



Vertical Tasting | Published DoctorWine N°19



## San Leonardo - Part One

by Daniele Cernilli 07-02-2012

San Leonardo is one of those Italian red wines on which everyone can agree: critics, wine lovers and people who work in the business. It is made in Trentino, in Borghetto d'Avio, a few kilometers from the border with Veneto, which from 1866 to 1918 was the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and before that between the Venice Republic and Habsburg dominions. Not far from the San Leonardo Estate, belonging to the Marquis Carlo Guerrieri Gonzaga, there are a number of locations of great historic importance. These include Bezzecca where, in 1866, Garibaldi's victorious troops were stopped in their attempt to conquer Trento, forcing the 'General' to utter his laconic statement: "I will obey". Then there is the northern area of Lake Garda. And Mt. Baldo, which overlooks the whole area that the locals call the Campi Sarni (Sarni Fields), which is actually the Lagarina Valley, a unique microclimate which produces a wine of the utmost elegance: San Leonardo.

"I began to get involved with it in the early 1970s," Carlo Guerrieri Gonzaga, an man of old-school courtesy and great humanity, tells us. "I had studied enology and worked as a young man in the cellar of Mario Incisa della Rocchetta, making a red wine in Bolgheri which would later, with the decisive contribution of Giacomo Tachis, become Sassicaia. "The first wine produced under my supervision I found already made, it was the 1982 vintage. At the time the vines were set up using the pergola (trellis) Trentina method but the following year we switched to the Guyot method. The grapes used were Carmenère and Merlot, with a slight prevalence of the former. At the time everyone in the area called this grape Cabernet Franc and so that is what I thought it was at first. It was only years later, in 1998, that we began to plant the real Cabernet Franc, which since 2001 makes up, along with Petit Verdot, 15% of the final blend. But in the beginning we just blended Carmenère, between 55% and 70%, and Merlot, 30% to 45%, depending on the harvest. We used more Merlot if the year had been a colder one, more Carmenère if it had been warmer". It should be noted that grape harvests in this area never take place too early. It is rare that the Merlot will be picked before the beginning of October and the Carmenère before the middle of the same month. "The only thing that has really changed with me has been the number of bottles produced. In 1982 they were just 9,780, while in 2000 and 2001 some 90,000 were produced, which then slipped to 65,000 in 2005," Guerrieri Gonzaga said. The rest has remained the same, the maceration, always quite long, lasts at least 15 days; and the aging, between 18 and 24 months in Allier oak barriques is always the same, and this despite the switch in wine makers, from Tachis to Carlo Ferrini, which took place with the 2000 vintage. "I have to admit that there is no great difference stylistically speaking," Guerrieri Gonzaga continued, "except for the fact that Ferrini keeps the wine longer with the dregs, Bordeaux-style, but the San Leonardo remains what it always

was and the only differences there are can inevitably be attributed to how the weather was that year".



Carlo Guerrieri Gonzaga's son Anselmo has been working at the estate for several years now "and don't write this down, but I'm very happy about this. He has enthusiasm, competence and he is a hard worker. Good thing, too" Guerrieri Gonzaga concludes with a smile. And it is a good thing for all wine lovers that San Leonardo has a future. It is truly a great red, profoundly Trentino and at the same time international, but with a class all its own, with bouquets which are often balsamic and a little green, but well-integrated, elegant, like wines of the north are. The fact should not be ignored that its vineyards are close to the 46th latitude, much more north than Bordeaux. And sometimes you can taste this.

A final word on prices: the latest vintages of San Leonardo cost in the neighborhood of 45 to 50 euros in a wine shop, but online you can find it for a little less. Prices for the older ones vary but they never reach triple digits, something which makes this wine one of the best in Italy for price/quality ratio.

**Daniele Cernilli**

**Editor-in-Chief, Doctor Wine**

## San Leonardo 1982

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>89</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 60% and Merlot 30% and Cabernet Sauvignon 10%. A very hot but not dry year. A clear, garnet color of average intensity, with brick reflections. The aromas are tertiary, slightly evolved, but with well-defined balsamic and smoky scents, spices and walnut husk with hints of leather. The taste is full-bodied, pleasing, elegant, subtle but persistent, within tannins only hinted at. A long and delicate finish.

9,780 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1983

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>92</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 60%, Merlot 40% and Cabernet Sauvignon 10%. A hot and quite dry year. An intense garnet color, the edge a touch brick. The aromas are tertiary, typical, slightly smoky, broad, complex with accents of blueberry and lack current and balsamic highlights in the back ground. The flavor is full, savory, almost brackish, quite tannic. But it is also delicate and balanced. A long finish, warm and persistent.

18,600 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1985

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>88</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 50%, Cabernet Sauvignon 30% and Merlot 20%. A very hot and dry year. The garnet color is quite intense but less bright, the edge slightly brickish. Ethereal aromas, almost fleeting and penetrating, with scents more fruity than balsamic or smoky, with precise notes of blueberry, wild strawberries preserved in alcohol, leather and tar. The taste is more tannic, less delicate and balanced, savory, warm. The finish is not long.

19,600 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1986

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>90</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 50%, Cabernet Sauvignon 30% and Merlot 20%. a cool and slightly rainy year. The color is an intense and bright garnet, even concentrated, with the edge just a tad brickish. The nose is splendid, complex, almost Bordeaux-like, with sharp smoky scents, slightly vegetable and with touches of blueberry, black current, leather and damp earth, accents of tar. The taste is full-bodied, rich, slightly tannic, certainly fine. A classic San Leonardo, with a subtle but long finish.

28,000 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1987

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>86</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 50%, Cabernet Sauvignon 30% and Merlot 20%. A cool and rainy year. An intense, well-concentrated garnet color with a brick edge. The nose has an average delicateness, with citrus scents (blood oranges) alongside greener ones and smoky geranium. A savory taste, with the tannins slightly exposed, a medium body, a little diluted. A finish of average duration.

29,700 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1988

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>95</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 50% and Merlot 20%. A perfect year, with a rainy spring and hot summer. A very intense and lively garnet red, almost sparkling. Intense aromas, full, balsamic, with scents of 'After Eights' and blueberry so well-defined and pure to make the nose most complex. The flavor is full, balanced, almost harmonious, with thick and velvety tannins and an elegant savoriness supporting its body. It finishes long and warm. A classic vintage.

35,000 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1990

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>96</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 60% and Merlot 10%. A hot and dry year. An intense and very bright garnet red, an excellent concentration. Intense aromas, full and complex, with balsamic scents, slightly vegetable, and hints of cocoa, blueberry, black current and vanilla. A nose which is still young and very delicate. The taste is full-bodied, elegant, extremely balanced, savory, the tannins are fine and sweet and the finish is extremely long. One of the best vintages ever.

34,000 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1991

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>86</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 60% and Merlot 10%. An irregular year, rainy in the spring and during harvest, hot in August. The color is a very bright and intense garnet. The bouquet is intense yet delicate, with vegetable highlights. The citrus and blueberry. An average complexity. The taste is less concentrated, more agile, light, even delicate, but with a fast finish, of medium persistence.

42,000 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1993

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>92</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 60% and Merlot 10%. A regular year with some rain before harvest. The garnet color is very bright and well concentrated. An intense aroma, complex, typical, almost Bordeaux-like, with even mineral tar accents alongside the classic one of blueberry. The profile of the nose is aristocratic. The flavor is full, savory, gutsy, with delicate and elegant tannins. The finish is long and persistent.

52,400 bottles made

## San Leonardo 1994

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>86</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Carmenère 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 60% and Merlot 10%. An irregular and rainy year. The intense garnet color is slightly brickish. The aromas are of average delicateness, scents of vegetables and damp earth, almost mushroom-like, then geranium and smoke. The fruity scents are scarce, the hints a bit rustic. The taste is of medium intensity, savory, tannic, a medium body and a finish which is not too long.

48,600 bottles made

## San Leonardo - Part Two

*by Daniele Cernilli 08-02-2012*

We continue our review of San Leonardo starting with 1995, a year which stood out for its heat and dryness. An articulated management of the vines allowed for a very early start, but the harvest fortunately came later than usual. Together with 1990 and 1997 one of the years with the least rainfall.

## San Leonardo 1995

### *Vallagarina Igt*

### *San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>95</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A dry year, with rain only in May. A very bright and intense garnet color. Complex aromas, articulated and full, with scents of tar, blueberry, black current, citrus and a slightly smoky and delicate background. A full-bodied flavor, savory, with delicate and velvety tannins, abundant but not aggressive or too dry. A very persistent and long finish. A San Leonardo which is still young and will last.

56,000 bottles made

## **San Leonardo 1996**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>90</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A normal year with not much but well-distributed rain. A bright and intense garnet. Intense aromas, clean and delicate, slightly vegetable and fleeting, a nice fullness with classic scents of blueberry and black current. A full-bodied flavor, with delicate and slightly aggressive tannins which influence its balance. The aftertaste is quite long. A nice vintage, perhaps a little too rustic.

61,700 bottles made

## **San Leonardo 1997**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>92</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10% . A hot and dry year. An intense ruby color with garnet reflections. The nose has a nice profile, intense, complex, enveloping, even ethereal and delicate, with smoky and mineral scents, almost tarish, and traces of blueberry and licorice. The taste is full, solid, rich, with tannins present but buffered by a glyceric softness. It has body and character. A 'muscular' wine which finishes long, warm and persistent.

78,185 bottles made

## **San Leonardo 1999**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>95</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A hot and dry year. The last vintage under the guidance of Giacomo Tachis. A very intense ruby-red color with garnet reflections. Intense aromas, ethereal, blood-like, scents of ink then blueberry and licorice, less vegetable-like than the others and more concentrated. A full-bodied flavor, rich, delicate and abundant tannins, well buffered by a glyceric softness. Savory, warm and balanced. A long finish. A great vintage.

83,600 bottles made

### **San Leonardo 2000**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>88</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A hot and dry year. The first vintage by Carlo Ferrini. A bright and intense ruby-red color with slight garnet reflections. Ethereal aromas, intense and enveloping with smoky and slightly flowery and spicy scents. Hints of wisteria flowers, licorice and sage, quite unusual. A full flavor, soft, glyceric, rich but without its usual pluckiness. An excellent body. It finishes warm and with an average persistence. 90,000 bottles made.

### **San Leonardo 2001**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>96</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A normal year, with little rain in September. A bright, intense ruby color, quite concentrated. Slight garnet reflections. Ample aromas, intricate, Bordeaux-like, with balsamic and mineral scents and hints of licorice, blueberry, black current and curry. A decisively savory flavor, full, elegant and harmonious. It has an excellent body and tannins of a rare delicacy. It finishes long and persistent. One of the best vintages ever. 90,000 bottles made

### **San Leonardo 2003**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>86</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. A very hot and dry year. An intense ruby color with garnet reflections. The bouquet is intensely fruity with scents of strawberry, prunes and mulberry on spirituous hints which are a little split up and not very articulated. A full flavor, rich, soft, warm with tannins that are a little green and which crinkle its balance. A warm finish, quite long and a little bitterish. A good DR0P but with little prospect for aging. 90,000 bottles made



## **San Leonardo 2004**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>92</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. The year began cool and rainy but then warmed up and became more normal. A well-concentrated and intense ruby color. An intense bouquet, Bordeaux-like, nicely broad with scents of licorice and blueberry, some accents of alcohol just a tad prickly, but tending towards mineral. A full flavor, savory, with nice young tannins, luxuriant and plucky. A robust vintage, with personality, but still a very young wine. It finishes long and quite delicate. 65,150 bottles made

## **San Leonardo 2005**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>92</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%. Quite a regular year, with a harvest a little earlier than in other places. A bright and intense ruby color, even quite concentrated. Intense aromas, sharp and well-defined, of red fruit, strawberry and raspberry, then with more mineral scents in the background. A distinct flavor, savory and tannic, a strong body. The finish is long and persistent. Very pleasurable in its extreme youth. 48,000 bottles made

## **San Leonardo 2006**

Vallagarina Igt

*San Leonardo*

Rating »	<b>93</b>
Category »	<b>Red</b>
Region »	<b>Trentino-Alto Adige</b>
Country »	<b>Italy</b>

Cabernet Sauvignon 60%, Cabernet Franc 15%, Carmenère 15% and Merlot 10%, A hot year with quite an early harvest which, however, still allowed for the grapes to have an excellent level of ripeness. A bright and concentrated ruby color. An enveloping bouquet, very intense, with scents of small fruits, balsamic highlights and accents of vanilla and cacao in the background. A pronounced flavor, warm, savory, rich and persistent, with a very long finish. A puissant vintage but not without grace and an ability to improve with age. 50,000 bottles made.