

Tenuta di Trinoro: Tenuta di Trinoro 1997-2005

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1997 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro (magnum) 93
1998 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro 95
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2001 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro 96
2003 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro 90
2004 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro 92
2005 Tenuta di Trinoro Tenuta di Trinoro (from tank) (93-96)

Nestled among the soft undulating hills of the Val d'Orcia, in the province of Siena, **Tenuta di Trinoro** gives new meaning to the expression "in the middle of nowhere." Andrea Franchetti is the man behind the singular wines of this small estate. Though somewhat of an eccentric, Franchetti is down to earth and unassuming, qualities made all the more remarkable given his aristocratic lineage. In today's marketing-conscious world it is refreshing to spend time with a producer who is so brutally candid. Franchetti's career has encompassed many different activities, including importing fine wines into the US to his latest adventure, producing some of the most exciting wines to come out of Sicily's emerging Mount Etna appellation. As if that were not enough, in 2007 Franchetti will follow in the footsteps of Michel Rolland and Denis Dubourdieu in making the 2007 "Episode 3" wine at Chateau d'Arsac, in the southern Medoc.

As Franchetti gives me a tour of the vineyards in his beat up station wagon I find myself completely immersed in a feeling of remoteness and serenity which is oddly stressful to a city dweller. To say that Franchetti is obsessed with quality is a gross understatement. We pass a parcel planted with Cabernet Franc, but the fruit lies shriveled on the vine because Franchetti wasn't happy with the quality so he didn't bother harvesting the fruit.

When he is at Trinoro Franchetti lives in a rustic home at the top of the hill which offers extraordinary views of the isolated surrounding landscape. Like many estates that are born from an agrarian tradition Trinoro also produces small amounts of olive oil and other crops. Franchetti fervently believes that the most complex and expressive wines he makes are those that are blends of the four main varietals he grows on the property: Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. Franchetti no longer produces his Palazzi (Merlot and Cabernet Franc) and Cincinnato (Cesanese d'Affile) bottlings because he found himself bored by those wines. In addition to Tenuta di Trinoro there is a second wine, Le Cupole di Trinoro, which is made from the barrels that aren't deemed to be of the exacting quality Franchetti requires for his 'Grand Vin' and which is priced much more accessibly.

The vines are planted at altitudes ranging from 500 to 700 meters using a high density of approximately 9,000 plants per hectare, which was very unusual for Tuscany when the first plots were planted in 1992. The soils at Trinoro are quite poor, which along with the tight spacing stresses the vines and encourages them to develop stronger, deeper root systems. Franchetti classifies the soils at Trinoro into two major sub-divisions, using the St. Emilion terms "côtes" and "graves" to differentiate between the soils which are composed primarily of clay and limestone on the upper ridges and the more gravelly terrain which is found on the lower portions of the

vineyards. Yields are extremely low and range from 15 to 26 quintals per hectare, depending on the vintage. Franchetti remains deeply influenced by the wines of Bordeaux, and many of his cuttings come from some of that region's top estates, such as Vieux Chateaux Certan, which is the source of his Cabernet Franc.

Franchetti favors late harvests that push ripeness to the extreme. This is clearly a high-stakes approach to winemaking as the likelihood of rain and other inclement conditions increases as the harvest season moves into the Fall. Franchetti typically picks his Merlot in beginning of October while the Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot are usually picked towards the end of the month, although in some years, such as 2004, the harvest can stretch into November. Because of the extended growing season at Trinoro, the quality of the harvested fruit varies quite a bit from year to year, as does the final blend of the wine.

In the cellar Franchetti favors small fermentation tanks which allow him to vinify each parcel separately. The wines are vinified using indigenous yeasts and undergo varying fermentation/maceration times that can last a few days or as much as a few months, as Franchetti often leaves a small portion (around 15%) of the wine in contact with the skins for several months. Walking through the cellar in late 2006 I tasted many small lots from barrel, many of which had already been selected for the Tenuta. Franchetti employs 100% new French oak for the Tenuta and the period of barrel aging varies from year to year. The wines are not filtered but do undergo a slight egg-white clarification prior to being bottled.

The **1997 Tenuta di Trinoro** (60% Cabernet Franc, 20% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Petit Verdot) is a phenomenal effort for a first wine. Tasted from magnum, it still shows a deeply saturated color, with a superb nose that is followed by opulent layers of jammy ripe fruit, chocolate, cassis, menthol and sweet toasted oak. Ample and full-bodied on the palate, it is absolutely irresistible. The warm vintage produced a deeply concentrated, powerful wine that promises to drink well for another 10-15 years, even if it doesn't quite possess the detail of the very finest vintages. Although Tenuta di Trinoro was produced in 1995 and 1996, the first commercial release was the 1997. **93**/Anticipated maturity: 2007-2017. As hard as it may seem to believe the **1998 Tenuta di Trinoro** (70% Cabernet Franc, 20% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot) is even more concentrated than the 1997. Showing overt varietal Cabernet Franc notes on the nose, it is a more nuanced wine than its older sibling, with a deeply expressive core of sweet dark fruit that blossoms on the palate with exceptional length and superb persistence. Still somewhat tight and clenched, it comes across as requiring at least another few years of cellaring. It is a remarkable achievement from Andrea Franchetti. **95**/Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021.

The **1999 Tenuta di Trinoro** (70% Cabernet Franc, 20% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot) presents a distinctly over-ripe, almost raisinated personality, along with notes of chocolate and sweet toasted oak on a massively concentrated frame, with outstanding length and a lingering touch of sweetness on the finish. It shows excellent balance but should be a relatively early-maturing Tenuta di Trinoro. As befits a producer who pushes the envelope, with this wine Franchetti seems to have gone a bit too far. **90**/Anticipated maturity: 2007-2017. Franchetti once again takes ripeness to the extreme with his stunning **2000 Tenuta di Trinoro** (55% Cabernet Franc, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot). It is a flamboyant wine packed with generous sensations of blackberry liqueur, jammy dark fruit, bell peppers, cassis and minerals. Fat and opulent on the palate, it displays a youthful, muscular personality, with outstanding finesse for a wine of this size. It is an awesome effort. "The 2000 is really my first important wine," says Franchetti. "The vines had a little age on them so the tannins are finer. The previous vintages also taught me a lot about when to harvest my various plots." **95**/Anticipated maturity: 2010-2020. The estate's **2001 Tenuta di Trinoro** (48% Cabernet Franc, 22% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Petit Verdot) is simply a wine to marvel over. The cool, long growing season provided Franchetti with the perfect conditions with which to harvest each parcel at the optimal level of ripeness and he fully captures the potential of this important vintage in the breathtaking 2001. Incredibly detailed for such a big wine, it presents highly expressive aromatics along with

endless layers of fruit that burst from the glass, showing exceptional depth and fine, silky tannins on the long finish. Stunning in its overall balance, the 2001 is a wine I found myself coming back to often. **96**/Anticipated maturity: 2011-2023.

The estate's **2003 Tenuta di Trinoro** (42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Cabernet Franc, 16% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot) presents notes of jammy, over-ripe dark fruit and a plush personality. Made in super-concentrated style, the full-throttle 2003 comes across as somewhat heavy and ponderous. It should be accessible relatively early. "Obviously 2003 was a very hot vintage. Still, I am happy with our result. I think the wine is very well-balanced considering the conditions we had to work with," says Franchetti. **90**/Anticipated maturity: 2009-2018. The **2004 Tenuta di Trinoro** (83% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot, 4% Cabernet Sauvignon) is an atypical wine for this estate owing the high percentage of Merlot in the final blend. It is a very fine Tenuta di Trinoro, showing plenty of super-ripe jammy fruit, with an expansive, generous presence on the palate, superb length and fine tannins on the finish. It is a more linear version of this wine but its slightly roasted character leads me to believe that it won't be one of the estate's longest-lived wines. "Our plants were still recovering from the severe conditions of the preceding vintage," explains Franchetti. "Flowering was late and irregular. As a result we had trouble achieving our desired level of ripeness in many sites. The core of this wine comes from a terrific Merlot vineyard that I always use to make the Tenuta." **92**/Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022. Franchetti's **2005 Tenuta di Trinoro** is shaping up to be another winner. Officially listed as 63% Merlot, 18% Cabernet Franc, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon and 6% Petit Verdot, Franchetti says the percentage of Merlot is closer to 90%. Tasted from tank, this sample of the final blend presents generous notes of blueberries, blackberries, graphite, minerals and sweet toasted oak on a full-bodied frame. It is an incredibly pure and expressive effort, with superb intensity and length, as well as exceptional overall balance. It offers outstanding potential and may very well turn out to be another profound wine from this estate. "In 2005 we had a picture-perfect harvest," says Franchetti. "In fact you couldn't have scripted a better set of conditions. The Merlot we brought in was beautiful. Then it started to rain in October, and that compromised the rest of our harvest. Thankfully 2006 is a more normal vintage. I was starting to get sick of all this Merlot," says Franchetti with a laugh." The 2005 saw a brief period of roughly 7 months in oak prior to being racked into cement. "I used to give my wines 18 months in new oak because that is what conventional wisdom held, but with the 2005 I thought the wine was starting to take on too many oak flavors so I moved it into cement where it will stay until it is bottled." (**93-96**)/Anticipated maturity: 2015-2027.

Our tasting concluded with Franchetti's 2004 and 2005 Passopisciaro, one of the wines he is making on Mount Etna. The cool-climate Mount Etna is rapidly proving to be one of Italy's most exciting re-discovered wine regions and in the hands of the inspired Franchetti the indigenous Nerello Mascalese shows much promise. These wines are set to challenge consumers' long-held perceptions about wines from Sicily.

—Antonio Galloni