

## 2020: The Year in Review

BY ANTONIO GALLONI | DECEMBER 30, 2020

### Winemaker of the Year – Tony Biagi (Napa Valley)



I am fortunate to have the opportunity to taste with talented winemakers all over the world. This year, one person stands out. Tony Biagi is not only gifted as a winemaker, he also has a talent for mentoring young, emerging winemakers. Biagi has made a meaningful difference everywhere he has been. An early stint in retail in the mid-1990s provided an opportunity to taste the first generation of cult wines just as they were getting started. Internships at Dry Creek and Hess led to a full-

time job at Duckhorn, when it was still a relatively small winery. “That was my first experience working with world-class vineyards,” Biagi told me. “We sourced from Vine Hill Ranch, Spottswoode, Oakville Ranch, J.J. Cohn and other top sites.” Stops at Paraduxx and Neal Family Vineyards followed.

I first met Biagi around 2011 at PlumpJack, where he was making bold, luscious wines. A year later Biagi was looking for a role where he could also make wine on his own, so he went to Hourglass, but not before putting the pieces in place for a smooth transition at the three wineries in the PlumpJack group and staying on as a consultant for several years. Biagi took over Hourglass, which was stylistically adrift at the time, and brought a clear identity to those wines. Biagi then launched his own label, Patria, in 2013 in partnership with Kimberly Jones, one of the most respected distributors in California. The first few vintages have been positively stellar.

Quietly and very much behind the scenes, Biagi consulted as Clos du Val moved away from an emphasis on volume towards a greater focus on quality under winemaker Ted Henry. The change in the wines was dramatic and sudden. Sinegal was next, where Biagi worked alongside winemaker Ryan Knoth to help the estate get off the ground. Other recent projects include Amici with winemaker Jesse Fox, Lasseter with winemaker Danielle Langlois and Alma Rosa with winemaker Samra Morris. In every one of these cases, Biagi has provided guidance, but always pushed his protégés into the spotlight and given them all the credit. In today’s world, that is exceedingly rare. In a relatively new role as winemaker at The Vineyardist, Biagi has ushered in small but noticeable refinements to wines that were already superb. For all these reasons, Tony Biagi is my Winemaker of the Year for 2020.