

Benvenuto Brunello, welcome ai wine lover...

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A hearty welcome to the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Consorzio di Tutela (in 1967) seems exactly to be the 2012 vintage presented this year.

For twenty-five years the wine preview has been held in the mystical cloister of Sant'Agostino into whose complex the Consorzio moved just a few months ago. A preview that forced the two hundred or so journalists, assisted impeccably by efficient sommeliers, to do an authentic Brunello marathon more suitable for Superman than mere human beings: just one day (instead of the usual two) to taste over one hundred and seventy Brunello 2012 (including the selections), about thirty Brunello Riserva 2011 and approximately one hundred and twenty Rosso di Montalcino 2015. That's right! Because this year's new idea was to open the doors on the following day to wine lovers, stopping us from continuing our work in the hall with due concentration and the professional support of the sommeliers. We could, of course, wander around the producers' stands with the public (you can imagine the obvious difficulties of trying to do our job well in these conditions).

Before going on to speak about the tastings, just a couple of words about the year. It started off with an initially mild and reasonably dry winter, followed by a cold February and abundant rainfall, including snow, to compensate for the lack of rain in the initial phase and to feed the water reserves. The end of March was very cold with the odd frost, but spring was quite normal. Then there were three intensely hot months, copying the pattern of 2011. The rains at the end of August arrived just in time to shut off the red alert of the dwindling water reserves (and stress for the vines). September proved to be decisive thanks to mild temperatures and, above all, to the temperature gradient, which favoured phenolic ripening. In a harvest characterized by a very hot and dry summer, experience says a lot and, fortunately, the majority of Montalcino producers did a good job in the vineyards during the summer and were therefore able to obtain excellent results.

In short, a rough ride, but one with a happy ending: the wines do not seem to have suffered from the critical phases, the freshness of the fruit is, in the majority of cases, intact, and the tannins are mature. It probably is not the year of the wonder of wonders, as almost all are wont to say in the race to

exaggerate, and this is mainly due to tendentially sweet textures that are more enveloping than tense, sometimes lacking that depth and persistence that characterize an optimum Brunello. But the true Beauty lies in the variety of interpretations, which, in the more successful ones on the one hand, and the more austere on the other, shows concentration and well-managed body. The “lighter” ones, however, reveal finesse and freshness on rich and pulpy substance. The common attitude of producers towards measure and a search for balance which, in most cases, definitely disregards flamboyance, is certainly to be evaluated.

Here are the selected wines from among Brunello 2012.

95 Le Potazzine Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Violet, raspberry, floral-fruity tones dominate the nose in succession, expanding with balsamic contributions in preparation of the almost ephebic lightness of the sip, rich in counterpoints. Soft volumes, amiable tannins and masterly balance.

The company was founded in 1993 thanks to Giuseppe Gorelli, agricultural expert and oenologist. The estate has five hectares of vineyards, three of which spread out near to the winery. The others, planted in 1996, are located more to the south near Sant’Angelo in Colle, at the village of La Torre.

95 Sesti Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Opening in *esprit de finesse*: violet, fine herbs, raspberry, citrus fruits. What a combined definition of aromas and composure! Iridescent and always balanced. The sip follows suit, both in terms of attack and development: tactile sensation of pure cleanliness, variegated elegance of aromas, mature and bright fruit: a dense and highly delicate texture, naturally gripping tension and energy, all perfectly blended up to the long apogee.

Giuseppe Maria Sesti, an astronomy historian, manages the estate with an organic, agronomic approach (not certified) together with his daughter, Elisa, and the help of Giuliano Bernazzi. The ten hectares of vineyards encircle the Argiano Castle tower at an average altitude of 350 metres. The soils consist of sands and marine fossils and are rich in mineral substances.

95 Poggio di Sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Radiant complexity, evident energy right from the perfume with a vast and dynamic expressive range, iridescent and never uncoordinated, absorbing and modulate development of the aromas. A mouth that englobes concentration and dynamism, energetic, extremely dense in the texture of the tannins, gratifying due to the tactile sensation of cleanliness and its persistence. Succulent and refreshing. Strong and light.

Despite a recent change in ownership, nothing has been altered. The ten, organically-farmed hectares are planted with vines on the south-eastern side of the Montalcino hill, benefitting from a unique micro-climate accompanied by a significant temperature range. The vineyards are at different height, ranging from 250 to 400 metres above sea level, on different soils, varying in age from twelve to forty years maximum. At the winery, Luca Marrone, who inherited from Giulio Gambelli, operates under the supervision of Federico Staderini.

95 Il Marroneto Brunello di Montalcino Selezione Madonna delle Grazie 2012

Here there is much more touch than perfume, the latter being quiet, sometimes unfathomable, while the tannin is extremely dense in texture and heavy in grain yet not invasive: tasty, robust, fundamental due to the gustatory progression and persistence. Substantial but with a good tension, profound, turgid fruit that develops in a heavenly sip.

Since 1975, the year in which he and his brother planted the very first vineyard, Alessandro Mori has represented the company’s “historical memory” by wanting every individual step to respect naturalness. The five-hectares of vineyard extend on the northern slope in an area with marine and Aeolian sediments and sea sands mixed with various minerals.

95 Le Ragnaie Vigna Vecchia Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Rounded off roughness, pure fruit distilled in a vibrant and dynamic progression. It touches the palate with fruit and thirst-quenching freshness. Tense and slender, lively in its arresting flavour. Ineffable goodness, it flows clearly without ever insisting, for a compulsive drink.

Riccardo Campinoti heads a company that the family bought in 2002. The vineyards extend for fourteen hectares over various zones: le Ragnaie (with vines of between 5 and 40 years old), Pietroso and Castelnuovo dell'Abate. A certified organic business since 2009.

93 Corte dei Venti Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Multi-faceted, vibrant nose. Visceral and authentic, it unites tension, integrity and substance with a flash of enormous emotion. A Rossini-style crescendo, in the wake of earth, fruit and flowers that intertwine in a harmonious sip with a lengthy run.

The vineyards extend over the south-eastern side overlooking the suggestive landscapes of Monte Amiata, caressed by the confluence of sea winds that constantly blow in the area (as the company names indicates). A property of five hectares on red soils managed by Clara Monaci, assisted in the vineyard and winery by oenologist Andrea Brocco.

92 Il Paradiso di Manfredi Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Full and tenacious nose, coherent and clean even in its fullness. Hints of dried flowers, wood and a well-dosed trace of iron, earth and roots. Intense and compact gustatory texture, robust and of striking impact. It is brimming with intrinsic, natural, radiant and propulsive strength. The name comes from Manfredi Martini and "Il Paradiso" farm, a country house built in the early 1800s which Martini bought in the 1950s. His son-in-law, Florio, with wife Rossella Martini and daughters, calls himself the "guardian" of these vineyards located over 2.5 hectares at variable altitude (around 330 m above sea level), exposed to the north east, on soils rich in fossils. The vineyards have an average age of thirty years. The regime is organic.

92 Gianni Brunelli – Le Chiuse di sotto Brunello di Montalcino 2012

The bright clearness of its visual aspect is equal to its floral and musky fragrance with traces of iron and sweet coffee. Ethereal and graceful, in the mouth it is compact, salty and has a tannin with a fine touch. An easy, almost euphoric finale due to the fruit that rises to total evidence.

The six and a half hectares of this estate are divided into two different vine-planted areas: thirty-year-old vines in the north-eastern Le Chiuse area with their roots in muddy soil, and, in the Podernovone zone (where the new winery is located), where the soil is highly skeletal. Since 2007, Maria Laura Vacca Brunelli has been managing the family business (currently directly managing the vineyards and winery).

92 Baricci Brunello di Montalcino 2012

The clear reference to dark fruits is accompanied by notes of spice, bark, brier and moss. In the background, crunchier traces of plum and raspberry. The sensual body, tonic substance and solid pace are unveiled progressively. It leaves nothing unturned and its lengthy, clever and fluid finale is where it really proves itself.

The company belongs to Nello Baricci (a person of reference for the denomination and one of the Consorzio di Brunello founders), who is helped in his work by his daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. The vineyards are located in Montosoli over 5 hectares of medium texture, stony with marl, clay and quartz shale. The oldest vines are around twenty-five, while the youngest are about ten.

90 Pietroso Brunello di Montalcino 2012

Hyperkinetic, skimming, energetic and juicy mouth with a tasty note to complete the harmonious, extremely long and persistent crescendo. The

considerable depth is sustained by a texture inlaid with acid and tannic embroidery.

The Pignattai family, with Gianni (his grandfather founded the company in the 1970s), his son Andrea and wife Cecilia, takes care of the five and a half hectares of vineyards, planted exclusively with Sangiovese. They are located in three different areas in the municipality of Montalcino, at an altitude of between 350 and 450 m above sea level, on soils with different and complimentary characteristics.