



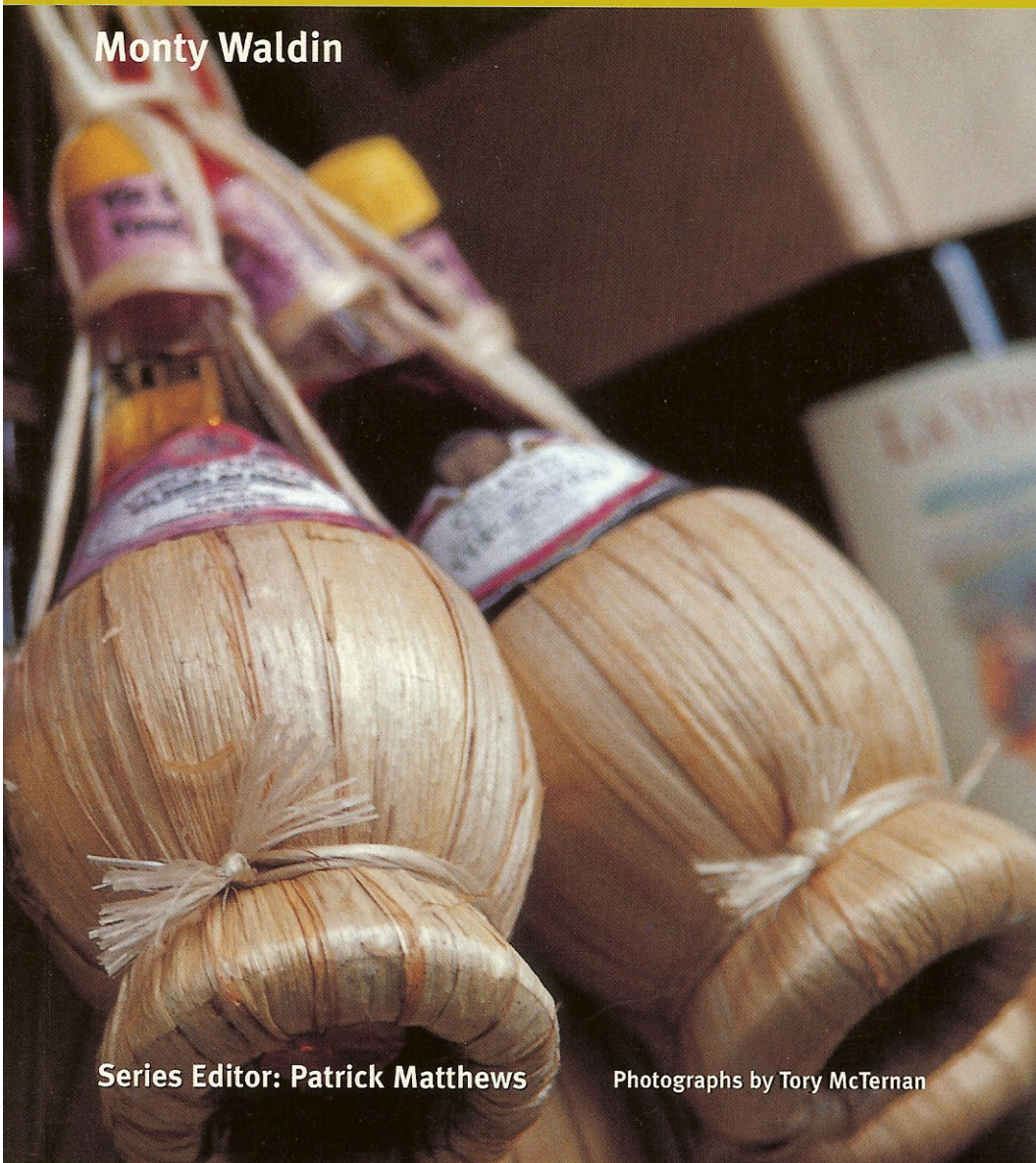
MITCHELL BEAZLEY

**DISCOVERING WINE COUNTRY**

# Tuscany

How to find great wines  
off the beaten track

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**Series Editor: Patrick Matthews**

**Photographs by Tory McTernan**

Across the valley, west of Panzano on the Pesa Valley side, you'll find wineries like Fattoria La Massa (tel: 055 852722) which Giampaolo Motta bought in a run down state in the early 1990s, leaving the family tanning business in Naples to make wine. Motta worked at Riecine (see p.53) to learn the ropes, and made thick Chianti Classico reds, full of boisterous oak, but has since toned down the style, even in the "Giorgio Primo" bottling which mixes Merlot with Sangiovese. Other reliable performers here include Villa Cafaggio (tel: 055 852949), for clean, almost clinical Chianti Classicos and lightly honeyed *vin santo*, and Carlo Novarese's Carobbio (tel: 055 8560133; info@carobbiovine.com), where relatively low-lying vineyards produce warm-hearted Sangiovese reds like "Pietraforte" and "Leone del Carobbio".

Another much respected performer here is the de Napoli family's Castello dei Rampolla (see p.44), where oats and flowering clovers are sown amongst the vines to encourage beneficial insect predators, such as ladybirds and lacewings, and to stress the vines into lower yields by competing with the vine roots for water. This makes for chunky, thick red wines like the Chianti Classico and the usually consistent Chianti Classico Riserva, as well as the Cabernet Sauvignon-dominated "Sammarco" red. From the top of the tower you can get a fantastic view of Panzano's "golden bowl".

#### Food matching in the vineyard

South of Panzano you'll find Tenuta Fontodi (see p.44; by appointment), one of Tuscany's most respected and consistent performers over the last two decades for smooth Chianti Classico and Syrah, savoury Sangiovese reds like "Flaccianello", full-bodied dry whites, and thick *vin santo*. The striking gravity-fed winery contains spacious barrel halls and red wine vats in which the skins can be punched down into the fermenting wine automatically. In the vineyards, owner Giovanni Manetti keeps a herd of Chianina cows to provide manure for compost, fertilizing the soil. When mature, the cows are butchered at the renowned Macelleria Checucci, one of Panzano's two butchers; the other is the flamboyant Dario Cecchini of the Antica Macelleria Cecchini (closed Monday). The Manetti family's 400-year-old terracotta business has even been called on by the Uffizi Gallery in Florence during its many restorations.

Continue south on the SS222 to Monte Bernardi (see p.44; by appointment), run by engaging and energetic siblings Michael and Jennifer Schmelzer. The tiny cellar is cut into the hillside, with bare rock exposed above the wine press and fermenting vats. Bright, unfiltered Chianti Classicos with a confident mineral edge, the firm 100% Sangiovese "Sa'etta",

LEFT Take a stroll along a meandering track through the vineyards.

BELOW Refresh yourself at the municipal water fountains.



**WHERE TO EAT****Porta del Chianti**

Piazza Castelli, 12  
53010 San Gusme (SI)  
Tel: 0577 358010

Small, inviting restaurant away from the usual Chianti crowds, offering tender lamb or beef with chickpea purée.

**Taverna del Guerrino [E3]**

Via Montefioralle, 39  
50022 Greve in Chianti (SI)  
Tel: 055 853106

Small restaurant with good seasonal greens and white beans, plus spaghetti (no other kind of pasta) with various meat-based sauces, and grilled meat.

and the peppery Bordeaux-style "Tzingana" are produced from impeccably farmed vines. Biodynamic sprays of fermented cow manure aerated in water are dripped on the vineyard topsoils, giving them a more friable texture. This allows rain water to penetrate more easily and to prevent soil erosion, a perennial problem in hot regions like Chianti where rain tends to fall in short, sharp bursts. And elegance in the wine is preserved by soaking the grape skins in the chilled juice for a day or so before fermentation begins, allowing vital colour and flavour to be extracted but without too much extra tannin that would make the wine unwieldy. You can rent rooms here, or even the whole beautifully furnished house.

**In the footsteps of Michelangelo**

From Monte Bernardi turn right towards San Donato in Poggio for the Casavecchia alla Piazza (see p.57), where Valeria Sodano and Gabriele Buondonno (both agronomists from Naples) produce very refined organic Chianti, bursting with moreish, earthy plum flavours, a Syrah, called "Campo ai Ciliegi" notable for a very restrained level of alcohol (young

Syrah vines can burn out on Chianti's hot, loose sandy soils), and one of Chianti's most sippable grappas. The estate used to belong to Michelangelo's family in the 15th century.

South of San Donato in Poggio at Isole you'll find the de Marchi family's Fattoria Isole e Olena, source of crisp but creamy Chardonnay, pinpoint reds like "L'Eremo" (Tuscany's first varietal Syrah, made from vines grafted onto Canaiolo in the mid-1980s as the fashion for Rhône varietals was about to take off), the fine-grained 100% Sangiovese "Cepparello", and total benchmark Chianti Classico, plus bitingly authentic *vin santo*. The *vin santo* barrels are dotted around the winery courtyard, creating extra complexity as each spot has its own humidity and temperature level, causing the fermenting yeast to work at different speeds during the three to six years it takes them to make the wines stable. The name Isole e Olena comes from the uniting of two hamlets, around which the vineyards are situated. One of these, Olena, is now almost deserted, and you could easily get lost in the courtyards of old houses now strewn with blue, yellow, and pink wild flowers.

**Machiavellian option**

From San Donato in Poggio join the dual carriageway at the San Donato exit, leaving at

