

## ONE BOTTLE: THE 2009 CASTELLO DI AMA "ROSATO"

by JOSHUA BAER

In the beginning, Santa Fe was a secret. The moon, the sun, and the stars knew the secret but they were the only ones who knew. Slowly, over millions of years, the moon, the sun, and the stars told the secret to the mountains, the mountains told the secret to the land and the rivers, and the land and the rivers told the secret to the plants and the animals. Then the original people arrived.

After the original people arrived, the plants and the animals experienced a certain degree of resentment because the original people liked to kill and eat plants and animals. They did not want to kill and eat *all* of the plants and the animals but they wanted to kill and eat some of them, and they never stopped killing and eating. The plants and the animals recognized this but had no way to stop the original people. Their only choice was to adapt to the new reality and hope that the original people would eventually show some restraint.

When the plants and the animals talked among themselves they criticized the original people. "These people," said the animals. "Five minutes after they get here they start acting like they own the place. If they knew the secret, they wouldn't act that way. They'd show more respect—for this place and for the secret."

"You're wrong," said the plants. "They knew the secret before they got here. That's why they came. It's all over. Things will never be the same."

For several thousand years, the original people lived in harmony with the plants and the animals. The original people knew the secret and were careful to keep it to themselves. They knew there were barbarians in other parts of the world and they had heard stories about how brutal and careless those barbarians could be. Their hope was that the barbarians would never come to Santa Fe and discover the secret. Their fear was that the barbarians would learn the secret on their own and come to Santa Fe to find out if the secret was true. Then the Spanish arrived.

After the Spanish arrived, the original people experienced a certain degree of resentment. "These Spanish," they said. "Five minutes after they get here they start acting like they own the place. They eat, they drink, they ride around on horses, they shoot us whenever they feel like it, and all they talk about is their god, and how he forgives them for their sins. It was better before they got here. Things will never be the same."

The original people and the Spanish lived together in Santa Fe for centuries. During those centuries, the Spanish learned the secret. They gave Santa Fe its name (which means "Holy Faith"), and they came to believe that the secret belonged to them just as much as it had belonged to the original people. The Spanish thought Santa Fe was a sanctuary, a place where the sacred and the profane could coexist, and they believed in the power of Spanish culture. It never occurred to them that another culture would come along, learn the secret, and tell it to the rest of the world. Then the Anglos arrived.

After the Anglos arrived, the Spanish experienced a certain degree of resentment. "These Anglos," they said. "Five minutes after they get here, they start acting like they own the place. They smell bad, they drive like maniacs, and they look down on anyone who's not white. All they care about is money, and they have no respect for the land. It was better before they got here. Things will never be the same."

Which brings us to the 2009 Castello di Ama "Rosato."

There are wine experts who will tell you that rosé wines are not serious wines and that the only time to drink rosés is during the summer. I could not disagree more. During the last twenty years, wine makers in Burgundy, Languedoc, Provence, and Italy have produced rosés that are on a par with the best red wines and the best white wines in existence. The fact that even the most famous rosés sell for

less than \$50 a bottle is the only reason rosés are still regarded as less important than their red and white counterparts.

Certain wine experts will also tell you that rosés do not age.

Those experts are wrong. Rosés are like attractive women. The more authentic they are, the more beautifully they age.

In the glass, the 2009 Castello di Ama "Rosato" is a clear, sensuous carnelian. The bouquet manages to be simultaneously wild and tame. The attack is precise but not fussy. It gives you moment after moment of sustained, focused pleasure. The finish takes you to a place where excitement, relief, and contemplation converge. At \$15 a bottle, I think the 2009 Castello di Ama "Rosato" qualifies as more than a bargain. I think it qualifies as living proof that price has nothing to do with value.

My family and I moved to Santa Fe in September of 1985. We had been living in California, and we liked the way New Mexico felt like another country. During our first winter here, we met so many people and made so many friends that our memories of California faded away. We knew California was still there, and we missed the ocean, but Santa Fe became our home. It became the place where we celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and our birthdays. Santa Fe spoke to us in a language that made us wonder if it would ever be possible to live anywhere else. As we learned that language, we spoke it to each other, to our friends, and to ourselves.

Will things ever be the same? No. Not on this planet. Can Santa Fe remain a secret, even if everyone knows where it is? After twenty-five years, I have to say "Yes." ♥

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