

WineAdvocate

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Wine Advocate

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The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine RATING SYSTEM

Robert Parker's rating system employs a 50-100 point quality scale. It is my belief that the various twenty (20) point rating systems do not provide enough flexibility and often result in compressed and inflated wine ratings. THE WINE ADVOCATE takes a hard, very critical look at wine, since I would prefer to underestimate the wine's quality than to overestimate it. The numerical ratings are utilized only to enhance and complement the thorough tasting notes, which are my primary means of communicating my judgments to you.

96-100	An extraordinary wine of profound and complex character displaying all the attributes expected of a classic wine of its variety. Wines of this caliber are worth a special effort to find, purchase, and consume.
90-95	An outstanding wine of exceptional complexity and character. In short, these are terrific wines.
80-89	A barely above average to very good wine displaying various degrees of finesse and flavor as well as character with no noticeable flaws.
70-79	An average wine with little distinction except that it is soundly made. In essence, a straightforward, innocuous wine.
60-69	A below average wine containing noticeable deficiencies, such as excessive acidity and/or tannin, an absence of flavor, or possibly dirty aromas or flavors.
50-59	A wine deemed to be unacceptable.

TASTING NOTES AND RATINGS

When possible all of my tastings are done in peer-group, single-blind conditions, (meaning that the same types of wines are tasted against each other and the producers' names are not known). The ratings reflect an independent, critical look at the wines. Neither price nor the reputation of the producer/grower affect the rating in any manner. I spend three months of every year tasting in vineyards. During the other nine months of the year, six and sometimes seven-day workweeks are devoted solely to tasting and writing. I do not participate in wine judging or trade tastings for many reasons, but principal among these are the following: (1) I prefer to taste from an entire bottle of wine, (2) I find it essential to have properly sized and cleaned professional tasting glasses, (3) the temperature of the wine must be correct, and (4) I prefer to determine the line allocated to the number of wines to be critiqued. The numerical rating given is a guide to what I think of the wine vis-à-vis its peer group. Certainly, wines rated above 85 are very good to excellent, and any wine rated 80 or above will be outstanding for its particular type. While some have suggested that scoring is not well suited to a beverage that has been romantically extolled for centuries, wine is no different from any consumer product. There are specific standards of quality that full-time wine professionals recognize, and there are benchmark wines against which others can be judged. I know of no one with three or four different glasses of wine in front of him or her, regardless of how good or bad the wines might be, who cannot say, "I prefer this one to that one." Scoring wines is simply taking a professional's opinion and applying some sort of numerical system to it on a consistent basis. Scoring permits rapid communication of information to expert and novice alike.

The score given for a specific wine reflects the quality of the wine at its best. I often tell people that evaluating a wine and assigning a score to a beverage that will change and evolve in many cases for up to 10 or more years is analogous to taking a photograph of a marathon runner. Much can be ascertained but, like a picture of a moving object, the wine will also evolve and change. Wines from obviously badly corked or defective bottles are retasted, since a wine from a single bad bottle does not indicate an entirely spoiled batch. Many of the wines reviewed have been tasted many times, and the score represents a cumulative average of the wine's performance in tastings to date. Scores, however, do not reveal the important facts about a wine. The written commentary that accompanies the rating is a better source of information regarding the wine's style and personality, its relative quality vis-à-vis its peers, and its value and aging potential than any score could ever indicate.

Here then is a general guide to interpreting the numerical ratings:

90-100 is equivalent to an A and is given only for an outstanding or special offer. Wines in this category are the very best produced of their type. There is a big difference between a 90 and 99, but both are top marks. As you will note through the text, there are few wines that actually make it into this top category because there are not many great wines.

80-89 is equivalent to a B in school and such a wine, particularly in the 85-89 range, is very, very good; many of the wines that fall into this range often are great values as well. I have many of these wines in my personal collection.

70-79 represents a C, or average mark, but obviously 79 is a much more desirable score than 70. Wines that receive scores between 75 and 79 are generally pleasant, straightforward wines that lack complexity, character, or depth. If inexpensive, they may be ideal for uncritical quaffing.

Below 70 is a D or F, depending on where you went to school. For wine, it is a sign of an imbalanced, flawed, or terribly dull or diluted product that will be of little interest to the discriminating consumer.

In terms of awarding points, my scoring system gives every wine a base of 50 points. The wine's general color and appearance merit up to 5 points. Since most wines today are well made, thanks to modern technology and the increased use of professional oenologists, they tend to receive at least 4, often 5 points. The aroma and bouquet merit up to 15 points, depending on the intensity level and dimension of the aroma and bouquet as well as the cleanliness of the wine. The flavor and finish merit up to 20 points, and again, intensity of flavor, balance, cleanliness, and depth and length on the palate are all important considerations when giving out points. Finally, the overall quality level or potential for further evolution and improvement-aging merits up to 10 points.

Scores are important for the reader to gauge a professional critic's overall qualitative placement of a wine vis-à-vis its peer group. However, it is also vital to consider the description of the wine's style, personality, and potential. No scoring system is perfect, but a system that provides for flexibility in scores, if applied by the same taster without prejudice, can quantify different levels of wine quality and provide the reader with one professional's judgment. However, there can never be any substitute for your own palate nor any better education than tasting the wine yourself.

IN THIS ISSUE

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COPPO 2005 BARBERA D'ASTI L'AVVOCATA	PIEDMONT (\$19.00)	RED	88
COPPO 2005 BARBERA D'ASTI CAMP DU ROUSS	PIEDMONT (\$24.00)	RED	88
COPPO 2007 MOSCATO D'ASTI MONCALVINA	PIEDMONT (\$23.00)	SWEET SPARKLING WHITE	86

Coppo is one of Piedmont's historic properties. Although the Coppo brothers excel with Barbera, (which is particularly expressive in these hills) the rest of the range is well worth a look. The entry-level **2005 Barbera d'Asti L'Avvocata** is delicious and harmonious in this vintage. Medium in body, it opens in the glass, revealing layers of vibrant red fruit, earthiness, smoke and menthol, with terrific balance and poise. This Barbera is aged in large, neutral oak barrels, which gives the wine a pretty sense of transparency. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2011. The **2005 Barbera d'Asti Camp du Rouss** is made from higher-quality vineyards than the Avvocata and aged in French oak. This super-ripe Barbera comes across as juicy

and forward, with leather, spices and sweet toasted oak that complement the generous fruit. It provides a fascinating contrast to the Avvocata, in that it is a different, but not necessarily better, wine. One can only wonder what a wine made from the best fruit and aged in neutral oak might taste like here. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2012. Coppo's **2007 Moscato d'Asti Moncalvina** offers up scents of ripe peaches, mint, spices and flowers wrapped into a creamy-textured frame. Given that Coppo is based in Canelli, in the heart of the Moscato d'Asti zone, it would be nice to see them do more with this wine. Anticipated maturity: 2008. A Leonardo Lo Cascio Selection, Winebow, Montvale, NJ; tel. (201) 445-0620