

October, 2005



Tuscany trip

Monte Bernardi

I met brother and sister Michael and Jennifer Schmelzer earlier this year at a couple of tastings. They invited me to visit them at Monte Bernardi, their well-situated estate in the "Conca d'Oro" (golden bowl) of Panzano – one of Chianti Classico's hot spots. Michael, the winemaker, made the 2003 vintage in conjunction with the previous owner, Stak Aivaliotis. Since 2004, the wines have been solely down to Michael, whose non-interventionist instincts are leading him to reign back on oak and pursue biodynamic techniques in the vineyard – all to good effect based on the fruit purity, freshness and mineral undertones of barrel samples of the 2004 vintage!

Here are some highlights of a Monte Bernardi vertical presented by Imperial Wines in Suffolk earlier this year together with tasting notes from my visit, which coincided with the Panzano Wine Festival:

Monte Bernardi Chianti Classico Paris Monte Bernardi 2003 (Sangiovese, with a small % of Canaiolo) – primary, fruity, sappy nose with violets and kid glove notes, palate shows good tannic grip and depth of black cherry fruit, finishes clean and minerally – impressive.

Chianti Classico Paris Monte Bernardi 1998 – ruby, spicy black cherry/berry nose – very attractive and inviting; tightly knit palate with excellent concentration of black fruits, well-balanced tannin, fruit and acidity; long, fresh finish with sour cherry twist.

Chianti Classico Paris Monte Bernardi 1999 – vibrantly fruity nose of black fruit gums (blackcurrant/cassis); a real fruit bomb on the palate supported by a firm backbone of tannins – concentrated and ageworthy.

Sa'etta Monte Bernardi 2003 (100% Sangiovese) – closed on the nose and palate, hints of red fruits, vanilla; showing some tannic asperity but, overall, an elegant, minerally frame.

Sa'etta Monte Bernardi 1997 – lovely, rich, ripe cherry and plum fruit on the nose and palate; present tannins and well balanced acidity lend elegance – very good.

Tzingana Monte Bernardi 2003 (Bordeaux blend) – perfumed, blackcurranty nose, very primary and sappy, little peppery. Bright fruit on the youthful, well-structured, focused palate, fresh and minerally with toasty oak flavours.

Tzingana Monte Bernardi 1996 (magnum) – blackcurrant, plum and cherry nose with mineral character; fleshy, fruity palate with good persistence and a fine, minerally finish with liquorice spiciness.

Tzingana Monte Bernardi 1997 – deep colour, exuberant blackcurrant nose, opulent palate, succulent blackcurrant and supple tannins – drinking beautifully now.

Tzingana Monte Bernardi 1998 – much tighter nose with smoky, charry oaked characters; great depth of fruit on the palate with kirsch and succulent black cherry, more structured than the 97, ripe tannins with well balanced acidity giving a long, persistent finish with a veneer of smoky oak.

Tzingana Monte Bernardi 1999 – great depth of colour, expressive nose of kirsch and creamed corn; tight knit, youthful palate; plenty yet to come.