

ONE BOTTLE: The 2006 Feudi di San Gregorio “Rubrato Aglianico”

by JOSHUA BAER

The word “rare” comes from the Old French *rere*, “sparse,” from the Latin *rarus*, “thinly sown, having a loose texture,” and from the Greek *eremos*, “lonely, solitary, desolate.” In the New Testament, when John the Baptist says, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” he uses the Greek noun *eremo* for “wilderness.” Rare things are rare because they are hard to find. When something is rare, it cannot be bought or sold at will. It is not a commodity. It is a treasure.

In the art world, the wine world, and the world of real estate, sales people use the word “rare” to describe etchings made by Salvador Dalí, wines made by Lafite-Rothschild, and mansions built by contractors who spend their lives talking on their cell phones and driving around in their duallies. These etchings, wines, and mansions are not rare. They are expensive, but if you have money you can buy them in quantities. The fact that they can be purchased *at a price* proves that they are not rare. They may be desirable and they may confer prestige upon the consumer who buys them, but to call them “rare” is like calling Barack Obama “professorial.” It dances around the truth but does not tell it.

One of the ironies of the wine world is the way that, over time, cheap wines become rare while expensive wines become common. People buy cheap wines to drink them, so it is almost impossible to find vintage wines from the Languedoc, Provence, the Valpolicella, or southern Italy. Vintage Bordeaux, Burgundies, and Sauternes, on the other hand, can be bought at any wine auction, because wine collectors cellared these “rarities” when they first came onto the market.

So what does it mean to be rare? One of the rarest people on earth is a man who can admit that he was wrong. Women love to admit that they were wrong. They do it all the time—sometimes recreationally. But most men would rather be eaten alive than admit to making a mistake. On occasion, a man will pretend to admit that he was wrong, but then he will turn around and explain why he had no choice, which waters down his admission of guilt to such an extent that it sounds like an excuse.

Why do men refuse to admit that we were wrong? Because admitting that we were wrong makes us look weak, and we hate weakness. We live in fear, and our greatest fear is of being identified as easy prey.

In 2008, I supported Barack Obama. I watched him on television and listened to his speeches, then I told everyone I knew that Barack Obama was a man of profound intelligence, a politician with a soul, and that the United States would be a better place if he was elected president.

Imagine my disappointment when Barack Obama got elected and refused to hold George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, David Addington, and Donald Rumsfeld accountable for breaking national and international laws, and for committing war crimes. Imagine my dismay when President Obama borrowed a trillion dollars from the treasury and used the money to bail out the banks, brokerage houses, and insurance companies who had demonstrated, beyond any reasonable doubt, that losing money was the only activity at which they excelled. Imagine my shame when President Obama decided to subsidize General Motors, excuse Goldman Sachs from criminal prosecution, limit British Petroleum’s liability, and give the



health care companies the legal right to bankrupt the middle class. And imagine my horror when President Obama continued to sanction the slaughter of civilians in Afghanistan, the torture of “enemy combatants,” and the assassination of American citizens, in this country and overseas—all in the name of national security.

Why did I think Barack Obama’s robust I.Q. would protect our country from four more years of military-industrial secrecy? Why did I fail to see that Barack Obama was an apologist for global corporate greed? I failed because I was wrong. I failed because I let a well-spoken corporate lawyer suspend my disbelief. Instead of taking a cold, hard look at Barack Obama, I chose to believe in a fairy tale.

Which brings us to the 2006 Feudi di San Gregorio “Rubrato Aglianico.”

Feudi di San Gregorio is an estate located in Sorbo Serpico, a village in the Irpinia region of Campania, one hour’s drive east of Naples. In Campania, everything revolves around Mount Vesuvius. This is understandable, because each time Mount Vesuvius erupts, it covers the region with volcanic ash. Living in the vicinity of an active volcano is like living with the threat of nuclear war, terrorism, or a government that thinks it is above the law. You can live a happy, productive life but in the back of your mind you know your happy, productive life could be erased at any moment.

In Campania, the soil contains quantities of volcanic ash. Certain grapes thrive on volcanic ash. Others do not. One of the grapes that thrives is the Aglianico grape. The name “Aglianico” (pronounced “Ah-LYAH-nee-ko”) is a corruption of the Latin *Hellenica*, which means “Greek.” Aglianico was originally planted in Greece, so the Romans called it *vitus Hellenicus*, “the Greek grape.”

Feudi di San Gregorio was started in 1986, by Enzo Ercolino and his wife Mirella Capaldo. There are vines on their property that are a thousand years old. Some of those vines are as tall as trees. Every wine produced at Feudi di San Gregorio is infused with authenticity. If you are trying to fool yourself and you drink these wines, the urge to be honest with yourself will overwhelm you.

In the glass, the 2006 Feudi di San Gregorio “Rubrato Aglianico” is a dark, intricate garnet. The bouquet is as simple as the color is complex. On the palate, the wine tastes like a vintage Amarone by Allegrini or Zenato. The finish is a great comfort, especially to those of us who tend to confuse ambition with character.

At \$25 a bottle (at Whole Foods), or at \$156 a case (at finewinehouse.com), the 2006 Feudi di San Gregorio “Rubrato Aglianico” is a deal, a truth serum, and a singular pleasure, all rolled into one. Buy some and drink it before it becomes rare. ♡

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