



Misunderstood Italian wines

Some wines are misunderstood and, as a result, don't get a lot of respect. Wine fans and collectors know about them, but the average consumer finds confusion on the label and passes those wines by, not realizing there is great quality or value behind that label mystery.

Let's cut through that confusion and explain four Italian wines.

Valpolicella Ripasso

This wine is not only a blend of Veneto's two most popular wines – Valpolicella and Amarone – but it is also a byproduct of Amarone.

What I really love about the Italians is they waste nothing when it comes to grapes. After all is said and done in the wine-making process, they take the pressed and potentially wasted grapes and make Grappa (distilled grape skins).

In the case of Ripasso, which means “to re-pass,” they make use of the skins leftover from making Amarone. Amarone is made by drying grapes over about three months, which causes them to lose 30 per cent of their water weight and concentrate flavours. Italian winemakers realized there was still potential in these grapes, namely the sugars still trapped within.

So they took simple Valpolicella wine –



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an easy-drinking, light-bodied red – and passed it over the skins of already pressed Amarone grapes thus making a medium-bodied, more flavourful wine with a little more alcohol, usually about a half to one full per cent higher. All three wines – Valpolicella, Ripasso and Amarone – are all made from the same indigenous red grape blend: Molinara, Corvina, Rondinella. But let's stop there before we get too far into the weeds.

Good examples of Ripasso wines to try are: **Zonin Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore** (\$19.10 - #170142), **Farina Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore** (\$15.45 - #195966), and **Villa Annaberta Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore** (\$18.30 - #378091).

Sangiovese Romagna

The Sangiovese from Romagna have always been looking for their identity. The confusion is tied to the fact that the majority of a Chianti blend is a grape called Sangiovese. What Sangiovese di Romagna

is made from is right in the name. It's rare for Italian wine to have the variety so prominent, but the same could be said for most European wines, which either have a region or producer as the prominent words on the label.

The Sangiovese from (di) Romagna is different from Chianti because it's grown in the more northerly area of Romagna and because of this, its acidity stays relatively high while the sugars remain relatively low. This makes for a great wine to pair with food, but not a wine made for sipping – that acidity can sometimes get in the way.

To see what I mean, you can do your own comparison. Try these Chiantis: **Ruffino Chianti** (\$14.95 - #001743), **Villa Puccini Riserva Chianti** (\$15.95 - #573519), **Gabbiano Chianti** (\$14.95 - #78006) next to these from Romagna: **Tini Sangiovese Romagna** (\$9.05 - #179432), **I Diavoli Sangiovese Superiore** (\$19.95 - #542670), **LeRocche Romagna Sangiovese Superior** (\$15.30 - #314194).

Vino Nobile

One of the reds from the region that causes confusion is Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, another Sangiovese-based wine, this time from the vineyards that encircle the town of Montepulciano.

The confusion stems from another wine with a similar name – Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. In this case the grape is Montepulciano (a red grape) from the region of Abruzzo ... Follow?

Vino Nobile has a strict code on how it is made. Seventy per cent of the wine must be Sangiovese, aged a minimum of two years before release, of which one of those years must be in barrel. And if you see the word “riserva” on a bottle, then the wine must be aged three years.

When heading to the LCBO your cheat sheet should read Vino Nobile equals Sangiovese.

Hiding in plain sight at the LCBO are these delicious bottles: **Palazzo Vecchio Maestro Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** (\$29.95 - #348532), **La Braccesecca Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** (\$24.95 - #566216) and **Gattavecchi Vino Nobile di Montepulciano** (\$25.95 - #672642).

Brunello di Montalcino

Here's where many get messed up – Montepulciano versus Montalcino. One produces an ageable high-end Sangiovese, the other a more moderately priced quaffable Sangiovese. Brunello is a wine produced in Tuscany as well, but this time the grapes are grown around the town of Montalcino.

The name Brunello comes from the word “brown,” which is how the grapes were described by the locals and were thought to be unique to the area. Studies later showed what the locals thought were unique was actually Sangiovese and so they just repurposed the name Brunello as the name of the wine instead of the name of the grape.

The region was one of the first regions in Italy to be given the highest designation for wine. It is one of Italy's most expensive wine styles and ages incredibly well. Great examples of Brunellos to try are **Castelgiocundo Brunello di Montalcino** (\$52.95 - #650432), **Banfi Brunello di Montalcino** (\$55.95 - #378257), **Carpineto Brunello di Montalcino** (\$64.95 - #515486).

Be sure to buy one to put in the cellar for a few years. 🍷

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