

MONICA LARNER

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Something quite unexpected happened this year. Winemakers started showing up at my apartment door in Rome. In my almost 20 years of tasting new vintages of Italian wine, I have never experienced such an influx of incoming vintners descending upon the Eternal City with wine-filled travel trollies and cars packed with Styrofoam carriers. All of them navigated the labyrinthine alleys of the city center to find themselves at their destination: buzzer number 5 on the polished brass doorbell panel of my Palazzo.

It started with Renzo Cotarella, who showed up with two bottles of the 2016 Tignanello earlier this spring. I had tasted most of the other Marchesi Antonori wines at the various relevant estates own by the Antinori family. But the new Tignanello was not yet ready to be presented on those occasions. Renzo Cotarella and I exchanged a few messages, but between my moderately impossible travel calendar and his decisively airtight schedule, we could not agree on a date for our Tignanello tasting.

He pronounced the words that still echo in my head: “If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain.” Just like that, this modern-day prophet of Italian wine showed up at my door—the “Muhammad,” of course, being Mr. Cotarella in this version of the story.

Later in the year, I hosted Stefano Frascolla of Tua Rita. He came to my house with various trolleys of new releases including one of only 420 magnums produced of his very precious 2013 Redigaffi 7. I had a friend over at my house at the time who joined us to taste on the sidelines in my living room. Like any novice taster, she was understandably ruffled by our apparent *sprezzatura*, or certain nonchalance, at spitting a \$1,600 wine into a tin spittoon between mindless vintage and vineyard chitchat.

Next on the visitors’ roster was Bibi Graetz, who came through Rome to pour his newest releases of Colore, Colore Bianco and Testamatta Bianco Isola del Giglio. He had the forethought to bring me two bottles of each sample, one opened at 10 a.m. that morning and one opened in front of me during our afternoon tasting. He arrived to Roma Termini by train, so I suppose six bottles was about all he could take with him. I whipped up a quick plate of *cacio e pepe* pasta on my terrace before he headed back to Fiesole. (The banner image above is of Bibi Graetz’s Ansonica vineyards on Giglio Island off the Tuscan Coast that I visited last year.)



Left:

Following a daylong visit to Caiarossa last year, Lorenzo Pasquini was kind enough to bring his new releases to me in Rome. Right: Luca D'Attoma's new releases from his Duemani estate in Riparbella include the Syrah Suisassi, Cabernet Franc Duemani and Merlot and Cabernet Franc Altrovino from the 2017 vintage.

A few days later, I got a call from Lorenzo Pasquini of Caiarossa, who asked if he could also stop by for a visit. (I suspect word was getting out that I might have some sort of open house policy.) He lives in Bordeaux but is Roman by birth and was headed off to his summer holiday on Ponza Island that afternoon. He came by my apartment with his samples and an iPad loaded with an excellent Google Map-like video of the Caiarossa vineyards in Riparbella, Tuscany, made Pierre Le Hong. (If you don't know his work, I strongly suggest you search for it online.) He gave me a full, morning-long presentation of his work and of the Caiarossa philosophy. It worked nicely, because I had visited the vineyards last year and Lorenzo's presentation hammered home the lessons learned back then.

The grand prize, however, goes to Luca D'Attoma who showed up with nearly 70 samples—two bottles of each for a total of 140 bottles—all rigorously packed to serving temperature in foam containers. The lovely Elisabetta Geppetti of Fattoria Le Pupille joined him and made such a grand impression on my Roman neighborhood, we discovered a little love poem dedicated to her affixed to Luca's car, parked illegally on my tiny street. Luca D'Attoma consults with a number of Italian estates, and many of them are represented here in this report. In addition to his estate Duemani and Fattoria Le Pupille, he works with Tua Rita, Bulichella, Fortulla and Tenute Lunelli. My tasting with Luca D'Attoma and his right-hand man, Andrea Lupi, lasted the full day and literally took over half my apartment with packing materials and open wine bottles. I remember the pitiful conditions of private homes after my cinematographer father and his movie crews would leave them after filming. That image came to mind as I surveyed my apartment.



This

year's mega tasting at the so-called Rome Office was with Luca D'Attoma (in the gray shirt), Andrea Lupi (in the blue shirt) and Elisabetta Geppetti (in the white and pink dress). This photo includes a "where's Waldo" cameo appearance by my dog, Tappo. Here we are on my terrace at the end of the presentation, and if I look disheveled and less enthusiastic than the others, it's because I was still reeling from the 70 samples tasted.

I should not be surprised that my so-called Home Office has become a fitting destination for vintners' visits. If I worked out of our Napa or Singapore offices, I assume winemakers would also stop by with samples. However, it does feel a little strange to breach that imaginary line between my personal and professional lives. Something tells me that this was a watershed year and that visits to the Rome Office of *Robert Parker Wine Advocate* (i.e., *la casa di Monica*) will become more common in the future, especially as we strive to bring reviews of new releases to our readers in a more timely fashion throughout the year. I broke down and purchased additional Zalto glasses and wine decanters in the event someone else should come knocking at my door.

I'm ready for you now.