



Tasting
NOTES
from the
UNDERGROUND

Article and
Tasting Notes by
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6 from Castello di Corbara



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One of the best things about this gig is getting to meet really interesting people in the wine business, and two of the most engaging guys I've met lately are principal figures in an Italian producer centered in Umbria, [Castello di Corbara](#). **Fernando Patrizi's** family owns and operates this 1,200 hectare estate, the site of which dates back to Etruscan times, and he and his sister **Patricia** had the good judgment to employ the influential consulting enologist **Franco Bernabei** ([Selvapiana](#), [Fontodi](#), [Felsina](#)) and his son, **Marco**, an accomplished winemaker in his own right. The vineyards are planted largely to 25 to 30 year old **Merlot**, **Cabernet Sauvignon** and **Sangiovese**, and in 1999, new plantings of **Cabernet Franc**, **Sauvignon Blanc**, **Semillon**, **Gewurztraminer** and **Grechetto** were begun.

A few weeks back, Fernando Patrizi and Marco Bernabei paid a visit, accompanied by **Greg Ross**, Senior Vice President of their importer, [Vineyard Brands](#); Franco Bernabei had been scheduled to travel with them, but unfortunately, was unavoidably detained. Nevertheless, Fernando and Marco are quite engaging, and both speak much better English than they give themselves credit for, so our chat was most interesting and informative. Best of all, they brought along some very nice wines to taste.

2005 Podere il Caio Grechetto dell'Umbria IGT, 13% alc., approx. \$13.99: Medium straw color, offering dry green apple flavors and aromas with some added white flowers on the nose



along with nice, slightly chalky minerality and a hint of fennel on the palate. With good cut, weight and length, this will pair well with a variety of seafood. According to Marco, Grechetto has good aging potential, "unlike Trebbiano." Sourced from vineyards located on the western side of the Estate at around 200 meters above sea level, using the cordon system, spur pruned with 8-10 buds; soil is of medium consistency with alluvial substrata similar to Vernacia. Individual vineyards harvested separately; vinification takes place in steel containers for about one month at controlled temperatures, with the wine then kept on the residual lees for over two months to impart aroma and bouquet. Racked and bottle-aged for about 2 months before release. [Find this wine](#)

2004 Podere il Caio Rosso dell'Umbria IGT, 60% Sangiovese, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 13% alc., approx. \$13.99: Good color, with blackberry, dried cherry, a little licorice and an earthy minerality; medium-full to full bodied, with good structure. A solid everyday red to pair with grilled red meats and tomato-based pasta. Sourced from vineyards located at various altitudes and exposures, using the cordon system, spur pruned with 6-8 buds; soil varies from medium to loose (medium clay and sand). Individual vineyards and varieties are harvested separately; vinification and maceration take place in steel containers for around 12 – 15 days at controlled temperatures, with each variety and each vineyard separately vinified. Malolactic fermentation follows the initial fermentation, then the wine is transferred to small oak French "barriques", with a small percentage put into Slavonian oak casks for about 3-5 months. Bottle-aged for around 2-3 months before release. [Find this wine](#)

The following wine is one that I've tasted from previous vintages, so it was good to become reacquainted with it.

2003 Castello di Corbara Lago di Corbara DOC, 50% Sangiovese, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 13% alc., approx. \$16.99: Rich garnet color, with floral blackberry, black cherry and licorice on the nose, following through on the palate with even deeper, darker character anchored by earthy minerality; well structured, with great depth and length. A lovely wine at a great price; Marco says that he likes this wine the best, because it's most typical of the area. Another excellent match for a variety of grilled red meats (I might opt for a leg o' lamb) and tomato-based pastas. Sourced from vineyards with 26 & 28 year and older vines, located at various altitudes and exposures, using the cordon system, spur pruned with 6-8 buds; soil varies from medium to loose (medium clay and sand). Individual vineyards and varieties are harvested separately; vinification and maceration take place in steel containers for around 12 – 15 days at controlled temperatures, with each variety and each vineyard separately vinified. Malolactic fermentation follows the initial fermentation, then the wine is transferred to small oak French "barriques", with a small percentage put into Slavonian oak casks for 12 months. Bottle-aged for about 4-5 months before release. [Find this wine](#)

2004 Castello di Corbara Lago di Corbara Cabernet Sauvignon DOC, 13.5% alc., \$16.99: Deep, dark color, with equally deep, dark black currant and blackberry flavors and aromas accented with some red pepper and underscored with some serious earthy minerality. Very well structured, with excellent length on the finish, and yet already delicious; I'm all for a medium rare rib eye steak with this one, or maybe even some serious steak tartare. Sourced from small vineyards located at different altitudes and exposures (Vallecchio, Ponticello & Viavalle), using the cordon system, spur pruned with 6-8 buds; soil



varies from medium to loose calcareous clay with an alluvial substrata and pebbles. Individual vineyards harvested separately and by individual clones, with vinification and maceration separately for each vineyard, in steel containers, for around 15-18 days at controlled temperatures. After initial fermentation, malolactic fermentation continues in small oak casks, where the wine remains for 12 months. Bottle-aged for 6-9 months before being put on the market. [Find this wine](#)

The following two Reserve wines come from Castello di Corbara's best vineyards and cellar selections.

2003 Castello di Corbara Lago di Corbara Merlot De Coronis DOC, 13.5% alc., approx. \$32.99: Another deep, darkly colored wine, with rich, opulent black currant and blackberry character shaded with a note of cocoa; well structured, with excellent depth

and length. Sourced from a vineyard historically called "Villa de Coronis", from which the wine takes its name and that nowadays corresponds to Podere Corone; planted to the cordon system, spur pruned with 6-8 buds; soil is medium clay and sand with pebbles and vines are 20 years old. Production doesn't exceed 40 quintals/hectare on around 2 hectares, with annual production around 70 hectolitres. Only produced in the best vintages, with a limited number of bottles. Vinification and maceration take place in steel containers for around 15-18 days at controlled temperature, followed by malolactic fermentation in small oak casks (Tonneaux) of 5 hectolitres each; Marco says that after 24 months in oak, it doesn't need to be filtered, because it's already stable. Bottle-aged for 7-9 months before being put on the market. [Find this wine](#)



2003 Castello di Corbara Umbria Sangiovese Calistri IGT, 13.5% alc., approx.

\$32.99: Offers subtly floral blackberry and dried cherry flavors and aromas laced with a dose of licorice, and underscored with the seemingly obligatory earthy minerality, along with some sticks-y underbrush. A big, full-bodied mouthful of wine that drinks well now, but will undoubtedly benefit from a minimum of 3-5 years in the cellar. Marco characterizes this as occurring from the "typical Umbrian Sangiovese clone," similar to Brunello in that it shows a little more licorice and is a little more elegant and round in the mouth. Sourced from Castello di Corbara's most ancient vineyards, planted near the Castle and using the Guyot system, spur pruned with 6-8 buds. Sandy soil, with alluvial substrata and pebbles that Marco describes as being similar to that of Cheval Blanc. The vineyards, now 40 years old, have been transformed using the Guyot method and the production does not exceed 50 quintals/hectare; vineyard area stretches over 3 hectares and the annual production is around 100 hectolitres. Only produced in the best vintages, with a limited number of bottles. Vinification and maceration take place in steel containers for around 15-18 days at controlled temperature, followed by malolactic fermentation in small oak casks of 225 litres each, where the wine for over 16 months. Bottle-aged for 7-9 months before being put on the market. [Find this wine](#)

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