

label, long cork, smart wine: a pleasing, lively ruby colour; lovely gentle fruit on the nose; crisp, flavoury, stylish, unusually attractive, great length and a powerful dry finish. This wine will doubtless improve with age, but it is hardly a snip at £15.35. I then tried a comparative cheapie, at £4.25, Giuseppe Mascarello's *Dolcetto d'Alba* 1985. Admittedly it is only a couple of years old, yet I fondly imagined 'Dolcetto' to be 'dolce'. Not so: it was massive. Opaque, intense purple; sweetish, full bodied, loaded with fruit, alcohol and tannin. It certainly packed a punch. Glorious — in due course, and excellent quality for the price.

Next, a familiar name, GAJA, emblazoned in large block letters, a banner headline on an austere label, with *Barbaresco* 1982 in minuscule lettering beneath. Clearly a big ego at large. The bottles are individually numbered — the least one can expect for £18.95. The effect was rather like going to see a play someone had raved about: a let down. The wine was fairly deep, rich, with mature rim. It had a sweaty tannic nose showing some age — bottle age, a lean stalkiness, almost woody; a touch of oxidation? A lean wine, very tannic, with a curious crisp fruit mid-palate, and trace of iron. Not my style.

Another great name tempted me to proceed: Conterno. The *Barolo Riserva Speciale* 1970 was the oldest of the group. Impressive, deep, mature, old oak appearance; a ripe, fully evolved bouquet with the touch of the slightly sour decadence, well hung *gibier*, I associate with a 1924 claret; ripe entry, dry tannic/acid finish, fairly full-bodied, positive, powerful assertive. Expansive and expensive, £22.95.

What marvellous names some Italian wines have; like *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo*. The 1975 from Valentini however, I found odd. Despite its age, still opaque and immature looking, with a touch of spritz on the rim; very alcoholic nose, figs, blackberry; on the palate sweet, full bodied, chewy, with a strong taste of coffee. Price £7.15. A *Chianti Classico Riserva* 1980 of Badia a Coltibuono was quite a contrast: palish; slightly singed Rhône-reminiscent nose; sweetish, lightish. Pleasant enough at £5.39. The *Torre Ercolana* 1979 I did not like. Strawberry red; pig-sty smell and taste (butyric acid?), highish volatile acidity and a hot, raw, sharp finish. £8.95! Give me a modestly priced Spanish or Portuguese wine any day.

The *Cavalotto Barolo* 1978 at £13.45 did, however, show quality. Maturing cherry red; deep, dumb, singed chocolate/coffee nose; sweet entry, dry finish, rich chewy flavour — enjoyable to drink by itself. My voyage of discovery continues...

