

The most influential wine makers in Italy today

1. Riccardo Cotarella

Unquestionably, the most influential wine personality in Italy today, Cotarella has helped to turn around many ailing wine companies throughout Italy. His greatest achievement has been to revitalise the dormant wine industry in Central and Southern Italy, creating some iconic wines in the process such as Patrimo, Serpico, Terra di Lavoro, Montiano and Monte Vetrano to name but a few. The Falesco winery, which he owns jointly with his brother, produces some of the best value for money wines in Central Italy. An inspiration to many enologists, his services are sought after at home and abroad. The Cotarella name is sported as a fashion design logo by many of his clients.

His critics accuse him of creating a standardised style, the “Cotarella” style;

However without him, Central and Southern Italy would still be in the Dark Ages of winemaking.

2. Angelo Gaja

A charismatic figure in the wine industry, he is undoubtedly the most respected and admired in Italy. He has proved that it is possible to implement innovative ideas in a traditional wine area without loss of heritage

He introduced the following:

- * international grape varieties to Piedmont (cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc),
- * modern vinification techniques (stainless steel tanks, barriques)
- * crop control
- * single vineyards
- * an entrepreneurial approach at the highest level of winemaking (expanding to Tuscany in Montalcino and Bolgheri)

His drive, passion and uncompromising approach to quality, has transformed winemaking in Piedmont; he is the role model and inspiration to the industry

His critics disagree with the introduction of barriques and international grape varieties to Piedmont

However, he has made wine producers in Piedmont aware of their great wine heritage; and that radical change was necessary both in attitude and approach in order to achieve the high standards essential to win over the world of wine lovers.

3. Piero Antinori

Marchese Antinori is heir to a family estate with 700 years of history. Under his stewardship, the estate has led the way to the Italian wine renaissance; Tignanello, his most iconic wine started the Supertuscan trend of top quality wine being sold at a premium, under the declassified label of *Vino da Tavola*. (the wine did not comply to an obsolete DOC regulation). This challenge led to the subsequent change in the DOC law.

A great innovator, experimenting with traditional grape varieties as well as international ones, he has expanded the estate throughout Italy and abroad. Wines such as Tignanello and Solaja in Chianti, Guado al Tasso in Bolgheri, Pian delle Vigne in Montalcino and Cervaro della Sala in Umbria are found on wine lists of the best restaurants around the world.

He is the ultimate renaissance man of the wine industry, and has surrounded himself with the finest enologists and estate managers, creating iconic wines which are still the benchmark against which high quality wines throughout Italy are measured

4. Roberto Conterno

Third generation of the Giacomo Conterno winery, he is the ultimate purist, continuing the tradition of vinifying Barolo the same way his father did and grandfather before him, at a time when many producers were embracing more modern winemaking techniques with short maceration and ageing in French barriques. His uncompromising approach has led to many family feuds; a cousin stated in disagreement with his approach: “Your father was a traditionalist, but you are worse!” as if the traditional approach was somehow an impediment to growth.

His technique – long maceration up to 4 weeks and long ageing in large *botti* (oak barrels) – was considered too extreme and old-fashioned by many producers in Langhe, but time has proved him right. His wines are now recognised as the finest expression of the nebbiolo grape, with his legendary Monfortino (spending up to 7 years in large barrels) being the most sought after and expensive Barolo.

Today, many modernist producers are returning to more traditional methods and younger producers are following his example. It is arguably the case that he can be credited with having made more change possible in Langhe, without himself having changed anything in his own approach

5. Romano dal Forno

In the Valpolicella wine region, Romano dal Forno has created a style of rich, opulent full-bodied wine with ability to age and develop remarkable complexity, in a region where it was, at best, light, easy to drink, and mildly fruity. By ruthlessly restricting yields in the vineyards, he was one of the first to craft his wines in an artisan fashion by combining traditional methods of wine making with modern techniques

Today Valpolicella comes in a variety of styles and differing levels of quality. His approach has encouraged many producers in Veneto to produce great wines of complexity under the Valpolicella label. His style of wines has influenced winemakers in many other regions

His critics say that his wine style has produced wines atypical of the Veneto region;

However he has proved that it is possible great wine in Veneto by restricting yield and aiming for the highest standards. His wines are monumental, able to age and develop over time, - previously a rarity in Veneto