

The town of Montalcino, situated 70 miles southwest of Tuscany, is surrounded by vineyards that grow the Brunello grape. This particular grape is a clone of Sangiovese. (Actually a special clone called the Brunello clone.) Although it is only 70 miles further south, it appears to make enough of a difference in that the warmer climate has the effect of producing bigger and bolder grapes. From this grape is produced “Brunello di Montalcino” red Italian wine. The final product is revered, expensive, and well deserving of every accolade that is showered upon it.

Brunello first came upon the scene in the 14th century. Fast forward to the 19th century when a local farmer named Clemente Santi isolated certain plantings of Sangiovese vines in order to produce a 100% varietal wine that could be aged for a considerable period of time. This experiment worked quite well, and so Clemente’s grandson Ferruccio took it one step further. He was able to prove that the 100% Sangiovese clone could stand up against the dreaded Phylloxera Aphid. As a result, he went on to package, and eventually release, the first great vintage of Brunello di Montalcino. This was 1888.

Brunello wine is strong and bold. When it is mature, it is garnet in color and has a penetrating bouquet which is reminiscent of wild berries. The flavor possesses warmth as it carries ripe fruit and polished tannins to a long finish. All of this is the result of hard work and Italian Law. Brunellos fall within the DOCG regulations, therefore the normale must be aged a minimum of 50 months before release. The riserva are held for an additional 12 months.

Brunello di Montalcino has a companion wine called Rosso di Montalcino. This wine is also produced using the 100% Sangiovese grape; however the aging requirement is only six months. This style of wine gives the producer a great deal of flexibility. He can either produce Rosso only, or if his Brunello is not maturing to the high standard required, he is able to downgrade and declare the wine a Rosso. In either case, this flexibility leads to positive cash flow as he is in receipt of funds that will tide him over until a satisfactory Brunello is available.

Franco my driver is among the missing. I suspect that he has a girlfriend. I hope that they are enjoying the use of my car. In any case, I am in need of his advice on our next wine, which is Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. Vino Nobile is produced in and around the town of Montepulciano. It is referred to as Nobile because it was regularly consumed by the noblemen and popes of the 18th century. Like Brunello, Vino Nobile is produced from a Sangiovese clone called Prugnolo Gentile. However the requirement for the Prugnolo is only 60-80% followed by 10-20% Canaiolo grapes, and up to 20% of lesser grapes grown *only* in The Province of Siena. Should a producer include a white varietal, he is allowed to add only

10%. Should an aromatic grape be added in the blend it may only be Malvasia del Chianti. The wines are to be stored in Botti (large oak barrels) for a minimum of two years for normale, and for three years for riserva. The minimum alcohol level will be 12.5%. These are the DOCG regulations for Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and they are strictly enforced.

Vino Nobile does not enjoy the elite status of Brunello. It does, however, have its place. It is after all the third most important wine from Tuscany. There are about 45-50 producers in all. After a period of inferior production, Vino Nobile made a serious rebound in the early 1990's. The wines returned to market with great improvements in bouquet, fruit characteristics, and improved accompaniment with food.

If you go to the Chianti region of Tuscany, try to include Montepulciano in your itinerary. The countryside is beautiful and you will be well received at the wineries. In addition to this, try to include the winery of Banfi. At Banfi you can make a reservation for Lunch. I assure you it will be unforgettable. Another visit that must be included is the ENOTICA. This is a tasting room located in the Cosimo de Medici fortress within the walled city of Siena. There you will enjoy selecting from over 1000 different wines from over 500 different producers. These producers are all from Italy.

Winespeak:

What is a **Barrel Tasting**? Besides being lots of fun for the tourists, a barrel tasting is nothing more than an indication of the wines POTENTIAL. However, barrel tastings are vitally important to the producer, as he will repeat this process many times before bottling.

As always, the wines discussed above are available in the Lowcountry. Enjoy! Please feel free to contact me at [tacc@ hargray.com](mailto:tacc@hargray.com).

Next stop: Austria.

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