

WINE News

*New arrivals from Italy—
and more on the horizon!*



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Italian Wines for Today and Tomorrow

By Greg St. Clair

As this newsletter arrives in your inbox I'll be on a plane headed to **Montalcino**. Awaiting me is the Brunello 2012, "A Rockstar Vintage," as proclaimed by James Suckling. I'll have the chance to taste more than 150 Brunello di Montalcino from this great vintage. Yes, this vintage is great—I go to Montalcino once or twice a year and have tasted the 2012 vintage every year since February 2013, and the wines are sensational. Shortly after my return my tasting notes will be available on our website. But for me one of the most exciting portions of this trip will be to taste the 2015 Rosso di Montalcino, an oft forgotten category and rarely reviewed or rated. The 2015 vintage is already

legendary for whites and reds across Italy, and pretty much across all of Europe. I've talked to many producers in Montalcino who think 2015 is better than 2010. This isn't hyperbole from someone who's trying to sell you "another" great vintage—it is really special, but a very different style from what the 2010 was like. 2010 was savory, and upon release already into the secondary and tertiary flavor evolution, but 2015 is a bolder, more dynamic fruit-filled character. These Rosso will mostly range in price from \$15 to \$25 and will be incredible buys. They'll be going out the door cases at a time, so when you see the first offers in your mailbox, pull the trigger. You won't be disappointed!

2015 Einaudi Dogliani (\$14.99) This is what Dolcetto from Dogliani is all about! The nose of this wine just bursts out of the glass with a flow of wild cherry, and as the wine crosses your palate the richness plays out on your tongue. Then the Middle Eastern spices begin to emerge, with bits of leather and earth. This is the perfect wine for these cold wintry nights. I can just imagine this wine with a plate of braised meat on a bed of polenta!



2013 Erik Banti "Carato" Toscana (\$8.99) Erik Banti's Carato is back! This mini Super Tuscan has a great following at K&L and the new vintage is even better than the last! It's a Sangiovese-based blend from the Tuscan coast that tastes like it should cost much more because of its full, smooth, flavorful palate presence and excellent balance. A K&L Direct Import that offers you extraordinary value, and at this price you will be saying, "I should buy two!"



2012 di Majo Norante "Ramitello" Molise Rosso (\$13.99) I was really stunned by the richness, complexity and depth of flavors in this wine—and then I saw the price! This blend of 80% Montepulciano and 20% Aglianico offers such bang for your buck, you are not going to believe it. The nose is full of bold, dark fruit aromatics. Layers of spicy Montepulciano fruit wrap around a solid core of structure. Balanced, bold and a real mouthful of wine—and such a deal! **91 RP!**



Ermacora's Friulian Whites

By Greg St. Clair

I've known Dario Ermacora for 18 years now. He was one of our first Italian Direct Imports at K&L. His wines have always been textbook,



Dario Ermacora.

classic, and archetypal for Friulian whites:

understated, balanced, with a long finish. His winery is in the Colli Orientali del Friuli or the Eastern Hills of Friuli, a few scant kilometers from the Slovenian border.

Most of Friuli is a flat, glaciated plain running from the Julian Alps down to the top of the Adriatic Sea, but on the eastern border the topography changes. In the Colli Orientali a series

of horseshoe-shaped glacial moraines dot the landscape and make perfect vineyard sites. They call the soil in these moraines *ponca*. It

is calcium-rich marl that gives the wines a real zing in their finish. Dario makes all of his whites in stainless steel, no wood needed—he's looking for the least amount of intervention. 2015 has produced the best wines I have ever tasted from Ermacora (by the way, it is pronounced air-MA-kor-ra). The wines have beautiful aromatics, rich bodies and vibrant cores.

2015 Ermacora Ribolla Gialla (\$14.99) Ribolla Gialla is an indigenous grape variety that usually shows a more energetic acidity, and because of that is often used in sparkling wines, but in this vintage it really sings. This is fragrant, with a citric crispness, and a wonderful shellfish wine.

2015 Ermacora Friulano (\$14.99) Friulano is what the locals more often than not drink. This has a bit more flesh on the mid-palate and sort of a tarragon-flavored tang with excellent lift in the finish.

The **2015 Ermacora Pinot Grigio (\$14.99)** is broad. Pinot Grigio naturally has a bit more heft, and in this vintage it's powerful and muscular with excellent balance. The wine Dario is most proud of is always the Pinot Bianco, and the **2015 Ermacora Pinot Bianco (\$14.99)** is no different. The wine has richness on the palate yet underneath you can see the structure and depth. Then the flavors start to emerge, with hints of nutmeg, cardamom and bergamot. The wine lengthens on your palate, driving deeper and deeper. Every year I visit the Ermacoras we do a vertical tasting of the Pinot Bianco, and it almost always shows best about 2–5 years after the harvest. You should put some in your cellar—trust me!

The Vibrant Verdicchio of La Monacesca

By Greg St. Clair

I think the first time I tried La Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica was in the late 1980s. It startled me at the time because it was so dramatically different from the far better-known DOC (denominazione di origine controllata) Verdicchio di Castelli di Jesi. It was in and out of the California marketplace in a distribution sense and wasn't always available to buy, and I sort of lost touch with it for a while.

Several years ago an Italian friend of mine suggested that I go and visit the winery since I was in the Marche, and I agreed. We were treated to a vertical tasting of both the La Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica and the La Monacesca Mirum Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva. It was astonishing. The Monacesca Verdicchio vertical went back to 2002 and the Mirum Riserva back to 1994. I was blown away by the quality and ageability of this varietal.

What makes this DOC of Matelica so special is its geographical position and geological character. This is an inland north-south valley, the only one in the Apennines that blocks the flow of warm coastal air, giving the region more of a continental climate. La Monacesca's vineyards sit at about 1,800 feet above



sea level in what was an ancient salt lake. The marine soil is full of fossils and rich in minerals that add to the wines' vibrancy and aging ability. The nights are cool and the days are warm all summer long, allowing the grapes to remain on the vines for a duration that by California standards would seem extraordinarily long. La Monacesca doesn't start the Verdicchio harvest until the first week of October—there isn't a worry about harvesting before the sugar gets too high, it's about getting the grape physiologically ripe. The Mirum Riserva harvest doesn't start until the third week of October when the juice picks up density and allows the flavors to fully express themselves in the wine.

The **2015 La Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica (\$17.99)** is a vibrant, aromatic wine that is unoaked and layered with fruit, spice and a long, mineral-driven finish that is couched in a richly textured body.

The **2013 La Monacesca "Mirum" Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva (\$26.99)** is a stunning wine. Layered, powerful and unoaked, it is something you must try. **92 W&S.**





A Few Stops on the Grand Tour: Chianti and Amarone

By Greg St. Clair

Last May, Mike Parres, John Downing and I took the Grand Italian Tour. We landed in Florence and hit the ground running—two hours of driving after landing, we were at our first appointment (just last week I received notification that I was running a little too fast—a ticket courtesy of the Polizia di Castagneto Carducci, for driving 121kph in a 110kph zone).

Villa Poggio Salvi: Chianti By Any Other Name

We traveled all over Tuscany, Umbria, Marche, Friuli, Veneto and Piemonte—a lot of driving and a lot of wine. One wine that we enjoyed while tasting at Villa Poggio Salvi in Montalcino was the 2014 Ca Spagnolo Chianti Colli Senesi. This estate is just outside of Siena in the little town of Monteriggioni, but it seems there is a Villa Poggio Salvi there as well (it basically means the “hill of health”) and after many letters between attorneys and dwindling bank accounts the owners of Villa Poggio Salvi in Montalcino decided it wasn’t worth the effort, and they renamed the Chianti Colli Senesi as Ca Spagnolo.

There are so many different Chianti DOCs. You’re probably familiar with Chianti Classico: the original, hence classico, it is actually a place called Chianti between Florence and Siena. Then there is Chianti DOCG, the broadest of the appellation and the one you’ll usually see on supermarket shelves at fairly low prices. Chianti Rufina is a small but high-quality DOC just to the east of Florence. Then just to make things difficult to understand, there are a series of regional Chianti DOCs: Chianti Colli Pisani, which means the Chianti Hills of Pisa; Chianti Colli Aretini, the Chianti Hills of Arezzo; and Chianti Colli Senesi, the Chianti Hills of Siena.

Chianti Colli Senesi isn’t a very well known appellation in America, but we were a little shocked at the quality of the 2014 Ca Spagnolo. We were thinking about how we’d market it when we asked—could we try the 2015? “Well sure,” they answered, so we wandered into the cellars and tasted the new vintage. *Wow...* it might have even been a *double wow*. We liked it immensely—the luxuriant richness of the 2015 fruit was amazing. The wine just jumped off our palates. Vibrant, spicy, full of wild cherry aromatics, long, balanced, supple and round, it was amazing. And it’s finally here! The **2015 Villa Poggio Salvi “Caspagnolo” Chianti Colli Senesi (\$11.99)** is tremendous. It’s so well balanced that you can drink it now and it’s so well structured, it will age for another five-plus years, and at this price you can afford to buy multiple cases! **91 JS.**



Chianti isn’t the only thing that Villa Poggio Salvi makes. They are Brunello producers first and foremost, and we just got back in the last portion of their **2011 Villa Poggio Salvi Brunello di Montalcino (\$29.99)**, a superb example of this ripe vintage. The winery’s elevation, high up on a ridge facing the western breeze, provides a fresher climate than many of their counterparts and wasn’t as bothered by the August heat spell. Instead, this has wonderful plummy fruit, with the estate’s signature leather, iron and spice notes, that dominates the mid-palate and continues into a long finish. This wine is drinking beautifully now and I would suggest you enjoy it with pork tenderloin slathered with rosemary, or a rare T-bone with extra virgin olive oil drizzled across the top. You’ll enjoy the combinations! **90 WS.**

Valpolicella to Amarone, Musella’s Got It!

A quick diversion from Tuscany: Musella, one of my favorite Amarone producers, is now back in stock. They’d been out of the market for some time but now they are back! Musella’s wines have an elegance, a supple grace to them and don’t carry that “heavy” connotation that most would tag on Amarone—but to really understand Amarone you must understand Valpolicella first! I really like folks to work their way up the chain to understand the base flavors that make Amarone, and if you start with the **2014 Musella Valpolicella Superiore (\$14.99)** you’ll see why these are the grapes for Amarone. This so complex for a wine in this price range, it’s ridiculous, but if you venture just a little deeper to the **2013 Musella Valpolicella Ripasso Superiore (\$24.99)** you’ll hit the OMG moment. This is a stunning wine, with layers of spice, complexity and then a richly textured body...wow. Yet we still have two more Amarone: the **2011 Musella Amarone della Valpolicella (\$49.99)** and the **2010 Musella Amarone della Valpolicella Riserva (\$64.99)**. These wines are so good, you won’t need my help to understand why I wish they could all taste this good! **93 WE.**





The Joy of Sangiovese

By Greg St. Clair

Montalcino produces some of the most delicious and drinkable wines in Italy, and priced so you can afford to drink them even Tuesday nights during this cold and wintry season. If we were in Montalcino we'd be talking about having a plate of pinci pasta with a wild boar ragu—I can taste it now! Here's a selection of some of our best Direct Import values:

2014 Tenuta di Sesta Rosso di Montalcino (\$14.99) Tenuta di Sesta is our most elegant Rosso. It is subtle and has a more feminine grace, but underneath that obvious restraint lies a wine full of complexity and intrigue...it just takes a bit of time to open up (I'd decant for an hour if you have the chance—also, they will age wonderfully for another 4–5 years). The soil here is rich in marl and limestone, the perfect foil to harness Sangiovese's vigor and allow the vine to produce complexity rather than bulk. Long, balanced and so flavorful, this wine is ideal for roasted pork tenderloin with a bit of rosemary, sea salt and black pepper. So good, you'll need to buy more!

2014 Baccinetti "Saporioia" Rosso di Montalcino (\$14.99) Affectionately named "Catzilla" by our staff because of the seemingly oversized orange cat adorning the label, the Baccinetti hails from south slope Montalcino vineyards adjacent to Lisini. Lush, rich and luxurious, this wine is awesome—the wild, spicy and plummy fruit flavors just burst in your mouth, with layers of spice and a powerful palate presence. Perfect for grilled meats, especially Italian sausage or your favorite pastas. You'll love the richness, be captivated by the complexity, and be back buying more!



Ciao gattino—it's the return of Catzilla!

2014 Sesta di Sopra Rosso di Montalcino (\$19.99) This exceptionally small estate sits above Tenuta di Sesta (sopra means "above" in Italian) on Montalcino's south slope, but with this small bit of elevation you reach an outcrop of galestro, a marine-based exfoliating shale that gives the most profound Sangiovese. This wine is pure and classic—that wild cherry Sangiovese just explodes from the glass—not opulent and fruity, just heady, lithe and focused. Ettore Spina has crafted a superbly complex and classic expression of the vintage, a wine that feels equine to me—rippling muscles but lean, not heavy, vibrant not ponderous. Nose in the air and ears back, this wine is just bursting to get in your glass—with so much complexity, balance and length, a truly superb wine.

2014 La Fortuna Rosso di Montalcino (\$17.99) In 2014 La Fortuna decided not to make Brunello, so all of those grapes went into their Rosso, an extraordinary financial sacrifice—but it puts their Rosso in a different class. This is another wine from Montalcino's south slope and it's full of ripe Sangiovese fruit, from vines 25–35 years of age, and aged for one year, six months of which were in French oak barrique. The texture is lush: plum and chocolate flavors coat the palate, yet the inherent structure of this wine gives it terrific depth, concentration and scintillating aromas. Drink it now and it will give you a thrilling drinking experience, and it will age well for the next 3–5 years. Try it now with your meat-sauced pasta, yet it will go equally well with roasted chicken or grilled meats, or just as a glass on its own!

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