

WHO'S WHO IN TUSCANY

Italy's number one wine-producing region has a heritage that goes back to before the Middle Ages, says Michèle Shah. Some of the oldest names have been the most revolutionary winemakers of the past century.

Tuscany is indisputably Italy's number one wine-producing region, and not simply because of its reputation for fine, classic wines. Even non-wine-loving visitors who come to see Florence, Siena, Pisa and San Gimignano will often tour the scenic vineyards that grace the hillsides, evidence of a rural civilisation shaped over centuries into a landscape of extraordinary harmony and beauty.

No other Italian wine-producing region has evolved, over the past 30 years, as dynamically as Tuscany has. The renaissance began in Florence when the influential Marchesi Antinori estate reinvented a 600-year heritage with new styles in wines of international class. The epicentre of this oenological revival was Chianti, the heart of Tuscany, but it quickly spread to Montalcino, Montepulciano and the coastal area of Bolgheri, attracting new money and talent into the region. Today, Tuscany's unique styles and high quality are respected within the international arena. "Tuscany today conveys a new tradition. That of being able to produce basic Sangiovese; clean wines characterised by structure and harmony," explains Francesco Ricasoli CEO of Castello di Brolio.

Chianti and Chianti Classico remain the nucleus of Tuscan viticulture, and this is where the greatest expression of the Sangiovese that dominates the region's reds is to be found. Chianti's restrictive production regulations were also the original source of the controversial wines that became known as Super Tuscans. The Super Tuscans, an unofficial category of wines that aren't dependent on the traditional Sangiovese, are a phenomenon that rose in the 1970s with the creation of the IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) denomination, which allowed for the use of an unlimited range of grape varieties, blends and styles.



Wines from Chianti Classico Consortium can be recognized by the black cockerel emblem.

Today, Tuscany encompasses some 42 DOC and 11 DOCG appellations. The most important wine route is the Chiantigiana, which winds its way through the heart of Tuscany, between Florence and Siena. From Siena a steep climb and several bends takes you on to Montalcino, which has given rise to wines of international standing, such as those from the estates Tenuta dell'Ornellaia and Tenuta San Guido.

The most influential consortiums

Almost all wineries in the different appellation areas belong to a representative consortium. The consortiums are powerful, official bodies that regulate the quality of production from the vineyard through to promotion and sales, as well as implementing research projects for the improvement of quality. The three top players in Tuscany are Consorzio Chianti Classico, Consorzio Brunello di Montalcino and Consorzio Chianti. The largest consorzio in Tuscany is the Consorzio Chianti, with 2,500 members and 10,500 ha of vines. It's managed by Marco Bani, described by Lamberto Frescobaldi as "a man with his feet on the ground". Wines from Chianti Classico Consorzio can be recognised by the black cockerel emblem on the bottle-neck; it's considered one of the most dynamic consortiums, with 560 members.

Tuscan consortiums often join forces when promoting abroad, so that their presence becomes a significant force in established and emerging markets. "Fragmentation in production and promotion is a problem throughout Italy, especially at a time of economic crisis," says Giuseppe Liberatore, director of the Chianti Classico Consorzio since 1992. "Therefore the role of the consortium, which groups together its members, helps with being competitive in international markets."

Consortio directors have political roles and are often called

to Rome to the seat of the Federdoc, the national headquarters for the protection of DOC and DOCG wines. The directors are responsible for implementing project guidelines and strategies, which have been proposed by a board of directors and voted in by its members. Stefano Campatelli has been director of the Montalcino Consorzio since 1990. He sees Montalcino as being a world-renowned, unique terroir, which has really only developed over the last 50 years, thanks to its pioneer, Biondi Santi. Today Montalcino has 250 consorzio members and is the only consorzio in Italy where 100% of its producers are members. Its 3,500 ha of vineyard, of which 2,100 are planted to Brunello, produce some 6,500 bottles of Brunello.

Most influential wineries and winemakers

Piero Antinori is one of the region's most influential winemakers. In the 1960s, Antinori was one of the first producers in Tuscany to experiment with new grape varieties and blends. The result was the production of his now world-famous Tignanello, one of the very first Super Tuscans. Recently Antinori completed the building of a 300,000-cubic-metre underground cellar in San Casciano Val di Pesa, a massive investment and a unique architectural project, which has become the company's headquarters. Tuscany also owes a lot of credit to Giacomo Tachis, winemaker to Antinori, known as the 'father of Super Tuscan wines'. He is the man behind labels such as Sassicaia, Tignanello and Solaia.

The Bolgheri area boasts a number of international style wines, such as iconic Masseto, a 100% Merlot from Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, today part of Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, one of Italy's most notable and historic wine companies. In the same area is Tenuta San Guido, property of Nicolò Incisa della Rocchetta, famous for Sassicaia, a Cabernet Sauvignon created by Tachis. It's thanks to pioneers such as Tachis, Antinori and Incisa, and their pioneering efforts with Bordeaux-blends that Tuscany at-



Piero Antinori, Marchesi Antinori estate, reinvented a 600-year heritage.

Stefano Campatelli has been director of the Montalcino consorzio since 1990.

Giuseppe Liberatore, director of the Chianti Classico Consorzio since 1992.

tracted international attention, especially in the 1980s. The potential being expressed by these wines attracted winemakers such as Angelo Gaja in the 1990s to invest in properties in Montalcino and Castagneto Carducci, in search of great terroirs.

"Tuscany should pay homage to Piero Antinori, a man with a vision, capable of producing numbers without sacrificing quality; Biondi Santi, (who passed away recently, in April 2013), one of the first winemakers in Tuscany to really believe in Sangiovese; Francesco Ricasoli, who is the pillar of Chianti, responsible for bringing back dignity to Chianti Classico; and Incisa della Rocchetta because he gave us the concept of Cru wines," says Marco Pallanti winemaker of the niche Tuscan winery Castello di Ama.

There are, of course, innumerable worthy Tuscan winemakers, and numerous estates, which have contributed to the great fame of Tuscany.

Research and winemakers

San Felice winery stands out for the energy and time it devotes to research. In the mid 1980s, when most of Tuscany was turning its attention to planting new vineyards with 'international' varieties, San Felice responded positively to a proposal made by the University of Florence to embark on an experimental project to revive some of the dying clones of Tuscany's indigenous varieties. Their work with the almost extinct Pignatello variety has resulted in a new wine.

Castello di Brolio has always been very conscious of 'zonation'. This month, in collaboration with Florence and Arezzo's Agrobiologia

research centre, Ricasoli will be publishing an in-depth study on the zonation of their vineyards, down to each parcel. "This study has allowed us to understand even better our Sangiovese vine which is extremely sensitive to soil and climate," explains CEO Ricasoli.

The Chianti Classico 2000 Project was another important research project, started in 1987 and promoted by the Consorzio, in conjunction with Florence and Pisa universities. It focused on creating better agronomic procedures, such as denser planting, soil management and better rootstocks, as well as techniques to limit soil erosion and the study of selected clones of Sangiovese, Canaiolo, Colorino and Malvasia Nera, used in the Chianti Classico blend. Marco Pallanti of Castello di Ama was one of the first pioneers back in 1984, even before the research project took off, to plant as many as 8,000 vines per hectare. By 1982, Pallanti was already producing selected Sangiovese single-vineyard wines under the labels San Lorenzo, Casuccia and Bertinga, and was the first Tuscan winemaker to produce, in 1985, a world-acclaimed Merlot, under the label 'l'Apparita'.

Most influential sommeliers

In April 2013, 32-year-old Luca Martini was recognised at London's Park Lane Hotel as 'The World's Best Sommelier 2013'. Martini already has a solid track record of winning titles, including the title of best Italian Sommelier in 2009, and Best Tuscan sommelier in 2007. Martini also runs his own restaurant, Osteria da Giovanna, in Arezzo. Cristiano Cini, owner of Arezzo's La Tagliatella Restaurant is also considered one of Italy's most influential

sommeliers. His experience as runner up in the Best Italian Sommelier championships in 2006, 2007 and 2008 earned him his current position, as responsible for Italy's technical board of AIS (Associazione Italiana Sommelier) in their national and international competitions. "Coming from Tuscany is already a plus," says Cini. "We are lucky to be surrounded by magnificent terroirs and sublime wines. However, we can't just sit on our laurels; the time has come for all of Tuscany to join forces and play as one team, up against worldwide competition."

Most influential restaurants

Tuscany has a number of great Michelin-starred restaurants, but the 3-star Florence-based Enoteca Pinchiorri is particularly notable for its excellent cuisine, and because it boasts one of the world's top cellars with over 140,000 labels. Another favourite Florence-based restaurant is Michelin-starred Cibreo, located in the S. Ambrogio market, and said to have one of Tuscany's top wine lists, along with an interesting range of French wines. Moving to the Tuscan countryside is 2-star Arnolfo, in Colle di Val d'Elsa, owned by the Trovato brothers, which focuses on Tuscan cuisine prepared with a light touch and focusing on flavours and textures. The restaurant carries an excellent wine list, featuring over 700 labels. In the Bolgheri area is Michelin-starred La Pineta at Bibbona, Gaja's favourite restaurant, which enjoys the perfect beachfront setting on Maremma's wild coastline. Chef Zazzeri's style is Mediterranean seafood, with no heavy sauces, but just fresh, light ingredients.

Notable wine shops

Recommended specialist wine shops, notable for their range of Tuscan labels and vintages, are: Fiaschetteria de' Redi and La Torre di Gnicche at Arezzo; Casa Porciatti at Radda in Chianti; I Terzi and San Domenico at Siena; Enoteca Gallo Nero at Greve; Oinocoé at Montepulciano; and Enoteca La Fortezza.

Sommeliers Cristiano Cini and Luca Martini place Enoteca Marcucci above all others, calling it one of the best in Italy for its impressive selection of over 3,000 vintages; the historic Enoteca Bonatti in Florence offers top Tuscan selection, as does Enoteca Molesini in Cortona, which offers more than 1,200 labels and an impressive knowledge of all Italian wines. "No visitor comes out with less than a couple of bottles under arm," says Cini. ■