

TUSCAN COAST



Above: Lodovico Antinori offers three different styles and price points from his latest winery, Biserno. Right: Merlot goes solo to much acclaim in Redigaffi from Tua Rita



'One major difference from Bordeaux is the growing emphasis on single-varietal wines'

Nonetheless the Bordelais have made an impact here. While Michel Rolland established the style of Ornellaia, Pascal Chatonnet has consulted at Petra in Suvereto since 2004, and Stéphane Derenoncourt has been the consultant at the magnificent Tenuta Argentera in southern Bolgheri from the outset.

In contrast, Angelo Gaja, of Ca' Marcanda in Bolgheri, says: 'I'm not trying to copy Bordeaux and, unlike some others, have never hired a Bordeaux consultant. I want to make wines that speak in a Tuscan language.'

Although the top wines of Bolgheri, in particular, are as costly as some of their counterparts from Bordeaux, the Tuscan producers have mostly created tiers of wines so as to offer customers a choice of styles and qualities. The international market is eager to buy such renowned wines as Sassicaia, Ornellaia, Paleo and Redigaffi, but there is a limit to the demand for wines often priced at over €100.

At Biserno, for example, just outside Bolgheri in Bibbona, Lodovico Antinori has launched a new project. The most basic wine, Il Pino, is aged in tanks as well as barriques, and in vintages such as 2008 this has been delicious. The principal wine, Biserno, includes Syrah and is aged in new oak. Finally, in top vintages there's a luxury wine called Lodovico that has no Syrah but is aged in new oak. I prefer Biserno to the more strenuous Lodovico.

The same kind of three-tier structure is found at Argentera, Ornellaia, and even Sassicaia. The lesser wines are not always second wines in the Bordeaux sense, in that they are produced from young vines or barrels considered unworthy of inclusion in the grand vin. Rather wines such as Guidalberto, from the same stable as Sassicaia, come in part from

different vineyards and may include grapes purchased from neighbours. There is no doubt that some of these second-tier wines can be excellent value, displaying their own character and structure.

Going it alone

One major difference from Bordeaux has been the growing emphasis on single-varietal wines. Ornellaia set the trend with its acclaimed all-Merlot Masseto, but hot on its heels are wines such as Petrolo's Galatrona, Sant'Agnes's Spirito, Le Macchiole's Messorio, Tua Rita's magnificent Redigaffi, and Rocca di Frassinello's Baffonero.

Cabernet Franc also seems to perform exceptionally well around Bolgheri, with fine examples such as W - Dedicato a Walter from Poggio al Tesoro, Cabraia from Gualdo del Re, Paleo from Le Macchiole, and Ducemani from the eponymous estate. These wines are generally free of the herbaceousness that can mark the variety, while retaining varying degrees of red-fruited aromas and flavours. There are even a handful of pure, or almost pure, Petit Verdots, such as Campo alla Sughera and Giovanni Chiappini's Lenà. The grape, used sparingly in the Médoc, can, in this warmer climate, deliver wines of spice and complexity.

But in general the blends work best, just as they do in Bordeaux. Not all the wines, even from Bolgheri, are good. While the likes of Antinori, Gaja, and other famous names can draw on great experience and fathomless technical expertise, other producers are simply farmers. Some of those wines, such as those from Giovanni Chiappini, can be very good; others are distinctly rustic, with excessively meaty or savoury tones.

Although Bolgheri is the most prestigious area, zones to the north and south can make wines that rival it in quality. Biserno and Castello del Terriccio lie just to the north and produce sensuous but elegant wines. South of Bolgheri is the small zone of Suvereto, hotter than Bolgheri, it results in wines of great intensity and staying power from the likes of Tua Rita, Gualdo del Re, Sulichella and Petru.

This makes generalisations about the typicity of these wines risky. The zone of production, only loosely covered by existing DOCs, stretches from the hills around Pisa to the border with Lazio far to the south. As well as Bolgheri and Suvereto, there is

Steve Weids, fine wine investment manager for Armit, which imports many of the leading wines, confirms the trend. 'There is certainly a group of disgruntled Bordeaux fanciers looking at places such as Tuscany for cheaper alternatives to the increasingly pricey Bordeaux super-second,' he says. 'We also find that the second-tier wines, such as Sassicaia's Guidalberto and Ornellaia's Serre Nuove, sell almost as fast as the top wines. Consumers can buy into the family, as it were, and have excellent wines at a fair price that don't need long cellaring.'

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