

WINE News

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Montalcino Awards K&L Top Prize, the Leccio d'Oro

By Greg St. Clair

In February of this year I ventured to Montalcino for the annual **Benvenuto Brunello, the welcome of the new vintage**. I've done this many times before but this year was rather special. Each year the Consorzio Brunello di Montalcino recognizes industry members for their work in spreading the word about Brunello di Montalcino around the world. A prize, the Leccio d'Oro (the golden holm oak), the symbol of Montalcino (it's what you see on the neck band around Brunello bottles), is awarded to two restaurants and two retailers in two categories each: one located in Italy and one outside of Italy. This year K&L Wine Merchants was awarded "Best Brunello Retailer Outside of Italy." It has been a specialty at K&L, the result of a lot of work by

me and just as much by my colleague Mike "Guido" Parres, who has been on innumerable trips to Montalcino with me (whenever I forget something I just ask him, he always remembers or has his notes—I translate and he writes), as well as so many of my other colleagues who have become big fans of Montalcino over the years. One of the things that turned the judges in our favor was our commitment to Montalcino in every vintage, but with the 2010 vintage we outdid ourselves: we sold more than 85,000 bottles of Brunello di Montalcino in this vintage, an impressive number, but even more so when you realize that it is more than 1% of the entire production for the DOCG. Check out page three to read about the latest vintage and what we're offering from 2013.

2017 Leone de Castris "Five Roses" Rosato (\$14.99) Provençal rosé? Who needs it when you have Puglia! Leone de Castris was the first producer to bottle rosé in Italy, in 1943—interestingly enough it was for the US Army! The de Castris family's Five Roses is exceedingly well balanced and although it looks a little darker, it is an easy-drinking and expressive rosé with richness yet has excellent acidity for a perfectly balance summer sipper.



2015 Felsina Chianti Classico Riserva (\$25.99) This is a stunning wine that really shows off the spectacular 2015 vintage. The nose is concentrated fruit confit, layered, bold and dark. The wine has incredible length on the palate and flavors of wild cherry and wild strawberry. The finish is exceptional: power and length while supple tannins wrap a smooth, soft, protective cloak. You should stock up for the long haul—this wine's going to last a long time. **93 RP**



2012 La Fortuna Brunello di Montalcino (\$34.99) This vintage is really good, especially if you're looking to drink something now! La Fortuna blends grapes from their vineyards on Montalcino's southern slope with their estate fruit on the east side of Montalcino next to Fuligni. The nose is full of wild cherry, then shows hints of Tuscan brush and wild herbs. On the palate the wine is supple and soft, yet focused, showing great balance and length. Drinkable now! **93 JS**





La Monacesca

I always like to turn people on to La Monacesca—it's a wine no one ever seems to expect. White wine from Italy is generally more difficult for Americans to grasp, as the delicate, subtle character and lack of an easily definable oak signature is not easy for the American palate to pick up.

Monacesca, however is unique. The Matelica DOC is situated in the only north-south valley in the Apennine Mountains, closing it off from the warm Adriatic coastal air flow. The grapes ripen in a true continental climate. At 1,400 feet, the vineyard is planted on soil that was once an ancient salt lake, and the combination of that fossil-laden marine soil with the cool nights and warm days give the grapes a special character. I mean special, because the grapes for the Verdicchio are harvested in the first 10 days of October—yes, October—and the Mirum is harvested the last 10 days of October. This allows the grapes to become completely physiologically ripe, not harvested because

the sugars are getting too high. This later harvest fills the wines with complexity, and that leads to the deeper, ripe pear aromatics and more complex fruit on the palate.

One might think that with wines being “late harvested” you’d find over-ripeness, but not at all: the Monacesca Verdicchio is 13% alcohol by volume (abv) and the Riserva is 13.5%, and the wines have great acidity and minerality. Having that acidity, minerality and richness give the wine an incredible structure and balance that aids longevity.

Besides Verdicchio being a grape that ages extremely well (hard as it is for some to believe that white wines can age well), I’ve had multiple vintages of both the Verdicchio and Riserva going back more than twenty years, and they have been exceptional. The Verdicchio and Verdicchio Mirum Riserva are both fermented and aged in stainless steel. The Verdicchio spends six months on the lees while the Mirum spends 18 months in stainless on its lees.

The nose of **2016 La Monacesca Verdicchio di Matelica (\$17.99)** is full of white flowers, ripe pear and hints of anise. On the palate the wine has weight and richness but is defined by the acidity, with pear flavors and lots of minerality on the finish.



The **2015 La Monacesca “Mirum” Verdicchio di Matelica Riserva (\$26.99)** shows lots of ripe pear in the nose but it is on the palate that it differentiates itself from the Verdicchio. Waves of lush richness flow across your palate but seem more like coiled energy—they aren’t fat, they’re vibrant. Skewered by an energetic acidic core, the wine shows incredible depth and vigor. The finish is long; it seems as if minerals are being deposited on your tongue for minutes. Outstanding!

Castello di Fonterutoli

I remember the first time I had lunch at the Castello di Fonterutoli, sitting across from the family tree, painted on the far wall, that went back to 1435. Lunching that day with the direct ancestors, I was trying to contemplate just how that could be—something us Americans have little ability to comprehend. Lapo Mazzei, the many-time president of the Chianti Classico Consortium and current family patriarch, has been followed by his two sons Filippo and Francesco, who are the managing directors. It is through their leadership that the company has taken great steps forward in quality, building an incredible new winery and expanding their portfolio.

The **2015 Fonterutoli Chianti Classico (\$21.99)** just landed and it is exceptional. Fonterutoli is in the southwest portion of Chianti Classico, called Castellina in Chianti, and the wines from there show more earth, spice and leather in a normal year, but in 2015



the depth of fruit richness is truly obvious with layers of wild cherry and earth blended together. On the palate the wine has structure and length and a super finish. **93 JS**

The **2013 Castello di Fonterutoli Chianti Classico Gran Selezione (\$37.99)** is a stunning wine. With tremendous depth and structure, it’s a story unto itself. **92 JS**

The standout in this vintage, however, is Castello di Fonterutoli’s Super Tuscan, the **2015 Castello di Fonterutoli “Siepi” Toscana (\$99.99)**. This exceptional wine is a blend of 50% Sangiovese and 50% Merlot from vineyards facing southwest. This wine just sings. It has perfectly balanced richness and structure, and is supple yet powerful with intertwining layers of spice and intrigue. I’ve had it several times over its lifetime, starting from the barrel through now, and this wine is a stunner! **98 JS**



2013 Brunello di Montalcino

I was in Montalcino in February and tasted more than 175 Brunello di Montalcino wines from the 2013 vintage. There are only about 220 producers and I've been doing this event for 15 years, watching the growth in the number of producers as well as the overall quality of the region. In April I was at Vinitaly Italy's annual wine fair in Verona where I tasted another 25, enough to comfortably say I have a pretty good handle on what's going on this vintage.

This was not as even of a vintage as the exceedingly drinkable 2012, but for me the high spots in 2013 were better wines, more structure, more intensity of fruit and a better future. I've listed the scores of the major reviewers because if I don't someone always asks, so here they are, with a brief note of my own ideas about the wine. You can read my full reviews on our website under each wine. Some of these wines are pre-arrival and some will be in stock. Pre-arrivals are noted (PA).

2013 Caprili Brunello di Montalcino (\$54.99) A sensational year for Caprili, surrounded by Gaja on one side and Soldera on the other, making truly super wines of expressive richness and balance. I love this wine. **94 JS, 93 VN**

2013 Villa le Prata Brunello di Montalcino (\$54.99) On the west side of Montalcino's ridge at a fairly high elevation. Elegance, balance and a highly stylized wine. **93 JS, 93 WE, 92 VN**

2013 Casanova di Neri Brunello di Montalcino (\$58.99) Traditional barrel aging for Giacomo Neri's White Label Brunello. Needs a bit of time to round out but good, solid structure. **94 VN**

2013 Renieri Brunello di Montalcino (\$69.99) Barrique-aged Brunello but high-quality winemaking. Lots of polish, structure and remarkably well balanced for its type. **98 JS**

2013 Livio Sasseti "Pertimali" Brunello di Montalcino (\$69.99) I had this wine several times this year and am super impressed every time: excellent balance, a warm, restrained richness, and a very savory character. It will go in my cellar.

2013 San Polino Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.99) Purity...wild, carefree and layered...so much to talk about in this wine with such a great future. **95-96 JS, 92 VN, 92 WE**

2013 San Polino "Helichrysum" Brunello di Montalcino (\$79.99) A great bottle of wine: so much character, depth, flavors that waver between ethereal and earthbound; fruit, spice, earth...wow. **97-98 JS**

2013 Il Valentiano "Campo di Marzo" Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$29.99) I've watched this new, small winery emerge through a couple of hiccups, but in this vintage they are on track, and wait until you taste their 2015. Savory, spicy, with such lithe balance, this is an excellent wine and a steal of a price. **91 JS**

2013 Poggio Salvi Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$32.99) Leather and earth slowly open to wild cherry and spice. Balanced and long, this is a real classic. **93 JS**



2013 Poggiarellino Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$34.99) Poggiarellino is one of Montalcino's best-kept secrets. Powerful, with layers of wild cherry and dense fruit with porcini, saddle leather and a long, powerful finish.

2013 Altesino Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$39.99) Long and elegant, with a long life ahead of it, this is a well-balanced wine that comes from Montalcino's northeast quadrant. Expressive, stylish and super drinking. **95 WS, 94 JS, 94 RP, 93 VN**

2013 Costanti Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$64.99) For me this is one of the highlights of the vintage. Incredible depth, focus, complexity, balance. Just stupendous. **97 WE, 96 VN, 94 WS**

2013 Lisini Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$49.99) Warmer, more supple, with rounded edges but also a core of Sangiovese purity, and an intriguing, savory finish. **96 WS, 94 WE, 93 RP, 93 VN**

2013 Banfi "Poggio alle Mura" Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$59.99) This was the original vineyard that Banfi bought when they took over in 1978, an excellent vineyard, and I always look forward to tasting this wine. It's one of my bellwethers of the vintage and it's excellent this year. **96 JS, 92 VN, 92 WE**

2013 Argiano Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$44.99) From the southeastern quadrant of Montalcino, this shows a bit more richness, but the fruit is much more umami than simple, and the finish is long and savory. **96 JS, 93 RP, 93 WE, 93 WS**

2013 Uccelliera Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$67.99) Always one of my favorite producers from southeastern Montalcino. This vintage is savory and supple, showing porcini dust, wild herbs, layers of saturated fruit. An outstanding wine. **94 JS, 94 RP, 94 WS, 92 VN**

2013 San Filippo "Le Lucere" Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$89.99) Powerful, dense, a barrique version of Brunello with highly polished fruit, touches of sweet vanillin, but underlying dense fruit and spice with long, elegant tannins. Supple, fleshy, slightly more New World but tremendous balance in its power. **96 JS, 95 WS, 94 VN**

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2013 Brunello di Montalcino

(Continued from page 3)

2013 Salvioni Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$149.99) This famous producer continually makes supple wines that seem to be able to carry more fruit and intrigue than the structure would hold. Balanced and expressive. One of Montalcino's jewels. **97 WE, 96 VN**

2013 Il Marroneto "Madonna delle Grazie" Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$189.99) Maybe the best Brunello I tasted in this vintage: purity, length, complexity, spice, unbelievable quality...OK, it's expensive, but it's incredibly good and a fraction of the price of top Burgundy. **97 RP, 95 VN**

2013 Caparzo Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$34.99) **95 WS, 93 JS, 92 RP**

2013 Fuligni Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$74.99) I love this property. The wines are, dare I be sexist and say more feminine—they always have a softer, more ethereal feel to them. Texturally velvety, coupled with a higher-toned sweeter cherry and plum fruit that seamlessly blends together, this is stupendous this vintage. **97 VN, 96 JS, 95 WE, 93 RP**

2013 Fossacolle Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$39.99) Supple, warm and showing more fruit than many in this vintage, yet still good balance and structure, and a long finish. **94 RP, 92 JS, 92 VN**

2013 Il Marroneto Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$69.99) Not quite at the standard of their single-vineyard Madonna but still an outstanding wine, and if you're intrigued by the Madonna, the Marroneto will give you a warm-up to the style and flavors. **96 WE, 94 RP, 94 VN**

2013 Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$34.99) A blend of vineyards from multiple sources across Montalcino, it is a powerfully structured wine with a muscular bent. Earth, spice, tannin and a brooding dark fruit character; always solid but will need a few years. **93 VN, 93 WS, 91 RP, 91 WE**

2013 Banfi Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$44.99) The company that made Brunello famous, the Mariani family, since purchasing Banfi in 1978 have made Brunello a household word. This is their classic restaurant-friendly example, with lots of soft, forward fruit and a bit of tannic structure in this vintage. **95 JS**

2013 Poggio San Polo Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$54.99) Excellent wine this vintage for San Polo, who's been on an uptick qualitywise for several years. Balanced, with sweet ripe fruit and hints of spice and earth, this is a very solid wine. **96 JS, 92 VN**

2013 Voliero Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$54.99) A separate property made by Uccelliera and at a higher elevation, but they still get that wonderful mix of savory plum and brilliant wild cherry fruit. A real deal in this vintage. **94 JS, 94 VN, 93 RP**

2013 Gianni Brunelli Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$59.99) I'll be honest, I'm not always a fan of this wine, which is sometimes a bit too tannic for my palate, but in this vintage it's superb: fruit, spice and layers of earth. It needs a bit of age but is sensational.

2013 Capanna Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$52.99) Capanna sits on one of the best portions of the Montosoli hill, Montalcino's most famous vineyard site, and produces wines of power, displaying powerful structure, incredible depth of fruit yet superb balance. Consistently one of Montalcino's best wines. **95 JS**

2013 Baricci Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$54.99) I'm so in love with this wine. The Buffi brothers, following in the footsteps of their grandfather, Nello Baricci, and uncle, Graziano, have upped the game at this winery and it is now garnering super high scores every vintage. An outstanding wine: savory, sweet earth, supple yet powerful; so elegant, a real winner. **97 WE**

2013 Sesta di Sopra Brunello di Montalcino (PA \$49.99) K&L's first Direct Import from Montalcino, and we were Sesta di Sopra's first clients. It's worked out well for the both of us. From one of Montalcino's best zones, all Galestro soil, a savory, sweet character, full of wild herbs, stone, leather, Japanese plums and wild cherries. A superb wine. **95 VN**



At Benvenuto Brunello: Patrizio Cencioni, Consorzio president, Greg St. Clair, K&L, and Charlie Arturaola, Leccio d'Oro presenter and judge.

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