

Exploring Sagrantino: The Wines of Arnaldo Caprai 1994 - 2007

July 2009

2007 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	(89-91)
2006 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	90
2005 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	89
2003 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	87
2001 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	90
1998 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso	90
2006 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	(91-93)
2005 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	91
1999 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	90
1998 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	88
1997 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	92
1996 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	91
1995 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	92
1994 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso Riserva	89
2006 Arnaldo Caprai Rosso Outsider	(89-91)
2005 Arnaldo Caprai Rosso Outsider	91
2001 Arnaldo Caprai Rosso Outsider	91
2006 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano	(91-93)
2005 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano	92
1999 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano	89
1998 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano	91
1997 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano	91
2006 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	(91-94)
2005 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	92+
1998 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	93
1997 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	90
1996 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	91
1994 Arnaldo Caprai Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni	91

My visit with Marco Caprai a few months ago was one of the highlights of a day in Montefalco. In recent years Montefalco has experienced a boom in interest and new investments. Little of this success would have been possible without the foresight of Caprai, a man who has dedicated considerable time and resources in promoting the unique qualities of Sagrantino and Montefalco after taking over his family's estate in 1988. Never one to rest on his laurels, Caprai's newest project is *Montefalco 2015: A New Green Revolution*, a collaborative effort involving a number of local wineries which aims to examine and address issues of sustainability in the region.

No expense has been spared at the winery, something that is plainly evident even to the most casual observer. A well-appointed visitors' center lies at the heart of the property. All of the estate's wines are available for tasting and purchase in the beautifully appointed tasting room. By far the most impressive part of the winery is the vineyards. Caprai has experimented endlessly with clonal selection in his drive to understand all things Sagrantino. The vineyards themselves are impeccably manicured. Here, too, Caprai has invested significantly in discovering the optimal vine density for Sagrantino, as is evidenced by the many different vine training systems in place throughout the large, sprawling estate.



Sagrantino boasts a history that goes back at least several centuries. Up until fairly recently, though, Sagrantino was most often vinified as a sweet dessert wine meant to be enjoyed over the Easter holidays. Because of its intense color and formidable tannins, when it was vinified as a dry wine, Sagrantino was traditionally blended with Sangiovese and other varieties in Montefalco Rosso, the standard red table wine of the region. It has only

been over the last few decades that producers have learned to tame some of Sagrantino's wilder elements, and the results have been extremely promising, as this tasting attests.

Like Sangiovese and Nebbiolo, Sagrantino is a grape that gives its best results in years where hot days are tempered by cool nights, conditions that allow for full phenolic ripeness to be reached gradually. Caprai and consulting oenologist Attilio Pagli favor fairly lengthy macerations, which they believe help soften the tannins as much as possible, within the context of Sagrantino. Malolactic fermentation takes place either in steel or French oak, depending on the quality of the fruit itself, and all of the wines are subsequently aged in French oak barrels.

Caprai's Montefalco Rosso, the entry-level wine, is made of 70% Sangiovese and 30% Sagrantino. Although the wine is clearly made to be enjoyed on the young side, in exceptional vintages the Rosso is also capable of developing quite nicely in bottle. The **2007 Montefalco Rosso** reveals lovely fragrance in its fruit and an expansive, caressing personality. Anticipated maturity: 2010-

2014. The **2006 Montefalco Rosso** is a full-bodied, intense version of this wine with a firmer personality than the 2007. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2016. The **2005 Montefalco Rosso** offers up sweet scents of tobacco and earthiness intermingled with red fruit in a smaller scaled style than either the 2006 or 2007. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2013. At this stage the **2003 Montefalco Rosso** is quite forward. The presence of oxidative aromas and flavors suggests the wine is fully mature. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010. The **2001 Montefalco Rosso** is in a gorgeous place right now where secondary and tertiary notes have come together with notable grace. Floral red fruits, sweet spices, menthol, licorice and new leather are some of the nuances that linger on the long finish. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010. The **1998 Montefalco Rosso** opens with a beguiling bouquet that could easily be mistaken with that of a Pinot. The wine has acquired gorgeous complexity and soft, caressing personality. The balance here is impeccable. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010.

Caprai's Montefalco Rosso Riserva, a blend of 70% Sangiovese, 15% Sagrantino and 15% Merlot that spends two years in French oak, has come back into the estate's lineup after a period of absence caused by the replanting of a number of older vineyards that took place between 1999 and 2005. The **2006 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** is a highly promising wine bursting with fresh blueberries, blackberries, minerals and flowers. Medium to full in body, the 2006 Rosso Riserva offers superb balance, not to mention tons of style.



Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021. The **2005 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** has softened up quite a bit since I last tasted it. The wine reveals lovely inner purity in its red fruit and sweet spices, all of which come together in a slightly slender style. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2020. The **1999 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** has developed considerable complexity in its leather, tobacco, spices, plums and prunes. There does not appear to be much, if any, upside in cellaring the wine further, although it may continue to hold for a few more years. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2012.

The **1998 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** lacks the elegance of the best wines in this flight. Leather, game, worn-in leather and barnyard dominate the wine's aromatic and flavor profile. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2011. Caprai's **1997**

Montefalco Rosso Riserva is a ripe, sexy wine loaded with ripe fruit. This gorgeous, expansive wine coats the palate with tons of fruit and harmony. The 1997 is absolutely irresistible in every way. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2014

The **1996 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** is especially fresh and minty in this vintage. It is a delicate, medium-bodied wine imbued with notable finesse. In some ways, the wine comes across as Bordeaux-like. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2016. The **1995 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** combines elements of the richness found in the 1997 with some of the more advanced, gamey Sangiovese tones found in the 1996. This seamless, harmonious Montefalco Rosso Riserva should continue to drink well while its fleshy core of fruit remains intact. 2009-2012. The **1994 Montefalco Rosso Riserva** offers up worn-in leather, spices and prunes in a soft and fully mature style. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010.



The estate's Rosso Outsider is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The **2006 Rosso Outsider** is a flashy, plump wine loaded with ripe fruit. The wine possesses excellent length, although today the tannins remain rather firm. Obviously, there is plenty of time for the wine to find its inner balance. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2016. The **2005 Rosso Outsider** is classy and elegant. The wine's soft, expansive texture is beautifully balanced by an attractive freshness and a long, lingering finish. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2015. The **2001**

Rosso Outsider has developed lovely tertiary notes that add gorgeous complexity to the dark red fruit. The tannins remain somewhat powerful in style, yet the wine has achieved exceptional balance. The 2001 should continue to drink at peak for at least another few years. It is a gorgeous effort from Marco Caprai. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2013.

The Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano, first produced in 1979, is Caprai's more accessible Sagrantino. In top vintages, it has proven to age very nicely. The Collepiano is aged in French oak, roughly 1/3 of which is new. The **2006 Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano** reveals remarkable purity and grace. Jammy, ripe fruits burst from the glass with superb richness, density and balance. This is a highly promising Sagrantino. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021. The **2005 Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano** is terrific today. Medium to full in body, the wine flows with layers of intensely perfumed red fruits, sweet herbs, flowers and minerals. Fruit, acidity and tannins are all

impeccably balanced in this super-refined Sagrantino. This is a jewel of a wine. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2020. The estate's **1999 Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano** is fully mature at age ten. Worn-in leather, spices and prunes are some of the nuances that emerge from this full-bodied red. Here the aromas and flavors have developed at a faster rate than the wine's structural components, and a measure of balance vis-à-vis the finest vintages is missing. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010.

Caprai's **1998 Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano** is a very complete and beautifully balanced wine that has matured splendidly. Everything is simply in the right place, and the 1998 should continue to drink well for another few years, although personally I wouldn't press my luck too far as the wine is in a gorgeous place right now. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2011. The **1997 Sagrantino di Montefalco Collepiano** reveals a gorgeous balance of tertiary aromas and flavors married to a firm sense of structure. Sweet notes of menthol linger on the long, refined finish. This is a wonderfully complete Collepiano. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2012.

Caprai's top wine, the Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni, was first released in 1993 to commemorate the estate's 25th anniversary. It has since gone on to become one of Italy's most recognized wines. The 25 Anni starts as a vineyard selection of the finest fruit at harvest, followed by a second selection in the cellar. Essentially the 25 Anni represents the finest barrels of Sagrantino the estate has produced in a given year. The wine undergoes malolactic fermentation in French oak and sees approximately 50-60% new barrels, depending on the vintage. The **2006 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** is a big, brooding wine that needs time to come together. Today the tannins are imposing, yet there seems to be quite a bit of potential in the glass. This will be a fascinating 25



Anni to follow over the coming years. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021. The **2005 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** is a rich, sweeping wine that caresses the palate with layers of dark raspberries, flowers, minerals and

cherries. This expansive, generous Sagrantino offers tons of length and polish. Sweet notes of herbs, licorice and tar linger on the long, harmonious close. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021.

The **1998 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** has developed pretty notes of menthol, tar and spices that add complexity to a rich core of fruit. The tannins remain on the firm side, and one day in the not too distant future they will likely win the battle for domination in the wine's balance. For today, though, the 1998 is in a beautiful spot to deliver considerable pleasure. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2012. The **1997 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** is a powerful wine packed with generous fruit. This doesn't appear to be a perfectly clean 25 Anni, as elements of Brettiness detract from the wine's overall balance. Ultimately the 1997 is a rather one-dimensional wine, despite its considerable richness. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2011.



The estate's **1996 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** is a deeply spiced, balsamic wine loaded with iron, smoke and tar, all of which add complexity to the fruit. The 1996 is still quite dense and full-bodied, and at this stage it seems likely the wine will retain those qualities for some time. In many ways, the 1996 25 Anni reminds me of a Serralunga Barolo in its darkness. Anticipated

maturity: 2009-2011. The estate's **1994 Sagrantino di Montefalco 25 Anni** is fully mature. The aromas and flavors have come together in a beautiful expression of Sagrantino. Although the wine is still alive, for my taste it is slightly past peak. Still, at 15 years of age, this is an impressive showing. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2010.

—Antonio Galloni