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The Power of Tuscany

Italy's premier region delivers a wealth of great wines, with the
2017 vintage capping a run of excellent harvests

BY BRUCE SANDERSON

Photographs by Molchenphoto



STILL LIFE BY JEFF HARRIS

As in many wine regions around the globe, Tuscany has witnessed extreme weather over the past two decades. Blistering heat, combined with severe storms, frost and drought, is the new normal for this famed region of central Italy.

The 2017 growing season was hot, but it was the drought that left its mark, along with frost in some areas. “The 2017 vintage was quite unique,” says Antinori CEO Renzo Cotarella. “With the drought and frost, I haven’t seen any vintage like it in the past 20 years.”

At Bolgheri estates Ornellaia and Masseto, director Axel Heinz describes 2017 as a winemaker’s vintage. “If you got it wrong, it’s going to show.”

Based on my tastings over the past year, the best wines from the 2017 harvest are concentrated, maintaining freshness and well-integrated tannins for balance and harmony. At worst, the tannins are unripe, dry and astringent. The good news for fans of Tuscan reds—and of Sangiovese in particular—is the multitude of top labels available from the superb 2016 and 2015 harvests.

At the high end, a mix of super Tuscan, Chianti Classicos, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and Brunello di Montalcino *riservas* deliver plenty of excitement, while dozens of terrific wines on the value side round out the year’s offerings. (For an in-depth look at the 2015 Brunellos, see “Strapping Sangioveses” in the June 30, 2020, issue.)

Overall, I have reviewed more than 675 Tuscan wines in blind tastings at our New York office since my previous report (“Tuscan Harmony,” Oct. 31, 2019). Tuscany typically offers a cornucopia of vintages at any one time, and this year is no different, with my reviews ranging from 2019 to 2007. The majority of the wines, however, hail from recent harvests, led by the 2017s and 2016s, along with a number of newly released 2018s. Though not quite at the same level as its two predecessors, the 2017 vintage is an outstanding year overall, earning a rating of 93 points.



Masseto estate director Axel Heinz examines bottles inside this Bolgheri winery’s state-of-the-art cellar, where every vintage of the wine is stored, dating back to the original 1986 bottling.



This report’s top-scoring wine comes from the 2016 vintage: Antinori’s expressive Toscana Solaia (98 points, \$340), a wine of purity and finesse, with a vibrant structure that fits harmoniously with the cedar, iron, tobacco and fruit flavors. “The vintage was great, but we were obliged to do a strong selection in order to stress the quality of the wine,” explains Cotarella, adding that the final selection was 25% less than usual.

Since the 2015 vintage, Cotarella and his team have also started the blending process earlier. “Starting with the 2015,” he says, “we modified the blending approach as we now make a master blend—including the Sangiovese portion—in January, after the malolactic, keeping aside some lots that require a different barrel management due to their specific characteristics,” a reference to lots that are lighter or more structured. “These lots have been blended together with the master blend

during the aging period according to their evolution and to the style of the final wine we want to achieve.”

The Solaia is followed by a trio of 97-pointers from different areas of Tuscany. Carnasciale’s Toscana Il Caberlot 2016 (97, \$275/1.5L) is a project of the Rogosky family, whose tiny production comes from a cross between Cabernet Franc and Merlot planted in four parcels totaling 8.5 acres in Val d’Arno di Sopra, just east of Chianti Classico. Il Caberlot’s alluring aromas of black currant, cedar, lead pencil and iron are matched by its polished texture.

The Le Chiusse Brunello di Montalcino Diecianni Riserva 2010 (97, \$180) is the debut release of Lorenzo Magnelli’s new concept of *riserva*. He thinks *riservas* represent a different expression of a vintage, needing time to show their higher concentration and complexity, thus his wine’s 10 years of aging, four of those in large Slavonian oak casks. “Aging it longer is the character of a *riserva* in a better way,” Magnelli says. “Sangiovese needs time to express the *terroir*, and releasing the wine later helps people to understand this.” This complex wine is ready to enjoy now, featuring savory

and spicy cherry, plum, leather, iron and wild herb flavors.

Castello di Volpaia’s Chianti Classico Riserva 2016 (97, \$40), offering exceptional value, caps a brilliant trio of wines made by this producer in the stellar back-to-back 2015 and 2016 harvests, alongside the Chianti Classico Il Puro Gran Selezione 2015 (96, \$215) and Chianti Classico Coltassala Gran Selezione 2016 (95, \$80).

Among the other impressive wines at 96 points is one of the three Chianti Classico *gran selezione* from Castello di Ama, its Vigneto Bellavista 2016 (96, \$230). Ama’s Vigneto La Casuccia 2016 (95, \$230) and San Lorenzo 2016 (95, \$60) are close rivals, the latter a great value. Querciabella’s Toscana Camartina 2015 (96, \$137), a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Sangiovese, is a superb late release.

Another standout is the debut vintage of the Mazzei family’s new project, the Ipsus Chianti Classico Gran Selezione 2015 (96, \$395). As export manager Giovanni Mazzei explains, the story of this wine dates to 2006, when the family purchased the property adjacent to its Fonterutoli estate, Il Caggio, notable for its 16-acre *clos*. After



Le Chiusse winemaker Lorenzo Magnelli held back his 2010 Brunello *riserva* for a full decade before its release. The result is one of the year’s top-scoring wines, offering complex flavors, vibrant acidity and excellent balance.

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—Lorenzo Magnelli

vinifying the fruit from the site for a decade, the family decided that 2015 was the vintage to unveil Ipsus. “For some years, it has been a personal ambition to develop a wine from the exceptional Sangiovese vines of this new plot, and to pursue the Mazzei family’s wine-making traditions in my own image,” explains Giovanni, who represents the 25th generation of this historic clan of vintners. “Within Il Caggio, the ‘*clos*’ in particular, quickly surpassed our expectations, and the wine it gave us revealed a spectacular character of its own from the first vintage we tasted.” (For more on Ipsus, see my column on page 28.)

Six wines lead the pack from 2017. Antinori’s Toscana Solaia 2017 (95, \$340) is a worthy successor to the brilliant ‘16. “We were lucky because a light frost at the end of April reduced the crop, and the vines were better able to deal with the drought,” notes Cotarella. The small crop (70% of a normal yield), with its small berries, made it difficult to manage the tannins. No pump-overs were performed by the Antinori team, just punch-downs to soften the extraction, with the goal of smoother tannins.



Mazzei export manager Giovanni Mazzei (left) walks with his wife, Lara, and their two sons at his family's Fonterutoli estate in Castellina in Chianti, where a 15-year-long project to cultivate the neighboring property of Il Caggio has come to fruition with a classic-rated 2015 red.

The Fontodi Colli della Toscana Centrale Flaccianello (95, \$149), Masseto Toscana (95, \$814), Podere Poggio Scalette Alta Valle della Greve Il Carbonaione (95, \$67), Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Campo di Tenaglia (95, \$110) and Tenuta San Guido Bolgheri-Sassicaia Sassicaia (\$245) are the other classic-rated reds from 2017.

Masseto's Heinz describes the 2017 season as hot and dry in the spring and summer, with cool nights that saved the vintage, unlike 2009 and 2003. "The average temperatures during the harvest were identical in '17, '18 and '19," he says. "But what happened before was different." The drought resulted in small berries with thick skins—"the lowest berry weights I have seen in my entire career."

It was necessary to achieve ripe tannins, which meant not picking too early. Many had finished the harvest in Bolgheri by mid-September, but the second half of the month was cooler. Heinz

and his team finished picking at the end of September. "It was a vintage you had to read properly," he adds. "You couldn't make any mistakes, because it was not a forgiving vintage." The Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore 2017 (94, \$170) is another success for the vintage.

At Tenuta San Guido, estate director Carlo Paoli upped the percentage of Cabernet Franc slightly, from 10% to 17%–18%, due to its "fabulous ripening." Only the oldest Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc vines (32- to 48-years-old) were designated to Sassicaia. Fermentation was cooler, the maceration time shorter by about three to five days and the maturation in barrels was 19 months instead of 24. These decisions preserved the freshness and avoided the dry tannins that are the downside of the 2017 harvest.

Despite many top wines costing upward of \$100, Tuscany also shines when it comes to value. One of the best places to look for affordability is Chianti Classico, a denomination that offers terrific quality, yet whose prices have not caught up with those of its neighbors in Montalcino and Bolgheri.



FREE ALPHABETICAL CHART
Scan the QR code to see a list of scores and prices for all wines tasted for this report, or go to [WineSpectator.com/TuscanyAlpha103120](https://www.winespectator.com/TuscanyAlpha103120)

BRUCE SANDERSON'S RECOMMENDED WINES FROM TUSCANY

More than 675 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [WineSpectator.com/TuscanyAlpha103120](https://www.winespectator.com/TuscanyAlpha103120). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE	WINE	SCORE	PRICE
ANTINORI Toscana Solaia 2016	98	\$340	CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA Chianti Classico Coltassala Gran Selezione 2016	95	\$80
CARNASCIALE Toscana Il Caberlot 2016 (1.5L)	97	\$275	CECCHI Chianti Classico Valore di Famiglia Gran Selezione 2016	95	\$65
CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA Chianti Classico Riserva 2016	97	\$40	COLLE BERETO Chianti Classico Riserva 2015	95	\$45
LE CHIUSE Brunello di Montalcino Diecianni Riserva 2010	97	\$180	DEI Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Bossona Riserva 2015	95	\$65
CASTELLO DEI RAMPOLLA Toscana d'Alceo 2015	96	\$225	DIEVOLE Bolgheri Superiore Tenuta Meraviglia Maestro di Cava 2016	95	\$80
CASTELLO DI AMA Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista Gran Selezione 2016	96	\$230	FATTORIA DI FELSINA Chianti Classico Rancia Riserva 2016	95	\$60
CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA Chianti Classico Il Puro Gran Selezione 2015	96	\$215	FONTODI Colli della Toscana Centrale Flaccianello 2017	95	\$149
IPSUS Chianti Classico Gran Selezione 2015	96	\$395	IL MOLINO DI GRACE Chianti Classico Riserva 2016	95	\$33
LE MACCHIOLE Toscana Messorio 2016	96	\$225	LIVIO SASSETTI Brunello di Montalcino Dieci Pertimali 2007	95	\$200
QUERCIABELLA Toscana Camartina 2015	96	\$137	MASSETO Toscana 2017	95	\$814
ANTINORI Toscana Solaia 2017	95	\$340	MONTERAPONI Chianti Classico Il Campitello Riserva 2016	95	\$78
BARONE RICASOLI Chianti Classico Roncicone Gran Selezione 2015	95	\$85	PODERE POGGIO SCALETTE Alta Valle della Greve Il Carbonaione 2017	95	\$67
CASTELLO DEI RAMPOLLA Toscana Sammarco 2015	95	\$99	ROCCA DELLE MACIE Chianti Classico Sergioveto Riserva 2015	95	\$53
CASTELLO DI AMA Chianti Classico San Lorenzo Gran Selezione 2016	95	\$60	TENUTA DI TRINORO Toscana Campo di Tenaglia 2017	95	\$110
CASTELLO DI AMA Chianti Classico Vigneto La Casuccia Gran Selezione 2016	95	\$230	TENUTA SAN GUIDO Bolgheri-Sassicaia Sassicaia 2017	95	\$245
CASTELLO DI MONSANTO Chianti Classico Il Poggio Gran Selezione 2015	95	\$70	TENUTA SETTE PONTI Toscana Vigna dell'Impero 2016	95	\$115
			TOLAINI Cabernet Sauvignon Toscana Legit 2016	95	\$45
			TUA RITA Toscana Redigaffi 2016	95	\$300
			VECCHIE TERRE DI MONTEFILI Toscana Anfiteatro 2016	95	\$120

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE	WINE	SCORE	PRICE
CAIAROSSA Toscana Pergolaia 2016	94	\$28	MARCHESI DE' FRESCOBALDI Chianti Classico Tenuta Perano 2015	92	\$24
COLLE BERETO Chianti Classico 2017	94	\$28	NOZZOLE Chianti Classico Riserva 2016	92	\$30
MAZZEI Chianti Classico Ser Lapo Riserva 2016	94	\$28	QUERCIABELLA Maremma Toscana Mongrana 2018	92	\$22
CAPRAIA Chianti Classico Riserva 2015	93	\$30	CANDIALLE Chianti Classico La Misse 2016	91	\$23
CASTELLO DI ALBOLA Chianti Classico Riserva 2017	93	\$30	PODERE IL PALAZZINO Chianti Classico Argenina 2015	91	\$23
CASTELLO DI GABBIANO Chianti Classico Riserva 2015	93	\$22	TERENZUOLA Vermentino Colli di Luni-Tuscany Fosso di Corsano 2018	91	\$20
ISTINE Chianti Classico 2016	93	\$25	ANTINORI Toscana Villa Antinori 2017	90	\$20
LE MORTELLE Maremma Toscana Botrosecco 2017	93	\$30	BOSCARELLI Rosso di Montepulciano Prugnolo 2018	90	\$23
MONTESECONDO Chianti Classico 2017	93	\$28	CASTELLO DI MELETO Chianti Classico Meleto 2017	90	\$20
VAL DELLE ROSE Maremma Toscana Aurelio 2016	93	\$29	DEI Rosso di Montepulciano 2018	90	\$22
VILLA A SESTA Chianti Classico Riserva 2015	93	\$20	LAMOLE DI LAMOLE Chianti Classico Blue Label 2016	90	\$19
BINDELLA Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Tenuta Vallocaia 2016	92	\$26	LANCIOLA Chianti Colli Fiorentini 2017	90	\$15
CASA EMMA Chianti Classico 2017	92	\$21	LA BRACCESCA Rosso di Montepulciano Sabazio 2017	89	\$16
CASTELLARE DI CASTELLINA Chianti Classico Riserva 2017	92	\$22	RENZO MASI Toscana Erta e China 2017	89	\$14
CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA Chianti Classico 2016	92	\$25	VITICCIO Toscana Ferraiolo 2016	89	\$18
GIOVANNI PANIZZI Vernaccia di San Gimignano 2019	92	\$18	CASTELLO MONTAÚTO Vernaccia di San Gimignano 2018	88	\$13
IL MOLINO DI GRACE Chianti Classico 2016	92	\$26			
LA SALA Chianti Classico 2016	92	\$20			