

# Brian Larky's Italian Wines, When People Live Up to Their Reputation

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It can be overwhelming to look for high quality, small family Italian wine producers. Since the US market is saturated with wine producers from Italy, it can be a Herculean feat to pick a special wine at a fair price. But finding those certain individuals, and companies, that we can trust that select these wines to import into the US can make this stressful task achievable for mere mortals.

For years, I had heard the name **Brian Larky** – he was known in wine business circles as the man with the heavenly portfolio of outstanding family wine producers. I had always heard from New York City Sommeliers that he was a good guy who found a way to offer Italian wines, which were iconic in their region, at a fair price that was a good deal for the customer. As time went on, I would hear from some of Brian Larky's Italian wine producers themselves... they seemed committed to him and passionately talked about his company **Dalla Terra Winery Direct®** as being one that they had pride in... one that truly considers both the producers and consumers needs... Through time, I wondered when I was ever going to meet this man.

**Brian Larky**

A few months back, I was invited to a portfolio wine tasting; considering there are around a dozen that happen in NYC several days a week, I cannot attend all of them. But then I saw the name – Brian Larky – and it was his wine company’s portfolio! I would finally get my chance to hear from the man himself. Brian was everything I thought he would be... comfortable in his own skin, an easy yet focused energy and an infectious smile. I could easily see how Brian was able to be the magical matchmaker that **introduced one of his producer’s adult kids to his future girlfriend.**

### **Dalla Terra Winery Direct®**

Dalla Terra (“of the earth” in Italian) Winery Direct® was started by Brian in 1990. Previously, he had worked for Napa Valley wineries Far Niente and Domaine Chandon, and then after graduating from U.C. Davis with a degree in Fermentation Sciences in 1985, he moved to Italy to work for the well-respected Italian sparkling producer Ca’del Bosco, in Franciacorta. Although he learned a lot from various winemakers in Italy, he felt he was meant to do more with this opportunity (as one can imagine during that time) since there were not a lot of the small top producers being exported to the US. So Brian was able to make relationships with distributors (who also had importer licenses) in each of the states through time – North Dakota is the only state where he does not have a distributor. This was one of the key steps to attract iconic family wineries to his company when he first started. Now he has a dream portfolio that includes 18 different families and a total of 22 wineries – a couple producers have more than one winery.

The idea that Brian has been able to keep continuity by having most of his producers stay with him is remarkable considering many of these wineries are now famous among Italian wine connoisseurs – producers such as Vietti, Alois Lageder and Casanova di Neri – and so probably have other companies approaching them on a regular basis. From the very beginning, Brian knew that he needed to implement a few things to keep such an excellent



Brian Larky Speaking – Founder and Chairman of Dalla Terra Winery Direct®

roster of winemakers; he had to set up relationships with trusted distributors in most states in the US, he had to keep the pricing fair, he had to listen to his producers and give them a say anytime he was considering adding another producer to the Dalla Terra portfolio, and most importantly, it needed to be a list of only Italian producers, since that was a firm decision made by his heart.



Casanova di Neri, Tenuta Nuova, Brunello di Montalcino DOCG

### **Contentment Brings Success**

In my experience, as someone who has worked in the New York City wine distribution business, Brian's company is a rare entity. Wine producers are notorious for jumping ship to another portfolio because they wonder if the grass is greener on the other side. But Brian asks for only a small commission and the fact he is able to find distributors with import licenses, he is able to cut out the middle man making the wines on average 25% less expensive for the consumers and adding around \$1.80 more per bottle back into the wine producers' pocket. Because he is happy to couch surf at his friends' places and to keep his life on the simpler side, he is able to create a business model that makes it advantageous for his prestigious producers to stay.

As I was getting ready to leave the **Corkbuzz Restaurant & Wine Bar**, where our media tasting and lunch with Brian was taking place, we ran into one of the restaurant's founders, Master Sommelier Laura Maniec. As we were talking to her about how much we liked the food they provided, one of the other media ladies asked her about another wine trade tasting that Laura had just attended. Laura's face looked slightly disappointed and said that it was okay but nothing special and then she said, "You were lucky to be here with Brian."

And with that one statement, Laura reassured what I had already known... if you ever get confused when deciding what wine to grab and you can't remember thousands of producers' names, then just look on the back label of the bottle to see the importer who is bringing in the wines. Dalla Terra Winery Direct® works because, for 27 years, it has delivered on the promise of top quality at a fair price from a man who thrives on conquering those daily challenges to make sure such an ideal concept works, and hence, he lives up to his mighty reputation.

### **Cathrine's Recommendations**

**Below I give a few selections that I tasted from Brian Larky's portfolio:**

#### **Everyday Drinking Wine** (less than \$15)

*2015 Alois Lageder, "Riff", Pinot Grigio delle Venezie IGT, Tre-Venezie, Italy (\$10):* 100% Pinot Grigio. From the Tre Venezie an historical name that includes the regions of Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige from the great white wine

producer Lageder who is known for his outstanding wines in this North-East of Italy. Fresh white peach and nectarine flavors with a clean finish.

*2015 Masseria Li Veli, "Orion", Primitivo, Salento IGT, Puglia, Italy (\$13):* 100% Primitivo. A medium bodied flavorful wine with blackberry and earthy old world charm.

*NV Cleto Chiarli, "Vecchia Modena", Lambrusco di Sorbara DOC, Emilia-Romagna, Italy (\$15):* 100% Lambrusco di Sorbara. Cleto Chiarli has always been my favorite producer for Lambrusco di Sorbara – the most aromatic of all the Lambrusco wines. Pristine strawberry flavors with gentle bubbles and a lively zing of cranberry on the finish.

#### **Special Occasion Wine** (from \$15 to \$50)

*2016 Tasca D'Almerita, "Didyme", Malvasia Salina IGT, Sicily, Italy (\$25):* 100% Malvasia. This white wine comes from the Salina island, part of the cluster of Aeolian Islands, off of the coast of Sicily. All Malvasia is not the same... so if you know flavorless Malvasia, this is not that type of wine. Lovely aromatics of flowers and orchard fruit.



Selvapiana, Bucerchiale, Chianti Rufina DOCG Riserva pic 1

2013 Marco Felluga, *Cabernet Franc*, *Collio DOC, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy* (\$28): 100% Cabernet Franc. Cabernet Franc has found its Italian home in North-East Italy and Felluga, in Collio, is one to always trust. Dried autumn leaves on the nose with black raspberry on the palate with a hint of green peppercorn.

2012 *Selvapiana, "Bucerchiale"*, *Chianti Rufina DOCG Riserva, Tuscany, Italy* (\$35): 100% Sangiovese. Selvapiana's flagship wine is only made in the best years, since 1979. Juicy black cherry fruit with hints of crumbly rock and smoky espresso that has a richly textured body.



Selvapiana, Bucerchiale, Chianti Rufina DOCG Riserva

2012 *Tasca D'Almerita, Nerello Mascalese, Sicilia DOC, Sicily, Italy* (\$50) 100% Nerello Mascalese. From the north slopes of the Etna volcano in Sicily, this wine is intensely aromatic, enticing with black truffles and underbrush with a fierce acidity that gives it an intense energy throughout the long finish.

### **Fantasy Wine** (over \$50)

2013 *Vietti, "Barolo Castiglione"*, *Barolo DOCG, Piedmont, Italy* (\$52) 100% Nebbiolo. The grapes are selected from small vineyards in the communes of Castiglione Falletto, Monforte, Barolo and Novello. There was a question: if one of Brian's family producers sold their winery, how would he handle it? Well, he did say that in one instance, a family sold their winery to new owners that he did not see eye to eye with and felt it was best to part ways, and there is another situation, with Vietti, where it did work out. Although this family winery was sold to the Krause family last year, the enologist Luca Currado, part of the original family owning this estate, has remained as CEO under the new ownership. Currado asked Kyle Krause to purchase his family winery since Vietti's vineyard contracts were up and they could no longer afford a lot of the top fruit from the area. And so Krause, who already owns premium vineyards in Barolo, is able to own a winery in an area he loves and allows Luca Currado to keep making some of the best Barolo at reasonable prices. This wine is an insane value considering the breathtaking qualities of rich dark fruit with tar, lilacs and anise seed that has elegantly structured tannins... this is the brilliance of Vietti – being able to blend certain vineyards that are complementary to each other.

2011 Casanova di Neri, "Tenuta Nuova", Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Tuscany, Italy (\$80): 100% Sangiovese. This is, hands down, year after year, one of my favorite Brunello producers... this 2011 Tenuta Nuova has a stunning intensity with lively fruit interwoven with licorice and a saline minerality that had velvety tannins – a knockout of a wine!