

The Maestro of Veneto

Giuseppe Quintarelli (1927-2012)

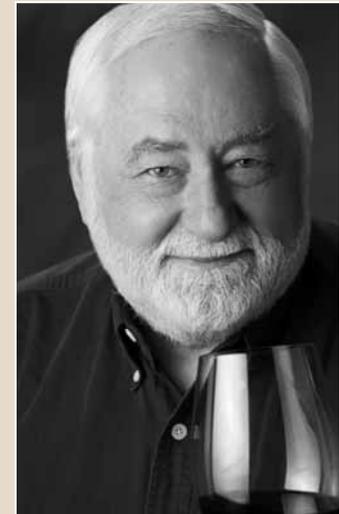
On January 15, 2012 one of the greatest winemakers left this world. While this is one man's opinion, it was consistently mentioned in almost every wine publication and reference book. The wine world agreed that Quintarelli, along with one other, Romano Dal Forno, produced the greatest Amarone. While both producers' wines rest at the pinnacle of Amarone, Quintarelli was an 'old school' producer while Dal Forno produces more international style wines. The Amarone from both are extremely difficult to find and fairly expensive (around \$400 per bottle) but if you're able to find them, you should at least consider buying one or more bottles.

I have long been a fan of Quintarelli's wines but have only been able to find less than two dozen of his Amarone (six Amarone Riserva 1983 and nine Amarone Classico 1997) over my lifetime. Luckily, Giuseppe felt that 1996, 1999, and 2002 did not meet his standards for Amarone so he declassified these wines and sold them as Russo del Bepi (his nickname). Although it seems

strange to spend \$120 for a bottle of Italian 'Red,' I jumped at the chance to do so several years ago when the 1999 was released and found myself in rare company with the others who managed to find a few bottles. It ranks as one of the, if not the greatest wine buys of my life. The wine has been described by professionals as perhaps the greatest Amarone ever made except one made by Giuseppe in other declared years.

One of the reasons I chose to write about Giuseppe is that there are still some bottles remaining via the Internet of both the 1999 and the 2002 for \$160-\$200. Obviously this is a lot of money to spend on a bottle of wine, but he will make no more, so now is the time to strike if you want to experience Amarone unlike anything you've ever had or can imagine. His Amarone Classico bottlings are still available from the 2000 and 1998 vintage also, but at much steeper prices.

In addition to Amarone, he is the acknowledged greatest producer of Recioto della Valpolicella, a wine also made from the Corvina, Rondinella and



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Molinari grapes but which is vinified with higher remaining residual sugar. After being allowed to dry out on mats placed in racks for 4-5 months, both Amarone and Recioto wines are very powerful, intense, and strong wines, the best of which must be experienced to be believed. They are both capable of long-term aging for a decade or more. Amarone goes best with roasts or world class lasagna, my favorite, or accompanied by bites of Parmigiano-Reggiano. They are the ultimate example of what Italians call *vini di meditazione*.

Lest you think I'm exaggerating the quality of his wines, listen to what the Gambero Rosso's, Italian Wines 2005 (Italy's wine bible) says about the 1995 Recioto: "When you meet Bepi Quintarelli, you are instinctively reminded of Michelangelo, perhaps intent on his sculpting, attempting to coax from his Rondanini Pietà a sign of life, a word. Bepi, too, seems to ask his grapes to speak in his Recioto. And gradually, like the unfolding of spring time after the long winter, the chorus of aromas raise their voices in sensations of flowers, rich fruit and an infinite breath of personality."



Jim Bryant and Giuseppe Quintarelli

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Giuseppi as also known for producing another great wine from the Cabernet Franc grape, Alzero. I've had it only a couple of times and it is fabulous also.

Although I believe that anyone who will be fortunate enough to taste one of his wines will feel the same, I should also tell you about the greatest afternoon I've ever spent with wine. In 2000, I attended the world's largest wine show, Vin Italy, held annually in Verona. Along with the joy of meeting many of Italy's greatest wine makers and having dinner at fabulous producers' castella nearby, I was being 'wined and dined' by a small Italian company specializing in selling the world's top wines. The chairman position was open and they wanted me to consider it. As part of their encouragement, knowing my feelings about Giuseppe, they arranged for me to visit him at his estate in Negrar. I was accompanied by the company president and a couple of friends, Diane and Denis Raab, formerly of Barrington. Unfortunately, both of them were suffering from the flu and had little interest, ability or tolerance for drinking even Bepi's nectar. Diane promised him she would try his last wine, so I had a 'canary in the mine' so to speak.

We started with relatively current vintages of Amarone, both Classico and Riserva, and I could scarcely contain myself. Those of you who know me know that I can exude passion and I have never done so more than that day. Attired in his blue cashmere sweater which accentuated the twinkle in his eyes, he was obviously enjoying putting on a show for us. I ate it up and every time he opened another bottle, I watched his eye contact with Diane. When he 'passed' by her glass, I knew more was coming. We soared from heights to ever higher heights and finally he poured from what I remember him saying was his last bottle of 1947 Amarone, literally priceless. As of the 1999 vintage which he had just finished, he had made 49 vintages and helped in the previous six as well as making the next 12 or a total of sixty-seven.

I often challenge myself and others to "never say never," but it is highly probable I will never have such an unforgettable wine experience again.

The following day, I asked my host to call Bepi and again express my sincere thanks. Imagine my feelings when Bepi told him to tell me that even though I had not gone there with any intentions of buying his estate (it had been for sale for 10 years), he said he would be happy to have me return if I was interested in the purchase. He also said that he did not invite any of the previous interested parties to return. What a compliment! To Bepi. A santé! 🍷

