Italy's best wines?

29 Sep 2010 by Walter Speller

In Europe 'tis the season of mellow fruitfulness, and the latest editions of Italian's most influential wine guides. The first to start the media fanfare is Gambero Rosso with its *Vini d'Italia,* a hefty work of some 1,000 pages scoring wines, not according to points, but *bicchieri* or glasses, the highest rating being three glasses, or *tre bicchieri*.

Although the influence of the guide has been waning, as has the impact of the Tre Bicchieri awards, which in the past meant an immediate sell-out for the winery in question, the editors have not been sitting still, and have come up with the largest ever *Vini d'Italia*, with 2,350 producers and 20,000 wines reviewed for the 2011 edition just out.

With the Veronelli guide, the Gambero Rosso guide can be considered instrumental in Italy's quality wine renaissance since the mid 1980s. Born as a joint venture between the Slow Food movement and the Gambero Rosso publishing house, the guide lost momentum a couple of years ago when accusations of unclear tasting protocols began to emerge, and internal disagreement led to the dismissal of Stefano Bonilli, one of the founders of the guide. Slow Food decided to terminate its collaboration with Gambero Rosso and kept a low profile while working on a completely new concept for their own eagerly awaited guide, Slow Wine, which will be presented to the public next month. During a press conference at this year's Vinitaly, the Slow Food publishers announced that their new guide would abstain completely from any scoring system.

Gambero Rosso's *Vini d'Italia,* in the meantime, has added a range of extras to the tried and tested formula of reviewing wineries and their wines, which was so often controversial in its choice, and perhaps even more in its omission, of certain top producers. Last year Tre Bicchieri Verde awards were introduced for the best wines made from organically grown grapes as well as Tre Bicchieri Plus for wines particularly appreciated by the head editor Daniele Cernilli, as the Gambero Rosso website puts it.

This year no fewer than 52 wines are highlighted as gaining the highest accolades but with a retail price of less than €15 - 'the best antidote to the economic crisis', according to Gambero Rosso. In total, 402 wines were awarded Tre Bicchieri against 391 in last year's edition, which seems to indicate that, despite the recession, wine quality in Italy has increased.

• Red wine of the year
Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 2004 Biondi Santi [Shame they didn't show this in the tasting reported in Italian heavyweights - JR]

• White wine of the year
Alto Adige Sylvaner R 2009 Köfererhof

• Sparkling wine of the year
Franciacorta Brut Secolo Novo 2005 Le Marchesine

• Sweet wine of the year
Albana di Romagna Passsito AR Riserva 2006 Fattoria Zerbina

• Producer of the year
Valentini

• Best-value wine
Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico Superiore 2009 Pievalta

• Oenologist of the year
Ruben Larentis

• Viticulturist of the year
Walter Massa, Piemonte

• Newcomer of the year
Polvanera, Puglia

• Sustainable viticulture award
Sandi Skerk, Friuli