

# THE WINE SPECTATOR BUYING GUIDE

91

## FATTORIA DI FELSINA Fontalloro 1985

Massively concentrated violet, plum and raspberry aromas and flavors compete with tannin and oak, a tough wine that needs four or five years in the cellar to tame the roughness. **\$24**

89

## POLIZIANO Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 1985

Ripe, plummy and rich, with lots of supple flavor packed into a frame of velvety tannins. With its excellent concentration, it should be wonderful when it smooths out in a couple of years. **\$13**

88

## CASTELLO DEI RAMPOLLA Sammarco 1983

Expansive, mellow flavors of plum and black cherry mingle with chocolate and tobacco in a warm envelope of velvety tannins in this ripe, elegant blend of Cabernet and Sangiovese. **\$28**

88

## IL POGGIONE Brunello di Montalcino 1982

Rich, ripe and velvety, with lots of ripe cherry and plum aromas and flavors and a hint of anise on the finish, supple, concentrated, long and elegant. First bottle tasted scored lower. **\$30**

86

## CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA Coltassala 1983

Tarry, tough and drying tannic, yet there is a suppleness underneath that gives hope that the wine will develop smoothness in five years. Flavors hint at tobacco and chocolate, with a faint raisiny core and a hint of cherry. **\$22**

83

## BADIA A COLTIBUONO Sangiovese 1982

Ripe, full-bodied and tannic, plum and cherry flavors with overtones of chocolate, toast and tobacco, plus a hint of lime to keep the finish crisp. Very impressive, but a bit awkward. It's years away from showing everything it has.—HS **\$21**

82

## TORRE GAIA Il Dugentino 1986

Impressively balanced, medium-weight red with cedar and berry aromas and flavors, firm structure, good concentration and length.—HS **\$5**

79

## DEI ROSETI Rosso di Montalcino 1985

Firm and slightly tannic but assertively flavorful, with more tobacco and toast character than fruit.—HS **\$9**

75

## VILLA NICOLA Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1981

Lee Iacocca's wine is mature from the color to the finish, tasting strongly of coffee with a tinge of ripe raspberry, but it still has life in it. An unusual wine, but oddly fascinating. **\$14**

## Italy Other Red

92

92

## CA' DEL BOSCO Maurizio Zanella 1985

Smooth and supple, with rich berry, cherry and smoke flavors, velvety and expansive on the palate, elegant and balanced with acidity. This Cabernet-based red has a nice touch of oak, and it feels as if it can only get better with aging. **\$38**

CA' del BOSCO  
FRANCIACORTA

Denominazione di Origine Controllata



Comune di Adro, partita catastale 135 - 154 p. e nel Comune di Cazzago S.M., foglio 1, mappale 13241, foglio 1, mappale 14 p. Da 656,18 q.li di uve, vendute dal 10 al 17 ottobre 1985, si sono ottenuti, al termine della vinificazione e della maturazione in botti di rovere, 420 Hl., pari a 56.000 bottiglie, imbottigliate a Erbusco (Italia) dall'Azienda Agricola CA' del Bosco di Annamaria Clementi Zanella.

83

## CA' DEL BOSCO Franciacorta 1985

Lean and stylish, packed with beautiful raspberry flavors, with lots of black pepper and herbs on the nose. Very firm and tightly wound, it should open up nicely in two more years. **\$11**

81

## BOSCAIN Valpolicella Superiore

See Best of BG3.

71

## CORVO Rosso di Montalcino 1985

Ripe but still tannic, with the finish in this so red.—HS

## SPAIN



soften up.

80

## MONTESIERRA Somontano 1987

Loaded with ripe fruit. Plum, cherry and spice flavors unfold on the palate. It's soft and lush, very palatable.—JL **\$5.50**

78

## TORRES Gran Sangre de Toro Penedès 1984

The distinct black currant and anise flavors stand out. It's also tannic and can stand time to soften.—JL **\$9**

68

## GRAN CAUS Cabernet Sauvignon- Cabernet Merlot Penedès 1984

Its meaty and plummy flavors clash, creating an unusual taste combination. Not for everyone.—JL **\$12**

\$75

## CALIFORNIA

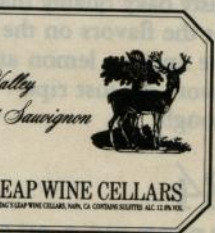
## Cabernet Sauvignon

## Cabernet Sauvignon Napa 1985

Cellar Selection, page **\$20**

## Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Coach Insignia 1985

Careful and built to last. It is by concentrated, ripe currant and plum flavors that are deep and long. Touched with leather notes give it complexity. Three to five years ago begin to melt the tannins. **\$18**



## LEAP WINE CELLARS

## Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1985

Supple, rich and elegant, with good extract and ripe cherry and plum flavors that unfold on the palate. The structure is firm and well balanced, with a hint of oak on the nose and finish. **\$16.50**

89

## HESS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve 1983

Ripe cherry, spice, anise and plum flavors in a lean, concentrated package. The fruit is well defined and nicely balanced. Has the structure for aging. **\$23**

88

## GIRARD Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1985

Sleek and elegant, with spicy cedar and cigar box aromas, ripe plum and black cherry flavors and firm, mouth-drying tannins on the finish. Has room to grow. **\$15**



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20FF £2.50 UK \$2

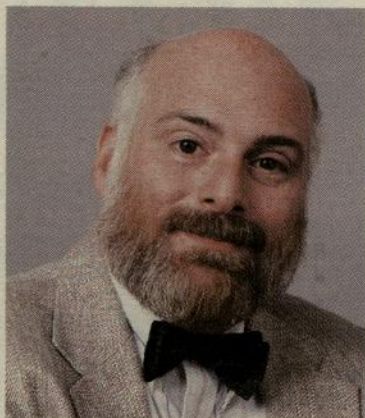
18

SEPT. 15, 1988

THE WINE SPECTATOR  
OPINION

HARVEY STEIMAN

## Ca' del Bosco



### Italian Vintners' Chutzpah

**T**hey used to laugh at the idea of Italian Chardonnay. They're not laughing anymore. They're in shock — at the prices.

Angelo Gaja makes a Chardonnay in Barbaresco, where no one even thought about growing it before. He gives it the full treatment — barrel fermentation, barrel aging on the lees, fancy bottling. Last time I checked it was \$37. Does having a Chardonnay from Gaja mean enough to collectors to warrant such a price?

Pio Cesare has a new Chardonnay. Known for its excellent Barolo and fine Dolcetto, the winery dipped a toe into Chardonnay with the 1986 vintage. I liked the wine a lot when I tasted it in Italy, finding it rich and harmonious. It's \$29.

At Ca' del Bosco, best known for its dry *spumanti* and a Bordeaux-style red closer in taste to the Libourne than Lombardia, they've been working on a Chardonnay, too. I tasted the 1985 several

times in Italy. Very impressive. It has deep, rich flavors — and a \$38 price tag.

Who do these guys think they are kidding?

There is no justification for prices like these. These are experimental wines, untested for aging potential, unproven for consistency. Gaja at least has a few vintages on the record, and it's a record of constantly increasing quality. For a while he was the only Italian making quality Chardonnay in the international style, with the distinctive character derived from oak barrels. At least Gaja was a rarity.

**B**ut for Pio Cesare and Ca' del Bosco, these are the first commercial vintages. And the field is getting crowded. In Tuscany I tasted excellent Chardonnays from Avignonesi (Il Marzocco, \$16), Villa Banfi (Fontanelle, \$14), Capezzana (\$14) and Ruffino (Cambreo, \$17). In Umbria, Lungarotti makes a lovely Chardonnay Riserva (\$15). None

of them is cheap, but they are priced competitively with California Chardonnays.

To justify a fancy price tag, a wine must have something unique to offer. By all rights, it ought to be evident in tasting, but pedigree and a long track record of celebrity are also important factors.

If high-priced wines are not distinctive, they're not worth it. Why pay a lot of money for a wine no better than another a fraction of its price? And the hard truth is that, for all their qualities, Italian Chardonnays offer nothing unique, except that they come from Italy.

Compared with California, France, Australia and, lately, New Zealand, Italy has little to add to the Chardonnay discussion. Make no mistake; these are good wines. There is simply nothing uniquely Italian about the way they taste.

This price spiral is not limited to Chardonnay. Cabernet-based wines such as Gaja's Darmagi (now \$51), Ca' del Bosco's Maurizio Zanella Signature wine (\$38) and Castello dei Rampolla's Sammarco (\$28) are testing the limits of credibility. Of the three, only Sammarco could be readily identified as Italian. Otherwise it's the same story — very fine wines, but not unique.

Proud of his wines, Maurizio Zanella of Ca' del Bosco likes to pour them blind for knowledgeable tasters against certified champions. On a recent visit, he paired his '81 Brut against an '81 Moët & Chandon Brut, his '85 Pinero (Pinot Noir) against a Comte de Vogüé '85 Musigny and his '85 Chardonnay against a Marquis de Laguiche '85 Montrachet. He wanted to demonstrate that his wines compared favorably

The strategy is familiar. A number of California wineries have made their reputations in similar tastings against French benchmarks. And, tasting blind I liked Ca' del Bosco's bubbly slightly better than the Champagne and the Pinero better than an obviously flawed bottle of Musigny. But the Chardonnay wasn't even in the same league as the Montrachet. If the Chardonnay was a stand-up double, the Montrachet was a home run into the upper deck.

**I**talian winegrowers easily clear the fences with their great red wines, more often with their own grape varieties than the international types, if truth be known. At least the experimental reds are exciting and often unique.

But white wine is a different story. Good to excellent wines are made from more traditional Italian varieties, including Cortese, Arneis, Pinot Grigio and Grechetto. These wines are distinctively Italian, but they don't have the finesse, the elegance or the international appeal of the best Chardonnays.

At these prices, it seems clear that these wines are destined for restaurant wine lists, where the markup won't look so bad after a page or two of even higher-priced white Burgundies called Meursault or Montrachet.

My advice to value-conscious consumers is to flip through the wine list to the pages with California and Australia on them. Even though these prices are also going up, at least they retain a semblance of sanity.

*Harvey Steiman is the editor at large of The Wine Spectator.*

