



Bedford Uncorked!

Pressing News About Our Fine Italian Wines

ISSUE No. 1 – 2006

Meet Bedford

In the first issue of Bedford Uncorked! a profile and interview with Mario Belardino, Bedford's founder and president, was absolutely mandatory! So here we go...

Mario Belardino was born in Rome, Italy. In 1949, his father Aldo founded Mediterranean Importing Corp. a well-known wine import and distribution company that eventually employed Mario and his brother Philip. In over 30+ years, the Belardinos introduced into the U.S. market successful brands such as Bertani, Fazi-Battaglia, Casal Thaulero, Mastroberardino, Ceretto, Torresella, Livio Felluga, Caparzo, and Contratto. In 1982, this legendary portfolio was acquired

by the company Heublein Inc. – Palace Brands.

In January of 1992, Mario decided to go back into the family business...this time "solo" and founded Bedford International, an importer of fine Italian wines, headquartered in Larchmont, New York. Since then, Mario has traveled up and down the "Bel Paese" snatching up 24 brands, 22 of which are estate-bottled. Most of Bedford's coveted wines are single-vineyard offerings, personally discovered, scrutinized, and tasted by Mario and John Vesce (Bedford International VP of Sales).



Interview with...

MARIO BELARDINO

BU: Mario, how was the Bedford portfolio created?

MB: It was assembled with great care along with our passion for quality wines and a scrupulous look to our distributors' needs. Also, some good luck helped me, particularly in some transfers from under-performing importers, but we always kept a keen eye for solid human partnerships with the Italian producers. This has resulted in very, very long relationships! For instance, the Belardino family has represented Contratto since 1955, except for a two-year period during the 90s. And even when, for various reasons, business cannot be carried on, at Bedford we become very attached to certain wines and the regional cultural background behind them: at one time my family represented the number one estate in Le Marche: Fazi-Battaglia. We still represent the number one estate in Le Marche. Only now it is UMANI RONCHI!

BU: What are the main factors involved in the decision to pick up a brand?

MB: We look for excellent quality, modern business mentality, ample resources to acquire the best

technology, the best wood for aging, top-notch vineyards, a talented consulting enologist, marketability in the U.S. and a deeply-entrenched "famiglia" behind the scenes. Sometimes you just have to be lucky to find a winner. How we found Michele Castellani is a perfect example of that:

Until a few years ago I used to think that all the great Amarone producers were spoken for until John Vesce and I stumbled upon Michele Castellani at Vinitaly and tasted his great wines. We were unexpectedly floored by the power and structure of his Amarone, Recioto, and Ripasso, and when Sergio (Michele's son) brought out 5 lbs. of Parmigiano, we immediately made our minds up! Now in all of our tastings, Sergio unfailingly includes the Parmigiano as a good-luck symbol of our successful partnership. Another key factor is being open-minded about the real potential of certain wines, always anticipating the unexpected! Years ago I was traveling in Tuscany and I visited Riccardo Falchini to check out his world famous Vernaccia di San Gimignano. During lunch, Riccardo opened up his wonderful reds that we hadn't known anything about: the Colombaia Chianti, Paretaio Sangiovese, and Campora Cabernet, all of which carried the prestige of a legendary Italian enologist, Giacomo Tachis. You can imagine how

happily surprised we were to discover these truly great wines!

BU: You touch on a very delicate aspect... how challenging is it to balance the Italian business mentality with the American one?

MB: This challenge is less daunting than it appears because the American and Italian cultures mesh perfectly in so many ways. I am steeped in both cultures, being born in Italy but also having studied and observed the American way of life, particularly its legal system in law school. I have enormous respect for both of these quintessential cultures. I have learned to combine the Italian love of civility, humanity, and community values with the American commitment to common sense and respect for the individual. I just think that I was very lucky to be able to enjoy the cultural benefits of both countries. I can really express my identity in marketing great wines in a society that is increasingly appreciative of "all-things-Italian."

BU: After almost 15 years of action, is there anything about Bedford that still excites you?

MB: There are several things that excite me about Bedford. First of all, to put into action my ideas and those of my associates is so self-satisfying, particularly when *continued on Pg. 4*

Regional Focus

Italian varietals are usually associated with specific regions of the "Bel Paese": Sangiovese is king in Tuscany, Nebbiolo and Barbera dominate the Northwest, while Aglianico is predominant in the Southwest...

This edition of Regional Focus takes us to the coastal regions of Le Marche and Abruzzi, located respectively East and South-East of Tuscany, along the Adriatic sea. In this stretch of land, two grapes stand out: Montepulciano and Verdicchio. Over centuries of vinification, both have adapted nicely to this area, yielding wines of diverse texture and complexity; Montepulciano in particular, has taken over the western coast as the predominant red grape.

Recent Trends – Le Marche is undergoing a transformation in its winemaking that makes it one of the most dynamic growing zones in Italy. Since the late 80s, innovative producers like Umani Ronchi decided to fully utilize the exceptional terroir of locations such as Mount Conero, home to the Rosso Conero D.O.C.

Montepulciano from Conero is known for its soft tannins, bright fruit, and elegance, which set it apart from the traditionally rustic, denser, and more concentrated Montepulciano from surrounding Rosso Piceno or Abruzzi. The Conero offerings are modern and varietally correct wines, which exploit the full potential of single-vineyard Montepulciano or blend it with international varietals that add structure and weight. Le Marche's modern approach to winemaking has brought innovation to the white wines as well, particularly in the "Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Classico" D.O.C. where winemakers volun-



tarily cut the yields in half, identified specific crus, and occasionally added a touch of oak for opulence, while staying true to the Jesi trademark acidity. The gamble taken eventually paid off as demonstrated by the 1995 granting of the "Superiore" designation for wines with lower yields and higher alcohol, with Verdicchio sales in the U.S., Europe, and Japan rising steadily since 2001.

Many believe Le Marche winemaking to be in its infancy, but considering the new vineyard management techniques together with the unlimited potential of Verdicchio and Montepulciano, even greater improvements are soon to come.

Modern Thinking – Internationally, the diverse production of Le Marche has been hindered by its many D.O.C. appellations, most of which are still unknown outside of Italy. Furthermore, the "Marche I.G.T." category has received attention and accolades mainly since Umani Ronchi's Pelago (a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Montepulciano, and Merlot realized with legendary enologist Giacomo Tachis, then consultant to the Osimo-based winery) was nominated in 1997 "Best Red Wine Overall" at the London International Wine Challenge.

Michele Bernetti of Umani Ronchi has suggested an additional step: the creation of a unique, regional appellation called "Marche D.O.C." that would facilitate the end-user's perception while maintaining diversity and local traditions. A definitive response is still to come, but the proposal suggests the modern and forward thinking typical of Le Marche.

A More Traditional Approach – In Abruzzi, similar innovative ideas take more time because here in the South wineries are accustomed to produce large

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Interview with...

MICHELE BERNETTI OF UMANI RONCHI

BU: Michele, can you tell us a little bit about the winemaking philosophy at Umani Ronchi?

MB: At Umani Ronchi, we strongly believe in the future of the Montepulciano grape and we want to develop the potential of what we consider the most typical and important of all Italian varietals. To this extent, we have the unique possibility of growing the same varietal in different areas, basically in different "crus" such as Conero D.O.C. (Le Marche) and just recently Colline Teramane D.O.C.G. (Abruzzi). This is a very challenging and motivating idea and in fact, our winemaking philosophy is based on exploring the differences that the terroir can give to Montepulciano.

Eventually, we want to be working a bit like in Piedmont, where producers pay very serious attention to discovering and enhancing the differences between the various "crus" of Nebbiolo.

The wines we are going to produce in the newly acquired "Montipagano" estate in the Colline Teramane area will follow the exact same goal: explore the Montepulciano varietal potential respecting its intimate nature and characteristics. The initial tastings from this estate are very encouraging.

BU: What kinds of wines do these plans lead to?

MB: We will specifically direct our efforts to achieve good and important richness and concentration, maintaining Umani Ronchi's trademark focus on the wine's elegance. We believe wine should not have an excessive velvet or cream character, yet it should maintain good suppleness and remain varietally-correct. In my opinion, this makes for wine that is very enjoyable to drink.

BU: How do you actually transform these ambitious goals into real products?

MB: We are very careful on the use of the oak-barrels. We always use a good percentage of, at least, second-year barrels to avoid dominating oak and vanilla flavors. We want to be making very, very Italian wines! Also, our

consulting enologist, Beppe Caviola, shares our same view: his motto is that "an enologist's touch should always remain invisible!" We are very happy about his attitude, considering also that these days it's quite uncommon for a consulting enologist to be so attentive to the producer's specific terroir and to the varietal's main characteristics.



SEASONAL REPORT

The winter of 2004/2005 in Le Marche was characterized by heavy rains and unusually heavy snowfall. The spring and the greater part of the summer were characterized by slightly below-average temperatures. Luckily, the second half of August and the first half of September surprised us with very good temperature variations between night and day, allowing a faster and more complete ripening process.

Best of Bedford

Our recent ratings...

**2001 GRATTAMACCO BOLGHERI ROSSO
WINNER OF 2005 GAMBERO ROSSO
"TRE BICCHIERI" NOW AVAILABLE!!!**

Sold on a "first-come first-serve" basis
(quantities are limited)

DESSILANI SPANNA 2001

INCLUDED IN "TOP 12 VALUES FROM PIEDMONT"
WINE SPECTATOR MARCH 2006

"Subtle and complex aromas of cedar, flowers, and plum. Medium to full-bodied, with silky tannins"

**CANTINE VOLPI "SU SU SU" BARBERA-
CABERNET 2003**

INCLUDED IN "TOP 12 VALUES FROM PIEDMONT"
WINE SPECTATOR MARCH 2006

"Licorice and blackberry, with hints of dark chocolate. Full and soft, with a fruity finish"

CANTINE VOLPI "VOBIS MEA" GAVI 2004

INCLUDED IN "TOP 12 VALUES FROM PIEDMONT"
WINE SPECTATOR MARCH 2006

"A minerally white with ripe citrus fruit character. Medium-bodied, with a clean, fresh palate and a mineral finish"

**CASTELLUCCIO RONCO DEI CILIEGI
SANGIOVESE FORLI' ROMAGNA 2001**

WINE SPECTATOR 90 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005

**CASTELLUCCIO RONCO DELLE GINESTRE
SANGIOVESE FORLI' ROMAGNA 2001**

WINE SPECTATOR 90 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005

DESSILANI GATTINARA 2000

WINE SPECTATOR 90 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005

"Aromas of cherries, plums, and blackberries with hints of toasted oak. Full-bodied, with a lovely, focused fruit character, fine tannins, and a chewy finish. Delicious wine and excellent value"

**2002 UMANI RONCHI VERDICCHIO CLASSICO
DOC RISERVA "PLENIO"**

**WINNER OF 2006 GAMBERO ROSSO
"TRE BICCHIERI"**

After winning the "Three Glasses" in 2005 with the 2001 vintage, Plenio has done it again! The 2002 vintage will be available in Spring/Summer of 2006. Limited quantities!!!

**MICHELE CASTELLANI AMARONE CLASSICO
"I CASTEI" CAMPO CASALIN 2000**

WINE SPECTATOR 92 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005
Available Spring/Summer 2006

**MICHELE CASTELLANI AMARONE CLASSICO
CINQUE STELLE 2000**

WINE SPECTATOR 91 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005
Available Spring/Summer 2006

**MICHELE CASTELLANI AMARONE CLASSICO
MONTE CRISTI 2001**

WINE SPECTATOR 90 POINTS – DECEMBER 2005
Available Spring 2006

**VILLA VIGNAMAGGIO AND CASTELLUCCIO
FEATURED IN GAMBERO ROSSO**

Please visit the news section of www.winesfrombedford.com to read the articles.

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quantities of inexpensive and easy-drinking Montepulciano and Trebbiano (the Chieti area is one of the most prolific in Italy, with its characteristic high-yielding overhead "tendone" or canopy). Recently, the demand for quality wines from the international markets has been gaining impetus and certain high-elevation areas have been singled out for their terroir and growth potential. In fact, the Colline Teramane appellation was

recently awarded D.O.C.G. status, initiating a land and vineyards rush by producers interested in making high-quality Montepulciano di Abruzzo grown in Guyot-type systems. As a result, since 2000, the number of Abruzzi estates mentioned in the Gambero Rosso – Vini d'Italia has doubled, and in 2005, five Three Glass Awards were bestowed on this region, which with effective quality control systems can likely evolve into one of the country's finest.

Did you know?

*The amphora-shaped bottle that made Verdicchio world famous was designed by Antonio Maiocchi, an architect from Milano. In the sixties it was referred to as the **Gina Lollobrigida** bottle!*

The "Marchigiani" (residents of Le Marche) are known in Italy for consuming the most wine per capita as well as for living the longest!

Inside this issue...

- *Meet Bedford: An interview with Mario Belardino, founder of Bedford International*
- *Regional Focus: The wines of Le Marche and Abruzzi*
- *Interview with Michele Bernetti of Umani Ronchi*
- *Best of Bedford: A selection of our recent best ratings*

Bedford News

- *We are pleased to announce the launching of our new website: www.winesfrombedford.com
We have updated all the content and included much more information on our wines, Italy, and the Bedford world. Please visit us soon!*
- *Bedford International has recently added to its portfolio three prestigious producers: **Giacosa Fratelli** from Neive (Piedmont), **Grattamacco** from Bolgheri (Tuscany), and **Colle Massari** from Maremma (Tuscany).
Please read about these award-winning wines on www.winesfrombedford.com*

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these ideas express our honesty and commitment. Secondly, I am excited to introduce new marketing ideas and products that deserve to be represented in the marketplace. The fine wine business never fails to surprise me! Just when I think we have exhausted our alternatives, there is a new spark that triggers a new chain reaction. There is so much to learn about making and marketing wine...it really never ends!

But mostly, I am excited to share all this with my family, with Susan, my wife, who is essential to my ultimate happiness, and with my two sons, Adam and David (David has recently joined

Bedford after graduating from college while Adam has one more year at Fairfield University, CT). I am also fortunate to be able to associate with our regional and district managers who are true professionals. Of course I am always excited to work with John Vesce who has meant so much to our development.

BU: Finally, Mario, where do you see the company in 3 to 5 years?

MB: With some good fortune and hard work thrown in, I see Bedford as a company with an impeccable reputation for rigorously maintaining its

commitments, and for having a solid and successful portfolio of quality suppliers from just about every region of Italy. Ideally, our distribution will grow to over 200,000 cases/year so that Bedford will become a significant presence in every U.S. market. Most of all, I'd like the company to be rewarding to whomever it comes in contact with. When we visit our distributors and our clients, we want them to continue to smile and open their doors wide. We want to be able to continue to share the rewards of our efforts with our suppliers, who have been so loyal and rigorous in their standards of quality. Avanti tutti!