



Tuscany Wines

Italian wines are some of the most famous in the world, and Tuscan wines include some of the best wines in Italy.

WHAT DO DOC and DOCG MEAN?

The letters DOC or DOCG on an Italian wine label mean **Denominazione di Origine Controllata**, and **Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita**, the latter superior to the first. They refer to government guarantees of the wines' origins. About 300 wine growing regions in Italy have the DOC designation, while only 21 have a DOCG label. The DOCG wines conform to DOC laws and in addition are quality tested by government-appointed inspectors. However, this doesn't mean that non-DOC wines are bad. On the contrary, some wine makers have broken away from the DOC restrictions to experiment with blends of grape varieties. These 'new' and often very expensive wines in Tuscany have become known as "**Super-Tuscans**" even though they only bear a *Vino da Tavola* (table wine) label. Some of these Super-Tuscans are being produced in the Livorno Province, particularly in Bolgheri (municipality of Castagneto Carducci).

Another denomination, **IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica)**, means that a wine is guaranteed to come from a specific wine-producing area.

NOT JUST CHIANTI

Trying to be everything to everyone is a bad idea, for a person at least. Nonetheless, we expect such adaptability from many of our wines. And how rare it is. So for a wine grape, the ability to please everybody should make it awfully special.

Most of the wine produced in Tuscany is red wine, made above all from the Sangiovese grape. The best-known name is undoubtedly Chianti, but this is only one of the many types of wine produced in the region of Tuscany and there are actually 8 different areas of Chianti itself. But Tuscan wine is not about Chianti alone.

Sangiovese is one of those special grapes – perhaps the most unique of all. Although it has not travelled widely beyond Italy, in its native land it is the most planted grape – bar none – precisely because of its incredible versatility and range of charms.

Txanton has the most popular and well-known Tuscan wines, including the few whites that the region produces using mainly the Trebbiano grape (except for Vernaccia). Vin Santo ('holy wine'), made from dried grapes, is also widely



produced. It can be dry or sweet and is drunk as a dessert wine with special almond biscuits (cantuccini). But let's begin where this wonderful grape demands - not with its extraordinary value wines but with its superbly noble and premium ones. Because each year Italy drinks a massive pyramid of bright-fruited Sangiovese, with the very top being some of the finest and most age-worthy red wines in the world.

BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO

For decades, Brunello di Montalcino has stood as one of the absolute best Italian red wines, standing ably alongside its Tuscan companion, Chianti, and offering drinkers the opportunity to experience the best that the entire region has to offer. It is made with 100% Sangiovese with Italy's highest DOCG classification.

Tuscany's Brunello di Montalcino is a cellaring style, made famous by its elegant red fruit and nuances of cured meat and flowers. The fruit is a highlight to the enduring popularity of Brunello di Montalcino, but it's the tannins and acidity that extend the life of this wine so it reaches perfection a decade or more later.

Pairing with a wide range of foods, most famously the white truffles produced in the same region, there are many vintages of Brunello di Montalcino that have received high praise from a number of different sources such as the 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004, and 2005.



However, achieving perfection is something that very few wines manage to achieve. Producers work long and hard to achieve the level of quality that consumers demand from the Italian wine industry, and all are working

towards achieving perfection, even if that goal seems out of reach.

BRUNELLO FROM GAJA

The Gaja family-- who made their name producing award-winning Barbarescos in their native Piedmont-- are actually relative newcomers to Brunello. They missed out on the 1980s, the big era of Brunello expansion and the decade when this fortified historic Tuscan village really put itself on the international wine map. Their involvement came about as a result of wanting a second string to their bow-- another iconic Italian grape variety to sit alongside Nebbiolo. Tuscany's Sangiovese was its obvious companion. The family bought the historic Pieve Santa Restituta estate in 1994-- named after the church (pieve) which sits at the heart of the state, whose foundations date back to the fourth century. Two years later, the family established a foothold in Bolgheri with the Ca' Marcanda winery to make Bordeaux-style 'Super Tuscans.'

Gaja produced their first Brunello vintage in 1996 with wines made from the estate's historic vineyards of Rennina and Sugarille. The first big change came in 2005, when **Angelo Gaja** made the decision to add a cuvee Brunello made from grapes gathered from across the estate. The aim was to make a more forward, pretty much ready to drink wine retailing at around half the price of the traditional wines such as **Santa Restituta**.

The Gaja family's 2010 Brunello di Montalcino Sugarille opens to striking intensity and beauty that is apparent even as you pour the wine from the bottle. **Gaja Gaja** admitted that there has been a gradual change in the style of wines, away from the more tannic and reserved approach of earlier vintages towards the accessible richness more usually expected of Sangiovese.





THE INTRODUCTION OF BIONDI SANTI

It was not until 1888 that Ferruccio Biondi-Santi, who was a former soldier, unleashed upon Italy his Brunello di Montalcino, which stood apart from all of the other Brunellos of the era because he aged the wine for over ten years inside large wooden barrels. Those who were paying attention at the beginning of the article may recognize the Biondi name as being the one attached to the perfect wine as mentioned earlier, and it is this family, perhaps more than any other, that has been responsible for the continued ascent of Brunello di Montalcino in the years that followed.



Biondi-Santi's Brunello di Montalcino quickly developed a reputation as the rarest wine in the entire country, however, over time, the high prices attracted by the wine, coupled with the reputation that it had developed, led to other producers trying their hand at emulating Biondi-Santi's success. By the end of the 1960s, eleven producers were making a wine that had previously been restricted to one company, resulting in the Montalcino region being granted the DOC status.

The number of producers of Brunello di Montalcino has rocketed up in the years that followed. Once 1970 had rolled around, there are 25 producers, and today there are now over 200. While it would be natural to assume that this expansion in production would naturally have an effect on the quality of the wine, the opposite has ended up happening. New producers brought different ideas, with the end result being that the Brunello di Montalcino region became the first to achieve the DOCG classification, highlighting once again the quality that the wine has become known for.

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