

WINE News

*Treasures from Montalcino and
Whites from All Over Italy*



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Italy's Collectible Classics and Surprising Discoveries

By Greg St. Clair, Italian Buyer



Every time I write a newsletter, I am amazed at the vast array of varieties that make up the Italian wine landscape. From the tip of Calabria to the Slovenian, Austrian, Swiss, and French borders there are so many different grapes, with a winemaking history over 2000 years old. My eternal struggle is to remain focused and disciplined, but there's always that one wine that really doesn't have a category or

there just isn't much of it—and those end up as the wines I want to tell you about. However, the economic reality always hovers over my head as the amount of inventory that I have dictates what I must write about. So, my ever-diligent editor always has her hands full, and I'm sure that she curses me under her breath! (Editor's note: not in the slightest!)

The 2017 vintage of Brunello di Montalcino has arrived, and, if you've read the critics, it seems as if they've all become meteorologists, because weather is all they have written about. The 2017 vintage was hot and dry in Italy. Usually, summer rains balance out the days of heat, but 2017 was damned hot and dry all season long. It would make you think the wines are bottled prune juice with many of the reviews the "meteorologists" have written. Yet: I poured a whole series of 2017 Brunellos for our staff, and they were all shocked when I told them of the vintage's problems. The wines are anything but over-ripe, flabby, or overly alcoholic. They, at worst, are slightly more drinkable now! So, Page 2 will give you a rundown of some of the newly arrived wines with some late-arriving 2015 and 2016 vintages. Below, I am going to squeeze in some of the exciting and fun varietals that are just too delicious to not include them!



2021 Almondo "Vigne Sparse" Roero Arneis \$17.99 Almondo's Vigne Sparse is spectacular this vintage! Piedmont's go-to white wine is dry, medium-bodied, and, in this vintage, shows great balance while still having lots of mid-palate richness. If you haven't had an Arneis recently

this is the release that'll draw you back—supple, aromatic, and as the young folks say, crushable!



2019 Emiliano Falsini "Feudo Pignatone" Etna Rosso \$49.99 Sicily's Mt. Etna is one of the most fascinating wine regions in the world. Though grapes have been growing here for millennia, investment in quality winemaking started only in the mid-1990s. The vineyards here are

up to 100 years old! Emiliano Falsini, one of Italy's up-and-coming enologists, purchased a vineyard and has made a classic rendition.



2018 Montefiorito Monferrato Rosso (Nebbiolo) \$29.99 Nebbiolo, yes...but from Asti? Sì, even in Asti where Barbera reigns supreme, Nebbiolo has a microscopic foothold. This version starts with fermentation in large wooden vats and then is aged in amphora for seven

months. A mere 2,500 bottles are produced. This unique version of Nebbiolo is full of cherry confit flavors. Delicious!

Montalcino Masters from Our Direct-Import Portfolio

When I first came to K&L 25 years ago, I was offered the opportunity to start directly importing wines. The benefits were immediately obvious: buying directly from the producer allows the retailer to offer outstanding values and extends a fantastic opportunity to independent wineries who wouldn't have been imported otherwise. Likewise, our customers get access to the best under-the-radar small producers in the world. Montalcino was one of the first places I went to, and, ever since, we've been importing the wines of a bundle of exceptional producers. I'm so excited to have these on our shelves.



Gaetano Salvioni, founder of Albatreti.

One of my favorite personalities in Montalcino is Gaetano Salvioni, a micro-producer who started making a tiny production of wines in his "retirement." His family owns a small vineyard just outside the town of Montalcino near Palazzone. His first vintage was 2008, but it wasn't until the 2010 vintage was released that he became known. His wines show a savory, umami-tinged flavor spectrum and are

medium- to full- bodied, elegant yet powerful.

Gaetano's **2018 Albatreti Rosso di Montalcino \$24.99** is a great way to introduce yourself to his style. This 100% Sangiovese is delicious now but will age easily for another five to eight years. Only 2,800 bottles were produced.

Gaetano's **2016 Albatreti Brunello di Montalcino \$49.99** is a classic—the nose is full of savory plum, soy, oyster shell, and a bit of that Tuscan brush. Deceptively drinkable now but it will easily age another 10 to 15 years.

I've known Luigi (Gigi) and Katia Fabbro for a long time. They're one of the more in-tune and intriguing couples I've ever met. They even hosted my son for six months way back in 2009, filling him with an understanding and empathy for the land I wish I had. They are in the southeasterly quarter of Montalcino, just down the back road from Fattoria Barbi, one of the oldest wineries in



Gigi Fabbro.

Montalcino. They are biodynamic practitioners (Gigi is a biologist) and use conical wooden vats to ferment with indigenous yeast. Their wines express a freshness counterbalanced with layers of complex fruit and spice—you can feel nature in their wines.

The **2019 San Polino Rosso di Montalcino \$29.99** is 100% Sangiovese, and, if you don't feel like spending for the Brunello right off the bat, this is a wonderful way to experience the winery's style and flavors. I'm a believer in the "trickle up" theory of wine: people who buy a Rosso will eventually buy a Brunello as well, but those who start at Brunello rarely buy Rosso—and they're missing out! Indulge in Rosso!



The **2017 San Polino Brunello di Montalcino \$59.99** comes from south-facing vineyards at 1,000 feet and spends 42 months in large Slavonian and French oak barrels. The results are glorious. The purity of fruit is so strong it envelops you in its terroir. There's a bold presence on the palate and a long, seamless finish.

When you make the step up to the **2017 San Polino "Helichrysum" Brunello di Montalcino \$74.99** you're in a different universe. The vineyard is at 1,500 feet, and the wine goes through six months bâtonnage in French barriques, and then ages three years in large Slavonian and French oak barrels. You immediately notice the intensity of this wine—so much fruit, so much complexity, but supple and inviting. This is a superb wine, and you should really experience it.



Le Potazzine winery lies southwest of the village of Montalcino and only about a half a mile from where Albatreti is, as the crow flies. It's also next door to Villa le Prata. This zone is at a higher altitude than most of Montalcino and gives birth to wines that have incredibly fragrant aromatics. These are not lightweight wines; they still show power and depth, but in a more subtle way.

The **2020 Le Potazzine Rosso di Montalcino \$35.99** is made with indigenous yeasts and spends



12 months in 30/50 hl barrels of Slavonian oak, then is bottled unfiltered. I should write more often about how Rosso di Montalcino is sourced from the best estates and constitutes the best bargain in Italy where drinkability and age-ability are concerned. It's just an incredible value for this level of quality.

Yet the jump in quality to the **2017 Le Potazzine Brunello di Montalcino \$96.99** is immediately evident. The wine



Gigliola Giannetti and her two daughters are the force behind Le Potazzine winery.



Vineyards at Poggiarellino.

spends 40 months aging in 30/50 hl barrels in Slavonian oak and is bottled unfiltered. The leap of presence and depth is obvious: there's power, structure, and a long life ahead, but it is so supple and giving that you can drink it now. It's truly just a lovely bottle of wine.



Ludovico Ginotti of Poggiarellino, a fan favorite around K&L.

One of our long-time direct imports is Poggiarellino. Lodovico and Anna Ginotti, who, through inheritance, landed a second career in Montalcino as winemakers. Their tiny estate on the north end of Montalcino produces about 500 cases of Brunello and about the same amount of Rosso. Their wines have a distinct character and, a wild marasca cherry nose that I get lost in every time I taste their wines. Rugged and powerful, their wines always show bold structure and a bit of tannin that ages incredibly well. I had a 2007 Rosso a couple of months back that was stupendous and had years left to go.



This vintage of the **2020 Poggiarellino Rosso di Montalcino \$19.99** is no different. It's bold, forceful, and full of marasca cherry and gamey intrigue. It's composed of 100% Sangiovese and aged 1 year in 20hl Slavonian oak.

The 2016 vintage in Montalcino is already legendary. Fortunately, Lodovico still had some left for us, but I know it'll go quickly—only 6,000 bottles were made! This is one of the best vintages from their property that I've ever had. The **2016 Poggiarellino Brunello di Montalcino \$36.99** is aged 42 months in 20hl Slavonian oak. The first scent of this Brunello is a powerful statement of place, and, for Poggiarellino, that is marasca cherry, a wild and gamey Italian cherry with surreal aromatics. It's haunting, inviting, seductive, and incredibly complex. This is a big yet balanced wine that will age very well.



A bonus: the newly arrived Riserva from this extraordinary vintage! The **2016 Poggiarellino Brunello di Montalcino Riserva \$49.99** is a powerhouse wine. With structure, density, and tannins encasing the complex fruit and spice, this wine will need some time, but you'll reap huge rewards with some time in your cellar!



Greg brought out a lineup of these beauties for our recent staff tasting.

Scintillating New White Wines

It was 99 degrees at my house yesterday, and the idea of writing about Amarone or Barolo was...wow, just not appealing. What does make my mouth water are some of the new white wines we have just received. Some are crisp and refreshing and others are richer, showing more palate texture and savory notes.



Let's start with the **2020 La Ginestraia Vermentino Riviera Ligure di Ponente \$29.99**. This is my idea of Vermentino. You might be more familiar with versions from Sardinia or the Tuscan coast, which show more weight and flesh. This Vermentino comes from the narrow, south-facing vineyard slopes of Liguria in the northwest. This wine shows more complexity and has a racier mouthfeel than its brethren from the south, with more facets and brightness. It's just super, and, if you're having a pesto pasta...well, this is your wine.

I am a huge fan of the Verdicchio from Matelica, which is an inland, upland valley in the Apennines that runs north to south. The location and orientation allow the grapes to achieve full phenolic ripeness. The **2020 Tenuta Grimaldi Verdicchio di Matelica \$19.99** comes from the north end of the Matelica valley facing east and northeast at 1500 to 1800 feet. Here it gets just the morning sun, allowing the fruit to retain its acidity but still get completely ripe without high alcohol in the final wine. Partially fermented in stainless steel and partially in large barrels, the wine rests on its own lees until June of the following year, adding a gorgeous, supple texture. You're going to love this!



One of the amazing things in the Italian wine world is that there is always something "new" to discover, yet with an incredible historical past. Calabria, the toe of the boot, hasn't always been known for quality wine, but I was blown away by this winery. Antonella Lombardo is



Tenuta Grimaldi.

a name I had never heard of until recently, but OMG you will know her now! The **2020 Antonella Lombardo "Pi Greco" Greco** (the Pi is pronounced Pie, like the 3.14159) **IGT Calabria \$35.99** is one of the most exciting wines I have had in some time. It's luscious, alluring, and the nose is full of Middle Eastern spice and sandalwood. Yet it isn't overwhelming; it lies swirling beneath the surface, sort of a siren song that beckons you ever closer. Superb balance, excellent length, and a whole lot of WOW.

Everyone should try this wine. It's the best thing I have ever had from Calabria. With only 4,000 bottles produced, you can't afford to wait.



Antonella Lombardo.



Alvaro Pecorari from Cantina Lis Neris

Friuli is really a mystery for most Americans. It produces some of the best whites in Italy, yet remains relatively unknown. Lis Neris has been making wine since 1981 in the Isonzo D.O.C., just under the south slopes of Collio. Owner/winemaker Alvaro Pecorari produces wines with weight,

density, and complexity enough to rival any of the world's great white regions. His wines are fermented and aged in 500L tonneaux with lots of bâtonnage and time on the lees.

His **2018 Lis Neris "Jurosa" Chardonnay \$44.99** can go head to head with any Chardonnay in this price range. It is palate filling, showing wonderful weight and texture, yet still seems light on the tongue.

The **2017 Lis Neris "Lis Bianco" \$54.99** is a blend of Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc co-fermented in 500L French oak for 11 months and then two years in stainless steel. Luscious and mouth filling yet spicy, racy, and very complex—a super bottle of wine.



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