

## 2004 Brunello Report - Greg St. Clair (K&L Italian Wine Buyer)

The long-awaited release of the 2004 Brunello di Montalcino is upon us. My friend and colleague Mike “Guido” Parres and I spent two in-depth weeks in Montalcino visiting dozens of cellars and tasting more than 165 of the newly-released 2004 vintage Brunello di Montalcino. Guido and I compared notes, I stole words from him and without his help this belated report would definitely have been less intriguing and less accurate.

Along with the new releases, we tasted hundreds of Brunello in the barrel, young Rosso di Montalcino and, thankfully, many older bottlings as well. We think we’ve got a real good handle on what is going on in Montalcino! So, is it that good? James Suckling of the *Wine Spectator* says, “You are going to like 2004 Brunello di Montalcino. Do you remember the great 1997 and 2001, as well as the super 1999 Brunellos? Well, 2004 is along those lines of quality, but it's a different style.” But one of Italy’s top wine writers, and one of my favorites, Franco Ziliani, recently blogged, “but in my opinion the overall quality of Brunello 2004 was very disappointing and I have some doubt that 2004 has been interpreted [sic] by Brunello producers like a great vintage...” So who’s right?

I would tend to agree with Suckling’s vintage assessment that the vintage is a “different style,” and I would also agree with Ziliani that many producers failed to interpret the vintage correctly. Yet this is a vintage that needs more explanation than 1997, 1999 or 2001. 2004 is an amalgam, it is none and all of these vintages, every time I began to think it’s more like 1999 because of the length, pure fruit character and balance, I tasted something that seemed to display more of 2001’s richness, structure and power, or then something reminiscent of 1997’s lush richness and sweetness; there is not a simple signature. The vintage has great possibilities, yet while much would seem to depend more on where vineyards are, how old they are or how the wines were made, that doesn’t seem to be the easy answer either. I would say however that this vintage, in general, seem to be a slightly better vintage for “traditional” producers, however, one of the absolute best wines of the vintage is Siro Pacenti, all *barrique*.

So what is the 2004 vintage like? Outwardly it is gregarious, full of young boastful fruit, and on the palate subtle flavors merge and weave, spices emerge and eventually lengthen, forming a balance of power, flavor and structure. This is the vintage character, how each region, each vineyard, each winemaker responded will have an impact on the ultimate wine. The vintage itself is truly outstanding, however, the hand of Man will ultimately say more about this vintage than almost any other. It would have been hard to hide the lushness or 1997, the balance of 1999 and the structure of 2001. Those who listened to the grapes in 2004 and let the wine emerge, made wonderful wines.

I’m probably biased (we import the 2004 Baricci “Colombaio di Montosoli” Brunello di Montalcino), but after looking through my notes again and again, I really think this wine is the embodiment of the 2004 vintage. The Baricci has power, ripeness, complexity and balance, yet in such an incredibly graceful way. It’s elegant, supple and muscular with sort of a Michael Phelps- (he of the 8 Gold Medals) physique: big, imposing, yet not hulky or bulky. I think that the longevity of this vintage will be very good, but it is hard to think beyond 10-15 years because that seems so far away.

While in Montalcino, Guido and I searched out and drank (hey, it really is all part of the job) Brunello from 1986, 1988, 1990, 1995 and 1997, essentially wines that were all 10-plus-years-old, just so we could see examples of how those wines were aging to understand how this vintage might age. I have to admit that I was at least a little surprised by how youthful all the wines were and by how much life they all had left, with the exception of the 1990s. I thought they were very good, but not something I would put back in the cellar for more aging. Perhaps the most surprising of the wines we tried was the 1986 Poggio Antico, from a vintage that was good, but certainly not one of the best vintages of the 1980s, and from a bottle that had obviously leaked. It was glorious, with easily another decade of pleasure available! We don't think the 2004 is a vintage you need to bury in the bottom of your cellar for 15-plus years, they're drinkable now. The key will be to buy enough to have some in your cellar 15 years from now because you've been drinking them all along.

A couple of important things to know about this release: the 2007 Rosso di Montalcino will be released this year as well...OMG! You'll love them. I have written up many wines, though I don't plan to carry them all (nor will they all be available), however I felt it was important to include them. Not all of the 2004 Brunello come out at the same time so, we may have already sold out (or have not yet begun to sell), and if you have any specific wishes just write me and I'll let you know the status.

One last introduction...I use a 0-5\* star system of grading, and occasionally will add a .5 star to a score to emphasize its character. Although I think they are accurate, the real key is to read the descriptions. They should tell you more about a wine than a bunch of numbers and symbols. Lastly, these are my thoughts and descriptions from having tasted all of these wines. We all have prejudices, and I'll tell you up front that wines that show too much toasty oak are not my style. Where I have described them, I am doing it with the complete wine world in mind, and how they measure up to that style, not just what I like to drink at home. There are reviews for 92 wines and the 75 wines I tasted that I didn't review or score are listed at the end. Some of those wines would definitely have been rated higher than others I chose to review, but I stuck to wines that had a presence in the marketplace. If you want my opinion on any one of those just ask.

Greg St.Clair

**Altesino** **10,000 cases produced \*\* 2 stars**

I have been somewhat unimpressed with Altesino for the last few years, but I was incredibly surprised by the quality and richness of this vintage. Full of dense plummy fruit with a soft and fleshy mouthfeel, it lacks a little mid-palate structure but is very well balanced with character. It reminds me of the Altesino of old. Drink 2012-2019.

**Altesino "Montsoli"** **1,250 cases produced \*\* 2.5 stars**

I think the 2004 Montosoli is far more interesting than in recent years. The classic sweet earth and tobacco mixed with leather and ripe fruit are on the nose. In the mouth the wine has a good mid-palate feel with texture, structure and good length, and carries the same

flavors through onto the palate with more plummy fruit. Good balance and will age gracefully for another 10 years.

**Antinori Pian delle Vigne** **14,166 cases produced \*.5 stars**

The fruit in the nose is somewhat simple, redolent of baked apple, and languishes effortlessly in the glass. On the palate the wine is lean and tannic and shows some simple plummy character. The wine has a short and bitter finish.

**Argiano** **12,000 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

Argiano comes from the southwest corner of Montalcino where hot and dry is a regular. Their wines, for me, in the past half-dozen vintages have shown more winemaking and structure than location. This vintage I was pleasantly surprised to find a wine that showed its place. This wine has an initial ripeness that is omnipresent in a thick, fleshy sort of way, yet it has real balance, focus and direction. It has power and sits astride your palate with a regal grace, definitely masculine yet with depth of purpose and stride. This wine feels like a Kingly steed, rippling muscle, not a wild stallion with flaring nostrils just very well trained and confident. Plum, cherry, hints of vanilla bean, with an ocean of warm smoothness across your palate, this wine is very solid and will age well for another decade plus.

**Banfi** **45,833 cases produced \*.5 star**

This vintage for Banfi is decidedly more delicate, and this Brunello doesn't have the weight of wines in the past. Elegant, balanced and showing bright acidity, the wine has more of a Chianti feel to it than Brunello. Yet the wine isn't deficient in character. Pleasing plum and cherry fruit flow gently from a more medium-bodied structure. On the palate the acid is still bright and forward and lengthens the finish. This is more of a "food wine" and will drink nicely while you're dining at the Olive Garden.

**Banfi "Poggio alle Mura"** **6,666 cases produced \*\*2.5 star**

The nose is boisterously fruity, with hints of herb and spice. On the palate the wine has good weight and richness; it's finely crafted and plummy character abounds. The finish is lush and soft with a fine-grained texture. I remember this wine in years past and this version is not as focused and doesn't make the powerful statement previous vintages have made. Nonetheless, it is a solid wine with a good future, albeit a good not great wine.

**Baricci** **1,200 cases produced \*\*\*\*4 stars**

When one mentions the wines of Montosoli Hill among those from Montalcino, it is always done with a bit of reverence for the tremendous character these grapes can produce. The 2004 Baricci has power, ripeness, complexity and balance, yet in such an incredibly graceful way. It's elegant, supple and muscular with sort of a Michael Phelps- (he of the 8 Gold Medals) physique: big and imposing, yet not hulky or bulky. There is so much complexity, grace and intrigue in this wine it is amazing. The classic Montosoli nose of black cherry, cinnamon, anise, cardamom, sweet earth and glove leather all shine through. Yet for me, the most important character of this wine is balance. Time after time looking through my notes I

just can't get away from the idea that I really think that this wine is the embodiment of the 2004 vintage.

### **Camigliano**

**14,166 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

Deep, powerful, chocolaty and ripe, this is a classic Camigliano. This estate is on the western boundary of Montalcino and always has ripeness. However, the key to their wines is always in the acid balance and in 2004 they got it. The lushness is very evident on the palate, but it isn't overwhelming, it is just the embodiment of Camigliano: lush warmth with wonderfully complex character full of plums and spice, warming like a fireplace on a winter afternoon. It has a sort of glow to it that makes me feel good. This wine will age, but will be drinkable earlier.

### **Campogiovanni**

**6,666 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

A subtle sweetness flows from this wine. Delicate cherries in the nose, ripe yet balanced plummy fruits on the palate, with hints of pencil shavings and wild herbs. Complex yet easy, this wine is like a thriller movie where you can figure out the ending without any trouble, pleasing to watch and you feel good about yourself. The wine is elegant, and very easy to drink.

### **Canalicchio**

**1,333 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

While I rarely talk of the color of Sangiovese, this wine is definitely lighter in color with a fair amount of onion skin highlights. The nose is delicate, elegant and teases you with hints of subtle plum flavors and hints of fresh leather. On the palate, the wine has a long linear feel to it with somewhat restrained flavors. The finish comes together with a classic feel of length and balance that's somewhat straightforward.

### **Canalicchio di Sopra**

**2,833 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

This is the best CdS I've had in years. The wine shows great tannic structure when first on your palate, but it sheaths the complex fruit and wild herbs that are knit into the fabric of this wine. Slowly this wine opens with leather, sage, spicy wild cherry that flows across the palate. The finish is layered with structure and spice and is long.

### **Capanna**

**3,391 cases produced \*\*\*\*5 stars**

This is the best Capanna I've ever had. It exudes power, is full of dense black fruits, blackberry, hints of graphite and layers of complexity. There is a lot of tannin in this wine, yet it has wonderful balance, length and the power is palpable. There is so much to this wine, it is just hard to describe—like a flow of lava, potent, non-stop and omnipresent. A supple richness on the palate belies the brooding power underneath. There's complexity wrapped around a core of richness, strengthened with tannic structure and lengthened with great acidity. There is a superb and lingering finish, dynamic, lengthening and truly great.

### **Caparzo**

**8,333 cases produced \*1 star**

The nose is full of dark fruits; it is ripe and has good balance. Broad on the palate, the wine shows ripe blackberry and hints of intrigue. Medium-bodied it shows good body and richness, however it finishes a bit short. All-in-all, a step up for Caparzo's entry level wine.

### **Caparzo "La Casa"**

**1,666 cases produced \*3 stars**

There actually is a La Casa, it is a house that sits in the middle of the Montosoli Hill, and it is Caparzo's prize vineyard. This wine is dense, shows lots of dark fruit in a classic expression of Brunello. On the palate, the wine is long, elegant, has medium richness and has a good finish with hints of spice and cherry. This is a wine that needs time to knit and will blossom in a few years.

### **Caprili**

**2,216 cases produced \*\*\*\*4.5 stars**

This wine is just stunning, full of power and in my notes I wrote, "Jesus, what tannins." Wow, this wine is dramatic, extraordinarily full, but never fat or sloppy—just huge. It is full of sweet, ripe cherry and plum fruit. It's dark, spicy and fleshy, and the nose can barely show the depth of flavor. On the palate, it is commanding, forcing your focus towards the layers of dusty minerality, its ever-expanding center and extraordinary power. Tannins, although very powerful and present, are woven into the background and polished, never harsh. A superb wine that will need to have lots of time in your cellar.

### **Casanova di Neri**

**3,750± cases produced \*1.5 stars**

The nose has plummy fruit that is correct and straightforward. On the palate the wine seems a little stiff; some tannin emerges and shuffles along the tongue. The finish is straightforward and has some balance and ease, yet it lacks grace or pedigree.

### **Casanova di Neri "Tenuta Nuova" 4,300± cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

Bold, dark fruits dominate the nose, but are not distinct. On the palate, the wine shows lots of structure, muscle and depth, but the flavors are a bit muddled, muscle bound. The finish is structured, powerful, thick and supple while being slightly short as the tannins start to appear. While extraordinarily well made, the wine doesn't seem to blossom and seems more restrained than previous vintages.

### **Casanova di Neri "Cerretalto" 900± cases produced \*\*\*\*4.5 stars**

Oh, this wine sings. The nose is a loudspeaker for Sangiovese and soil, a symphony of intrigue, flora, fauna and wine. On the palate, the wine has great breeding long, elegant, supple, yet vital, stimulating layers of spice, earth, complex fruit and a restrained lushness that is scintillating. The finish is classic, long and displays all that it demonstrated in the nose and on the palate warming together to a significant crescendo. Outstanding wine.

### **Castelgiocondo**

**17,500 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

Loads of sweet plummy fruit bursts forth, pushing a toasty vanillin note up out of the glass. This wine is dense and shows lots of tannin both from *barrigue* and skins, as it fills your mouth with an almost impenetrable structure. Very ripe on the palate, the flavors are very

plummy, and it just ooze sweetness wrapped in young and vibrant tannin. The finish currently is a little short, but as the tannins age out the wines balance will lengthen.

### **Castello Romitorio**

**2,750 cases produced \*1.5 stars**

This is an easy drinking wine with some nice, if somewhat simple, fruit in the nose. On the palate it seems a little one dimensional—fruit with some earthy character, but with some body and balance. Finish is delicate.

### **Cerbaiola “Salvioni”**

**666± cases produced \*3.5 stars**

The nose is very ripe, but not in an over-ripe manner, just completely ripe, saturated, dense and almost chunky. On the palate, the wine expands, becomes muscular, and the dense fruit begins to grow and reach down the palate. This is a wine struggling to emerge, young and bold with strident character. This wine is destined for the cellar. Unlike what I have experienced in the past with these wines. Still, it's excellent, yet needs lots of time, not because it is hard or out of balance, it just has so much to drag up to the surface it will take some time, but my guess is worth the wait.

### **Ciacci Piccolomini**

**3,333 cases produced \*1 star**

This base Ciacci is very tight, square and showing more cherry like fruit than plum. Fairly full on the palate, it has decent length and finishes a bit short.

### **Ciacci Piccolomini “Pianrosso”**

**3,333 cases produced \*3 stars**

The nose is full of ripe, plummy fruit that moves a bit toward cola. On the palate, the plum carries through once again, yet has a zippy acidity balancing it out. There's lots of richness on the palate as the wine expands toward a complex, powerful end. Lots of square chunky tannins balanced by loads of fruit.

### **Col di Lamo**

**1,000 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

Sweet, tight, perfumed red fruit is very apparent in the nose with the slightest hint of wood spice. On the palate, the wine has good weight and balance; some warmth and fruit emerge as well as some tannin. In the finish the wine begins to lengthen, the tannins begin to ameliorate and some more fruit begins to come forward, balancing the wine and making a solid finish.

### **Col d’Orcia**

**21,250 cases produced \*3 stars**

The Col d’Orcia style is not an easy one for most to understand; it is understated, never willing to call attention to itself and, because of that, often gets lost in the midst of boldly fruity and/or oaky wines. However, there is no denying the classic pedigree this wine shows. The tannins are initially a bit stiff, but are softened with ripe plummy fruit that is delicate and appears like veils, shimmering, diaphanous and intriguing, yet never bold. The key to understanding Col d’Orcia is aging, and this wine needs time to unwind the tannins and unearth the spice and fruit. Very cellar worthy and a classic example.

**Collemattoni****2,166 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

The nose is immediately full of plums and sweet vanilla. On the palate, it expands into a pool of cultured lushness that flows broadly across the palate. This is a wine that is polished, showing layers of ripe plums and sweet toasty oak. It has a certain charm that seems to go beyond a simple recipe of winemaking; there is a core, although covered in lushness, it does give the wine good balance.

**Collosorbo****4,500± cases produced \*\*\*\*4 stars**

Gorgeous sweet dark fruit fills the room around you when this wine is poured. Luscious plums and chocolate roll across your palate. It's seemingly sweet, but balanced by a tightly wound core that seems to be dipped in plums and chocolate. Full-bodied, yet graceful, fun and buoyant, the wine seems to smile at you, releasing a cloud of sweet chocolate tannins balanced by a gentle acidic balance. Just a delicious wine.

**Corte Pavone****3,333 cases produced 0 star**

I've tasted this wine on three occasions and my notes are consistent. The nose of this wine is very gamey and is filled with wild fermentation odors. On the palate there is some weight and the flavors are ripe and taste similar to the nose. Finishes slightly bitter.

**Costanti****2,500 cases produced \*\*\*\*4 stars**

Textbook Brunello from one of Montalcino's most storied producers. What first impresses me about this wine is its presence. Without being obviously large, you know it is immediately important, serious yet smiling, no smugness, just confidence in a winemaking concept that has gone on the same way for years. This wine is full of supple, elegant fruit with hints of sweet saddle leather, ripe cherries and plum with a hint of wild herbs. Superb structure, mouthfeel, balance and length. This is a wine you can drink in a few years or you can lay it down to drink in 2025 if you wish; it is really good.

**Cupano****541 cases produced \*\*\*\* 4 stars**

I feel like I just walked into a nightclub that's full of sweet perfume. The wine is dark, smoky and titillating to the senses. Lush, sweet fruit that is a mixture of plum and wild cherry burst from the glass; sweet layers of vanilla and smoke waft after the fruit, hinting at the boldness of the wine. On the palate, it is powerful, sensuous and snaky, with muscular layers of sweet fruit and spice that flow from the center while it focuses toward the finish. The power of *barrique* when it is used well, this is a modern and fun wine that still says Montalcino proudly.

**Donna Olga****3,333 cases produced \*\* \*3 stars**

The nose is full of sweet spice, leather and fruit with a touch of toasty vanilla. On the palate, the wine expands and shows lots of elegance and feels graceful. The flavors are more red fruit than black and the sweet richness is very pleasant. The wine finishes fairly long and with lots of flavor.

**Fanti****5,416 cases produced \*1.5 stars**

Nose is packed with dark berry fruit and hints of vanilla float from the glass. On the palate, the tannin begins to take over, closing the center of the wine and it doesn't allow the fruit to show. A tight and grip-filled finish make this wine a little difficult now. This doesn't seem to have the mid-palate weight of years past, gone is the flash and sizzle.

### **Ferrero**

**558 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

A very ripe aromatic flows from this wine, sort of a plummy cola, just this side of chocolaty. The ripeness is obvious but it isn't blatant; it gives direction to the wine. Luxuriant on the palate and wonderfully smooth. This is well-balanced, like lying on a tropical beach, peaceful, absorbing the surroundings, the feel of the sun on your skin, lazily warming your soul. There is structure in the wine, but it is subtle, no noticeable tannins—they are so well-integrated they just become part of this satiny fabric that lingers easily in the finish, which is highlighted with a bit of Tuscan dust.

### **Fattoria dei Barbi**

**16,666 cases produced \*\* 2.5 stars**

Barbi is really a "classic" wine, more about traditional methods and resulting flavors. The initial sensation of this wine is that it has lots of grip, yet it is still very well-balanced, with the acidity to lengthen those tannins and coax them into line. Lots of earthy, leathery notes, good body and will need lots of time in the cellar. A very good wine.

### **Fossacolle**

**1,047 cases produced \*1.5 stars**

The nose is dark, chocolaty fruit that is very present and then gives way to a hint of vanilla. On the palate, the fruit is raspberry-like and seems coupled with bitter chocolate that seem to pool up into sweet wells of dense, soft fruit. The mid-palate has lots of chunky wood tannins and bright acidity, which make it a bit disjointed and leaves me to wonder when (if) the wine will balance. Slight bit of toasty oak in the finish but a wine that is in a state of development and will need time to come out of this phase.

### **Fuligni**

**2,250 cases produced \*\*\*\*4.5 stars**

Fuligni's wines have shown a more Burgundian elegance in the past, but they have now moved to a more direct and powerful style. This wine is large, muscular and has a certain wow factor in your mouth; it can't not be noticed. Full of a plummy smoothness with long tannins gracefully embedded into the wine, the fruit has hints of ripeness, but is brighter, lively, yet encased, waiting for time to blossom. This is a handsome wine, muscular and polished, sort of a Hugh Jackman, but cleaned up and at the Oscars. This wine is a keeper and will reward your patience.

### **Tenuta Le Potazzine "Gorelli" 1,250 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

This wine has so much sweet fruit character in the nose you'd think it might be Californian. Although initially that overtly fruity personality dominates, it is gently conjured into something more complex, more balanced, showing more depth and complexity. The delicious fruit that covers the palate is gradually accented by hints of wild cherry, vanilla and layers of spice and a piquant vibrancy that rolls toward a balanced and juicy finish.

## **Il Marroneto**

**1,383 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

This is a classic wine, born of the soil and filled with nature's goodness and nothing else. The nose gradually releases its pure wild cherry aromatics, while hints of earth and leather circle around it. On the palate, the wine lays down the law. This is a powerful, serious wine, not for the beginner. Decidedly focused and structured, but never out of balance just an authoritative voice of Montalcino. The finish sees some tannin emerge that is lengthened by the acids and then joined by earth, leather and wild cherry, leaving a serious finish. A wine for the cellar, but such a pleasure to see the real face of Montalcino as it was decades ago, made with an uncompromising hand.

## **Il Marroneto "Madonna delle Grazie" 525 cases produced \*\*\*\*\*5**

The Madonna delle Grazie is always a powerful wine, with incredible structure and a long, long, life ahead. The particular elegance of this vintage gives this normally HUGELY POWERFUL wine a chance to relax, be supple, subtle and ultimately soaring. This is one of the top five wines of the vintage. It comes from the *versante Senese*, the north slope, under the town, from vines of 40-plus-years-old, in a small parcel and made in a truly *storico* (classic) style. This wine is full of fruit and aromatics, but that isn't what you see first. The tightly wound structure holds in the violets, lilac, wild cherry and will slowly release it over time. The biggest part of this wine's flavor is *terroir*, sweet earth, wild animal gamey seductiveness that layers itself from the wine's bottom up, stratifying the layers with bold sweetness and accents of spice and herb. This wine is a classic and has a great, long future ahead of it, but it will certainly repay the wait.

## **Il Palazzone**

**719 cases produced \*\*\*\*\*4 stars**

The enticing aromas of complex fruit and baked apples with cinnamon embrace your olfactory senses; hints of leather and intrigue linger at the glasses edge. On the palate, this wine is very rich, but in a sensually delicate way. While lush, it is soft muscle, graceful, full and pulsating. The flavors weave into a silky fabric, caressing your palate, wistfully teasing you to wander toward the finish. Supple warmth, warming luscious flavors with superb balance and drinkability make this is a truly superb wine.

## **Il Poggione**

**16,666 cases produced \*\*\*\*\* 5 stars**

This wine is just delicious: sweet, plummy fruit, extraordinary balance, a long, long finish that is filled with intrigue. Yet, as immediately drinkable and friendly this wine is, there is an underlying complexity, power and intellectual boldness that one doesn't get upon first taste. This is a wine of power, structure, focus and a long life. Its simplicity is sort of like the smile of the Dalai Lama, it seems so pleasant and easy, yet if you gaze into it, you fall into the depths of the world, unfathomable profundity and then you begin to see how incredibly this simple plummy fruit has transformed itself into an extraordinarily complex wine. Layers of delicate intrigue, sweet saddle leather, hints of rosemary, wildflowers, stone, sunshine all weave themselves into a stupefying finish. This is a wine that really needs to be drunk; it can't be tasted. You must meld with it, if you do, the rewards are unbelievable.

## **La Colombina**

**992 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

Bright, focused fruit, a mixture of tart cherries and plums swirl in the glass with hints of vanilla as an accent. On the palate, the focus follows through with a clean and well-accented balance of fruit and spice, while the hint of vanilla is gently folded in to the body. The wine has a supple texture, soft and elegant, with balanced tannins ending in a flowing crescendo of sweet fruit. Well-balanced and friendly, this is a wine with a good structure and will age well for another decade.

### **La Fiorita**

**666 cases produced \*\*2 stars**

The nose booms out of the glass like a French forest on fire, a sweet toasty vanilla barbecue. Loads of sweet cassis fruit frolic in the background under the vanilla cloud and merge into the palate in a dramatic and luscious manner. At the moment the wine shows lots of chunky wood tannins on the palate, yet it's full of dense, ripe fruit.

### **La Fortuna**

**1,383 cases produced \*\*\*\*4 stars**

This wine feels like Brunello. It feels so real, so simply expressive, like a peasant's smile, effortless and extraordinarily genuine. This wine is warm, sweet plummy fruit mixed with bright spicy wild cherry, all flowing into a full-bodied, full-flavored wine focused to the center of your palate. The wine is lush and unctuous, while being bright, vibrant and refreshing. It is more like a symphony than a solo, so many notes and flavors intertwining themselves to form this extraordinary voice of balance and reason. This is a truly superb wine that stretches across all palates; elegant, powerful, lush and bright, it has it all in an extraordinarily genuine and friendly approach. This is truly a wonderful wine.

### **La Gerla**

**3,083 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

The nose is tightly wound wild cherries laced with spice and a vibrancy that makes it hard to miss. The palate has a classic feel to it, excited, popping and taut, the wild cherry character follows through with a bit of earthy intrigue rising up out of the tumult. Lots going on in this wine as it is emerging, growing and gaining character and flavors, the finish shows that the wine will have a long life and is still coming together but has so much character it is hard to deny a great future.

### **La Gerla “Vigna gli Angeli” 458 cases produced \*\*\*\*\*5 stars**

It will truly be a shame when this old vineyard needs to be replanted, because it is producing some of the best wines in Montalcino. The nose of this wine is molten; it is so full of fruit it is amazing. Yet, it isn't simple, one-dimensional fruit—this is truly the Holy Grail of fruit flavors. Dynamic wild cherry notes meld with mineral-laden aromas boiling to the top mixing with wild herbs, fresh leather and sunshine all wound tightly together at the core of this enormous wine. On the palate, this wine has such a tremendous range it is like opening the Oxford English Dictionary (unabridged). There is everything in this wine from A-Z. The focus of this wine is very linear and it just paves a path to the finish with stunningly complex character. Long and ever-unwinding the wine finishes with an unending length, truly marvelous. This wine is absolutely spectacular and it will last 20-30-plus years.

### **La Lecciaia**

**7,000 cases produced**

**\*1star**

The nose comes across as something slightly more interesting than just vinous, but not distinctive. The wine shows an easy balance on the palate and hints of a leathery cherry like character showing some intrigue and medium body. The finish is forward, easy and has a plummy, effortless grace to it that gives the wine a pleasant finale.

### **La Manella**

**1,666 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

The spicy, wild cherry nose is quickly sucked into the dense and flavorful richness. On the palate, the wine is rich, powerful and has slightly evident tannins that make it for a time a bit chunky. However, the wine begins to lengthen and sweet cherry ripeness carries through across the palate. The finish is balanced, long and fresh it has a certain vibrancy and will age nicely.

### **La Poderina**

**4,541 cases produced \*\*2 stars**

My first experience with this wine was that it didn't show much of a nose, but in the mouth the wine was enormously structured and almost knocked me out of my chair. Dense, compacted fruit focuses the power of this wine to a center point on the palate. It didn't let much of the complexity come forward at first, but gradually the richness and spiced plum began to emerge. This wine will need time; it has some real possibilities but the tannins will have to smooth out and that will take another 3-5 years to begin.

### **La Rasina**

**2,500 cases produced \*1 star**

There is a singularly dramatic chocolaty nose full of toasty vanilla that seems somewhat static. This leads to a broad and dense palate feel that has layers of tannin coupled with a spicy, vanilla, cherry cola flavor. Lots of structure and dense tannins that will need lots of time to age into balance.

### **La Serena**

**1,666 cases produced \*\*\* 3 stars**

Sweet, toasty vanillin aromas are the first to greet you from the glass, followed shortly by lots of plump, ripe plummy scents. On the palate, the rich and warm fruit stretches out as the acidity lengthens and brightens the powerful aromatics. The hints of barrique sometimes dominate and then blend into the background, but an obvious toastiness exists. The wine is luscious and has much intrigue as it darts in and out of the nose. Dense and powerful, this is a big wine that has an upfront lushness, but surprisingly good balance at the end.

### **La Togata**

**4,583 cases produced \*\*\* 3 stars**

A nose full of compacted toasty vanillin aromas cavort among layers of ripe fruit, plum and sort of a cherry cola like complexity. On the palate, the wine is ripe with some wood tannins, overwhelmingly lush and dense. There's much power in this wine and it has so much fruit and toasty wood it is hard to get to the bottom of it. Definitely a more modern style yet well made and powerful.

### **Lazzeretti**

**1,010 cases produced .5 stars**

This is a big, powerful and old school Brunello. The nose is somewhat closed with a bit of non-descript earthiness. On the palate, the wine has some drying tannins and a simple fruit profile. The finish is somewhat harsh and what little fruit was in the mid-palate doesn't seem to show up in the finish.

### **Le Chiuse**

**1,250 cases produced 3.5\* stars**

The nose is an intricate mix of sweet wild cherries, earth and delicate herbs. The wine has a great palate feel, serious, focused with classic Sangiovese notes of plum and cherry, sturdily set up for the long haul. Bright acidity points the way for flavors down the palate, leading to a serious and focused finish. This wine has excellent depth of flavor across the board with much more to blossom with a little cellaring. An excellent wine.

### **Le Gode**

**888 cases produced \*\*\* 3 stars**

The nose is sweet and full of wild cherries and earth, but the cherries are very bright light and crisp. On the palate, the wine is elegant, spicy and has a bit of grip in the mid-palate, yet it finishes easy. Delicately perfumed, the finish is a bit short but vibrant for this medium-bodied Brunello. While some Brunelli feel like a broad sword, this wine is more rapier-like—lean, wiry and very responsive. Not for those who are looking for a Napa substitute or an oozing Parker wine. yet classic for its exposure and pedigree.

### **Lisini**

**2,966 cases produced \*\*\*\* 4.5 stars**

This is one spectacular wine. Sweet, dense, ripe red fruit and plum and layers of spiced cherry flood from the glass. Spice, leather, fruit and a shimmering balance jump from the palate, while layers of spice and minerality begin to emerge and the wine expands in richness and wraps your palate in warm sweetness. The finish seems to enrich and concentrate the flavors rather than allowing them to gently drift away. This is a seriously good wine.

### **Luce della Vite**

**cases produced \* stars**

I tasted the Luce only once and prefer to think the wine wasn't showing well the day I tasted it. I'll fill in a review once I re-taste.

### **Piancornello**

**1,666 cases produced \*\*2 stars**

Bold, ripe plummy fruits fill the nose with loads of toasty oak character. The wine is lush, warm, ripe and dense on the palate with loads of thick, ripe plummy fruit, some wood tannin and loads of toasty oak character. The finish is broad, thick and begins to lengthen a bit with some plummy fruit. For those more interested in an international style.

### **Pian dell'Orino**

**800± cases produced \*\*\*\*3.5 stars**

This is the best Pian dell'Orino I think they've ever made. The nose is full of sweet and delicate fruit; it smells more like Nebbiolo smells, not in the aromas but in that the aromas hint at something more subtle than powerful. On the palate, baked apples, poached plums slide into complex hints of animal, fresh leather and wild herbs. The wine coalesces together,

forming a beautiful and supple palate feel while bringing the flavors to a crescendo. Beautifully balanced, elegant and yet well-structured.

**Pinino** **2,583 cases produced** **\*\*2.5 stars**

This wine opens with a bold fruity nose with more plum than cherry. On the palate, the wine is forward and fruity, soft and easy, and then mid-palate begins to stiffen and show a little tannin. The wine finishes long with lots of sweet plummy fruit and the tannins come back into balance.

**Pinino “Clandestino”** **525 cases produced\*\*\*\*4 stars**

The label for this wine is similar to the wine; the eyes hold your attention while veils of aromatics swirl around your head, layers of sweet fruit coupled with hints of spice and herbs have a bold yet yielding expression. On the palate, the wine stretches out and begins to gain its stride, loping effortlessly, filled with sweet expressions of wild cherry and plum with hints of spice. Long and elegant on the palate, this wine finishes with hints of spice and earth that act like bits of mystique floating through to the end. This wine will have an excellent future and drinks very well now with a bit of aeration.

**Podere Brizio** **1,700 cases produced** **\*\*\* 3 stars**

The nose just bursts out of the glass with layers of spice, complex fruit and loads of intrigue. The palate begins to show some richness, then lots of tannin, a serious grip that shakes your molars and hides some of the intrigue in the nose. The finish is long, structured and the tannins stand out as slightly aggressive. This wine has great potential if the tannins can soften, balance and give focus to the wine yet a LONG cellar stay is necessary.

**Podere La Vigna** **1,083 cases produced** **\*\*\* 3.5 stars**

A deep brooding nose full of dense fruit eases slowly out of the glass with more black fruit, though it's not quite distinguishable. On the palate, the powerful tannins are tinged with a hint of iron that gives a certain tang to the fruit. Boldly and dramatically structured, this is a powerful wine. I wrote about it a number of times in my notes, beckoning me to try it again. The lushness of the fruit began to well up in the middle of the tannins, making the palate warm slightly before it begins to shudder from the intensity. Impressively structured, this wine is definitely a candidate for the cellar.

**Podere Paganicio** **600 cases produced** **\*\*\*3 stars**

The nose shows lots of plum and dark fruits in a warm and inviting nose. The wine gives an immediate sensation of balance and length, with an excellent, supple, mouthfeel where the fruits evident in the nose play themselves across your palate, showing lots of soft, spicy fruit that lights up your mouth. The finish is well-balanced, long and shows good potential for drinking now but will age easily for another decade.

**Poggiarellino** **400 cases produced** **\*\*\*3.5 stars**



The nose of this wine vaults out of the glass full of spice and complex fruit. On the palate, the wine immediately shows its power, structure and barrique character. Loads of wood tannins that need to integrate haven't done so yet, however this is a wine with depth and intrigue. I am curious as to its evolution and uncertain enough to not score it any higher.

**Salicutti** **666± cases produced** **\*\*\*3 stars**

The nose is deep, dark fruits full of earth and leather coming together in whirling complexity. On the palate, the wine has a *very* powerful tannic structure but still has good length and the flavors carry through. The finish is a booming statement of earth, fruit and tannin that concuss your mouth and makes you reach for the guardrail. This powerful wine is brooding, complex, not smiling, deep and good, yet a wine that will need LOTS of time in your cellar.

**San Filippo** **2,500 cases produced** **\*\*\* 3stars**

Loads of sweet, ripe fruit in the nose, which is not overly complex but seamless. On the palate, the wine has balance and is medium- to full-bodied, yet it gradually begins to flesh out and finishes in a crescendo. Soft and sweet in the finish, some tannin begins to emerge. Very good wine, I *haven't* tasted the "Le Lucere," this is the regular Brunello.

**San Polino** **166 cases produced** **\*\*2.5 stars**

The nose is full of fresh cherry aromatics, hints of earth and flows easily from the glass. On the palate, the wine is full of spicy cherry notes, has a medium body that is soft and easy as it flows across your tongue. The finish comes together with good balance of structure, mouthfeel and flavors that are all in harmony.

**San Polino "Helichrysum"** **200 cases produced** **\*\*\*3 stars**

The big, bold nose is full of spicy cherry and plum character. On the palate, the wine is powerful, focused with layers of fruit and spice showing excellent balance and length but has a touch of a vitamin B flavor that is slightly distracting. Earth, spice and intrigue finish the wine that is well-balanced and full-bodied. Could use some aging but a very good wine.

**Sesta di Sopra** **333 cases produced** **\*\*\*\*4 stars**

As this wine approaches your nose you begin to feel like you're walking through the hills of Montalcino in spring with the fields aglow with life. The Sesta di Sopra nose is always a reflection of their vineyard, and it yields spicy, complex, wild cherry fruit, with hints of sage and leather that arch out of the glass, though not aggressively, just exuberant. On the palate, the wine shows more plum, grilled meats, soy sauce, rosemary and sweet leather, gradually forming its linear character. The wine gradually expands exposing layers of mineral, more spice, layering itself upon your tongue. The finish is full, long and persistent ending in a harmony of wild herbs and plums. This wine will be able to be drunk now with a couple of hours in a decanter, but will continue to improve easily for another decade plus.

**Siro Pacenti** **2,916 cases produced** **\*\*\*\*\*5 stars**

Wow. Sweet, toasty, coffee notes just burst from the glass. However, it doesn't smell as if it is heavily oaked at all. It is just the first step into layers of complex aromatics. There are swirls of complex fruit and earth that well up behind the essence of *barrigue* forming a whirlpool of intrigue and obvious complexity that display the wines decisive flavors. On the palate, smooth, rippling layers of fleshy sweetness are accented with bits of spice. Blackberries fill your mouth in a controlled expansion, layering levels of intricacy. The finish is a wonderful movement full of athletic prowess that, with effortless grace, portrays the wine's completeness. This is a masterful wine.

### **Solaria**

**1,416 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

The nose is full of dense, ripe, dark fruit with hints of vanilla. On the palate, the wine shows a dense focused richness that seems muscled into line, sort of a half-nelson on the flavors forcing them into a linear nature. The wine carries the shadow of structure and power like it's a dark visage struggling to bring forth some cavernous fruit beneath. Powerful and somewhat brooding, this wine will need age a bit to ameliorate the tannins and fulfill its powerful potential.

### **Stella di Campalto**

**? cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

Bold and strident, the powerful fruit in this wine leaps from the glass in a swirl of plum accented with hints of vanilla. On the palate, the wine shows lots of structure and grip, sizeable body and lots of plummy dark fruit aromatics. Hints of spice add to the complexity. The finish shows lots of tannin, and while it's not out of balance, significant aging will be required to resolve them. The fruit begins to slowly unwind as the wine stretches out gradually.

### **Talenti**

**2,166 cases produced \*\*\*\*4.5 stars**

Wow! The nose is sweet. Fresh leather, delicate and enveloping, evolves into a complex cauldron of plums and wild cherries spiced with cinnamon, cardamom, touches of sweet leather and laced with a shock of wild herbs. In the mouth, the wine is ethereal; it just floats across the palate activating all of your taste buds carrying through more of the wild cherry and plum, more spice and herbs emerge from the nose synthesizing them into a texture. A wonderfully long finish, balanced, luscious, full yet easy. Delicate power. This is just such an elegant and fun wine to drink it needs to be in your cellar.

### **Tassi**

**750 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

The nose is bright, clean and full of plumMy fruit. The body, however, is really intriguing with layers of spice, grip and lots of complex fruit. Spice fills up your mouth, but the wine has extraordinary balance with a certain supple texture that just makes it flow across your palate. The finish pulls lots of the spice and fruit together in a long, lithe and medium- to full-bodied concert of fruit, spice and just a hint of wood. Excellent first effort.

### **Tenuta di Sesta**

**5,000 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

The nose of this wine is pure Sangiovese, delicate yet with concentrated aromatics that seem to have the intensity of dried roses. The wine exudes real, pure Sangiovese length with a long

aftertaste. Dark fruits, hints of earth, leather, wild herbs, with a full ripeness that evades begin obvious. On the palate, the wine is lush-yet-crisp, sort of a velvet sword, clean, refreshing yet relaxing, smooth and makes me slide into a languorous state. The finish is savory, long and just gives one the feel of Montalcino; it's like a spring morning waling in the brush with a breeze wafting toward you and a smile on your face.

### **Tornesi**

**833 cases produced \*\*2 stars**

The nose is wild and gamey with hints of slightly stewed plums. Definitely bold. On the palate, the wine is decisive and has good acidic balance and the plummy character becomes more chocolaty, yet still has good length. The finish is slightly shorter and has lots of plummy fruit and hints of leather, definitely a wine for those who like it a bit wild and gamey; my colleague thinks it is like Brunello from Paso Robles.

### **Uccelliera**

**1,875 cases produced \*\*\*\*\* 5stars**

Wow. I could stop the review there and it would be complete. I'm in awe. The nose of this wine is so stunning and attention-grabbing that it reminds me of a great tenor singing an Aria, filling the room and awareness of everyone within earshot. Not a fruit laden "bomb," it is a wine, a wine with a nose that is so full of intrigue, complex earth and sweet fruit it is hard to imagine. On the palate, it shows richness and a confident ease, never trying to overpower you with size, just thrill you with complexity and balance. Gracefully complex, the wine expands itself to fill your soul, leaving a powerful finish, strikingly regal in its power and determination. My #1 wine for the vintage. Simply dazzling.

### **Valdicava**

**0,000? cases produced \*\*\*\*\* 4.5 stars**

The nose hints of power and a seductive nature with wild cherry and earth aromatics blending together, creating an perfume that really speaks of the *genus loci* (Latin with a grander sense than our use of *terroir*). Supple on palate with lots of complex fruit and earth, the wine flexes its mighty structure with power and depth, giving you real evidence that this is a big wine. Tannins are slightly more evident than previous vintages, but not out of balance as the wine has more power than the 2001 had. The wine finishes with long and powerful attack on the palate and just a hint of grip. In my notes, I wrote lots of horsepower. This excellent wine needs time in your cellar.

### **Valdicava "Madonna del Piano" 0? cases produced \*\*\*\*\*5 stars**

We are already getting asked about this wine even though it won't be released until next year. However, having tasted it over the course of the last three years I can tell you: start saving your money! This wine is beautiful and where the Valdicava 2004 shows its bold, structured character, the Madonna just sings sweet, effortlessly and elegant. A truly beautiful wine to behold. Next year I'll give a complete review.

### **Val di Suga - Tenimenti Angelini 15,000 cases produced \*.5 star**

The nose is fruity, vinous and one-dimensional. On the palate the wine emphasizes grip, density and structure. The finish is stodgy, lacks grace and, to use a football analogy, this is the infamous three yards and a cloud of dust approach to winemaking.

**Vasco Sassetti****3,333 cases produced \*\*2.5 stars**

The nose is classic, leathery, spicy, full of plums and cherries. On the palate, the wine has a certain lushness, body and depth, with rustic tannins that dominate and square off the mid-palate. The flavors are well-defined earth and spice, cherry and plum as well as leather. The finish pulls these flavors together, but in a chewy finish that will take some time to evolve but I like the wine in a decade.

**Verbena****1,300 cases produced \*\*2 stars**

Vanilla and toasty wood are dominant in the nose, with lots of dense, dark fruit crowded in underneath the wood. Ripe and thick on the palate, showing lots of cassis- and plum-like character that needs to come together. The finish is powerful and shows a bit of tannin but the fruit begins to emerge and lengthen. A young and boisterous wine that needs to find its place.

**Villa a Tolle****2,916 cases produced \*\*\*2.5 stars**

The wine starts out with a deep concentration of cassis and plummy fruit in the nose that seems dark. On the palate, the wine is powerful, full of chocolaty fruit, but with a big whack of tannin that on aeration begins to ameliorate and allows the wine to blossom. The wine finishes a little short, but wines that are big and chunky do that when they are young, and this wine will blossom later into a denser, riper style of Brunello for those looking for size.

**Villa le Prata****1,000 cases produced \*\*\*3.5 stars**

The nose is forward and full of dense plums interlaced with delicate traces of toasty oak. In the mouth, the wine is powerful, with loads of luxurious, dense, plummy fruit and tannin, all well in-check, and a long and elegant palate feel that resonates focused richness. The finish is building as you can feel the wine lengthening and stretching the tannic structure out with loads of fruit following. Excellent future for this wine.

**Vitanza****2,500 cases produced \*\*\*3 stars**

The nose is brooding, dark and elaborate, with more cassis than plum that is torqued into submission at the moment. On the palate, the wine is thick, dense and the flesh begins to enrich, while lengthening, and it has loads of powerful tannins fencing off the mid-palate. The finish is sheathed in sweet yet powerful tannins that direct one's focus to a distant point in the future when the wine will finally blossom.

**75 wines Tasted: Not Reviewed****Abbadia Ardenga****Agostina Pieri****Bartolo Giusti –Tenuta Comunali****Bellaria****Belpoggio**

Bolsignano  
Cantine Bonacchi  
Tenuta Brunelli  
Campi di Fonterenza  
Canneta  
Cantina di Montalcino  
Capanne Ricci  
Casanuova delle Cerbaie  
Casisano Colombaio  
Castello di Velona  
Tricerchi  
Castiglione del Bosco  
Citillie di Sopra  
Coldisole  
Collelreto  
Donatella Cinelli Colombini  
Fattoi  
Ferro  
Fornacella  
Fornacina  
Gianni Brunelli  
Il Colle  
Il Forteto del Drago  
Il Paradiso di Manfredi  
Innocenti  
L'Aietta  
La Campana  
La Fornace  
La Magia  
La Palazetta  
La Velona  
Lambardi  
Le Macioche  
Le Ragnaie  
Marchesato degli Aleramici  
Mastrojanni  
Mate  
Mocali  
Padelletti  
Palazzo  
Pian delle Querci

Pietroso  
Piombaia  
Podere Canalino  
Podere Canapaccia  
Poggio dell'Aquila  
Querce Bettina  
Querecchio  
Ridolfi  
Santa Lucia  
San Giacomo  
San Lorenzo  
San Carlo  
Santa Giulia  
SassodiSole  
Scopone  
Sesti  
Tenuta Crocedimezzo  
Tenuta Greppone Mazzi  
Tenuta La Fuga  
Tenuta Oliveto  
Tenuta Silvio Nardi  
Tenuta Silvio Nardi "Manachiara"  
Tenuta San Giorgio  
Tenute Niccolai – Podere Bellarina  
Terralsole  
Terre Nere  
Tiezzi  
Ventolaio  
Villa I Cipressi  
Villa Poggio Salvi

### **Those Not Tasted:**

Case Basse -Soldera  
Pieve di Santa Restitua  
Biondi Santi  
Tenimenti Ricci  
Armilla  
Castelli Martinozzi  
Cerbaia  
Cerbaiona

Colleoni  
Fastelli  
Fontebuia  
Fortius  
Greppino  
Il Cocco  
Il Paradiso di Frassina  
Il Poggiolo  
La Croce  
La Pescaia  
La Pieve  
La Torre  
Luciani  
Carlo Molinari  
Molino di Sant'Antimo  
Montecarbello  
Domenico Parisi  
Passo del Lume Spento  
Celestino Pecci  
Livio Sasseti Pertimali  
Angelo Sasseti Pertimali  
Pian di Macina  
Podere Bellarina  
Poderuccio  
Poggio degli Ulivi  
Scopetino  
Scopetone  
Tenuta La Torraccia  
Pietranera  
Visconti