Below: *the vineyards where Michele Satta (inset) grows the grapes for his distinctive wines*

Perfect *vintage*

TUSCANY'S SATTA VINEYARD MADE ITS NAME PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY WINES THAT REFLECT THE PASSION OF ITS FOUNDER, MICHELE SATTA, AS **JONATHAN BELL** DISCOVERS

A small vineyard must work hard and innovate to be successful. In a three-decade-long career of doing just that, the Tuscan winemaker Michele Satta has shaped the taste and definition of an entire region. "I was living in the north of Italy, studying agriculture in Milan," is how Satta recalls his first steps. "I went to Tuscany on a family holiday and met an old wine-maker, who convinced me to transfer my studies to that region instead."

At that time, the Bolgheri region did not have a well-known label, of course except for the legendary Sassicaia: its wines were produced for local consumption. Satta's winery had its first harvest in 1974, and produced its first wine in 1983. From the start, Satta innovated using quality and care, seeking out the Mediterranean character of the terroir.

Today, his is the leading label among just a handful that have followed his lead in discovering Bolgheri's potential for a rich, Tuscan-style wine made also from the Sangiovese grape. "My engine is passion," Satta explains. "We are always going to be something unique — it's just not possible to produce a million bottles. Instead, we are aiming to produce wine that cannot be repeated. Personality is so important."

The vineyard's most celebrated wines include Costa Giulia, a crisp and exuberant white that was once chosen by Michelle Obama to celebrate her birthday. Piastraia has its origins in a 1991 vineyard planted with Merlot, Cabernet, Sangiovese and Syrah. These four grapes are harvested and processed separately to maintain their best qualities, before being brought together in equal quantities to create this dense and flavoursome wine.

Cited as one of the world's top 100 wines by *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, Piastraia was also included in wine experts Hugh Johnson and Neil Beckett's collection of "wines to taste before you die". The 1991 plantings saw the debut of Castagni, a single selection wine produced from a vineyard smaller than one hectare. Achieving 94 points on American wine critic Antonio Galloni's wine scale, it's only available in a select few restaurants and wine bars around the world.

Satta built his own cellar in 1987 and has continued to expand without compromising on character and individuality. "My goal is always to produce wine that is purely from Bolgheri," he says, adding that he is adopting a biodynamic approach – the gold standard of organic systems

For the past five years, Satta has been producing a special wine that he describes as the "ultimate expression" of his career as a winemaker. "Semetipsum is not only a wine, but an encounter of different passions," he says, explaining how each vintage is released with a concert hosted in his cellars and accompanied by a strictly limited series of Magnums, just 250 for each vintage, that are boxed together with a recording of the concert.

> "We are aiming to produce wine that cannot be repeated. Personality is so important"

It is this combination of passion, art and extraordinary craftsmanship that defines Satta. "I am considered a father of wine-making in this region," he admits. The future holds the promise of "tailored wines" that will involve the customer in decision-making processes. "We love the idea of staying in this little part of Tuscany and producing 200,000 perfect bottles," Satta says.

And there will be exciting collaborations to come, including a partnership with Aston Martin. Pioneering and progressive, without compromising style or substance — it's a perfect match.

michelesatta.com

astonmartin.com