

REGIONS OF THE MONTH



TOSCANA

The name *Toscana* comes from the Latin *Tuscia*, which the Romans called the area to honor the Etruscans, who developed an advanced civilization there before the Romans subjugated them. The Etruscans were wine makers and were probably responsible for draping vines over trees, a practice that still exists. But the Romans preferred stronger southern wines, and the Etruscan wine trade faded until monks revived viticulture in the region. Wine became a daily beverage in the medieval cities of Florence, Siena, Pisa, Lucca, and Arezzo, and the Renaissance, which began in Florence, transported the wines of Toscana throughout Europe. In 1716, the Grand Duchy of Toscana created Europe's first official wine zones, and toward the middle of the 18th Century, the Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici imported 150 grape varieties to create a total of 211 in the region. But despite these advances, the French took the lead in fine wine in the 19th Century while Tuscans went for quantity instead of quality. The world came to know Toscana principally for its mass-produced Chianti in *fi-asci*, the straw flasks.

But Chianti, the dominant force in Tuscan viticulture, diminished production and improved quality in 1984 when it was elevated to DOCG, one of 13 regions in the nation, which the government defines geographically in its system of laws, controlling origins and protecting names of wines of

“particular reputation and worth.” In addition to DOCG, *denominazione di origine controllata e garantita*, the law specifies another 240 DOC regions, *denominazione di origine controllata*.

What Chianti has in common with the noble reds of Toscana is the grape variety Sangiovese. Although many clones of Sangiovese exist, the superior ones are among the world's noblest vines, such as Montalcino's Brunello, Chianti's Sangiovese, and Montepulciano's Prugnolo Gentile. Among other fine Sangiovese based wines are Rosso di Montalcino, Vino Nobile, and Carmignano. But the renaissance of Tuscan wines also includes the “Super Tuscans” such as Sassicaia, which is 100% Cabernet and Antinori's Sangiovese-Cabernet blend, Tignanello. Vernaccia de San Gimignano is the most prestigious white wine in Toscana, and Vin Santo is a highly prized dessert wine.

UMBRIA

Umbria is a combination of pastoral countryside and mountain wilderness. Nurtured by the Tiber and its tributaries and Italy's fourth largest lake, Lago Trasimeno, the region is known as the “green heart of Italy” and produces fine olive oil, truffles, grains, tobacco, and livestock, along with its vines. But Umbria also has a cluster of ancient cities, which offers glimpses into the past. The Umbri, Etruscans, and Ro-

mans all left their marks here. Magnificent Orvieto is perched on a plateau and looks down on vineyards below. Its grand Duomo is among the greatest of Italy's Romanesque/Gothic cathedrals. Perugia's ancient center embraces a 15th century duomo, and the city's most extravagantly decorated church, founded in the 10th Century and rebuilt in the 15th stands beyond the old walls. Medieval Assisi with its beautiful views and piazzas is the home of St. Francis, who is buried in a basilica frescoed by Giotto among others. And the nearby hill towns of Todi, Spello, Gubbio, and Montefalco blend medieval monuments with Roman remains. Spoleto, surrounded by woods, is the loveliest of the hill towns and hosts one of Europe's leading art festivals in June and July each year.

Noted mainly for its white wines, such as Orvieto, Procanico, Malvasia, Grechetto, and Trebbiano, the region also produces two noble red wines with special DOCG status, Torgiano Rosso, which is called Rubesco, and Sagrantino, both unmistakably grand wines, capable of aging for decades. The sweet white Vin Santo is a local favorite and is made from semidried Grechetto or Malvasia grapes.

Among the many outside varieties planted in Umbria, Merlot and Barbera have been prominent for more than a century. More recently, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Nero have produced some fine wines.



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Italian

Winery of the Month



Barberani Vallesanta

Etruscan Influence in Toscana & Umbria

Barberani Vallesanta

Family run Barberani-Vallesanta is located in Umbria, a few miles from Orvieto in the hills, which overlook Lake Corbara along the Tiber River. These hills are called the “Classico” zone and constitute the oldest and most well known wine-producing region in the Orvieto area. The estate itself, now covering 80 hectares, 50 of which are dedicated to biodynamically farmed vineyards and olive groves, dates back to the Roman era when grapevines and olive trees were even then its principle crops. The ruins of an ancient Roman harbor nearby are proof that these products were shipped to Rome itself. During the medieval period, many fortified castles with watchtowers were built to protect the borders of Orvieto, including the estate's Castello di Monticello. Perhaps the fami-

ly's most distinct wine, the Orvieto Classico Superiore Calcaia is a golden botrytis dessert wine, aromatic, complex, and delicious. Dr. Maurizio Castelli directs work in both the vineyards and the winery.

Friggiali

The Centolani family owns two estates in Toscana in the famed Montalcino zone, each with significantly different climate and soils. Tenuta Pietranera vineyards, olive groves, and woods cover approximately 200 hectares. The second estate, Tenuta Friggiali is much larger, but like Pietranera, has just 20 hectares of vineyards, cultivated entirely to Brunello, the legendary clone of Sangiovese. Winemaking facilities and storage are located at Tenuta Friggiali. The pomegranate appears on all

See **WINERIES** next page



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WINES OF THE MONTH



ARTISAN SERIES

Barberani Vallesanta
2008 Orvieto Castagnolo

The traditional blend for Orvieto Classico includes five local varieties, Procanico, Verdello, Grechetto, Drupeggio, and Malvasia. The winery also includes a small amount of Chardonnay in this refreshing, fruity wine with an intense bouquet. In addition to being an excellent aperitif, the Castagnolo complements seafood appetizers, delicate first courses, boiled and grilled white fish, and white meats.

Bartali
2007 Chianti

From the main estate in Monteriggioni, the grapes for this 2007 Chianti are 80% Sangiovese and 20% Canaiolo. With bright ruby color, this elegant wine has scents and flavors of fresh berry and cherry fruit. The winery recommends that the bottle be uncorked 1/2 hour before serving with a wide range of dishes, from pasta, risotto, and lentils to braised and roasted meats.

WINERIES from cover

Friggiali labels. A symbol of prosperity, wealth, and fertility, the fruit decorated the woven cloth of noble families and often appeared in Tuscan Renaissance art.

Icaro

In 1998, the Checchetti family purchased the nucleus of the winery, about four hectares of vineyards on one of the hills of Toscana's Montepulciano district. Today, Icaro comprises 22 hectares of vineyards and a new winery where Giancarlo and his children Alessandra and Andrea have committed themselves to making the traditional wines of the area in a modern and creative way. The Checchetti family named the winery after a bas-relief tile in Montepulciano, depicting a winged horse, probably inspired by the mythical origins of Pegasus, conceived by Poseidon, the god of the sea,

WINEMAKER SERIES

Icaro
2005 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

This delicious wine is 90% Sangiovese from the Prugnolo Gentile clone and 10% Canaiolo, Mam-molo, and Colorino. Aged for 18 months in larger oak casks and smaller oak barrels, the wine spends another six months in bottle before release from the winery. Let the wine slip to the sides of the tongue to enjoy its deep flavors. Serve at cool room temperature with braised, barbecued, or roasted red meats.

Icaro
2005 Rubi delle Pietrose

Made from estate vineyards, this wine is an unusual blend of 70% Sangiovese, 20% Teroldego, and 10% Merlot and undergoes a short fermentation to enhance its fresh cherry and raspberry aromas and spicy fruit notes... The wine was aged for 12 months in French oak barrels and for another four months in bottle before release from the winery. Serve at cool room temperature with spicy pastas and roasted meats.

and Medusa, one of the three gorgon sisters. Paolo Vagaggini is the enologist, and Claudio Bressan oversees the vineyards.

Bartali

In 1927, Alberto Bartali and his wife Leda Pucci founded their Tuscan estate in the heart of the Chianti zone on the slopes below the town of Monteriggioni. Each successive generation developed the business further. Today, cousins Filippo, Linda, and Andrea manage the business, whose properties include the 80-hectare Campinoti farm with 15 hectares planted to vineyards and 250 olive trees, facing the town of San Gimignano. The Villa Casone farm lies on 80 hectares of land, including the Villa, a majestic park, and woodland and cropland. The three owners and their respective families live on the Villa Casone estate.

WINES OF THE MONTH

COLLECTOR SERIES

Barberani Vallesanta
2004 Villa Monticelli Rosso

Prestigious Italian wine guide "Gambero Rosso" describes this *Tre Bicchieri* (Three Glasses) winner as nothing less than "fabulous." The wine is 50% Sangiovese and the other half equal parts Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon "offering black cherry and sweet spice aromas with the odd intriguing hint of balsamic. The palate is complex and layered yet also enjoyably relaxed, intensely vibrant, and fruity." Additionally, "...it gives saffron-like aromas and brings to mind Sauternes." Serve at cool room temperature.



The wines of Barberani are produced from grapes grown exclusively in estate vineyards. Vinification is carried out separately for every vineyard in order to preserve its individual characteristics.

Friggiali
2004 Brunello di Montalcino

Italian wine guide "Gambero Rosso" gave its highest *Tre Bicchieri* award to this classic 2004 Brunello from the Friggiali estate. The wine will age for years but is soft and deliciously drinkable now. With a particularly bright ruby-red color even in older vintages, the 2004 Friggiali Brunello di Montalcino has typical mineral accents from the terroir and berry fruit flavors, showing cedar and tobacco aromas that it has acquired from barrel ageing. After two years in Slavonian oak barrels, it was then aged for another 12 months in bottle before release from the winery, which takes place at the beginning of every fifth year after the harvest.



Face it, Frank, it's gone. Accept it and move on to the next vintage.

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