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Are Super-Tuscans Still Super?

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Fascinating article in the current issue of "[The World of Fine Wine](#)," a glossy, erudite and, alas, very expensive British wine quarterly that always has many things worth reading. [This article](#), by [Kerin O'Keefe](#), a wine writer based in Italy, suggests that the Super-Tuscan category, which has attracted so much attention in the last 35 years, may have run its course.

If so, it's not a moment too soon. For too long Super-Tuscan, a brilliant marketing term, has been essentially a license to charge too much money for wines that far too often are impeccably made bores. Let me qualify that briefly, because there are certainly some exceptions to my categorical statement.

The term Super-Tuscan - many are willing to take credit for inventing it - was originally applied to wines that were not made according to the rules governing production in Tuscany's various wine appellations. Those wines generally fell into the category *vino da tavola* - table wine - a term theoretically reserved for wines that fell below the Tuscan standards. But the Super-Tuscans were made by producers who felt that meeting the Tuscan standards would drag down the quality of their wines. This resulted in a reverse snobbery toward *vino da tavola*s that was captured perfectly by the term Super-Tuscan.

Super-Tuscan is often thought to refer to Bordeaux-style wines, like the first Super-Tuscan, [Sassicaia](#), a great wine to this day, which had no place in the legal Tuscan wine universe. Other superb Super-Tuscans fall into this category, like [Solaia](#), [Ornellaia](#), and [Masseto](#), just to name a handful.

But there is another category of Super-Tuscans. These wines came from producers who opted out of the classification system because they felt the antiquated and bureaucratic Tuscan rules kept them from making, say, great Chianti Classicos. They sought not to make wines inspired by Bordeaux, but to make great sangiovese wines, which, 40 years ago, was virtually impossible under the Chianti rules, which required a certain percentage of white grapes in the Chianti blend.

These included ahead-of-their-time producers like [Montevertine](#), whose wines would be among the elite Chianti Classicos today, now that the official rules have evolved to catch up. But [Montevertine](#) is comfortable outside the system and has no interest in submitting its wines to the bureaucracy, so its top wines remain Super-Tuscans.

Outside of these and a few other exceptions, though, far too many Super-Tuscans were simply

follow-the-trend wines, which had little intrinsic value beyond getting in on the profits. The wines may be popular and have an audience, which is reason enough for them to be made. But most are not intrinsically interesting wines, and they have less to do with Tuscany and far more to do with modern winemaking techniques.

"Ambitious producers across the region, armed with international varieties, brand-new barriques, and a fancy label sporting a proprietary fantasy name, began turning out their own Super-Tuscans and were soon followed by winemakers throughout Italy," O'Keefe writes. "But today, inundated with far cheaper but similar bottlings from the New World, consumers are apparently turning their backs on these once trailblazing wines."

It's an interesting discussion and perhaps partly explains why some producers of brunello di Montalcino, who feel their wines would benefit from the addition of grapes like merlot or syrah, are fighting to change the rules requiring that brunello di Montalcino be 100 percent sangiovese rather than simply making Super-Tuscan wines without the Montalcino imprimatur.

How do you feel about Super-Tuscans? Or do you even think about them at all?