

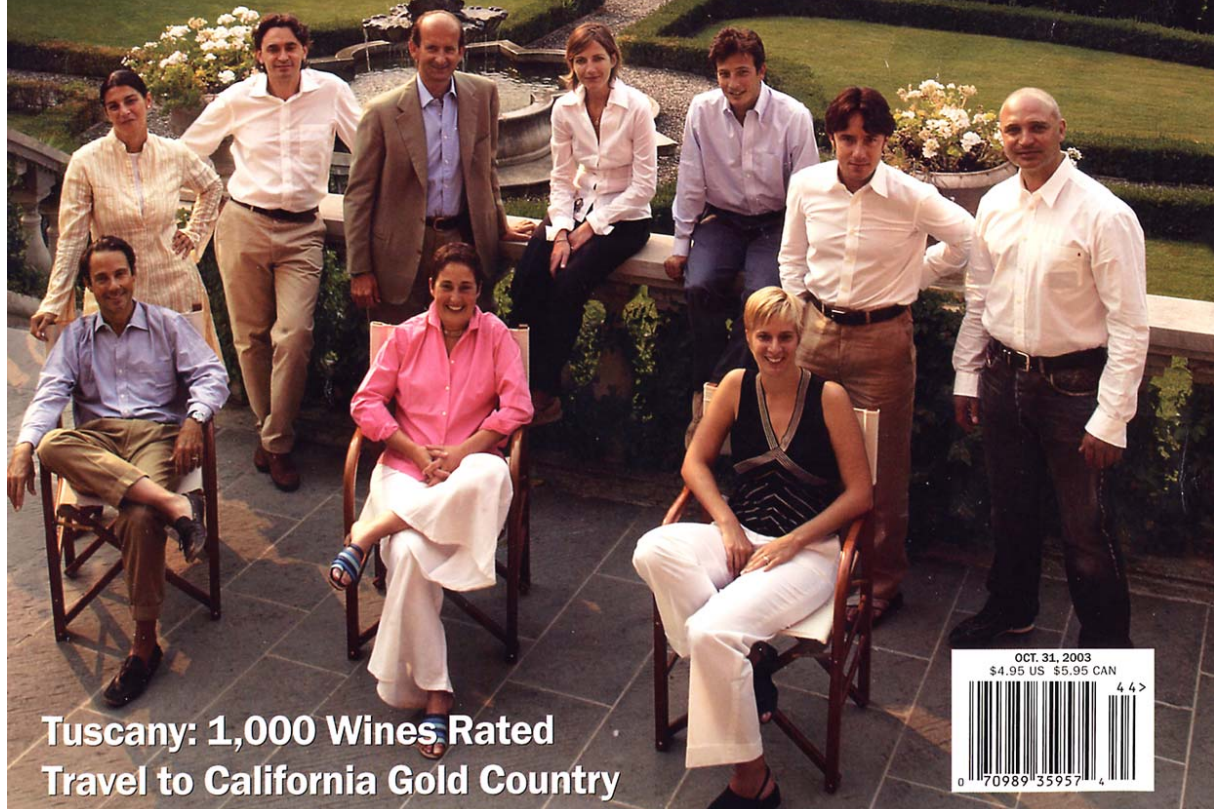
Wine Spectator

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Italy's New Faces

Fresh Approaches to an Ancient Wine Region

[PART THREE OF A SERIES]



Tuscany: 1,000 Wines Rated
Travel to California Gold Country



THE SAVVY SHOPPER

Big Reds and Bubblics Make Headlines

BY BRUCE SANDERSON

Warmth for the Soul

The abundance of bold, rich red wines in this issue suits the cooler weather ahead. Mainly from Tuscany and California, these soul-warming wines are the perfect matches for hearty stews, braised meats and roasts. And there's no better way to begin any occasion than with one of the many complex Champagnes currently on the market.

Remember when Tuscany meant Chianti and a handful of super Tuscans? This ever-changing landscape of vines now includes new appellations and regions, resulting in a plethora of unfamiliar names and wines. To help you sort out the newcomers from the established producers, senior editor and European bureau chief James Suckling sampled more than 1,000 new releases in his office in Tuscany over the past year. Turn to page 58 to see what's new and hot.

Overall, in this issue you'll find six classic-rated wines (95 to 100 points) and more than 90 outstanding wines (90 to 94 points) from among more than 1,200 wines included in our Buying Guide, with reviews of more than 575 new releases.

Tutti Toscana

It seems like everything is Tuscan under the sun today. New regions, new labels and new wineries continue to appear in wine shops and on

restaurant wine lists. With prices also escalating, here are a few suggestions for the value-minded. A good beginning is **Marchesi de' Frescobaldi Chianti Rufina Montesodi 2001** (93, \$40), a dark, blackberry- and mineral-flavored Sangiovese that's the best in a string of exciting Montesodis since the 1996 vintage. It's Highly Recommended. A little harder to find is the **Borgo Salcetino Rossole 2000** (91, \$32), a blend of Sangiovese and Merlot evoking berry and tobacco notes. **Podere La Brancaia** is a solid producer

whose **Chianti Classico 2001** (91, \$31) offers ripe black fruit, mineral and spice accents.

Lanciola Chianti Classico Le Masse di Greve 2001 (90, \$26) exhibits oak and plum flavors followed by a peppery finish. One of the best deals, however, is **Smart Buy Castello di Querceto Chianti Classico Riserva 1999** (90, \$23). Aromatic and full-bodied, it displays berry and spice notes. If you want an introduction to the region, try the **Monte Antico Toscana 2001** (88, \$12) for its ripe plum flavor and velvety tannins. It gets a Best Value nod. And don't forget the whites. **Smart Buy Cabreo Chardonnay Toscana La Pietra 2001** (88, \$17) delivers focused apple and vanilla flavors in a modern style.

Affordable Bubbly

Many consider Champagne a luxury wine and some bottlings are priced as such. Yet others offer relatively good value. If you want a great vintage Champagne, try to get a bottle or two of **Duval-Leroy Brut Blanc de Chardonnay 1996** (94, \$38). Its cashmere-like texture envelops citrus and honey notes in an elegant presentation. **Jacquart Brut Blanc de Blancs Mosaïque**

1996 (93, \$40) combines coffee with candied fruit flavors in a delicate way. Both are Highly Recommended. Double your pleasure with a pair from **Nicolas Feuillatte**: The creamy, peach-tinged **Brut Blanc de Blancs NV** (90, \$35) and vivacious, gingerbread-flavored **Brut Rosé NV** (90, \$35) show contrasting styles from the same producer. Ditto for **Montaudon**, whose Champagnes continue to impress me. The harmonious **Brut Chardonnay NV** (90, \$30) shows brioche and citrus notes; the **Brut Rosé Grande Rosé NV** (90, \$30) is redolent of red fruits, with accents of cinnamon and ginger. Shop around; Champagnes are often discounted.

Notable California Cabernets

Given its refreshing price, we wish there were more of the intense, berry- and coffee-flavored **Buehler Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Estate 2000** (90, \$30, 1,500 cases made). After more than a decade's hiatus, **Matanzas Creek** has released a Cabernet Sauvignon. Its **Sonoma County 2000** (90, \$35) is made in a rich, well-extracted style, with currant, anise and toasty oak notes.



Highly Recommended

SETTE PONTI Toscana Crognolo 2001 (92, \$35) With three consecutive outstanding vintages now, and this release equal to the 1999 in quality, Sette Ponti's Crognolo (Sangiovese with a dollop of Merlot) is no flash in the pan. Look for pretty plum and blackberry flavors with hints of toasty oak.

ITALY'S NEW GENERATION

A bright future in an ancient land

By James Suckling

At 9 o'clock on a midsummer evening, the blood-red sun slowly melts into the horizon, and a refreshing breeze begins to cool the hot, humid air. Men and women mingle around a swimming pool, their clothes as chic as the contemporary sculpture that surrounds them. The partygoers sip Champagne and sample canapés of raw fish and vegetables, laughing and conversing. • It could be New York's Hamptons, the French Riviera, or anywhere stylish people gather for fun. But this party takes place in the ancient hillsides of Tuscany during a small dinner for some of Italy's top young wine producers. • "This is like a beautiful dream," says Cesare Turini, 33, the Tuscan wine merchant

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFANO AMANTINI AND GUIDO COZZI

and international marketing consultant who organized the intimate dinner at his Zen-like house in the hills above Castelfranco di Sopra. The guests include some of the biggest names in Italian wine, such as Antinori and Frescobaldi, and nearly all of them are in their 30s. "If this is the new generation of Italian wine, then Italy is really going to go far," Turini declares.

It's hard to think of another wine-producing country where people in their 20s, 30s and 40s are working more diligently to improve on what their forefathers have given them. Vineyards, wineries, restaurants and wine shops in Italy are full of young people striving to provide the world with high quality wines. The men and women of this new generation are not only enhancing a winemaking tradition that goes back millennia, they are creating their own history in the world of Italian wine. They are responsible for new and exciting wines from just about every part of the country, from Piedmont in the north to Sicily in the south.

The following pages profile 10 of these accomplished young Italian wine professionals. It was difficult to select just 10 representatives of this ongoing renaissance, or *rinascimento*, in Italian wine, considering the hundreds of deserving candidates. But this select group illustrates what really is happening in the vineyards and wineries of Italy today.

Six are from Tuscany, the Italian wine region most popular among Americans and the one in which the greatest innovations in winemaking have occurred over the past two decades. Two come from the north, representing relatively small, traditional wine producers, one in Piedmont, the other in Trentino. The remaining two are Sicilians, highlighting the great potential for making world-class wines in southern Italy, particularly on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Southern Italy will inevitably be a source of fine wine for a new generation of wine lovers.

"We have a great opportunity to make a difference," says Albiera Antinori, 36-year-old daughter of Piero Antinori, the man most credited with pulling Italian wine into the 20th century. Their family's Florence-based firm has been making wine for more than seven centuries, but it's in the past decade that the Antinoris have made their best bottles. "The generation of my father was coming out in a devastated country after the war. We [the younger generation] didn't have to deal with that at all."

Indeed, the Italian winemaking generation of today is an educated, affluent group that has traveled the world to learn about quality viticulture and winemaking. Florentine Lamberto Frescobaldi graduated from the viticulture and enology program at the University of California, Davis, far from the thousands of acres of vineyards his family owns in Tuscany with its centuries-old traditions. "We are only beginning to make the great wines that are possible here in Tuscany and Italy at large," says Frescobaldi.

Many are working closely with their parents in writing the next chapter of the winemaking history books of their respective areas. For instance, Francesca Planeta, alongside her father, Diego, and two cousins, has created a spectacular winery in Sicily, producing international-style wines (such as blockbuster Chardonnays) and silky, indigenous reds (such as Nero d'Avola)

from pristinely kept vineyards in a handful of different areas on the island. "It was never a case of the father giving it all to the children," she says. "It was really the case of two generations working together. We really did it together. My father had the courage to do it with the new generation."

Others, such as Piedmont's Luca Currado Vietti and Trentino's Elisabetta Foradori, found entering the wine world more of an ordeal. After disagreeing with his father's tradition-bound approach to wine, Vietti left Italy for a few years in his early 20s to work in wineries in France and California and experience a new world of winemaking. Foradori, who had aspirations as a writer and musician, stepped into winemaking at 19 to help her mother, who was managing the small family winery after the tragic death of Elisabetta's father years before. In the end, it was family that brought them both into wine.

"They didn't say that I had to do this," says Foradori, who makes stylish reds from a little-known grape called Teroldego in the shadows of the Dolomite Mountains in Trentino. "I had a moral obligation. I was born in the vineyards. I always remembered that."

The calling to make fine wine is equally strong in the other four vintners profiled in this issue: Alberto Tasca d'Almerita, scion of Sicily's venerable Regaleali estate; Tuscany's Luca d'Attoma, a consulting enologist; Swiss-born Barbara Kronenberg-Widmer of Brancaia, and Fattoria Petrolu's Luca Sanjust, a celebrated artist who returned to the family estate.

"Once I dedicated myself to making wine, I knew that I could do nothing else," says Sanjust, who turned his small winery in the Tuscan hills into a super Tuscan powerhouse in less than a decade.

Very few of Italy's leading young vintners have done it all on their own; most have instead taken over from family or worked closely with the previous generation. "It's normal that it has worked that way," says Albiera Antinori. "Italy is still a country where the family is very important."

There are exceptions, however. Turini said his father was against him entering the wine trade and hoped he would work in the family's food distribution business. But the wine industry was just too exciting for him, and he began a small wine distribution company in Terranuova Bracciolini in the early 1990s that has evolved into the best in Tuscany. "I just loved wine," he says. "I loved the people and the product. I had to work in that world."

For the dinner at Turini's house, everyone has brought magnums of different wines to drink with the meal. The lineup is impressive, boasting everything from great 1999 super Tuscans to 1996 Barolo riservas. Most of the guests are already friends, or at least acquaintances, having met one another while selling wine in Italy or abroad. There's a friendly competition among them.

"Beautiful Chardonnay," says one about the 2001 Planeta. "Fantastic Brunello," says another of the 1997 Castelgiocondo Riserva, which is served later in the meal.

Everyone is clearly having a great time, enjoying the wine, food and conversation. As they share their wines, they radiate a real sense of pride, accomplishment and excitement. It's this positive attitude, this passion for wine, that defines the future of Italian winemaking.

10 Young Leaders

Italy has been rich in vineyards for millennia, but only in recent years have the country's wines truly achieved world-class quality. Now a new generation is shaping this long history in its own image, full of ambition, energy and talent. James Suckling and Jo Cooke profile 10 of Italy's most promising young wine professionals.

Barbara Kronenberg-Widmer

A Swiss woman finds her calling in Tuscany

Barbara Kronenberg-Widmer was in her last year of enology school in Zurich in 1998 when her father bought the 170-acre Brancaia estate in Maremma, the up-and-coming coastal region of Tuscany that some believe may one day deliver wines that rival Chianti Classicos or even Brunellos di Montalcino.

"I had no problem deciding on the subject of my final thesis," says the handsome blond, 32, who commutes between Zurich and Tuscany on a monthly basis. Her paper, "How to Build Up the Brancaia in Maremma Winery," has been a step-by-step manual for the development of the estate.

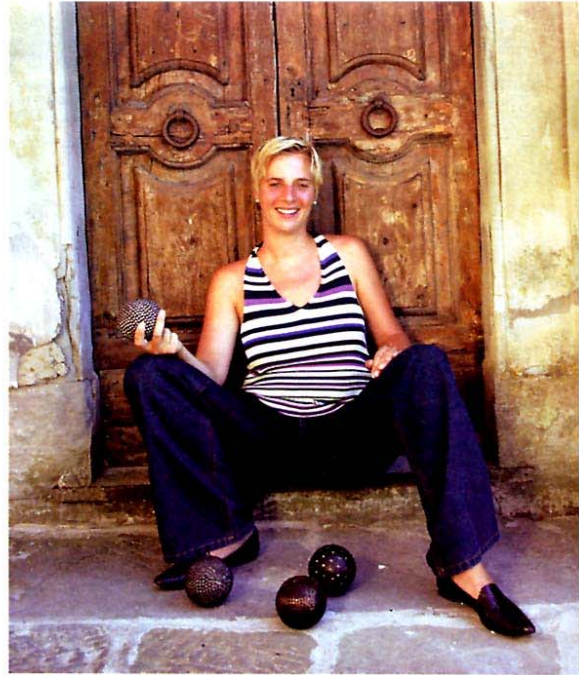
Brancaia in Maremma is located about 7 miles from the sea, southeast of the city of Grosseto. The property includes 87 acres of Sangiovese, Cabernet, Merlot and other varieties planted on steep hillsides. A large stone-faced winery blends in with the rugged terrain of the area. Kronenberg-Widmer's first wine from the estate, the 2002 vintage, is due for release in 2004.

"It's like a dream come true," enthuses the Swiss winemaker. "Brancaia in Maremma has been my baby from the start, and it has been a marvelous opportunity for me to be able to build up something from scratch. Maremma is a beautiful place and presents a new challenge for me as a winemaker."

Kronenberg-Widmer has already proven herself as a talented young winemaker. Besides overseeing the winery project in Maremma, she took over the winemaking at her family's winery in the hills of Chianti Classico near Castellina in Chianti, which is called Podere La Brancaia. Her first harvest there was 1998, while she was still in enology school in Zurich. With the help of consulting enologist Carlo Ferrini, she has produced some excellent wines—particularly the Brancaia 1998, a blend of Sangiovese, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. It was the first outstanding wine from the estate, and one of the vintage's best wines from the region.

The Brancaia estate in Chianti Classico was started by her father, Bruno Widmer, in 1980. It actually comprises two estates, the original Brancaia and another a few miles away called Poppi, which contains a new winery as well as the family home. The two sites together contain about 50 acres of vineyards, which provide grapes for the Chianti Classico and a couple of super Tuscan reds.

Kronenberg-Widmer says that it hasn't always been easy for the family, as non-Italians, to stake a claim to a piece of traditional Chianti Classico territory. "For some local producers," she says, "we are regarded with a little suspicion, because they think we might be trying to undermine the traditional winemaking methods." Indeed, Brancaia opted out of Chianti Classico's key grow-



While Swiss-born Barbara Kronenberg-Widmer is systematic about the development of her Brancaia in Maremma winery, her eclectic collections of items such as boule balls reveal a more fanciful side.

ers' association, Gallo Nero, in 2000, in order to concentrate more on the marketing of their Toscana IGT brands. "But, at the same time," she adds, "we've had a lot of support from producers in the area who were interested in what we were doing."

Kronenberg-Widmer originally planned a different career; she studied architecture for two years at the University of Zurich but never finished the program. In 1994, she took a trip down to the family property in Tuscany to think about her future. The visit coincided with the grape harvest.

"That visit was the turning point," she says. "I began to relate to the vineyards and the whole process of winemaking for the first time. I was converted."

Today, she spends more and more time in Tuscany with her husband, Martin Kronenberg, and their year-old daughter, Nina Johanna. Kronenberg is now in charge of sales for Brancaia. She and Martin are fanatical collectors—it could be pots, pans, old glasses, terra-cotta pie molds or boule balls—in short, anything that tickles her fancy as a self-confessed "lover of nice things."

"I'm very happy to be doing what I'm doing," she says, "and I really feel that I am able to make the wine I want. Luckily, there are a number of people out there who think the product is good." —J.C.