



Robert Parker
Wine Advocate

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.

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| 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 judgments 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 time 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 90 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 ratings 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 effort. 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.**

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TENUTA DI TRINORO	2004	IGT LE CUPOLE DI TRINORO	TUSCANY	(\$33.00)	RED	91
TENUTA DI TRINORO	2004	IGT TENUTA DI TRINORO	TUSCANY	(\$180.00)	RED	93
TENUTA DI TRINORO	2005	IGT TENUTA DI TRINORO	TUSCANY	(\$180.00)	RED	(93-96)

Nestled among the soft undulating hills of the Val d'Orcia, in the province of Siena, Tenuta di Trinoro gives new meaning to the expression "in the middle of nowhere." Andrea Franchetti is the man behind the singular wines of this small estate. Though somewhat of an eccentric, Franchetti is down to earth and unassuming, qualities made all the more remarkable given his aristocratic lineage. Franchetti's career has encompassed many different activities, including importing fine wines into the US to his latest adventure, producing some of the most exciting wines to come out of Sicily's emerging Mount Etna appellation. As if that were not enough, in 2007 Franchetti will follow in the footsteps of Michel Rolland and Denis Dubourdieu in making the 2007 "Episode 3" wine at Chateau d'Arsac, in the southern Medoc.

The vines at Trinoro are planted at altitudes ranging from 500 to 700 meters using a high density of approximately 9,000 plants per hectare, which was very unusual for Tuscany when the first plots were planted in 1992. The soils are quite poor, which along with the tight spacing of the vines, stresses the plants and encourages them to develop stronger, deeper root systems. Franchetti classifies the soils at Trinoro into two major sub-divisions, using the St. Emilion terms "côtes" and "graves" to differentiate between the soils which are composed primarily of clay and limestone on the upper ridges and the more gravelly terrain which is found on the lower portions of the vineyards. Yields are extremely low and range from 15 to 26 quintals per hectare, depending on the vintage. Franchetti remains deeply influenced by the wines of Bordeaux, and many of his cuttings come from some of that region's top estates, such as Vieux Châteaux Certan, which is the source of his Cabernet Franc. Franchetti favors late harvests that push ripeness to the extreme. This is clearly a high-stakes approach to winemaking as the likelihood of rain and other inclement conditions increases as the harvest season moves into the Fall. Franchetti typically picks his Merlot in early October while the Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot are usually picked towards the end of the month, although in some years, such as 2004, the harvest can stretch into November. Because of the extended growing season at Trinoro, the quality of the harvested fruit varies quite a bit from year to year, as does the final blend of the wine. In addition to Tenuta di Trinoro there is a second wine, Le Cupole di Trinoro, which is made from the barrels that aren't deemed to be of the exacting quality Franchetti requires for his 'Grand Vin' and which is priced much more accessibly. Franchetti no longer produces his Palazzi (Merlot and Cabernet Franc) and Cincinnato (Cesanese d'Affile) bottlings because he found himself bored by those wines.

The **2004 Le Cupole di Trinoro** is made in a style that deftly balances

concentration with a sense of near-weightlessness in its expression of candied red cherries, smoke, minerals and herbs. It offers notable length on the palate, with an open, sweet personality and fine tannins to round out the finish. Another year of bottle age should help soften the tannins further. In 2004 the Cupole is a blend of 55% Merlot, 23% Cabernet Franc, 5% Petit Verdo, 4% Cesanese and 4% Uva di Troia, all of which were harvested between the first week of October and the middle of November. Anticipated maturity: 2007-2014. The **2004 Tenuta di Trinoro** (83% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon) is an atypical wine for this estate owing to the high percentage of Merlot in the final blend. It is a very fine Tenuta di Trinoro, showing expressive aromatics along with plenty of super-ripe jammy fruit, with an expansive, generous presence on the palate and fine tannins. My impression is that the 2004 won't be one of the longest-lived vintages of this wine as it doesn't seem to have the stuffing of the very finest vintages. That said, in the nearly six months that have passed since I last tasted it, the wine has come together beautifully in the bottle. "Our plants were still recovering from the severe conditions of the preceding vintage," explains Franchetti. "The plants were late to flower and we had trouble achieving our desired level of ripeness in many sites. The core of this wine comes from a terrific Merlot vineyard that I always use to make the Tenuta." Anticipated maturity: 2014-2024. Franchetti's **2005 Tenuta di Trinoro** is shaping up to be another winner. Officially listed at 63% Merlot, Franchetti says the true percentage of Merlot is closer to 90%. Tasted from tank, this sample of the final blend presents generous notes of blueberries, blackberries, graphite, minerals and sweet toasted oak on a full-bodied frame. It is an incredibly pure and expressive effort, with superb intensity and length, as well as exceptional overall balance. It offers outstanding potential and may very well turn out to be another profound wine from this estate. "In 2005 we had a picture-perfect harvest," says Franchetti. "In fact you couldn't have scripted a better set of conditions. The Merlot we brought in was beautiful. Then it started to rain in October, and that compromised the rest of our harvest. Thankfully 2006 is a more normal vintage. I was starting to get sick of all this Merlot," says Franchetti with a laugh." The 2005 saw a very brief period of roughly 7 months in oak prior to being racked into cement. "I used to give my wines 18 months in new oak because that is what conventional wisdom held, but with the 2005 I thought the wine was starting to take on too many oak elements so I moved into cement where it will stay until it is bottled." Anticipated maturity: 2015-2027. Importer: Tom Edward Wine, New York, NY; tel. (212) 233-1504