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MARCH 6, 2001

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Star from Austria

PIEDMONT

Vallana Revisted

A Reprise of Rare Early Vintages of a Nebbiolo Master

One of our most remarkable offers ever appeared in these pages one year ago, when we offered an astonishing array of rare vintages of Antonio Vallana dating back to 1954. For us, this offering was the realization of a dream, since Vallana was one of our early idols.

The response to the offering was surpassed only by the response to the wines; never have we received so many raves from our customers, who were stunned by the quality and condition of these legendary Spannas and Barberas. But our satisfaction was tempered by the understanding that this would likely be the last time that any of us would see these great old wines.

But it did not work out quite that way. Three months ago, we got a call from Europe, informing us that the wines we had bought were not the end after all; there were still a few cases remaining from the Vallana family holdings. And they were our's for the asking.

The Vallana Legend

With all of the extraordinary wines now coming out of Italy, it seems incomprehensible that as recently as the late 1950's, there were really only three Italian producers making consistently great wines ... and they were all in Piedmont: Giacomo Conterno, Bartolo Mascarello, and Antonio Vallana.

Of course, the first two of these giants have continued to make monumental wines, evolving into enological icons. But what of Antonio Vallana, who

despite once making some of Piedmont's most spectacular and ageworthy red wines, is today virtually unknown to today's Italian wine drinkers?

A Forgotten Genius
The domaine of Antonio Vallana & Figlio dates back at least to the early part of the last century in the town of Maggiora, about 100 miles north-east of Barolo. While

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- ☉ "Intense, traditionally made wines that ooze with character ... Vallana's wines can age for 20-25 years as evidenced by his 1958's and 1964's, which I recently tasted and found to be still in superb condition." **Robert Parker, 1989**
- ☉ "Vallana was a master blender who produced some very fine and long-lived Spannas worthy of three and four stars (*Wasserman's highest rating*) ... the wines were magnificent." **Sheldon Wasserman, Italy's Noble Red Wines, 1990**
- ☉ "Vallana creates Spannas with extraordinary life spans ... their breeding, substance and longevity showing no compromise whatever with conceptions of mass consumerism ... Vallana's subcellars contain Spanna of the last half-century ... These are bargains for their age." **Burton Anderson, 1980**

PIEDMONT

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the domaine always produced a range of wines, its place in history is owed to its profound Spannas (the local name for the Nebbiolo grape).

Vallana also made what are certainly the most remarkable Barberas we've ever come across. In their mouth-filling richness and their aging potential, they were far greater wines than many of the wines that have ever worn the "Barolo" label.

The Cult of Vallana

During the late 1950's or early 1960's, Vallana's wines began to appear in the New York market. While never widely available outside of New York, for over a quarter of a century, with their wild labels and their fantastic power and richness, Vallana Spannas had a strong cult following among wine-savvy New Yorkers. By the time we became acquainted with Vallana's wines in the early 1980's, the quality of their current releases had fallen, but you could still pick up superb vintages from the late 1960's in New York wine shops.

Vallana produced a number of single-vineyard cuvées, several of which last appeared in the 1970's: **Campi**

Raudii, Cinque Castelli, Del Camino, Montalbano, San Lorenzo, Traversagna and Spanna del Piemonte. In a top vintage each of the cuvées had the potential to evolve into a great wine.

Out of the Past

Our offering last year was undoubtedly America's most extensive offering of great Vallana vintages in at least fifteen years. It included 14 different Vallana wines ranging from 1954 to 1961. Each was glorious—richer, more velvety and more youthful than almost any Barolo or Barbaresco we've ever tasted from the same period.

Our latest purchase includes several wines from our first offering, along with some new faces: the legendary 1964 Spanna Traversagna, the 1957 Spanna Montalbano and two 1967's, the Spanna Montalbano and Barbera di Bacco.

However, quantities this time around are even smaller than last: for some of the wines we were only able to get two or three cases. So please bear with us: to allow as many of our customers as possible to experience these incredible wines, we will have to limit the size of orders to just a few bottles.

The Wines

1954

1954 Vallana Spanna
"del Piemonte"
\$115.00



Medium dark color; opulent nose of cedar, tobacco and truffle. On the palate, very rich, sweet and long with vibrant, beautifully focused flavors. A marvelous wine that is as notable for its youthfulness as it is for its depth of character.

1955



1955 Vallana Spanna
"del Piemonte"
\$115.00

On the palate, this 1955 displays great sweetness, richness and length, and a fantastic finish. A wonderful, classic Spanna.

1957



1957 Vallana Spanna
"Montalbano"
\$110.00

Nebbiolos from 1957 are rare today, but here's yet more proof that this was one of the best Piemontese vintages of the 1950's. Today, the 1957 Montalbano has enormous sweetness with truffle-nuanced fruit that is deeply and firmly packed. Has a long, seductive finish.

1958

1958 Vallana Spanna
"San Lorenzo"
\$95.00



Sheldon Wasserman: "★★★★ rich bouquet, floral notes; full of flavor and structure, loads of character, smooth-textured, full bodied, nuances of leather, figs ..."

PIEDMONT

1958 Continued



1958 Vallana Spanna
"Campi Raudii"
\$125.00

Big, mouthfilling and powerful, with a nose that reminds us more of a top mature Bordeaux than an old Barolo or Barbaresco. The wine has fantastic texture, with a glycerin-like smoothness; the finish is long and refined. A complete and marvelous wine.

1958 Vallana Spanna
"del Camino"
\$95.00



The 1958 del Camino boasts an intriguing nose of truffle and game. On the palate, the wine is thick and rich, with the weight that is characteristic of the best of these old Spannas.

1961



1961 Vallana Barbera
"Cantina di Bacco"
\$89.95

After airing, immense fruit emerges, along with vibrant acidity, great richness and intense tarry flavors. An amazing wine we would have mistaken for a great Barolo.

1964



1964 Vallana Spanna
"della Traversagna"
\$175.00

One of the all-time great Vallanas, with a level of richness and power that must be tasted to be believed. Awesome flavors of cherry, licorice and leather. A strict one-bottle limit.

1967

1967 Vallana Spanna
"Montalbano"
\$89.95



Excellent color. A beautiful Spanna, elegant and medium bodied, its tarry cassis flavors buoyed by excellent acidity. Very good concentration and length.

1967 Vallana Barbera
"di Bacco"
\$59.95



Not quite as phenomenal as the 1961 Barbera, but still an astonishing bottle of 34-year-old Barbera, with elegance, concentration and length. A steal at this price.

MADEIRA

Wedding Wine

With the dwindling availability of old Madeira vintages over the past century, one of the few remaining sources of old wines are the private cellars on the island—particularly the cellars of families in the wine trade. Over the years, we have brought you a number of wonderful old Madeiras from these sources.

When Dona Manuela de Freitas, the owner of Vinhos Barbeito, was married 50 years ago, she was given 120 bottles of a 1912 Bual. This was a gift from the owner of the Quinta do São João in Estreito de Câmara de Lobos, and was made exclusively from grapes grown on the estate. Dona Manuela's father Mario Barbeito liked the wine so much he later purchased a further 240 bottles.



Because of Mario Barbeito's belief that Madeira ages best in barrel, he returned the wine to wood soon afterwards. The results were dramatic, producing of wine of concentration *and* finesse.

The wine was finally bottled in February, 2000. Needless to say, the availability is limited.

1912 Bual "Quinta de São João"145.00

The color is a medium amber, the nose is delicate yet classic, with hints of grilled nuts, flowers, coffee and raisins. The palate is smooth and medium sweet (2.8% residual sugar), finishing with flavors of caramel, wild mushroom and a touch of citrus.

COTE ROTIE

First Offer: Guigal's Great 1997 Single-Vineyard Côte Rôties

The 1997 vintage produced what are arguably Marcel Guigal's finest trio of single-vineyard Côte Rôties since 1991—even surpassing 1995. In fact, this is the first vintage since '91 to show the full promise of becoming one of the great Guigal vintages.

It is amazing just how coveted these Côte Rôties have become over the past few years. You can now forget buying any of the former greats for under \$400 a bottle. As for the just-released 1997's, the going prices are starting out in the mid- to high-\$200 range and can be expected to climb from there.

We have just completed our opening purchase of these legends-in-the-making, which we can offer at prices that are 10-20% below market. Buy them while you can at these levels.

1997 Côte Rôtie La Mouline*
96-99 Parker
\$225.00



Parker: "The deep, saturated ruby/purple-colored 1997 Côte Rôtie La Mouline is all silky softness. It boasts a striking bouquet of roasted coffee, jammy, over-ripe black fruits, smoke, bacon fat, and new oak ... gorgeously-proportioned, voluptuously-textured ... Its balance is virtually perfect."

1997 Côte Rôtie La Turquie*
96-98 Parker
\$225.00



Parker: "... flirts with perfection. The color is a more saturated purple than the La Mouline's, and the wine exhibits a more smoky, Asian spice, creme de cassis character with roasted meat, licorice, and melted road tar scents. Full-bodied and long, with low acidity, it will be undeniably appealing and complex when young, but promises to last for 15 or more years.



1997 Côte Rôtie La Landonne*
96-98+ Parker
\$225.00

Parker: "The black/purple-colored 1997 Côte Rôtie La Landonne reveals a cappuccino/espresso-scented nose with notions of sweet toasty oak, scorched earth, jammy black fruits, and *pain grillé*. Long, moderately tannic, full-bodied, and the least evolved as well as most massive of these 1997s ..."

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Rostaing's Marvelous 1998's



While Guigal's single-vineyard wines are in a class of their own as Côte Rôtie collectibles, Rene Rostaing's elusive Côte Blonde is next in line as the holy grail wine of Côte Rôtie. Normal vintages are nearly impossible to find; a great vintage like 1998 *will* be impossible. Extremely limited.

1998 Rene Rostaing Côte Rôtie Côte Blonde*135.00

Parker: "94-97 rating.... staggering ... a seamless, gloriously perfumed wine ... The opaque black/purple color is accompanied by sumptuous aromas of black raspberry/cassis jam, honeysuckle, and sweet woody notes. With fabulous concentration and awesome purity, this is one of the great Côte Rôties of the vintage. It should drink well when released, and age nicely for 12-15 years."

1998 Rene Rostaing Côte Rôtie Classique*39.95

Parker: "90-92 rating ... opaque, purple-colored ... exhibits surprisingly sweet tannin ... gorgeous levels of creamy black fruits, subtle smoke and toast, a voluptuous texture, and a forward, easy to drink and understand style. Concentrated, sensual, and velvety-textured, this lovely Côte Rôtie will drink well upon release and over the following decade."

Baby Barolo

A "Gift" from a New Star of Barolo

The dynamic young Enzo Boglietti (pronounced *bowl-yet-tee*) is one of the new breed of Barolo producers who are electrifying the wine scene of Piedmont.

Based in the town of La Morra—and with holdings in some of Barolo's greatest vineyards—Enzo took over his family's domaine in the early 1990's. He immediately went to work slashing yields in the vineyards, and improving the winemaking and elevage in the cellar. The result has been a transformation no less dramatic than the one that occurred in the 1980's in the cellars of Scavino, Altare, Clerico and Corino.

Best of the Best

The Barolo appellation covers a number of towns, but arguably the most important are Monforte d'Alba, La Morra, Castiglione Falletto and the village of Barolo. And some of the greatest Nebbiolo vineyards of all are on a steep slope south of La Morra. Along this slope are famous names like Case Nere, Fossati, Cerequio, and Brunate. Most of Enzo's vineyard holdings are on this "Golden Slope," and it is their quality that has allowed him to progress so quickly.

From these vineyards, Enzo produces between 300 and 400 cases each of three crus: Case Nere, Fossati and Brunate. He could produce a lot more from these vineyards if he wanted to, and he could pro-



duce a straight Barolo as well. But instead he produces a Super-Piedmont wine called *Buio* (pronounced *bwee-o*). Made from 92% Nebbiolo from his Barolo vineyards, he adds 8% of Barbera to add color, brighten the nose and add fruit.

The name *Buio* is the equivalent of Boglietti in Piemontese dialect. It also means "darkness." It represents Enzo's goal of capturing the greatest strengths of the "new-style" in Barolo: rich color, supple texture, and instant drinkability. Enzo lavishes as much care on Buio as he does on his cru Barolos, including use of top-notch French barrels.


1998 "Buio"

\$29.95 *bt.* \$350.00 *cs.*



Dollar for dollar, it will be tough to find a more hedonistic wine from the Piedmont in the next few years. This "Baby Barolo," from the great 1998 vintage, shows all of the classic rose, tar and cherry smells of Barolo, along with very sexy aromas of cocoa and vanilla from the new French oak barrels. On the palate, 1998 Buio mirrors the plush mouthfeel achieved by such leaders of the Barolo New Wave as Altare and Corino. A stunning value.

"The Rock Star of Barolo"

 "It would take a Bruce Springsteen ballad to describe the scene in this corner of the Langhe: father and son washing the barricades in the courtyard, the door bell ringing, dogs barking, the sound of footsteps, the burning July sun. A man in his early thirties comes out to meet us wearing boots, jeans, and a black shirt. It is him, Enzo Boglietti, the rock star of Barolo. He welcomes us into the kitchen and begins to talk. He has been married for two weeks and has been making wine for five or six years. Two godfathers keep watch over him, just like Jerry Lee Lewis and Roy Orbison; the one looks after his modern side (the barricade) and the other looks after his traditional, melodic lyricism (in other words, balance). And this is what his wines are like."

Italian Wines 1998, Gambero Rosso

AUSTRIA

A New Dessert Wine Star

Tinhof's Wonderful 1995 Trockenbeerenauslese

For white wine lovers, Austria is one of the most exciting countries on earth today. Top sommeliers throughout Europe and America are championing the rich, complex, dry wines of growers like Pichler, Hirtzberger, Nigl, and Prager, while dessert wine lovers have deified Alois Kracher.

In fact, these emerging stars are only the tip of the iceberg. Austrian wine is exploding with dozens of passionate young producers who, over the past decade, have begun to dominate Austria's wine industry. Among the most promising of these young growers is Erwin Tinhof.

After studies in Vienna and Montpellier, and an internship at France's esteemed Mas de Daumas Gassac, Tinhof returned to his native Austria determined to make world-class wines in the Burgenland, Austria's

great dessert wine region. Located just next-door to Hungary, Burgenland shares many of that country's sweet wine traditions yet has only recently (thanks to Kracher) begun to achieve the recognition it deserves as a dessert wine mecca.



The focus of Burgenland dessert-wine viticulture is the area around the Neusiedler See, a shallow, 30 km-long lake that moderates the local climate and contributes to warm, humid fall days. Botrytis forms readily in the vineyards, resulting in late-harvest

dessert wines of astonishing richness and complexity.

In 1990, Tinhof obtained the rights to some prime vineyards, with 20+-year-old vines, in Eisenstadt, on the shores of the the Neusiedler See. His viticulture is painstaking and low-yield, and botrytis figures prominently in exceptional years. Such a year was the great 1995 vintage, when he was able to produce his first Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA).

In '95, he delayed the harvest until the 18th of October. Over the next ten days, his crew made several passes through the vineyard, selecting only 100% botrytised bunches. The harvest yielded a miniscule ten hectoliters/hectare . . . and residual sugar of 175 grams/liter sugar! Even more amazing, the wine possesses bracing acidity to balance all that sweetness. **Just over 100 cases were produced.**

With TBAs from Germany selling at several times the price, Tinhof's 1995 TBA is an unbelievable value in great dessert wine. Arrives early April.

1995 Tinhof
Trockenbeerenauslese*

\$27.95 375 ml \$299.00 case of 12

An amazingly deft wine that shows tremendous richness. While honey and apricot flavors predominate, one also gets a striking sense of the constituent varieties: 30% each Pinot Blanc, Welschriesling, Neuburger, and 10% Muskat-Ottonel. A luscious, opulent nectar that will continue to develop further layers of complexities in the coming years.

One of the Great Haut Brion Blancs of the 'Nineties

White Graves lovers have always compared Haut Brion Blanc to Le Montrachet, for its quality and opulence, and the way its prestige towers above all other white Graves. You can now add "impossible-to-find" to the ways in which Haut Brion Blanc is like Montrachet.

In the past, Haut Brion Blanc was always scarce—but nothing like it is today. You simply cannot find great vintages today, except at stratospheric prices. Consequently, we recently were thrilled to discover some cases of 1997 Haut Brion Blanc in Bordeaux at an amazingly low price.

With its **96**-point rating from Parker, this is one of the three great Haut Brion Blancs of the nineties. The other two (1994 and 1998) both sell for \$250+ — if you can find them.

Don't miss it at this give-away price. May arrival.

1997 Haut Brion Blanc* Parker 96 149.95

CALIFORNIA

Blackford Chardonnay

An Exciting Solo Debut for a Napa Valley Veteran

For nearly two decades, David Cronin has been making wine for some of Napa Valley's most important producers, including a 9-year stint at Far Niente. But, in many ways, his heart is still back home in Blackford County, Indiana. So, when he decided two years ago to start his own operation in St. Helena, David chose to call it Blackford. For his first vintage, 1999, he has made two Sonoma Chardonnays and a Napa Valley Cabernet. Production of all three wines is minute, but the promise is unmistakable.

The 1999 Chardonnays

While we await the release of the Cabernet this fall, David has just released his 1999 Chardonnays, and they are anything but back home in Indiana. They represent the "take no prisoners" style of Chardonnay embodied by Helen Turley in California and Coche-Dury and Niellon in Burgundy. Key features of David's winemaking are whole-cluster pressing, 100% barrel fermentation, weekly lees stirring for ten months, 11 months of barrique-aging *sur lie*, and unfiltered bottling.

Only 100 cases of the 1999 Armagh, and 140 cases of the 1999 Sonoma Coast, were made. We were fortunate to get an allocation of each. But quantities are very limited. Hurry.

1999 Blackford Chardonnay
Armagh Vineyard

\$39.95 *bt.* \$450.00 *cs.*



Armagh Vineyard is located in the hills to the west of Petaluma (towards the coast). The micro-climate is cool and the soils are clay-loam. The four acres of Chardonnay vines were planted in 1995 to Dijon Clone 95. The 1999 Armagh is a concentrated blockbuster, with a thick, rich texture, and leesy flavors of peaches, roasted hazelnuts, minerals and honey. It should be at its best over the next three years.



1999 Blackford Chardonnay
Sonoma Coast

\$29.95 *bt.* \$350.00 *cs.*

This is also a single-vineyard wine: from the Calplans River Vineyard on East Side Road in the Russian River Valley, directly across the River from Rochioli and Allen Vineyards. It shares the Armagh's massive, mouthfilling texture, but the flavors are tilted more towards fresh citrus like lemon and tangerine, with a floral-mineral quality. This wine, too, will offer sumptuous drinking for the next three years.

1998 Hermitage La Chapelle

... at a fantastic price

1998 Jaboulet Hermitage
"La Chapelle"

96 *Wine Spectator*

\$79.95



Wine Spectator: "What a great red wine. Full-bodied, with crushed berry, smoke and grilled aromas, all presented quite subtly. Stands out for its natural, down-to-earth taste of clean, pure, shining fruit ... Best from 2003 through 2015."

1997 Cornerstone Collage

The fourth and final 1997 Cornerstone Cabernet, "Collage" is a luxury cuvée created by blending the three Cornerstone vineyards on Howell Mountain. Only 256 cases were made with a suggested price of \$100 per bottle. *Extremely limited.*

1997 Cornerstone "Collage"

96 *Wine Spectator*

\$87.50 *very limited*

Wine Spectator: "Dark, smooth and chocolaty, with lots of toasty, spicy oak framing a core of earthy currant, black cherry, sage, dill and olive notes ... the fruit keeps pumping through."

PRIORATO

Dances with Wolves

Pre-Release Offer for an Important New Old-Vine Cuvée

Decades from now, when the history of Priorato's meteoric rise is written, Rene Barbier will be seen as the man who started it all, inspiring the region's renaissance as an important wine-producing region.

Born to a family that had been winemakers in Burgundy, Barbier was the first modern winemaker to settle in Priorato (in the mid-1980's). He instinctively recognized the region's potential to make some of the great wines of Spain. Others—such as the gifted young Alvaro Palacios—soon followed his lead.

Over the past 15 years, Barbier's passion has never cooled, and he has continued to explore the varied *terroirs* of his new home, discovering some remarkable vineyard sites, many with old vines. One such site is the ancient Clos des Llops ("Place of the Wolves" in Catalan), located near Clos Erasmus.

In 1998, Barbier entered into a joint venture with his friend, Luc Van Eguisheim, to restore Clos des Llops' 30- to 50-year-old Cariñena vines. While Garnacha is by far the most famous grape variety of Priorato, Cariñena inhabits many of the region's oldest vineyards. It is Barbier's belief these old, low-yield Cariñena vines have the potential to produce some of Priorato's most powerful and complex wines.

And the debut 1999 Clos des Llops has more than justified his faith. Low yields, organic viticulture, and

incredibly stony soils have combined to produce one of the most distinctive Priorato wines to date. There is a dark berry and *garrigue* quality to the wine that the best growers in Châteauneuf du Pape might recognize.



One of Rene Barbier's vineyard workers amidst the old vines at Clos des Llops—"Place of the Wolves."

Barbier's winemaking always focuses on enhancing the raw material to best effect. Not wanting to mask the wild fruit character of Clos des Llops, Barbier employed large Burgundian barrels for *élevage*. He also added a small percentage of Cabernet, Garnacha, and Syrah. The result is one of the most successful and distinctive Priorato wines to date—a wine that gives a new voice to Priorato's ancient vineyards.

And, once again, Rene Barbier has shown the way.

Expected arrival for this inaugural release is June (by temperature-controlled container). For now, we can offer the '99 Clos des Llops at a special pre-release price.

1999 Clos des Llops*
"Old Vines"

89-92 Tanzer

\$45.00 *bottle* \$499.00 *case*

Tanzer: "Full bright ruby. Inky blackberry and eucalyptus on the port-like nose. Dense, sweet and very concentrated, with brooding black fruit flavors of noteworthy depth. Harmonious acids give the wine a 3-D texture. Finishes long ... Very promising."

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