



# CELEBRATIONS WINE CLUB

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## Italian *Winery of the Month*



## Wine, a Combination of Science, Talent, and Art

### Michele Alois

The Alois family is one of the world's most famous makers of fabrics, with their silk adorning the walls of the Louvre and the White House. The grandfather of Michele Alois, current director of the company, managed the silk factory for the Bourbon King of Naples, Ferdinando IV. Twenty-four years after Italy was united and the King fled in 1861, Alois managed to establish his own small silk plant with seven looms. The family home is located in Campagna in the foothills of the Caiatini Mountains in the province of Caserta where Ferdinando built his huge royal palace. Michele Alois added vineyards and cellars to the family's rural home with Bourbon origins that dates back to the early 1800s. Located on a plateau surrounded by an amphitheater of hills, the nine hectare estate is near the inactive volcano of Roccamonfina. Michele Alois has planted the ancient varieties of the region, Casavecchia and Pallagrello, both of which were rescued from near extinction about 20 years ago when the national government financed a project at the University of Naples to rediscover the ancient vines that the Romans and later the Bourbon King of Naples cultivated and vinified. Michele also grows the no-

ble Aglianico and Falanghina grapes on the estate. All four grape varieties were mentioned by the great naturalist Pliny the Elder (23 –79 AD) in his monumental work, *Naturalis Historicus*. The organic vineyards are a laboratory for history, reincarnating ancient wines but with more flavor and finesse than the ancients ever dreamed possible. The wines borrow names from the ancient Romans, like Trebulanum, Campole, Cunto, Settimo, Nadhir, Caiati, and Caulino.

### Tenimenti Luigi d'Alessandro

Tenimenti Luigi d'Alessandro is a combination of science, talent, and art. When properly combined, these three elements can produce formidable results. Massimo d'Alessandro taught Design at the University of Rome and was the founder of a well known avant-garde art gallery in Rome in the 1970s. Convinced that family property at Cortona in northeastern Tuscany would be suitable for viticulture, d'Alessandro consulted with Attilio Scienza, famed viticulture professor at the University of Milan, and together they set up experimental vineyards, which designated Syrah as the grape variety most suited to the area. During the time that

See **WINERIES** inside



CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner  
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## WINES OF THE MONTH



### ARTISAN SERIES

#### Michele Alois

##### *2009 Caulino Falanghina*

This delicious wine is 100% Falanghina, which scholars think Roman merchants brought to Italy from Greece. The vine takes its name from *phalange*, an ancient system of cultivation which tied the vine to a pole. Aged only in stainless steel and in the bottle, the Alois 2009 Falanghina is beautiful, delicate, and floral on the nose, and full, fruity, and tropical on the palate, followed by a sweet acid zing on the finish. This is one of the finest white wines that we've sent in the last 12 months. Serve chilled.

#### Michele Alois

##### *2007 Campole Aglianico*

Aglianico is the most important red grape variety of Southern Italy and has an ancient history. The Greeks introduced the vine to the Italians, who made from it one of the most prized wines of the ancient world called *Falernum*. The name of the grape transformed from *Hellenica* to *Helanica* and then into Aglianico during the period of Aragonese domination over the Kingdom of Naples at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Like all Alois wines, the 2007 Campole Aglianico is elegant and complex with a beautiful tannin texture and layers of flavor with berry, licorice, and pencil shavings on the nose and palate. The wine was aged only in stainless steel and in bottle. Serve at cool room temperature.



### WINEMAKER SERIES

#### Michele Alois

##### *2008 Murella Pallagrello Nero*

Pallagrello Nero is an ancient, rediscovered variety dating back to the ancient Greeks but made popular by King Ferdinand IV, who ruled Naples and Sicily between 1751 and 1825. Aged for six months in French oak barrels and six months in bottle, the wine projects aromas of red fruit and tobacco. Medium bodied on the palate, it has a beautiful silky texture and a long finish with even more fruit flavor. Complex and refined, the 2008 Murella is another beauty from Michele Alois. Serve at cool room temperature and savor.

#### Michele Alois

##### *2007 Trebulanum*

Grown in organic estate vineyards, this 100% Casavecchia, "Old House" in English, gets its name from a peasants' legend which refers to an ancient tree-like vine growing near an old barn. This particular vine of the legend was noted in 1851 because it remained healthy after surviving several epidemics. With the cooperation of the University of Naples, the Alois family was instrumental in resurrecting the grape varietal, which had once again fallen into obscurity, probably because it is extremely difficult to vinify. Each vine produces only a few grape bunches, basically less than a bottle per vine. *Trebulanum* was a place where the Romans visited to enjoy life and drink wine, according to Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historicus*. In a word, the wine is a treasure. Aged in French oak barrels for 12 months and eight months in bottle before release from the winery, Trebulanum has a notable saddleback and leathery nose backed with dense berry fruit. The wine is full and deep with a persistent finish, another deliciously remarkable wine from Michele Alois.

Luigi d'Alessandro proudly displaying his 2006 Il Bosco Syrah Manzano

## WINES OF THE MONTH

### COLLECTOR SERIES

#### Luigi d'Alessandro

##### *2006 Il Bosco Syrah Manzano*

Honored with Gambero Rosso's highest *Tre Bicchieri* award, this gorgeous 100 percent Syrah from the d'Alessandro vineyards at Manzano was aged for 22 months in Slovenian oak barrels. A superbly concentrated wine, the 2006 Il Bosco is full bodied with velvety smooth tannins, sweet fruity tones, and a finish with hints of pepper and spice. You'll find licorice, blackberry, and wood on the nose with berry, chocolate, and tobacco on the palate. Altogether, the wine is complex and elegantly balanced and can be cellared for at least another ten years. Decant and serve at cool room temperature.

#### Luigi d'Alessandro

##### *2007 Il Bosco Syrah Manzano*

Like the 2006 Il Bosco with vineyards at Manzano, the 2007 is 100 percent Syrah and was aged for the same amount of time, 22 months, in Slovenian oak barrels. Ideally, you would drink these wines side by side so that you could compare and contrast. You'd find both equally rich with dark red berry aromas and flavors, but as the wine opens up, you'll see more spice in the 2006 and more earthy flavors in the 2007. Both wines have amazing mouth-feel with gorgeous tannin texture and balance. Wine Spectator gave both the 2006 and this 2007 95 points. Decant and serve at cool room temperature.

#### WINERIES from cover

d'Alessandro operated the gallery in Rome, he became acquainted with Pio Calabresi, helping him to collect contemporary art. Calabresi was the founder of the Calabresi road transport firm in the Lazio region and later the finance company Ktesios, which Calabresi sold to Merrill Lynch in 2006. The two men became partners at Tenimenti Luigi d'Alessandro and engaged their friend Luca Currado, one of the owners of Vietti, a leading producer of Barolo in Piedmont. He acts as winemaker and is assisted by Christine Vernay, a well-known winemaker from the Rhone

Valley in France where Syrah is indigenous. After 20 years, they have 40 hectares of hillside vineyards, and their success has inspired many important producers to follow in their footsteps. Antinori, Avignonesi, Ruffino and many other smaller producers have also planted Syrah in the area, which makes up the largest concentration of this vine in Italy. In 1999, the Ministry for Agriculture granted its most rigorous designation, Denominazione di Origine Controllata, to the Cortona area. Wine Spectator awarded Tenimenti Luigi d'Alessandro 95 points for both the 2006 and 2007 Il Bosco Syrah.

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## 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> Century while Tuscans went for quantity instead of quality. The world came to know Toscana principally for its mass-produced Chianti in *fiasci*, 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.



## CAMPANIA

The capital of Campania, Naples was founded by the Greeks, enlarged by the Romans, and subsequently invaded by the Normans, Hohenstaufen, French, and Spanish among others. Established by the Greeks in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century BC, Naples was the earliest of a cluster of far flung settlements throughout southern Italy. Many important figures of the age, including Pythagoras, Archimedes, and Aeschylus lived in these settlements, and today some of the best ruins of the ancient Greek world can be found there. Along with mathematics, architecture, and drama, the ancient art of wine-making also flourished in the hills and valleys of the region as the cult of Dionysus spread. Aglianico and Greco, vines that the Greeks introduced, are still highly prized. The Greek historian Herodotus called this part of Italy Oenotria, the land of wine.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Sante Lancerio, the bottler of Pope Paul III, raved about the wines of the Kingdom of Naples, and their reputation continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But subsequently, viticulture went into decline for decades as growers left the land, and the majority of remaining producers ignored DOC regulations and instead chose to plant prolific vines rather than those that would produce premium grapes. In the last 25 years, producers have once again recognized the potential of southern Italy in general and have modernized their viticulture and winemaking techniques. Fiano di Avellino and Greco di Tufo are among Italy's most distinguished white wines, while Taurasi from Aglianico has been called the "Barolo of the South" because of its aging ability. Taurasi, Greco di Tufo, and Fiano di Avellino are the three DOCG wines to date. Mastroberardino is a distinguished winery in the region as is Feudi di San Gregorio, Villa Matilde, Mustilli, and Casa d'Ambrà.

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