

WINE News

Italy in a bottle.



SEPTEMBER 10, 2018 FEATURES

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It's Indian Summer for Wines of Italy

By Greg St. Clair

Perfect timing for this newsletter — our latest boat from Italy has just arrived, temperature-controlled all the way from the winery to our warehouse! The heart of our Italian Direct Import portfolio arrives from Montalcino with Baricci, La Fortuna, Sesta di Sopra and Il Valentiano all showing their respective 2013 Brunello. The 2013 Brunello is excellent and the best producers made wines that showed more depth and structure without losing near-term drinkability either. We have a bevy of choices—click [here](#) for a link. Along with their Brunello are the 2016 Rosso di Montalcino wines, an outstanding vintage and by many thought to be as good if not better than the already legendary 2015!

Here's a link to all of our **2016 Rosso di Montalcino**. I'm especially excited about the return of La Massa, one of K&L's most successful wines in our history, and the 2015 vintage is stupendously good. It comes accompanied by the 97-point Wine Advocate-rated Bordeaux blend, the 2013 Giorgio Primo, and the 100% Sangiovese 2014 Carla 6. September always brings us our warm Indian summer and nothing is better than a refreshingly crisp white or flavorful rosé with zippy acidity. Enter Tenuta Rovaglia, our Lake Garda-based producer that's fast becoming a K&L favorite—you can measure that by how many of our staff take it home! You should try these wines out and see why we like them so much.

2015 Blason Bruma Bianco Friuli (\$16.99)

Giovanni Blason has always made wines with a great quality-to-value ratio, and has been a well-kept secret except for K&L shoppers—but this seems to finally have become public knowledge! *Decanter*, the English wine bible, rated the 2015 Blason Bruma Bianco **96** points! This wine is totally delicious and a blend of 70% Malvasia Istriana and 30% Friulano, cold macerated on the skins and fermented in barrique for one year with frequent battonage.



2016 Il Valentiano Rosso di Montalcino (\$14.99)

You might have heard how good the quality of the 2015 vintage is in Montalcino...believe me, 2016 is just as good if not better! Fabiano Ciacci's Rosso comes from Montalcino's western slope at just over 1,200 feet overlooking the hamlet of Tavernelle. The nose shows hints of chocolate and Marasca cherry and then segues into more savory aromatics; on the palate it's smooth and luscious.



2017 Abbazia di Novacella Schiava Alto

Adige (\$14.99) Schiava? It's always challenging in Italy to keep up with the myriad grape varieties, but Schiava is one you should know! Grown in the alpine region of Alto Adige, this lighter-bodied yet incredibly bold and flavorful wine is only 12.5% abv but packs a lively flavor profile that's full of cranberry, dried orange peel and black pepper. It's smooth and supple on the palate. Drink it at cellar temperature!



Cover photo: View from La Fortuna.

Price-to-Quality Hits from Tenuta Roveglia

I remember when I first tasted the wines from Tenuta Roveglia at a trade tasting here in San Francisco in early 2017. I knew the guy who was showing the wines and it just happened to be the first stand, so I stopped and tasted the wines as my first of the event. I was totally blown away by the quality and even more so at the pricing! However, they were so good I didn't trust myself—after all, they were the first things I'd tasted that day—so I went back in an hour and tasted again and thought they were even better than when I first tasted. Since they first arrived in April of 2017 the wines from Tenuta Roveglia have been some of our top-selling products.

We start with the **2016 Tenuta Roveglia “Limne” Lugana (\$12.99)**. It is a knockout. The nose is floral and spicy, and a bit of beeswax and honey flow from the glass. On the palate the wine has weight and a distinct richness, yet you immediately feel the snap of acidity, that vibrant center-palate zing that just lights up your mouth. **90 JS, 90 WE**



The **2014 Tenuta Roveglia “Vigne di Catullo” Lugana Riserva (\$17.99)** is awesome and recently awarded **96** points by Decanter. Its nose is sensual, full of stone fruits. On the palate the wine is full and there's a richness that gives creamy texture yet has no wood. The Catullo has excellent acidity with hints of minerality to lift it on the end to an excellent finish. **96 DC, 93 WE**

During my visit to the winery this April I noticed they had a rosé and I had been looking for an Italian rosé for us to import for a while, but hadn't found one that really thrilled me and was a great price. Then I tasted the stunningly good **2017 Tenuta Roveglia Chiaretto Rosé (\$12.99)**. The nose is full of strawberry with hints of almond flowers, while on the palate the wine has weight and richness but the perfect amount of acidity to brighten and clean with lots of fruit and excellent minerality, and a long and complex finish. **90 VN**



I love these wines from Tenuta Roveglia—they really thrill me, and even more so for the price-to-quality ratio.

Soave and Debonair? Soave Classico Wines of Le Battistelle

I always liked Soave but I was never sold on the concept until in the fall of 2014 I visited the town of Soave and participated in a tasting that Consorzio Soave was putting on for importers. I had never much thought about the difference between Soave and Soave Classico: to me, most of the Classico portions of other DOC classifications don't really have a real difference. However, at the end of my four days I walked away truly stunned by the difference between Soave and the incredibly exciting Soave Classico. Soave Classico is an extinct volcano and it rises up out of a plain with wide swaths of black basalt evident in the road cuts as I drove through this hilly region.

I had tasted the wines from Le Battistelle (“bat the stars” in Italian) at the tasting and thought them so good I went up to the winery to see where they were and what they were about. Gelmino Dal Bosco and his wife Cristina took me further up the hill to their vineyards, first the steeply sloped Le Battistelle and then on to the Roccolo del Durlo, laced with 100-year-old vines planted on their own roots. The wines show incredible depth. They're made from one of Italy's greatest white wine grapes, Garganega (so says Ian d'Agata, guru of Italian varieties, the other two being Verdicchio and Fiano), and have a remarkable aging ability.

The **2016 Le Battistelle “Battistelle” Soave Classico (\$13.99)** comes from their steepest vineyard slope facing more southwest. The nose of this wine is full of dried white flowers and crushed rock. On the palate it's a volcanic wine: super focused minerality and acidity race down the middle of your palate, giving the wine a great central backbone yet it shows a distinct layer of richness. The best I've tasted from this vineyard, and at only 12.5% abv.

The **2015 Le Battistelle “Roccolo del Durlo” Soave Classico (\$16.99)** has a nose full of spice, white flower and in this vintage an array of stone fruits burst from your glass. On the palate it has depth and richness, but this vintage shows an extra level of complex fruit, spice and flavor. Superb balance and length show up in a driving, persistent finish. You definitely need to try these!



K&L's Team Italy drops in on Le Battistelle.

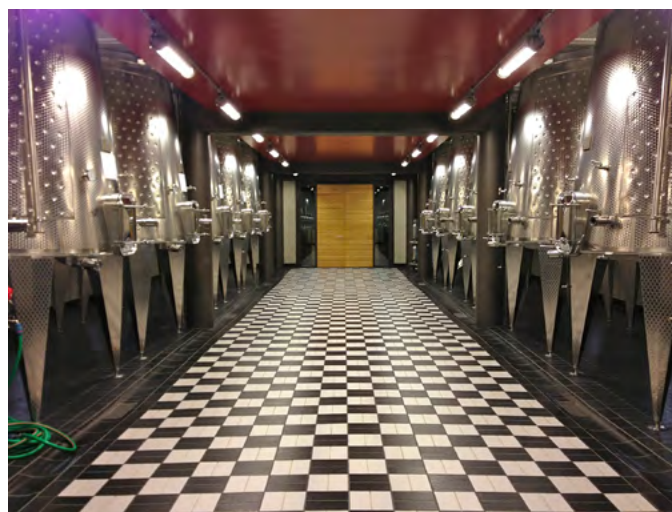
Tuscan Disruption: Bordeaux-Inspired Wines of La Massa

Giampaolo Motta is an interesting man. He's Neapolitan and he doesn't come from a winemaking family—his family is in the textile business. Years ago he decided to become a winemaker but he was not your average guy going to the local agrarian or enology school—nope, he wanted to study in Bordeaux, and you can't blame a guy. Way back then, Bordeaux was the center of the wine world, especially for winemaking.

He finished his degree, but more importantly he came back to Italy with a passionate love of Bordeaux, all things French, and a desire to make wine. He purchased property in one of Tuscany's most famous appellations, Chianti Classico, and in Chianti's most heralded zone, the Conca d'Oro or "golden conch" in Panzano. Giampaolo became an impassioned Chianti producer, making wines of balance, perfume, body and staying power, and was headed toward becoming an important player in the quality Chianti Classico market when things went a bit sideways.

For those of you not familiar with Italy, let me explain a bit: politics is a game played at every level of life in Italy and for a free-spirited Neapolitan (a culture famous for playing outside the lines) the players adding layers of bureaucracy attached to myriad laws and DOCG regulations was driving him crazy. The Consorzio Chianti Classico that governs producers and creates the regulations is an excellently run group and they've made some great strides. However, there are quite a few larger producers who buy grapes to make large quantities of wines or just produce very large quantities of wine that want the change toward higher quality to proceed at a pace they can keep up with and doesn't cause too much anxiety or cash outlay.

You might know the Consorzio more by their black rooster logo, famous around the world and heralded as a symbol of quality. Giampaolo's an impatient man and the speed at which he felt the rules were changing, he thought, was diluting the quality of Chianti Classico instead of raising it. Giampaolo in his early days was a rally car driver and passionate fan of motor sports, and in particular of Ferrari (he didn't adopt all things French!). I introduce it now so that when I say at this stage he blew a gasket it has more contextual meaning, and isn't merely a catchy phrase! He made an incredibly risky and dramatic decision by deciding to leave the Consorzio and stop making Chianti Classico. He put his faith in his enology school years and decided to make Bordeaux...in Chianti Classico. It was an enormous undertaking. You just can't change all of your vineyards overnight, but as I mentioned, he's an impatient man and he pretty much did. He decided as well that if he was going to replant the entire estate he might as well get it right, and commissioned a geologist soil expert to map his entire property.



Starting line: the cellar at La Massa.

The geologist dug six-foot-deep trenches all over the property to the point of it looking like a graveyard, but he came away with a super detailed map of what was going on sub-surface that allowed Giampaolo to plant his specific varieties to the perfect soil. He also installed remote, automated weather stations all over the vineyards so he could accurately measure rainfall, temperatures, wind and soil humidity—he was being very scientific in his approach. Giampaolo hired Bordeaux enologist Stephen Derencourt, one of the most respected men in Bordeaux, as his consultant and hired a French architect to build him a new winery—as I mentioned, he's got this French thing. He did, however, detail a specific interior for the new winery that makes the tank room look like a Ferrari engine with a checkered flag floor and Ferrari-red walls and ceiling—he's still Italian, after all!

The result is the **2013 La Massa "Giorgio Primo" Toscana (\$79.99)**. It is a blend of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot, and it is stunningly good. And for the quality, especially compared to what you'd get in Napa these days, it's a steal as well. And **97** points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, to boot.

One of our most successful wines here at K&L has been the winery's flagship blend, the La Massa. The **2015 La Massa "La Massa" Toscana (\$19.99)** is a blend of 60% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Alicante Bouschet and I think it is the winery's best to date. **94 JS**

Lastly, the **2014 La Massa "Carla 6" Toscana (\$79.99)** is an all-Sangiovese blend named for Motta's daughter. The first couple of vintages were a bit lacking, I thought, but this wine has made a dramatic stride forward. It's very good. **95 RP**





Zannoni family. Mike “Guido” Parres and I stayed so often at their winery we became part of the family, watching Angelo get married and then have twin daughters, and his sister Romina get married and have a daughter and a son. The family is real salt of the earth, Montalcino natives that make outstanding wine. Their winery (and home) is right next to Fuligni, just a bit outside of the town of Montalcino on the east side where they celebrated their 100th anniversary a few years ago. Back in the pre-global warming days the east side of Montalcino was not always an easy place to get a lot of ripeness, so Gioberto along with many others, like his neighbor on the east side, Siro Pacenti, bought on Montalcino’s south slope just below Castelnuovo dell’Abate on old Ciacci Piccolomini property. This southern slope region is a soil called terra rossa, or red earth, and yes, it is very red and the wines from here taste of bottled sunshine while adding an important textural component to flesh out the backbone of their estate vineyards. Here’s what just landed on our boat!

When I visited the winery in February the wine that Angelo was most interested in me tasting was the **2016 La Fortuna “Fortunello” Rosso di Toscano (\$14.99)**. It’s 100% Sangiovese and I have to admit I was floored, it was so rich, full of plummy, wild cherry fruit, and with great balance, it was amazing and a testament to the quality of the 2016 vintage.

The **2016 La Fortuna Rosso di Montalcino (\$17.99)** is a serious wine, complex, powerful and layered yet oh so drinkable now, full of lush plum and chocolate flavors that coat the palate, yet the intrinsic structure of this outstanding vintage gives the wine tremendous depth, concentration and dazzling aromas.

2013 La Fortuna Brunello di Montalcino (\$34.99)
The 2013 vintage for La Fortuna is excellent. The nose is full of wild cherry, fresh herbs and hints of plums. On the palate the wine shows the richness of southern Montalcino and a vibrant finish. **93 JS, 92 WS**

The **2012 La Fortuna Brunello di Montalcino Riserva (\$79.99)** received **97** points from *Wine Spectator*:

“Perfumed, featuring a subtle mix of strawberry and cherry fruit and wild herb aromas. Vibrant and dense, with fine acidity driving the long finish. Though elegant, there is intensity and fine energy on the aftertaste. Best from 2022 through 2028.”



Good Fortune: New La Fortuna

I remember meeting Angelo Zannoni and his father Gioberto in Santa Monica back in November of 2003. They were traveling with the Consorzio Brunello di Montalcino, doing a road show in Los Angeles and New York. I’ve always been passionately interested in Brunello so I jumped at the chance to taste a whole slew of wines and meet producers. I already knew quite a few producers but I was just beginning our Direct Import business and was on the lookout for new blood. I tasted La Fortuna’s wines and was really impressed. They had an advance sample of the 1999 (one of my favorite vintages) and it blew me away, so much so I took a glass to another producer who had become a good friend: Vincenzo Abbruzzese, the owner of one of Montalcino’s most famous wineries, Valdicava. I asked him to taste and let me know what he thought: his eyebrows raised immediately in surprise, just like mine had—the quality was outstanding! That became the first wine we imported from them in a long relationship with the

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