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JAMES BEARD  
SEMI-FINALIST  
2008 & 2009



# THE RARE WINE CO. NEWSLETTER

10/18/11  
ISSUE NO. 301



*Old Tempranillo vines that produce Pingus. Page 1.*



# A Rare Slice of Barolo History

## Luigi Oddero's "Vigna Rionda" Riserva



In our last issue, we recounted how Bruno Giacosa established Serralunga's Collina Rionda as one of the greatest of all Barolo vineyards. Though Giacosa hasn't made wine from this providential site since 1993, others continue to exploit its gifts.

Next to Massolino, whom we featured last issue, the principle family still making classically styled Barolo from Rionda is Oddero, which has long owned a prized piece at the upper end of the *cru*.

Until 1982, the Odderos put their Rionda juice into their classic blended Barolo. But in 1982, brothers Giacomo and Luigi Oddero decided to begin bottling Rionda on its own.

### The Split

Giacomo and Luigi both enjoyed towering reputations in Barolo's Old School. But in the early 2000s, disagreements between Luigi and Mariacristina (Giacomo's daughter) led to a split, with Luigi creating his own *azienda*.

The vineyards were divided, as were the wines still in barrel, including 2001 Barolo Vigna Rionda. Luigi also took a small amount of bottled—but not yet labeled—Barolo, including the superb '98 and '99 Vigna Riondas.

Along with his cellarmaster and vineyard manager, who came with him from Oddero, Luigi brought in his closest friend, the famed Armando Cordero. As winemaker at Franco-Fiorina in its glory days, Cordero's credentials were as impressive as Luigi's.

Sadly, Luigi Oddero passed away in 2010 at the age of 81. On his death respected Italian journalist Franco Ziliano called Luigi one of the "Grand Old Men of Barolo." Today, the winemaking at Luigi Oddero is still supervised by Cordero.

### This Offer

Both domaines remain emblematic of Langhe tradition. But while the original Oddero *azienda* benefits from its decades of distribution throughout Europe and the U.S., few Barolo enthusiasts even know that a second domaine was created.

Last fall, we visited Luigi Oddero and were very impressed with what we tasted. Especially in the Barolos, there is a pervasive sense of the Langhe's noble past not often found today. We tasted widely through the *azienda's* portfolio, but the stand-outs naturally were the Vigna Rionda Barolos from 1998 through 2004.

To our delight, we were able to purchase, directly from the *cantina's* cellar, four quintessential vintages of Vigna Rionda: 1998, 1999, 2001 and 2004. The prices are a gift; however, the quantities we could get of these vintages are very limited.

### 2004 Vigneti Luigi Oddero Barolo Vigna Rionda

**\$64.95 bottle \$375.00 six pack**

The best aspects of Old School Barolo. A deep nose of truffles, tar and licorice, leads to a sweet, pure palate of truffle-infused black cherry. There is a lovely roundness, as the tannins are already quite approachable. Delicious to drink now, but there's a good 20 years of future development ahead of it.

### 1999 Luigi Oddero Barolo Vigna Rionda .....98.50

Already bottled, this is the same wine as Oddero's '99 Rionda, and glorious. Daniel Thomases wrote in 2003: "potent, rich and explosive, very expansive and penetrating on the nose, packed, dense, and highly structured in flavor." Extremely limited.

### 2001 Vigneti Luigi Oddero Barolo Vigna Rionda

**\$64.95 bottle \$375.00 six pack**

We have found subtle differences between Luigi's bottling and bottles we've tasted of '01 Oddero Rionda. Luigi's is very structured, evolving slowly. Given Luigi's old-school passions—and the wine's character, which reminds us of the great Odderos of the '60s and '70s—patience is sure to be rewarded.

### 1998 Luigi Oddero Barolo Vigna Rionda .....84.95

From one of the decade's loveliest, but most underappreciated vintages, this 1998 offers lush, tarry fruit, classic structure, and heaps of black cherry fruit. This is very much an old-school wine, representative of the wines of previous decades. Extremely limited.

# A Forgotten Hero

## *The Legendary Ritchie Creek Cabernets Haven't Changed Much Since the 1970s ... in their Magic or their Price*

In the '60s and '70s, Napa Valley produced Cabernets the likes of which are seldom seen today.

With very little new wood, and alcohol levels between 12% and 13%, they had warm, cedary flavors, and textures of velvet. And they aged with remarkable grace, achieving a complex elegance that rivaled the period's best Bordeaux and Burgundies.

It was a philosophy of winemaking with striking parallels to Piedmont's Old School. But while Piedmont's traditionalists have staged a roaring comeback, Napa Valley's "Old School" is largely forgotten. Partly, it's because if you're under the age of 50, you may have missed it. And today, few of the early Napa Valley producers still make Cabernet the way they did then.

### **A Glorious Anachronism**

One that does is Ritchie Creek. Again, if you're under the age of 50, you may never have heard of Ritchie Creek. But in the 1970s, collectors spoke its name reverently, but quietly, for fear word would get out. The campaign of secrecy worked: it was seldom listed in the standard guides to California wine. Unless you were an insider, you simply didn't know it existed.

Ritchie Creek was the labor of love of a Berkeley dentist named Pete Minor, who in 1967, got cuttings from the vines that, from the 1940s on, produced the great Charles Krug Special Selection Cabs. Pete planted the cuttings high above the valley floor on Spring Mountain, making his first vintage in 1974. He was alone then; today his vineyard is surrounded by the likes of Pride Mountain, Philip Togni and Relic.

Even today, the Minor family has changed nothing. While most Napa Cabs carry alcohol levels above 15%, Ritchie Creek is always below 14, the result of both philosophy and a protected, high-elevation site. Yields are still about 1/3 of those on the valley floor.

And the wine remains a ghost in the market. In his 1987 *Buyer's Guide*, Robert



*Three generations of Minors with the tractor that has seen as many vintages as Pete (seen at right) has.*

Parker recommended Ritchie Creek Cabernet as a "buy," but noted that it's "rarely seen outside its native California." It's the same today.

Production is miniscule, with no national distribution. Despite having lived on the East Coast since the 1970s, we can never recall seeing a bottle of Ritchie Creek in a restaurant or a wine shop. It was a well-kept secret 40 years ago and remains so today.

The Minors don't court reviews, so you'll rarely see a tasting note. The last vintage reviewed by *Wine Spectator* was 1999, and we've seen nothing from Parker in at least 20 years. Yet, the wine still has a loyal following. If you read notes on Cellartracker, you see comments like: "a wonderful wine flying way under the radar," "great old Cab aromas," and "why is this producer so under-appreciated?"

A month ago, we managed to get our hands on a bottle of the 2007 Ritchie Creek Cabernet. It was a thrilling experience, carrying us back to those early days of drinking the best of Heitz, Freemark Abbey, and Mayacamas. Even its price is a throwback.

With Napa Cabs of little distinction selling today for \$75 to \$100, the idea of a wine of such history and noble bearing selling for \$49.95 seems absurd. No, it *is* absurd.

### **2007 Ritchie Creek Spring Mountain Cabernet**

**\$49.95 bottle \$295 six-pack**

A broad-shouldered, intensely nuanced Cabernet, of a style and philosophy that went out of fashion 20 years ago. Yet, despite its echoes of Napa Valley's past, it is also unique in its expression. The fruit is a dark, briary cassis, smelling of freshly turned loam and tobacco—a bit like Heitz Martha's without the eucalyptus. It exudes the scents of the earth. It is an utterly expressive, distinctive Cabernet that makes us sad that more wines like this aren't made today.



# Noble Survivor

## *The Buzz About H & H's 20-year-old Terrantez*

**W**hen Phylloxera arrived in 1875, it changed Madeira forever. Every vineyard had to be replanted, and in the process, low-yielding varieties were passed over for grapes that produced big, easy crops. Terrantez was among the casualties.

From our vantage point, it seems unbelievable that the grape many believed was the island's finest would be allowed to vanish. A large percentage of the greatest surviving Madeiras of the 18th and early 19th centuries were made from Terrantez. Its flavor and textural dimensions are unique, providing the rapier-like focus of Sercial, with the power of a great Bual. For sheer magnificence, there was really nothing like it.

### The Inevitability

But the Madeira trade was in total disarray. Shortcuts were taken everywhere; and one of the most pervasive was to replace viticultural diversity with a monocultural sameness. Tinta Negra became the grape of choice, and historic varieties like Bual and Sercial became rare. Luxury varieties—including Terrantez, Bastardo and the fabled Malvasia Candida—were even less welcome in a Madeira struggling just to survive.

Gradually, a few plantings of these grapes, including Terrantez, reappeared. By 1954, there were enough Terrantez vines to produce the great 1954s of Leacock and Henriques & Henriques. But 1954 seems a fluke; it was not until the late 1970s that Vintage Terrantez began to be made more than once or twice a decade. Even so, production remained miniscule—just a few dozen cases in a generous year.

How rare is Terrantez today? According to the IVBAM, the agency that governs the Madeira trade, there is less than one hectare of Terrantez on the entire island. There's almost twice as much Romanée Conti! Terrantez is that rare.



*Terrantez casks at Henriques & Henriques from '98, '99 and 2001.*

### H & H's Hidden Treasures

For decades, the venerable firm of Henriques & Henriques has been vinifying small lots of Terrantez for long aging. It's generally not enough to produce a single-vintage wine; to the best of our knowledge, the last time they did that was in 1976. Yet, as the photo at left shows, they have a few barrels of Terrantez resting in their lodge. And some of it is now very old.

So, the firm decided to blend some of these barrels to make, for the first time, a 20-year-old Terrantez. Given the value of Terrantez of this age, it's not surprising that this wine is selling elsewhere in the world for about \$100. But as a longtime friend and customer of the company, we were able to get a direct allocation of this sought-after wine.

Because of its rarity and quality, the wine has generated quite a bit of excitement in Europe. We are pleased to quote two reviews, one from the knowledgeable Swedish Madeira blogger, Niklas Jorgensen, and the other from Portugal's influential *Revista de Vinhos*.

### Henriques & Henriques 20-year-old Terrantez

**\$69.95** bottle

Niklas Jorgensen: "Restrained richness, ethereal, smoke, salty almonds, paint, vanilla and tobacco in its bouquet. When entering the mouth my first reaction is one of a quite sweet Terrantez style. Then it changes character, the intensity goes up, the slightly bitter (it is so well wrapped in it only adds depth) note sneaks up on you—and then finally, an acidity kick making me land on a more medium dry feeling. It's nutty with fine wet earth notes, dried tobacco and a dried flowers note I really like. Long, intense taste which is all about elegance. Ethereal ending. Bravo winemaker Luis Pereira!"



# Twin Peaks of Sangiovese

## *The Epic 2008 Tignanello*



Few of today's marquee Tuscan wines have as much history as Tignanello. In the 1970s, it became one of the earliest Super Tuscons, as Piero Antinori sought a way around that era's requirement that white grapes be included in the Chianti Classico blend. Antinori believed the requirement weakened the blend—while the addition of some Cabernet would enhance it.

And so one of the great Super Tuscons was born. Tignanello's brilliant quality—due not only to the Sangiovese-Cabernet blend but the use of small French barrels—was evident from the start, and the wine quickly gained reverence, alongside Sassicaia. Tignanello has also shown remarkable longevity, as anyone lucky enough to have tasted the 1985 or 1990 knows.

The 2008 promises to join these vintages among the all-time great Tignanellos. But just how great is the 2008? Antonio Galloni believes it has “more energy, focus and length than the Solaia” in '08.

Our offer includes not only one of the lowest prices around for bottles but also rare magnums. Hurry.

**2008 Tignanello\***

**94 Antonio Galloni**

**\$79.95 bottle \$195.00 magnum**

Antonio Galloni: “... unquestionably one of the wines of the vintage ... a wine that impresses for its sublime elegance and precision. Understated layers of fruit caress the palate like cashmere in this impeccable, soft wine. There is not a hard edge to be found. Black cherries, tobacco, smoke and licorice are some of the notes that come through on the finish. The flavor profile is decidedly on the dark side, but the wine's structure is medium in body and intensity. **In 2008 the Tignanello has more energy, focus and length than the Solaia.** It is a fabulous achievement!”

## *The Legendary 1997 Fontalloro in Double Magnums at a Giveaway Price*

Felsina is famous for its mono-*cru* Chianti Classico from the great Rancia vineyard. But the estate has other providential Sangiovese vineyards, including some just outside the Chianti Classico boundary.

And so, in 1983, winemaker Franco Bernabei created the multi-*cru* Fontalloro. The cuvée quickly became recognized as one of the great modern expressions of pure Sangiovese.

The 1997 Fontalloro has always been a collectors' favorite. In fact, one European collector put away a pallet of double magnums, sensing the wine's place in history. A mutual friend told us about the stash, and negotiated our buying a chunk of his treasure.

Whether you want to age one of these double mags for many more years—or pop it for a special occasion this fall—this one's a no-brainer.

**1997 Fontalloro**

**92 Parker 95 Wine Spectator**

**\$345.00 double magnum**

Robert Parker: “... may be the finest made ... and I have tasted them back through the early eighties ... a chocolate espresso-scented nose infused with cherry liqueur, it is a full-bodied, sweet wine with wonderful fatness, terrific ripeness, plenty of glycerin, and a chewy, long, spicy finish. There is some tannin in this youthful offering, but its appealing flamboyance is attention-getting. It should last for 12-15+ years.”

*Wine Spectator*: “Aromas of blackberry, fresh porcini and licorice. Full-bodied, with velvety tannins and a long caressing finish. Very youthful and powerful.”



# Buried in Time

## The Inspired Winemaking of Josko Gravner

Of the world's great winemakers, who's more rooted in the past than Josko Gravner? His fame is based on the extraordinary wines he makes by the most ancient of winemaking methods: aging his wines in terracotta amphorae buried in the ground.

Ironically, after starting in the 1970s as a strict stainless steel modernist, Gravner turned to barrique, which earned him the title of *King of Italian Whites*. But he wasn't satisfied; he wanted to make "true wine."

And so he traveled to the Black Sea to learn the ancient secrets of winemaking. He found that early methods were not only the least manipulative, they yielded magical results, revealing the soul of *terroir*. He concluded that "using this technique I feel the strength of my land and the greatness of my Breg and Ribolla."

Having learned vineyard work from his father, Gravner knows and cares for each of his old vines individually. And while many producers emphasize the importance of "vineyard" in their wines, for Gravner it is the towering influence. His work depends completely on his raw materials; as he told *The New York Times'* Eric Asimov, "You can't correct the wine once it's in the amphorae. Whatever is good or bad will be amplified."



Gravner's amphorae.

### Natural Winemaking

Gravner's winemaking is simple and natural. After a manual pressing, fermentation is in beeswax-lined amphorae, at its own pace and with indigenous yeasts, followed by a long maceration with the skins. The wines spend seven months in amphorae and then three years in neutral Slovenian oak *botti*.

While Gravner works with many varietals, his prize is the noble, indigenous, *Ribolla Gialla*. From 40- to 60-year-old vines densely planted on steep marl and sandstone slopes, this is a rich, finely structured white with a penetrating perfume of chamomile, yellow pit fruits, musk, earth and quinine. Aeration brings out even greater complexity, creaminess and length.

His other white wine star is *Breg*, a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio and Riesling Italico. Perfectly balanced, with an intensely exotic nose, it offers early richness on the palate but with superb aging potential.

These are among the world's most individual white wines, we are pleased to offer a selection of rare older vintages at prices nearly unheard-of in the market. But quantities are very limited.

### 2004 Gravner Breg 'Anfora' .....\$69.95

Antonio Galloni: "92 rating ... a subdued, elegant refined white laced with nuanced fruit. This is a relatively approachable, medium-bodied Breg that should offer fine drinking earlier than some of the more extroverted vintages such as 2003 and 2005. Release price \$118"

### 2004 Gravner Ribolla Gialla 'Anfora' .....\$69.95

Galloni: "92 rating ... similar to the Breg in that it is rather hushed and subdued. The wine offers outstanding balance and harmony in its gorgeous, layered fruit. Here, too, the finish is impeccably elegant and pure. Release Price \$118"

## Rare, Perfectly Cellared Early Gravner Whites

1995 Gravner Breg .....	84.95
1995 Gravner Ribolla Gialla .....	84.95
1994 Gravner Chardonnay .....	59.95
1994 Gravner Sauvignon .....	59.95

1994 Gravner Breg .....	95.00
1993 Gravner Sauvignon .....	59.95
1993 Gravner Chardonnay .....	69.95
1992 Gravner Ribolla Gialla.....	95.00

# Antique Wine Decanters

Each holiday season since 1993, we have offered a range of antique English and Irish wine decanters from the 18th and 19th centuries. As a direct result of this tradition, beautiful and rare decanters now grace the tables of many of our customers and their friends, enhancing their enjoyment of fine food and wine.

As always, each item is an original antique, representing one of the classic styles of the 18th or 19th centuries. Each decanter is accompanied by a letter of authentication

signed by Andrew Burne, one of England's foremost experts on early English and Irish glass.

The decanters shown here are just ten of 20 decanters or pairs available for delivery in early December. Photographs of the others are available on our website [www.rarewineco.com/decanter](http://www.rarewineco.com/decanter), or by fax or email on request. Decanters are 750ml bottle size unless noted.



11-136 George III, taper, lozenge stopper, flat finger flutes, engraved tulip band, fine finger flutes at base. English c. 1780. \$850



11-138 George III, shouldered club, bull's-eye stopper, 3 neck rings, plain classic body. English c. 1790. \$850



11-139 George III, club, mushroom stopper, 3 neck rings, cut fluted classic body. English c. 1800. \$695



11-140 George III, club, prism cut stopper, 3 neck rings, flutes to shoulder, flat-cut diamonds, fine flutes to base. English/Irish c. 1790. \$750



11-142 George III, club, mushroom stopper, 2 diamond-cut neck rings, flat flutes, body is diamond-cut. English/Irish c. 1800. \$750



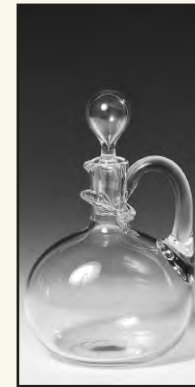
11-143 George III, prism stopper, 3 triple neck rings, flat finger flutes, alternating sun-blaze and diamond panels, fine prisms at base. Irish, possibly Cork, c. 1800. \$795



11-146 Early Victorian, tall club, spire stopper, fluted tall neck to shoulder, pointed Gothic arches cut within heavy pillar arches, star-cut base. English c. 1840. \$560



11-148 Victorian, onion, facet ball stopper, tall fluted neck, body wholly reticulated with diamonds. English c. 1860. \$395



11-149 Victorian, claret jug, hollow ball stopper, loop handle, slanting return drip ring, plain flattened bun body. Eng. probably made for Thos. Goode c. 1860. \$640



11-152 PAIR Victorian, onion, hollow ball stoppers, tall fluted necks, flattened bodies, thumbprints within panels formed by single prisms, radially prism-cut base. English c. 1870. \$675/pr

Attention California residents. Proposition 65 WARNING: Consuming foods or beverages that have been kept or served in leaded crystal products will expose you to lead, a chemical known to the State of California to cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.

# Etna Bargain

## *Firriato's Outstanding Value from Ancient Volcanic Vineyards*

**I**taly's most exciting wine region today may well be Sicily's volcanic Mount Etna. Here, dynamic winemakers are discovering a treasure of ancient vines that produce wines with an astonishing range of expression.

The dominant red varietal, Nerello Mascalese, is, like Pinot Noir and Nebbiolo, extraordinarily sensitive to site. This coupled with the diverse exposures, soils and altitudes where it is grown has had a magnetic effect on Sicily's most adventurous *vignaioli*. One of those is Firriato, founded in 1985 by Salvatore di Gaetano and Vinzia Novara.

Over the past quarter century, Gaetano and Navara have earned a solid reputation for the wines they make throughout Sicily. But with the recent acquisition of ancient vineyards, on the northeastern flank of Mount Etna, they're playing in a new league.

Their new vineyards are in arguably Etna's finest *terroir*, near Castiglione di Sicilia. This gives them all the elements to make something extraordinary: ancient indigenous Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio vines planted in well-drained volcanic soils.

But the altitudes—the highest in Europe—are also important. They make for a

unique solar exposure and wide diurnal temperature shifts, ideal for building complexity in the grapes through gradual, even ripening.

All of these elements of *terroir*, combined with Nerello Mascalese's surreal ability to express site, result in intensely perfumed wines having more in common with Burgundy or the Langhe than with other Sicilian reds.

The 2008 Firriato Etna Rosso is a bargain for the quality. Don't miss it.

“... compares quite favorably with a top-notch villages-level Burgundy at a fraction of the price....”

*Antonio Galloni*

Antonio Galloni: “A wonderful introduction to the wines of the Etna. This Nerello Mascalese-Nerello Cappuccio blend reveals gorgeous, translucent red fruit, flowers and spices in a soft, approachable style that is irresistible. Sweet notes of mint and flowers linger on the elegant finish. The Etna Rosso compares quite favorably with a top-notch villages-level Burgundy at a fraction of the price.”

**2008 Firriato  
Etna Rosso  
90 Galloni**

**\$19.95 *bt.* \$110.00 *six pack***



***Take advantage of our low-cost Ground Shipping this fall: \$25/case or \$15 within California, including free packaging and free insurance up to \$400 per case.***

**THE RARE WINE CO.**

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October 18, 2011 - ONLINE EDITION