



# Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

This quarter we are going to take a dive into a single wine region, the Italian provenience of Tuscany. I am sure that many of you understand the historical significance of the region, and likely appreciate many of the wines. For the selections this release I am going to examine the area from the north, near the city of Florence, to the south and the city of Siena. While it is only an hour and a half drive between the two cities, there is a vast difference in the wines that each region produces even using the same grape variety. It is this reason that I figured it was time to dedicate an entire quarter to this amazing wine region.

## **2016 Tenuta Capezzana Carmignano Riserva - \$75**

In the early 1990's I attended a grand wine tasting at the Peabody Hotel in Orlando, featuring the wines of Palace Brands, one of the top importers of Italian wines into the US at the time. I was one of the youngest people in the room, 25 or 26, and considered myself more than proficient in Italian wines, which at the time were not as common as they are now. As I approached the table where they were pouring the wines of Tentuta Capezzana, I was met by the owner, Count Ugo Bonacossi, who took the time to go into great detail about his wines. As we went through the lineup he kept mentioning that there was Cabernet Sauvignon blended with each of his Sangiovese based bottles, which surprised me. I asked if they were "Super Tuscans" the new buzz word of the time. He very quickly corrected me that his family had been growing Cabernet Sauvignon in his vineyards for generations, and they were far from a fad. To them, Cabernet Sauvignon is as indigenous as Sangiovese and an integral part of the wines from the tiny appellation of Carmignano.

If you are not familiar with this microscopic appellation do not feel like your knowledge of Tuscany is insufficient. The entire appellation covers only 287 acres, which are tucked into a valley 13 miles west of the city center of Florence. Despite the diminutive size the wines have an outsized reputation in the history of Tuscany. Ancient artifacts show winemaking in the area 3000 years ago, and in the 13th century Cosimo de Medici III declared it the first protected wine zone, centuries before other parts of Tuscany. When Italy formally created their DOC/G zones in 1975, Carmignano was initially declared a DOC, and lumped in with the Chianti Montebano appellation. In 1988 Carmignano was granted full DOCG status, making it the smallest such zone in Tuscany.

Like all the regions of Tuscany, Carmignano wines are based on Sangiovese and the grape must be 50% of the blend. Where they are unique is Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc are also legal, in quantities up to 20% each in the final blend. For those that are trying to figure out the remaining percentage, Canaiolo, Canaiolo Bianco and Trebbiano are also allowed up to 10%. There are conflicting reports about how long the region has incorporated Cabernet Sauvignon into the blend of traditional grapes, but the most reliable is that in the 15th century Catherine de Medici, then the Queen of France, promoted the grape to planted in the nearby vineyards of her home. For Capezzana, Count Bonacassi told me that their cuttings were brought by his grandfather in the 1930's, purchased from Chateau Lafite-Rothschild in Bordeaux.

Parchment records in the Florentine archives show a lease for vineyards and olive groves in an area marked as Capezzana from 804 AD. For much of the time the region was controlled by royal families, but their modern history began in 1920 when Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, Ugo's grandfather, purchased the estate after moving back from Spain. Alessandro invested heavily in renovating the estate, including modernizing the cellar and replanting the vineyards and olive groves. He also expanded the property by purchasing the two neighboring farms, "The Poggetto" and "Trefiano," dividing Capezzana into three distinct estates. Today in the best vintages the family separates the best blocks of Trefiano and vinify them separately as a Riserva. The blend for the 2016 is 80% Sangiovese, 10% Canaiolo and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, aged for 18 months in French tonneaux (400L) of which only 10% are new.

When you are ready to drink this wine you will want to decant it for an hour before serving. The nose is a savory combination of tart and cooked red cherries, red raspberry puree, peach skin, pipe tobacco, old leather book covers and tamari. On the palate the wine is quite dense and muscular, with rigid, obvious tannins framing the restrained fruit. Although drinkable now this wine will be best after 2025 and show well until 2035. Total production was 800 cases.

## **Castello di Bossi Chianti Classico Riserva Berardo 2016 - \$35**

While Chianti Classico is probably the most famous wine produced in Tuscany, I would put forth the argument that great examples may be some of the least appreciated, especially among collectors. There are many reasons for my opinion, formed by speaking with many of the region's top producers, and sadly we do not have the space for this here. Perhaps in a year or two I will select only Chianti Classicos for one quarter for a more thorough examination. For this quarter I chose a really exceptional example of a Chianti Classico Riserva, primarily to show the difference between wines of the north and those of the south.

To understand the Chianti Classico region you must first know that the vineyards for this area lie between the cities of Florence and Siena, running almost 50 miles. As of 2021 the region is divided into 11 subzones, called *Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive* (UGA) determined for the unique characteristics of the wines each produces. While not yet legal to list on wine labels, the creation and boundaries of the UGAs has been agreed upon by 500 producers and now only waits for the government approval. This will allow the producers to designate from where their wines were produced, creating differentiation akin to the way the wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux are labeled by commune.

My selection comes from the southern and eastern most zone of Chianti Classico, Castelnuovo Berardenga. The estate of Castello di Bossi is owned by Marco & Maurizio Bacci, who although scions of a family who produces jeans, decided to pursue their passion of winemaking in 1983. Today they own five estates in the region, with over 750 acres of vines, and Marco is seen as one of the most visionary producers in the Chianti Classico zone. (In 2019 Renieri Brunello di Montalcino was critic James Sucklings #1 Wine of the Year.)

The grapes for this wine come from an 88 acre parcel located on a steep, south facing hillside in the Castelnuovo Berardenga UGA. This is the warmest UGA of Chianti Classico so the wines are typically darker and more powerful than most examples. Bacci believes great wine is made in the vineyard so yields are very low and all the grapes are harvested and sorted by hand before fermentation. This wine was aged entirely in new barriques (225L) and casks (5000L) for 18-24 months.

To serve this wine, make sure you decant it for a half hour before serving. When you do the nose reveals a rich combination of cassia buds, star anise, violets, vanilla, dried red cherries and damson plum preserves. On the palate it shows superb richness, with classic restraint forming mid-palate and holding the reins into a fairly long finish. Good now and better in a couple of years, drink 2022-2031.

## **Fattoria La Leccaia Brunello di Montalcino Vigna Manapetra 2015 - \$55**

Much like Chianti, there is a contingent of producers who would like to categorize Brunello di Montalcino by specific sub-zones. Ostensibly one could divide the region into 4 quadrants, with the hillside town of Montalcino in the center. Doing so creates sub-zones with different elevations, soil types and expositions. Some producers prefer to blend across quadrants while many of the older, established estates have contiguous holdings so their examples are representative of their unique area. Our feature, Fattoria la Leccaia, lies less than a mile south of the city at the top of a hillside, with the vineyards fanning out below the buildings that make up the winery and residence. The neighboring hillsides are home to the great estates of Cerbaiona, Biondi Santi, Casanova di Neri and coincidentally, Renieri owned by the Bacci family of the previous wine. What makes the area around Fattoria La Leccaia so regarded is a combination of high elevation, steep slopes and poor, calcareous soils. This combination produces wines that are elegant, restrained and long lived.

When this property was purchased by Mauro Pacini in 1983, it was a neglected estate of 150 acres of forest, olive groves and vineyards. Like many properties in Brunello at the time, Mauro made a significant investment in the cellar and vineyards in order to produce world class wines. Although not well known in the US, yet, the property is revered in Italy and it is exciting to be able to bring you their single site wine as a selection in this club.

The single cru bottling of Manapetra is only produced in exceptional years, from a site with high levels of sand and limestone in the soil. This gives the wine a robust texture and fine, polished tannins, capable of aging for two decades. When you open this wine decant it for up to an hour before serving. Then the nose reveals a complex and generous combination of porcini mushroom, dried cherries, dried dates, espresso crema and pipe tobacco. On the palate it shows good concentration, with the fruit restrained behind tannins and earth components. Drink this wine 2022-2035.