

Viva Amarone!

By: **Melanie Bolduc**

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Another blanket of snow, and we realize it is the beginning of winter. It is far from over. In the winter months, heartier wines will compliment larger meals. What to drink with a stew or meat roast? Big robust wines pair well with hearty foods. If we look to Italy, the answers are abundant. And in this case, there is some signature wine from the Veneto, Italy that would suit winter fare.

Amarone is the reigning king of the great Italian wine. Along with the beloved Barolo's, Brunello's, and Taurasi's a collector's shelf, will sit the beloved Amarone. Amarone della Valpolicella has until recently been a DOC (as has Recioto della Valpolicella). However, these two DOCs have now been upgraded to DOCG status. The promotion to DOCG only highlights the fine quality of the wines produced there.

The process by which Amarone is made is signature to Veneto Region in North Eastern Italy. Amarone, Ripasso, and Recioto are all by products of the same aging process that was first discovered as a fluke! Rumor has it that one Italian winemaker mistakenly left his wine to age too long in the barrels. The result of this winemaker's error was Recioto, a rich, sweet dessert wine. As a result, he then began to re-create the process to make wines with varying degrees of sweetness. Recioto (Sweet dessert wine), Amarone (Dry-Sweet table wine), and Ripasso (Dry-Sweet table wine). Let us sample some of these delightful wines.

Amarone della Valpolicella has to be produced in the DOCG of Valpolicello. Amarone simply translates to "bitter." Amarone wines are full in body and texture, and are sweet on the palate. The process by which Amarone is made begins at harvest. Three grapes are used in the production of Recioto and Amarone: Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara. The best of the grapes are selected at harvest and brought to the loft of the winery to age in barrels. The grapes are aged for roughly 4 months in the loft. In this time, these grapes lose water content and gain residual sugar. After the fourth month, the grapes are brought down and pressed. Then, the wine is bottled and aged. Residual sugars are retained in the wine making process. The wine must legally be at least 14% alcohol or more. Amarone wine is best consumed 4 to 6 years old. When purchasing Amarone, the older the better, but never buy a bottle over 8 years. The resulting wine is rich, hearty, demi-sweet wine with dried cherries, raisins, plums, and Christmas Cake fruit flavors. Amarone is best consumed with venison stews, beef roasts, beef bourgogne. From harvest to the table, Amarone is a very labor intensive wine, and this will reflect in the cost of the wine.

Recioto della Valpolicella is a dessert wine that some wineries create as a bi-product of Amarone. The name Recioto translates to "ears," and refers the grape clusters signature to those used in Recioto production. Recioto is a wine created whereby fermentation is stopped during vilification. It is simply a wine that is richer, sweeter and denser than Amarone. Recioto has velvety dark cherry tones often with hints of chocolate. Recioto wines pair quite well with chocolate desserts as well as with cheeses.

Ripasso literally translates to "re-passed," in Italian. This reference means that the Valpolicello wine (a table wine) is re-passed through the previously pressed grapes used to make Amarone. In the process, the Valpolicello wine gains residual sugar, but only slightly. Ripasso wines are medium to full in body, and are not as expensive as their big brother Amarone. Ripasso wines are great value for those who like rich wines on a budget. Also, Ripasso would suit those who like the fullness of Amarone, but want something slightly medium in body.

The process by which Amarone, Recioto, and Ripasso are created in labor intensive signature to Veneto, Italy. The craftsmanship of the producers is exemplified by the quality of the wines they make. The promotion of Amarone and Recioto to DOCG further validates this quality. As a result, the price of a single bottle of



Amarone is quite high (upwards of \$30). The next time the snow flies, and the crock pot is full of something rich and hearty, ship out and pick up a bottle of Amarone for that special night in. A bottle of Amarone would also make a lovely Christmas gift! Viva Amarone!

Recommendations:

Santa Sofia Valpolicello 2005 Veneto, Italy

Crafted in the heart of Verona by the Bernoni family at the Santa Sofia Estate, this outstanding Valpolicello will delight. A medium bodied wine with dark cherries and slight spice. Best served with roasts, game, and stews. \$14.00

Corte Rugolin Amarone Classico 2003 Veneto, Italy

A classic Amarone. Deep cherry in color with rich fruit on the nose. Lush on the palate with ripe, red cherry fruit. Sweet on the top of the palate with balanced acidity and tannins. Excellent wine with beef bourguignon. \$46.00



Melanie Bolduc has lived in California, London, Boston, and Dublin. Melanie is a wine writer, teacher, and consultant. She has worked in wine sales, marketing, and writing (Nash Wines, Wines of Chile, Select Wines from Italy, etc.) Melanie earned her WSET Advanced Certificate from the Wine Academy in Ireland.