

# Wine Spectator

WineSpectator.com

THE MOST EXCITING  
WINES OF 2023

THE  
**TOP 100**

WINE OF  
THE YEAR  
REVEALED  
A 95-POINT GEM  
FROM ITALY PRICED  
UNDER \$100

44 WINES  
PRICED \$30  
OR LESS  
47 WINERIES  
MAKE A  
DEBUT



BRUCE SANDERSON

## The Virtues of Older Italian Reds

Over the past year I had the chance to taste dozens of maturing and mature reds from several Tuscan producers. Aside from the fact that it's fascinating to experience how wines evolve over time, it's also an opportunity to follow the development of a winery.

Tolaini is a perfect example. Founded by the late Per Luigi Tolaini in 1998 and now run by his daughter Lia, in 2013, Tolaini converted to organic farming; in 2014 an optical sorting table was added. The winemaking has embraced less extraction, larger casks for aging the Sangiovese and longer maceration but with more gentle infusion.

Twenty vintages of select wines illustrated the changes. The Al Passo 2002 and Duesanti 2002 were pleasant, however, the more recent wines showed greater depth and complexity. The Vigna Montebello Sette Gran Selezione 2014 and Picconero 2014 were standouts from a difficult vintage. Montebello Sette Gran Selezione 2018, Perlui 2018 and Mello 700 2020, the latest addition, 100% Sangiovese single vineyard, revealed terrific potential to develop over the next two decades.

Donatella Ciarelli Colombini was founded when she inherited the Casato estate in 1998. Its debut vintage, Brunello di Montalcino 1993, revealed fading fruit, tobacco, iron, sanguine and spice flavors, backed by good acidity and overall balance.

Between 1998 and 2009, new vineyards were planted, including the Ardita parcel in 1999, now consistently recognized as the source of DCC's best Sangiovese. Between 2002 and 2009, the wines were extracted and concentrated in style. In 2010, Colombini changed her approach, switching from stainless steel to concrete vats for fermentation and easing up on the extraction. Aging in *barriques* shifted to aging in *tonnelle* and large casks.

The 2010 benefited from those tweaks in the cellar, exuding sweet ripe fruit along with iron, tobacco, licorice and spice flavors typical of Sangiovese from Montalcino. It was elegant, complex and long. DCC's Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 2016, entirely from the Ardita parcel, may be the winery's best effort yet and it will be fascinating to see how it develops.

Carmignano's Tenuta di Capezzana estate, on the other hand, has a long history and a cellar full of mature vintages. When I



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visited in 2014, the Contini Bonacossi family, owners since 1926, shared a Carmignano Riserva 1931, still fresh and complex. This year, Beatrice Contini Bonacossi dropped by our offices with 10 vintages of Capezzana's Ghiata della Furba, from the 40th anniversary 2019 back to 1981. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, it was created by her father, Ugo, in 1979. Carmignano has a tradition with Cabernet Sauvignon dating from the Renaissance period. From 1998, the Cab Franc was replaced with Syrah.

The 2006 was my favorite, now hitting its sweet spot and still very vigorous, with a lingering finish of fruit, mineral and tobacco. The 1999 was complex, featuring an alluring bouquet of ripe cherry, plum, Eastern spices and mineral. Delicious now, yet with the potential of aging another decade or more, the 1988 offered ripe cherry fruit, along with wild herbs, mineral, vibrant acidity and a long finish.

One of my favorite vintages from Montalcino is 1999. I enjoyed Pieve Santa Restituta's Brunello di Montalcino Sugarille '99 at a presentation of the property's Brunello with proprietor Gaia Guja in New York. Sugarille is an 11-acre vineyard on *galestro* (schist) soils. Taut and brooding, yet refined, it displayed a mineral element to kirsch and black currant flavors.

Another 1988 at its plateau of pleasure was Ornellaia, poured at a tasting of select vintages. Mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, with Merlot and Cabernet Franc, it revealed leather, spices and a hint of tar wrapped around ripe black currant and plum fruit.

Most recently, Luca Sanjust and his son Rocco of Petrolro presented four vintages of Valdarno di Sopra Boggina A and Valdarno di Sopra Boggina C. The former, fermented and aged in amphora, is always pure, floral and silky, while its sibling shows more weight and more grain to its texture. The 2019s illustrated those differences clearly. As we tasted the older vintages, the differences became less obvious. The 2015s were in a transition phase; the 2013s and the 2012s were a delight for their nuance and length.

Some drinkers prefer younger wines, others mature vintages. I find that in about a decade after the harvest, fine Italian reds begin to reveal greater depth and harmony and maintain that allure for at least another decade, even longer.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson has been with Wine Spectator since 1993.

DAVID WILES

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