

THE WORLD'S BEST WINE MAGAZINE

£3.70 | US \$8.50 | CAN \$10.50

November 2007

# Decanter

www.decanter.com

## BORDEAUX'S last affordable vintage

### 51 STUNNING CRUS CLASSES FROM 2004

### PLUS: Did anyone buy 2006?

5180 151007  
RIF. SPEDIZIONE  
INTERCONTINENTAL  
TEL. 02. 67. 07. 32 27  
FATT. PREZZO  
10 € 8.00

## Wine bad for the planet?

Sustainable, organic,  
fair-trade, carbon neutral...  
what's it all mean,  
and do we care?

**REVEALED:**  
How a wine  
gets into your  
supermarket  
p54



> Cult Californians > Inside Rioja > South Africa > US Syrah

# MEET THE PURISTS

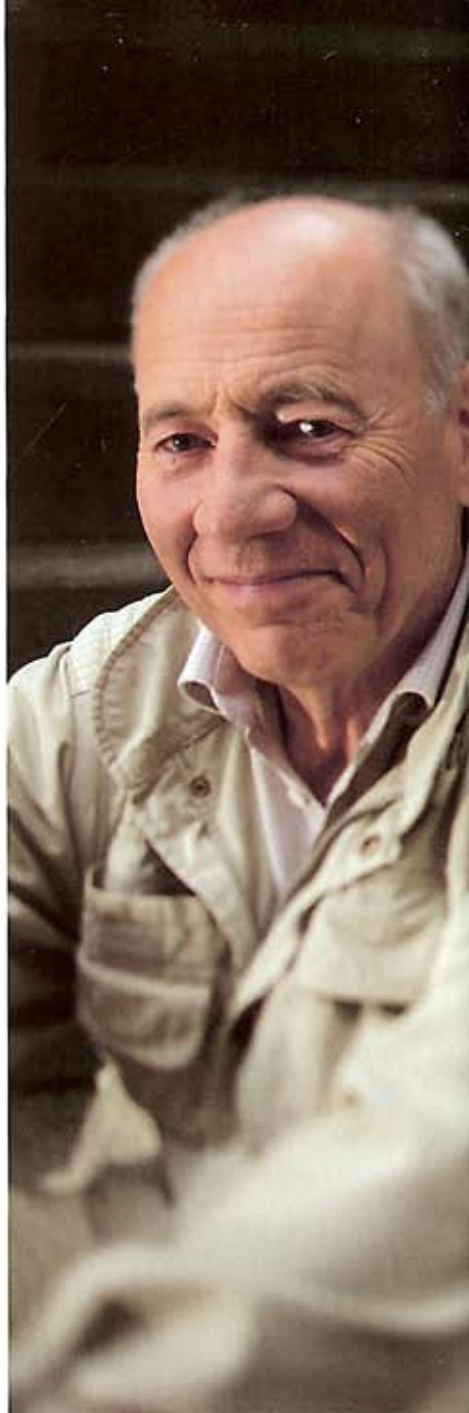
*That Sangiovese should not be adulterated is almost an article of faith for many producers.*

*Stephen Brook talks to the true believers about why they worship this difficult grape*

## San Felice

San Felice is owned by an insurance company and features a luxurious resort on its estate, yet for 25 years Leonardo Bellaccini (right) has had a free hand to produce wines with real Tuscan typicity. As well as a basic Chianti Classico, he makes two Riservas: Il Grigio being pure Sangiovese and Il Poggio Rosso containing a little Colorino.

The oldest vines in Il Poggio were planted back in 1971. It is a more powerful wine than Il Grigio, combining elegance with muscularity, and is typically very long-lived. The 1997 drunk this year was far from its peak. Bellaccini doesn't want an overtly oaky wine, so he ages Il Poggio in 50% new 500 litre barrels rather than Bordelais barriques.



## San Giusto a Rentennano

Luca Martini (left, with sister Elisabetta) at San Giusto a Rentennano admits he and his brother (a camera-shy man who usually makes a run for it when visitors arrive) were once persuaded by customers to blend some Merlot into their Chianti. 'We tried it, but found we lost much of the typicity of our wine. So we stopped.'

Not that a Sangiovese Chianti is a soft option. It's not always easy to achieve fully ripe Sangiovese in Tuscany's capricious climate. Even when it is ripe, it retains an acidity that its admirers consider a virtue, especially with food, but which those accustomed to the softer wines of the New World sometimes find too strident. A dose of Merlot rounds out the edges, while Cabernet Sauvignon gives the wine tannic backbone. Both add deep colour, which some misguided critics and consumers relate to quality.

However, Sangiovese enthusiasts argue that when it is grown on the right spot and attains complete ripeness, it needs no help or support from other varieties. Luca Martini explains: 'We're not trying to produce a heavy or powerful wine. We're looking for intensity and elegance, which is exactly what the natural acidity of Sangiovese can provide. Chianti is a difficult wine to make well. It must have concentration, but not too much. The danger is over-extraction, and our task is to find the natural balance.'

San Giusto produces a simple, fresh Chianti Classico for drinking relatively young, a more structured Riserva, from older vines and aged in older barrels, and an IGT called Percarlo, a single-vineyard wine aged in 50% new barriques. Percarlo is the wine that made the estate famous; it has wonderful purity and intensity, but the Riserva is not far behind.



## Castello di Querceto

The Castello di Querceto, and its vineyards, are buried among luxuriant wooded hills in the east of the region. Querceto has been owned by the Florentine Francois family since 1897.

The estate only came into its own after Alessandro Francois (left) gave up his career as an engineer in the early 1970s in order to look after the business. He now makes numerous wines, including a pure Cabernet Sauvignon and various Supertuscan blends. But when it comes to Chianti he remains a staunch traditionalist. He produces three Chianti Classicos: a regular, a barrique-aged Riserva and, since 1988, a single-vineyard Riserva called Il Picchio, from vines grown at up to 450m on distinctive reddish brown soil. This too is barrel aged but with a higher proportion of new oak. Both Riservas are first-rate, but Il Picchio has more personality. A vertical tasting back to 1995 at Querceto revealed a wine of stylishness rather than power, and a slow ageing curve.

Francois has no qualms about his devotion to Sangiovese for Chianti. 'I have no doubt that Sangiovese is the best expression of this region. In the past there was plenty of mediocre Sangiovese, but that's because of poor viticulture. Today there is no excuse for that. Of course it's not the easiest grape to grow, and some estates find it difficult and capricious, so they prefer to plant other varieties. But here we value Sangiovese.'



## Le Cinciole

For established estates with a wide selection of old Sangiovese vines alongside newer plantings of the best clones, it's relatively easy to focus on Sangiovese. For newcomers it takes more courage, especially since the more serious wines can be austere when young and harder to sell than fleshier, modern-style Chiantis.

Luca and Valeria Orsini (above) moved to Panzano in the early 1990s after wearying of city life. There are French varieties at their Cinciole estate, but the main emphasis is on Sangiovese, and numerous clones have been planted.

'Both my Chianti and the Riserva are pure Sangiovese. That's because I want to be able to taste the origin of the wine. We always wanted to retain the typicity of Chianti Classico, and we never even thought of blending in international varieties, which we use only in our Supertuscan blend. The challenge here is to get a reasonable crop without compromising on quality. Rich proprietors can afford to reduce yields to uneconomic levels, but we don't have that option.'

Yet the wines show no sign of dilution. The basic Chianti Classico has precisely

## A TUSCAN LOVE AFFAIR

*'Sangiovese on our stony soils has some austerity but also great ageing capacity, which we value. After 30 years our Riservas are still going strong.'* LAURA BIANCHI, CASTELLO DI MONSANTO

*'Sangiovese no longer needs help. With higher density and better clones, we have better and more even quality. But to give the wines accessibility, you need to handle the grapes gently in the winery and use good oak. So I admit that you need to get a good price for your wine if you want to set the highest standards.'* GIOVANNI MANETTI, FONTODI

*'Chianti Classico should always be recognisable as Chianti Classico. That means avoiding Merlot in the blend, as it gives a sweetness that is uncharacteristic of Sangiovese.'* ALESSANDRO BARTOLI, POGGIOPIANO

*'Because Sangiovese is sensitive to soil type, exposure and elevation, it gives Chianti producers a wonderful palate of aromas, flavours and structures to work with.'* MARCO PALLANTI, CASTELLO DI AMA

the bright cherry fruit, discreet structure, and zesty acidity that this wine should have, while the Petresco Riserva, which receives long ageing in barriques, has broader shoulders and is more assertive.

## Monte Bernardi

Michael Schmelzer and his sister Jennifer (right) came to Tuscany from the US a few years ago. They bought the established Monte Bernardi estate south of Panzano. The previous owner's wines had a lush oaky style not to Schmelzer's taste. 'I haven't bought a single barrique since we arrived. We have some wonderful vines here at a high elevation which produce an elegant, aromatic wine.'

He produces two Chiantis: the stylish, silky Monte Bernardi, and the richer Sa'etta. That two very different wines can be made on a small property is testimony to Sangiovese's versatility and strengthens the hand of the growing number of producers turning away from international varieties.



# CLASSICO!

## TUSCAN★ FINEST

*The top Chianti Classicos need time in bottle to develop, fill out and reach their peak.*

*Stephen Brook selects his top Classicos and Classico Riservas from the recent vintages*

### Chianti Classico

#### CASTELLO DI QUERCETO, 2004 ★★★★★

Fresh, zesty cherry nose. Concentrated, fresh, has ample tannin but there's good cherry fruit to the fore; quite long. Drink now–2014.

N/A UK: +39 (0)55 85921

#### CINCIOLE, 2004 ★★★★★

Fleshy, black cherry nose, but very fresh; assertive, with lively acidity, robust but complete. Drink now–2014. £12.99; Smk



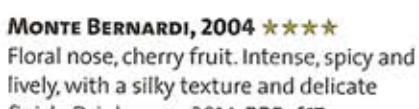
#### FELSINA, 2005 ★★★★★

Light fresh nose; supple and juicy, delicate and stylish, though with abundant fruit. Drink now–2012. £9.61; N&P



#### FONTODI, 2004 ★★★★★

Charming floral nose with bright cherry fruit. Richer on the palate, with fine fruit and ample vigour and length. Drink now–2015. £12.50; WSo



#### IL MOLINO DI GRACE, 2004 ★★★★★

Beautifully made Chianti, with spice, concentration, freshness and finesse. Drink now–2012. £9.69; Gdh



#### MONTEMAGGIO, 2005 ★★★★★

Rich cherry fruit, with unusual weight and plumpness for 2005; light acidity keeps it fresh. Drink now–2014.

£8.95; Rvs

#### IL PALAZZINO 'LA PIEVE', 2004 ★★★★★

Glossy but elegant cherry nose. Broad, concentrated, but elegant, lively and long. Drink now–2015. £13.22; J&B



#### POGGIOPIANO, 2004 ★★★★★

Discreet cherry aromas with a touch of vanilla; suave, concentrated and spicy, with some graphite tones; appealing length. Drink now–2014. £8.95; WSo



#### CASALOSTE, 2005 ★★★★★

Vibrant sour cherry fruit on the nose and palate; a full-bodied, brawny style from an organic producer. 2008–2014. £11.55; Jer

### Chianti Classico Riserva

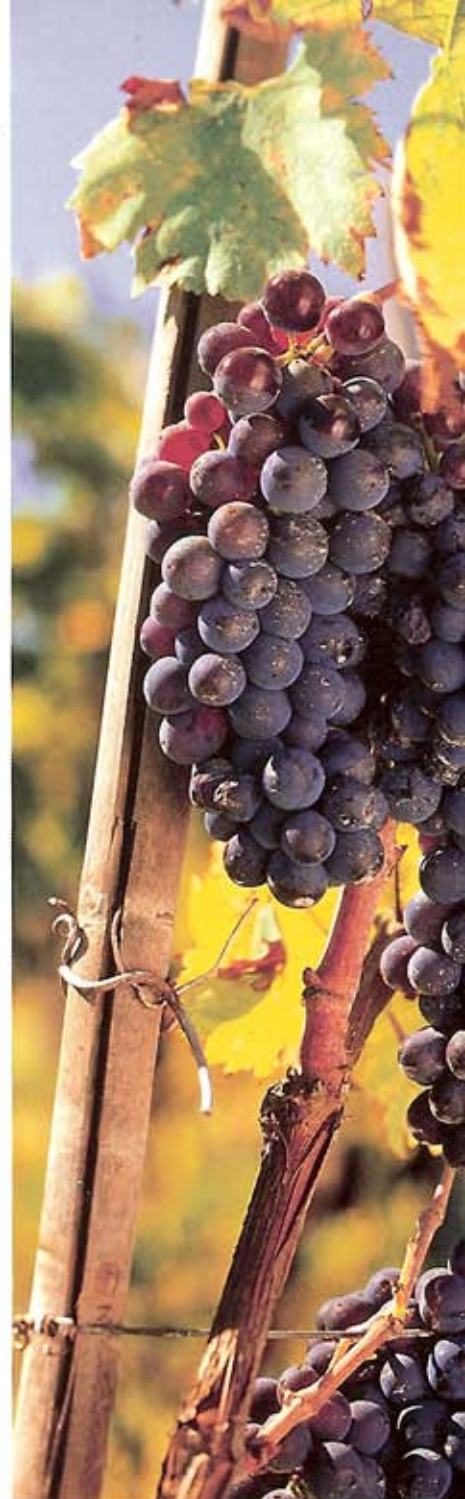


#### NITTARDI, 2004 ★★★★★

A modern-style Chianti with black cherries and fresh mint on the nose, a hefty palate with good acidity and considerable complexity. 2008–2016. W&Y; £17.52

#### RENZO MARINAI, 2004 ★★★★★

Smoky oak and plums on the nose. A sumptuous, concentrated style, but with



good balancing acidity and ample flair; long chewy finish. Drink 2008–2018.

N/A UK; +39 (0)55 856 0237



#### SAN FELICE, POGGIO ROSSO 2001 ★★★★★

Complex aromas of plums, sour cherries, liquorice. Spicy, concentrated, tannic, quite weighty but stylish and long. Now–2020. ReL; £17.99

#### BINDI SERGARDI, 2004 ★★★★★

This ancient estate has only just moved from bulk-selling to bottling its wines: this is balanced, attractive, and elegant, with firm underlying tannins. 2008–2016.



## Chianti vintages

### 1997 ★★★★★

Perfect growing season. Lush wines. Riservas still going strong.

### 1998 ★★★★★

Variable wines after rain at harvest, the best were forward and succulent.

### 1999 ★★★★★

Early and large harvest. Rich but balanced wines that will age well.

### 2000 ★★★

Heat stress led to many wines with high sugars but some unripe tones.

### 2001 ★★★★★

Very healthy grapes, similar to 1999. Austere at first but developing well.

### 2002 ★

Wet, cool summer with hail and rot. Selection essential. Modest at best.

### 2003 ★★★

Heat stress caused some baked characters and low acidity.

### 2004 ★★★★★

Classic year. Structured wines with good acidity. Will age well.

### 2005 ★★★

Cool August but a sunny September saved the crop. Selection essential.

### 2006 ★★★★★

Sunny, dry autumn after a cool rainy summer. Highly promising.

Dec; £111.63 (case of 12)

#### CASTELLARE, 2004 ★★★★★

Muted black fruit aromas; full-bodied, assertive, with brooding fruit and considerable grip. Drink 2008–2015.  
N/A UK; +39 (0)577-742903

#### CASTELLO DI BOSSI, BERARDO 2001 ★★★★★

Rich plummy nose; extracted but juicy on the palate, with firm acidity and a long peppery finish. Unc; £19.95



#### LILLIANO, 2004 ★★★

Bright cherry aromas on the nose.

Reasonably fresh, concentrated and spicy, not that persistent but well balanced. Drink now–2014. HB; £14.99

#### LA MARCELLINA, SASSOCUPO 2004

★★★★

Traditional in style but doesn't lack charm; supple yet concentrated, balanced and long. Ready to drink now up to 2014.  
N/A UK; +39 (0)55 852 126

#### MONSANTO, IL POGGIO 2000 ★★★★★

Lush and powerful on both nose and palate, with splendid fruit, considerable pungency, and a vigorous finish. Drink now–2018. UK N/A; +39 (0)5 58 05 90 00

#### SAN GIUSTO A RENTENNANO, BARONCOLE 2004 ★★★★★

Intense cherry aromas; sleek, silky, and concentrated, with fine acidity shielding the pronounced tannins. Good length. Drink now–2020.

N/A UK; +39 (0)57 774 7121



#### VICCHIOMAGGIO LA PRIMA, 2004 ★★★★★

Super-ripe black cherry nose. Rich and powerful with big ripe tannins and a light chocolaty tone; long. Drink 2008–2015.

£19.29; [www.wineroom.com](http://www.wineroom.com)

For a full list of stockist codes, see p131.