

# TUSCANY TRIUMPHANT

A TRIO OF CHALLENGING YEARS CULMINATES IN THE SUPERB 2015 VINTAGE

► BY BRUCE SANDERSON ◀



Cinzia Merli, owner of Bolgheri's Le Macchiole, steered the winery to success in 2012, producing one of this report's top wines.

A succession of difficult vintages has kept Tuscan vintners on their toes in recent years, and though there are excellent wines among the current releases, lovers of the region's styles must choose carefully to find bottlings with balance, ripe fruit and the ability to age.

All three growing seasons from 2012 through 2014 presented challenges in this central Italian region. In 2012, heat and lack of water were the culprits, while both 2013 and 2014 were cooler years with later harvests. The 2014 campaign in particular experienced a cold, wet summer, making it essential to manage the vineyards correctly and practice strict selection at harvest and in the cellar.

"Due to such a difficult growing season and maturation, 2014 was a really tough year," reports Giovanni Folonari of Tenute Ambrogio and Giovanni Folonari, which produces wines in Chianti Classico, Montalcino, Montepulciano and Maremma. "Fortunately, unlike other parts of Italy, we did not have any devastating weather conditions. Therefore, with the correct vineyard management, we were able to obtain a healthy crop. Again, due to the weather this year, only super high quality labor in the vineyards could lead to a good harvest."

But there is a silver lining to these gray clouds. In 2015, Tuscany experienced glorious weather, with ample water supplies, sunshine and warmth, resulting in a crop of ripe, balanced grapes. The 2015 whites and a handful of early reds indicate this will be an excellent vintage. Earlier this year, I spent a week in Chianti Classico and

Montalcino, tasting some stellar 2015s from tank and barrel. These will be released over the next two to five years.

Despite the difficulties in 2014, the single-vineyard Cabernet Francs from Tenuta di Trinoro, at the southern end of Tuscany's Val d'Orcia, are impressive—the best from that harvest I have tasted to date. The estate's Toscana Campo di Camagi (95 points, \$110), which shows the greatest density and power, comes from the site with the highest elevation; the Toscana Campo di Tenaglia (95, \$100) hails from the poorest, stoniest mix of limestone and clay; and the Toscana Campo di Magnacosta (94, \$120), from a lower-altitude plateau, offers the most floral, fruity and elegant profile of the three.

These three wines used to go into the Trinoro Toscana IGT (2014: 94, \$210), but as their individual personalities emerged over the years, proprietor Andrea Franchetti decided to bottle them separately. (For more on Franchetti, see Robert Camuto's profile beginning on page 81.)

In 2013, Tuscany's coastal areas performed well, with Bolgheri fielding top wines such as Tenuta San Guido's Bolgheri-Sassicaia

Sassicaia (95, \$235), a racy, tightly wound style, showing intensity and finesse, and Antinori's Bolgheri Superiore Guado al Tasso (94, \$125), also supple in texture and refined. (The 2013 Masseto was not released in time for this report.)

Farther inland, the Chianti Classico zone excelled in 2013, with Antinori leading the way with two cuvées from its Tignanello vineyard: Toscana Tignanello (94, \$105) and Chianti Classico Marchese Antinori Riserva (93, \$35). Barone Ricasoli's Toscana Casalferro (93, \$65), from 100 percent Merlot, shows silk and polish, with a backbone of vibrant acidity and iron. The Podere Poggio Scalette Alta Valle della Greve Il Carbonaione (93, \$75) also displays a silky texture matched to density and pure blackberry, blueberry and black pepper flavors. And from Panzano's famed Conca d'Oro come the Fontodi Colli Toscana Centrale Flaccianello (93, \$120) and Castello dei Rampolla Chianti Classico (93, \$38). Both the Chianti Classicos in this group offer terrific value.

There are fine reds from the 2012 vintage as well, the most impressive being the Le Macchiole Toscana Messorio (95, \$225), an homage to the Merlot gods.

As good as these wines are, the Brunello di Montalcino riservas from 2010 steal the show, fielding 15 classic-rated wines (95 to 100 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale), led by the very Burgundy-like Uccelliera Brunello di Montalcino Riserva (98, \$145). (For a more in-depth analysis, see "Wine Focus: Brunello di Montalcino 2011" in the Aug. 31 issue.)

These are the highlights from the more than 725 Tuscan wines I have blind-tasted in our New York office since my previous report ("A Tale of Two Tuscans," Oct. 31, 2015). As always, Tuscan wines available on retail shelves in the United States span a number of vintages, in this case from 2015 back to 2006. The size of the region is reflected in the different levels of quality. In general, vintage is crucial but can vary from the Tuscan coast to the hills of Chianti Classico. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at [www.winespectator.com/103116](http://www.winespectator.com/103116).)

The bulk of the 2015s released as of press time are whites, led by a pair of Vermentinos. Poggio al Tesoro's Vermentino Toscana Solosole (90, \$23), its best to date, is harmonious and juicy, with peach, melon, sage and white pepper flavors, and Antinori's Vermentino Bolgheri Tenuta Guado al Tasso (89, \$25) exudes floral, peach, lemon and saline notes, with a ripe, tangy character. Early indications from two bargain reds also foreshadow the potential of the vintage. Castello di Vicchiomaggio's Chianti Classico San Jacopo (89, \$15) and Castello di Volpaia's Cabernet Sauvignon Maremma Toscana Prelius (89, \$15) both burst with rich fruit.

The highest-rated 2014s in this report are almost entirely IGTs, hailing from both coastal and inland areas, including the Val d'Orcia and Chianti Classico. In addition to those mentioned above, the Tenuta di Trinoro Toscana Le Cupole (93, \$27), La Braccessa Syrah Cortona Achelo (92, \$22), Badia a Coltibuono Chianti Classico (89, \$20) and Brancaia Toscana Tre (89, \$23) all offer great value in



Marchese Nicolò Incisa della Rocchetta, president of Bolgheri's Tenuta San Guido, released the top Tuscan wine of 2013, a classic example of the highly sought-after Sassicaia bottling.

a year that posed challenges to achieving full ripeness and balance.

June and July were rainy, and it was still raining in mid-August. By the end of the month, the grapes were ripening, but rain continued to plague growers, according to Barbara Widmer, whose family owns Brancaia, a collection of two estates, one in Castellina in Chianti Classico and one in Maremma. "As long as you have grapes in the vineyard, you have to fight for them," she says. "Otherwise, you have to wait another year."

Riccardo Campinoti, proprietor and winemaker at Le Ragnaie in Montalcino, told me in April when I visited that he won't make any Brunello in 2014. "At this point, I think I will bottle a Rosso di Montalcino and maybe two single-vineyard Rossos," he said.

Other estates I visited will produce much smaller volumes due to a strict selection of the best fruit. At Montalcino's Le Chiuse, for example, Lorenzo Magnelli said he will bottle only one 30-hectoliter cask of Brunello (one-quarter of the producer's normal Brunello volume) and all the other lots will be declassified into Rosso. "It was difficult in 2014," he concedes. "It wasn't so much disease as lack of sun.

We just couldn't get concentration into the grapes."

In 2013, the vast size of Tuscany prevented a uniform growing season. The coastal areas of Bolgheri and Maremma had success, as did Chianti Classico. In these regions, the top wines show refinement and vibrant structures. The cooler weather and rainfall that



**"AS LONG AS YOU HAVE GRAPES IN THE VINEYARD, YOU HAVE TO FIGHT FOR THEM. OTHERWISE, YOU HAVE TO WAIT ANOTHER YEAR."**

**—BARBARA WIDMER, OF BRANCAIA**



Brancaia's Castellina estate in Chianti Classico is one of two properties operated by the producer in Tuscany. The winery achieved success in consecutive vintages, releasing an outstanding Chianti in 2013 and a great-value IGT bottling in 2014.

spread throughout the spring, summer and fall resulted in a later harvest. The yields were normal for some, and up to 30 percent lower than average for others.

"2013 was fresher, with better distributed rains than 2012," says Antinori CEO Renzo Cotarella. "The wines are vibrant, slightly acidic and fresh, with pleasant tannins. They're very savory, more refined, but less muscular."

Other wines to seek out from 2013 include Tenuta Sette Cieli Bolgheri NO14 (93, \$42), a Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, and the distinctly Mediterranean Ampeleia Costa Toscana Kepos (92, \$20), made from Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan, Alicante Bouschet and Marselan, from the Tuscan coast. A trio from the heartland bears out Chianti Classico's reputation for producing some of the best values in Tuscany: Brancaia Chianti Classico Riserva (92, \$40), Fattoria di Felsina Chianti Classico Berardenga (92, \$26) and Villa Cafaggio Chianti Classico (92, \$23). And from the historic Montepulciano zone, look for Bindella's Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Tenuta Vallocaia (92, \$26).

Heat and drought were the major weather elements in 2012, conditions that are evident in the density and assertive tannins of the wines. It was a



vintage that favored French grape varieties in all parts of Tuscany, though some Sangiovese-based reds also did well.

Bolgheri's Le Macchiole was a big success in 2012, not only with its Messorio bottling (95, \$225), which leads the pack, but also with its polished, Syrah-based Toscana Scrio (94, \$180), showing violet aromas and black cherry and raspberry fruit shaded by new oak, and its Toscana Paleo Red (93, \$110), with fragrant, juicy black currant, cherry, cedar, herb, coffee and spice flavors characteristic of Cabernet Franc.

According to Le Macchiole owner Cinzia Merli, the 2012 growing season, which started out hot and dry, initially did not look

promising. "All the vineyard work was aimed at protecting the vines' vegetative cycle by working the soil's surface layer and carefully removing the secondary shoots, but not topping [hedging] the plants, to allow the vines to deal with the summer's heat wave," she explains. "This proved to be successful. By the middle of summer [Aug. 15], the weather changed, bringing winds and rainfall, and the vegetative cycle recovered its strength and led to excellent ripening."

Other notable blends of mainly French varieties include the Antinori Toscana Solaia (93, \$325), Arcanum Toscana Il Fauno (93, \$30), Grattamacco Bolgheri Superiore (93, \$156), Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore (93, \$240) and Quercia-bella Toscana Palafreno (93, \$189), this last example from 100 percent Merlot.

The standout Sangiovese wines are the Bibi Graetz Toscana Testamatta (94, \$180); the Rocca delle Macie Chianti Classico Riserva di Fizzano Gran Selezione (93, \$38), which adds 5 percent Merlot; the traditionally styled Rodano Chianti Classico (93, \$20); and the San Giusto a Rentennano Toscana Percarlo (93, \$120), made entirely from the estate's best selection of Sangiovese despite the IGT designation.

From a value perspective, the following reds from around the region deliver excellent quality for the dollar: the Villa Pillo Toscana Borgoforte 2013 (90, \$12), a blend of 50 percent Sangiovese, 40 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 10 percent Merlot; the Fattoria di Felsina Chianti Colli Senesi Castello di Farnetella 2013 (91, \$15); and the Vecchia Cantina di Montepulciano Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Incanto 2012 (90, \$15).

Vintages play a significant role in Tuscany, and quality in any given year can vary from zone to zone. The 2012s are the ticket if you prefer more robust and muscular reds, with rustic tannins, while those who lean toward elegance and finesse should choose from among the best 2013s. And for wines that will be approachable soon, the top 2014s are also fresh and elegant but typically don't have the concentration for aging.

The 2015s show the most promise. Look for the early releases now, which display the ripe fruit of the vintage, while waiting for the more serious, cellar-worthy labels to reveal the deeper character of their *terroir* over the coming years.

Senior editor Bruce Sanderson is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Tuscany.

## Rating Tuscan Red Wine Vintages

### Bolgheri and Maremma

2014	87-90	Cool, wet summer presented challenges; lighter style of wines, with vibrant structures	NYR
2013	91	A cool vintage, with fresh, aromatic, elegant wines of refinement	Drink or hold
2012	90	Hot, dry year, with smaller-than-average yields; wines are dense and compact, yet fresh	Drink or hold
2011	95	Ripe, fruity wines, with a mix of power, density and flesh	Drink or hold
2010	90	Cool year, with a late harvest; elegant wines, with refined tannins at best, but inconsistent	Drink or hold
2009	91	Ripe, fruity wines, with a mix of elegance and muscle	Drink or hold
2008	93	Round, fruity and well-structured, with fine aromas and vibrant profiles. Some wines slightly hollow, with astringent tannins	Drink or hold
2007	95	Fresh, fruity and racy; firmer and more tannic than 2006	Drink or hold

### Brunello di Montalcino

2011	91	A warm year with a heat spike in August, producing forward wines with ample fruit. The best are lively and balanced; ripe and dense in the south	Drink or hold
2010	98	Perfect late summer weather resulted in ideal ripening for Sangiovese; wines are fresh, elegant, balanced and structured, with ample ripe fruit flavors. The best should age beautifully	Hold
2009	89	Warm summer gave elegant, fruity and balanced wines in the north; denser and more muscular in the south. Bright fruit, for early enjoyment	Drink or hold
2008	91	A cool growing season with rain at harvest; those who waited produced aromatic, balanced and elegant wines	Drink or hold
2007	93	Hotter and riper than 2006; fruit-forward, rich and elegant, offering immediate charm and softer textures	Drink or hold
2006	95	Complex and powerful wines that impress with ripe yet fresh fruit, firm, dense structures and fine balance	Hold

### Chianti and Chianti Classico

2014	86-89	Cool, wet summer hindered ripening, but a fine September saved the vintage. Best to date are slim, elegant reds; some are green and astringent	NYR
2013	91	Sleek, vibrant wines with bright, focused fruit flavors; at worst, lean and tart	Drink or hold
2012	89	Firmly structured wines that are rich yet elegant	Drink or hold
2011	93	Wines are ripe and rich, yet vibrant	Drink or hold
2010	92	The best are fine, ripe wines, showing freshness, structure and balance, yet some lack ripe tannins	Drink or hold
2009	89	Rainy spring and September yielded soft, open-knit wines. The best show elegance and ripe fruit	Drink or hold
2008	89	Intermittent rain dampened quality, but the best are fresh, elegant and pure	Drink or hold
2007	94	Aromatic and fresh, with ripe fruit and tannin backbone; well-balanced	Drink

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on barrel samples and/or a limited sampling; many wines of the vintage not yet reviewed.

**Vintage ratings:** 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended. **Drinkability:** "NYR" means most of the wines of the vintage are yet to be released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

### WINESPECTATOR.COM

**BONUS VIDEOS** Chianti Classico Explained: Get insight into the region from senior editor Bruce Sanderson and Laura Bianchi of Castello di Monsanto, known for its outstanding Sangioveses. Watch the series at [www.winespectator.com/103116](http://www.winespectator.com/103116).

# Bruce Sanderson's Recommended Wines From Tuscany

More than 700 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [www.winespectator.com/103116](http://www.winespectator.com/103116). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

## TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>LE MACCHIOLE</b> Toscana Messorio 2012 Ripe and expressive, featuring sweet cherry, plum, currant, leather and earth flavors married to mouthcoating tannins. Lush and fresh.	95	\$225
<b>TENUTA SAN GUIDO</b> Bolgheri-Sassicaia Sassicaia 2013 A tightly wound style, this offers violet, black currant, cherry, wild herb, spice and mineral flavors matched to a dense, smooth texture.	95	\$235
<b>TENUTA DI TRINORO</b> Toscana Campo di Camagi 2014 Aromatic, offering floral and light herb notes, with cherry and currant flavors. This is dense, with firm tannins and a touch of spice.	95	\$110
<b>TENUTA DI TRINORO</b> Toscana Campo di Tenaglia 2014 A smooth, polished version, with a hefty dose of licorice accenting the black currant, blackberry and tobacco flavors. The tannins are grippy.	95	\$100
<b>ANTINORI</b> Bolgheri Superiore Guado al Tasso 2013 A bit reticent, with black cherry, black currant and herb flavors married to a supple texture and fine-grained tannins.	94	\$125
<b>ANTINORI</b> Toscana Tignanello 2013 Aromas of graphite, smoke and tobacco introduce the cherry flavors in this expressive, focused red, with firm tannins and lively acidity.	94	\$105
<b>CANONICA A CERRETO</b> Chianti Classico Riserva 2011 Offers sweet fruit and a sinewy structure, with bright acidity and dense tannins. A mineral element shows on the long finish.	94	\$40
<b>CAPEZZANA</b> Carmignano Trefiano Riserva 2010 Fresh and focused, with cherry, raspberry, mineral, earth and licorice aromas and flavors. Firmly structured, showing fine balance.	94	\$55
<b>BIBI GRAETZ</b> Toscana Testamatta 2012 New oak provides toast and vanilla notes that augment the smoky black cherry and plum flavors, combining complexity and balance.	94	\$180
<b>BARONE RICASOLI</b> Toscana Casalferro 2013 A silky red, boasting cherry, currant, iron, tobacco and spice flavors.	93	\$65
<b>BINDELLA</b> Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Tenuta Vallocaia I Quadri 2013 Cherry, licorice, tar and spice flavors align in this dense, muscular red.	93	\$42
<b>FONTODI</b> Colli Toscana Centrale Flaccianello 2013 This powerful red is polished, with a toasty oak frame to the flavors.	93	\$120
<b>GRATTAMACCO</b> Bolgheri Superiore 2012 A rich red, with black currant, plum, cedar, spice, iron and tea flavors.	93	\$156
<b>LUCE DELLA VITE</b> Toscana Luce 2013 A powerful red, with a sheen of oak to the black cherry and plum fruit.	93	\$125
<b>ORNELLAIA</b> Bolgheri Superiore 2013 Vanilla, toast and smoke notes shade the cherry and plum aromas.	93	\$240
<b>PODERE POGGIO SCALETTE</b> Alta Valle della Greve Il Carbonaione 2013 Offers deep, pure blackberry, blueberry and black pepper aromas.	93	\$75
<b>ROCCA DELLE MACIE</b> Chianti Classico Riserva di Fizzano Gran Selezione 2012 A broad red, this offers black cherry, plum, leather and spice flavors.	93	\$38
<b>ROCCA DI MONTEGROSSI</b> Chianti Classico San Marcellino Gran Selezione 2011 Beefy tannins shore up cherry, plum, black currant and tar flavors.	93	\$50

## TOP WINES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>SAN GIUSTO A RENTENNANO</b> Toscana Percarlo 2012 Vanilla oak accents the plum and cherry fruit, offset by solid tannins.	93	\$120
<b>TENUTA SETTE CIELI</b> Bolgheri NO14 2013 Exhibits aromas and flavors of black currant, cedar, tar and earth.	93	\$42
<b>TOLAINI</b> Toscana Tenuta Montebello Picconero 2011 Features black cherry, black currant, violet, toast and mineral notes.	93	\$135
<b>CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA</b> Chianti Classico Coltassala Riserva 2011 This cherry-flavored red shows floral, mineral and tobacco notes.	93	\$65

## TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>ANTINORI</b> Chianti Classico Marchese Antinori Riserva 2013 Evokes focused black cherry, graphite and earth aromas and flavors.	93	\$35
<b>ARCANUM</b> Toscana Il Fauno 2012 Polished, boasting floral, black currant, raspberry and spice flavors.	93	\$30
<b>CARPINETO</b> Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva 2011 Rich, with black cherry, black currant, plum, leather and tar flavors.	93	\$31
<b>RODANO</b> Chianti Classico 2012 There's purity to the cherry, strawberry and earth flavors in this red.	93	\$20
<b>TENUTA DI TRINORO</b> Toscana Le Cupole 2014 This red offers concentrated flavors of cherry and sweet spice.	93	\$27
<b>FATTORIA DI FELSINA</b> Chianti Classico Berardenga 2013 Rich and sumptuous, boasting pure flavors of cherry and raspberry.	92	\$26
<b>VILLA CAFAGGIO</b> Chianti Classico 2013 This has a rounded profile, with cherry, raspberry and spice flavors.	92	\$23
<b>LA BRACCESCA</b> Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2013 A fruit-driven red, boasting black cherry and blackberry flavors.	91	\$25
<b>CASTELLO DI MONSANTO</b> Chianti Classico Riserva 2013 Pure cherry notes are framed by tar, earth, tobacco and mineral.	91	\$25
<b>BINDI SERGARDI</b> Chianti Classico La Ghirlanda 2013 Intense, with cherry, currant, herb, leather and tobacco notes.	90	\$21
<b>MARCHESI DE' FRESCOBALDI</b> Toscana Tenuta di Castiglioni 2013 Bright cherry leads the way, accented by notes of earth and spice.	90	\$25
<b>POGGIO AL TESORO</b> Vermentino Toscana Solosole 2015 Vibrant, boasting peach, melon, sage and white pepper flavors.	90	\$23
<b>SAN FELICE</b> Chianti Classico Il Grigio Riserva 2012 Coming together now, this red exudes cherry, iron and tea flavors.	90	\$24
<b>VILLA PILLO</b> Toscana Borgoforte 2013 Offers black currant and tobacco flavors, with cherry and iron notes.	90	\$12
<b>BIBI GRAETZ</b> Toscana Casamatta Red NV Sports cherry and plum flavors, with undertones of earth and almond.	89	\$15
<b>VITICCIO</b> Chianti Classico 2013 This meaty red offers black cherry, plum, earth and soy flavors.	89	\$19
<b>CASTELLO DI VOLPAIA</b> Cabernet Sauvignon Maremma Toscana Prelus 2015 A fruit bomb, this bursts with blackberry, black currant and spice.	89	\$15