

# Tuscan wine

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**Tuscan wine** (Italian *Toscana*) is Italian wine from the Tuscany region. Located in central Italy along the Tyrrhenian coast, Tuscany is home to some of the world's most notable wine regions. Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano are primarily made with Sangiovese grape whereas the Vernaccia grape is the basis of the white Vernaccia di San Gimignano. Tuscany is also known for the dessert wine Vin Santo, made from a variety of the region's grapes. Tuscany has twenty-nine *Denominazioni di origine controllata* (DOC) and seven *Denominazioni di Origine Controllata e Garantita* (DOCG). In the 1970s a new class of wines known in the trade as "Super Tuscans" emerged. These wines were made outside DOC/DOCG regulations but were considered of high quality and commanded high prices. Many of these wines became cult wines. In the reformation of the Italian classification system many of the original Super Tuscans now qualify as DOC or DOCG wines but some producers still prefer the declassified rankings or to use the *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* (IGT) classification of *Toscana*.



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## History

The history of viticulture in Tuscany dates back to its settlements by the Etruscans in the 8th century BC. Amphora remnants originating in the region show that Tuscan wine was exported to southern Italy and Gaul as early as the 7th century BC. By the 3rd century BC, there were literary references by Greek writers about the

quality of Tuscan wine.<sup>[1]</sup> From the fall of the Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages, monasteries were the main purveyors of wines in the region. As the aristocratic and merchant classes emerged, they inherited the share-cropping system of agriculture known as *mezzadria*. This system took its name from the arrangement whereby the landowner provides the land and resources for planting in exchange for half ("mezza") of the yearly crop. Many Tuscan landowners would turn their half of the grape harvest into wine that would be sold to merchants in Florence. The earliest reference of Florentine wine retailers dates to 1079 and a guild was created in 1282.<sup>[2]</sup>



Etruscan statue from Chiusi in the Province of Siena.

The *Arte dei Vinattieri* guild established strict regulations on how the Florentine wine merchants could conduct business. No wine was to be sold within 100 yards (91 m) of a church. Wine merchants were also prohibited from serving children under 15 or to prostitutes, ruffians and thieves. In the 14th century, an average of 7.9 million US gallons (30,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of wine was sold every year in Florence. The earliest references to *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* wine date to the late 14th century. The first recorded mention of wine from Chianti was by the Tuscan merchant Francesco di Marco Datini, the "merchant of Prato", who described it as a light, white wine. The Vernaccia and Greco wines of San Gimignano were considered luxury items and treasured as gifts over saffron. During this period Tuscan winemakers began experimenting with new techniques and invented the process of *governo* which helped to stabilize the wines and ferment the sugar content

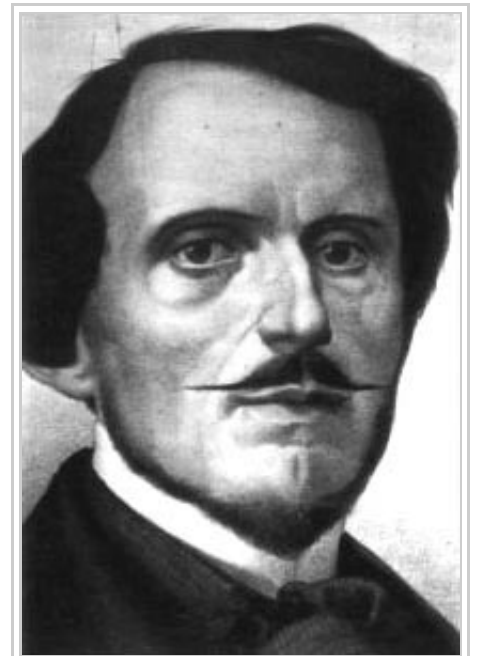
sufficiently to make them dry. In 1685 the Tuscan author Francesco Redi wrote *Bacco in Toscana*, a 980-line poem describing the wines of Tuscany.<sup>[2]</sup>

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Tuscany returned to the rule of the Habsburgs. It was at this point that the statesman Bettino Ricasoli inherited his family ancestral estate in Broglio located in the heart of the Chianti Classico zone. Determined to improve the estate, Ricasoli traveled throughout Germany and France, studying the grape varieties and viticultural practices. He imported several of the varieties back to Tuscany and experimented with different varieties in his vineyards. However in his experiments Ricasoli discovered that three local varieties — Sangiovese, Canaiolo and Malvasia — produced the best wine. In 1848, revolutions broke out in Italy and Ricasoli's beloved wife died, leaving him with little interest to devote to wine. In the 1850s *Oidium Uncinula necator* and war devastated most of Tuscany's vineyards with many peasant farmers leaving for other parts of Italy or to emigrate to the Americas.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Climate and geography

The region of Tuscany includes seven coastal islands and is Italy's fifth largest region. It is bordered to the northwest by Liguria, the north by Emilia-Romagna, Umbria to the east and Lazio to the south. To the west is the Tyrrhenian Sea which gives the area a warm mediterranean climate.

The terrain is quite hilly (over 68% of the terrain), progressing inward to the Apennine Mountains along the



Winemaker and politician, Bettino Ricasoli

border with Emilia-Romagna. The hills serve as a tempering affect on the summertime heat with many vineyards planted on the higher elevations of the hillsides.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Sangiovese grape performs better when it can receive more direct sunlight, which is a benefit of the many hillside vineyards in Tuscany. The majority of the region's vineyards are found at altitudes of 500–1600 feet (150–500 meters). The higher elevations also increase the diurnal temperature variation, helping the grapes maintain their balance of sugars and acidity as well as their aromatic qualities.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Wines and grapes



Sangiovese grapes harvested in the Montepulciano region.

After Piedmont and the Veneto, Tuscany produces the third highest volume of DOC/G quality wines. Tuscany is Italy's third most planted region (behind Sicily and Apulia) but it is eighth in production volume. This is partly because the soil of Tuscany is very poor, and producers emphasize low yields and higher quality levels in their wine. More than 80% of the regions' production is in red wine.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Sangiovese grape is Tuscany's most prominent grape, however, many different clonal varieties exist, as many towns have their own local version of Sangiovese. Cabernet Sauvignon has been planted in Tuscany for over 250 years, but has only recently become associated with the region due to the rise of the Super Tuscans.

Other international varieties found in Tuscany include Cabernet franc, Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot noir, Sauvignon blanc and Syrah. Of the many local red grape varieties Canaiolo, Colorino, Malvasia Nera and Mammolo are the most widely planted. For Tuscan white wines, Trebbiano is the most widely planted variety followed by Malvasia, Vermentino and Vernaccia.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Super Tuscans

Super Tuscans are an unofficial category of Tuscan wines, not recognized within the Italian wine classification system. The origin of Super Tuscans is rooted in the restrictive DOC practices of the Chianti zone prior to the 1990s. During this time Chianti could be composed of no more than 70% Sangiovese and had to include at least 10% of one of the local white wine grapes. Producers who deviated from these regulations could not use the Chianti name on their wine labels and would be classified as *vino da tavola*- Italy's lowest wine designation. By the 1970s, the consumer market for Chianti wines was suffering and the wines were widely perceived to be lacking quality. Many Tuscan wine producers thought they could produce a better quality wine if they were not hindered by the DOC regulations.<sup>[6]</sup>

The marchese Piero Antinori was one of the first to create a "Chianti-style" wine that ignored the DOC regulations, releasing a 1971 Sangiovese-Cabernet Sauvignon blend known as *Tignanello* in 1978. Other producers followed suit and soon the prices for these Super Tuscans were consistently beating the prices of some of most well known Chianti. Rather than rely on name recognition of the Chianti region, the Super Tuscan producers



*Tignanello* one of the early Super Tuscans.

sought to create a wine brand that would be recognizable on its own merits by consumers. By the late 1980s, the trend of creating high quality non-DOC wines had spread to other regions of Tuscany, as well as Piedmont and Veneto. Modification to the Chianti DOC regulation attempted to "correct" the issues of Super Tuscans, so that many of the original Super Tuscans would now qualify as standard DOC/G Chianti. While many producers have brought their Super Tuscans back under DOC regulations, many have not and instead continue to use the less restrictive IGT designation *Toscana*.<sup>[6]</sup>

In addition to wines based on the Sangiovese grape, many well known Super Tuscans are based on a "Bordeaux-blend", meaning a combination of grapes typical for Bordeaux (esp. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot). These grapes are not originally from the region, but imported and planted later. The climate in Tuscany has proven to be very good for these grapes. One of the first successful Super Tuscan based "Bordeaux-blend" was *Sassicaia*, by Tenuta San Guido.

## Vin Santo

*Main article: Vin Santo*

While Tuscany is not the only Italian region to make the *passito* dessert wine Vin Santo (meaning "holy wine"), the Tuscan versions of the wine are well regarded and sought for by wine consumers. The best-known version is from the Chianti Classico and is produced with a blend of Trebbiano and Malvasia Bianca. Red and rosé styles are also produced mostly based on the Sangiovese grape. The wines are aged in barrels for a minimum of three years, four if it is meant to be a *Riserva*.<sup>[7]</sup>

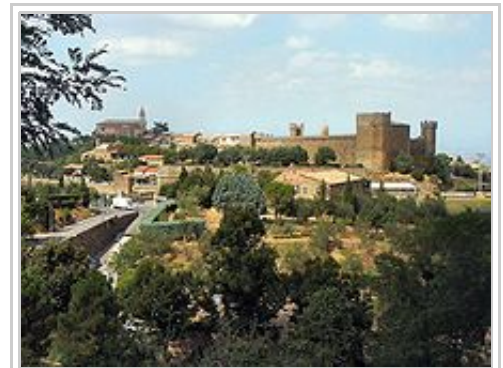
## Wine regions

Tuscany's 42 DOC and 11 DOCG are spread out across the region's ten provinces.

### Brunello di Montalcino

*Main article: Brunello di Montalcino*

Brunello is the name of the local Sangiovese variety that is grown around the village of Montalcino. Located south of the Chianti Classico zone, the Montalcino range is drier and warmer than Chianti. Monte Amiata shields the area from the winds coming from the southeast. Many of the area's vineyards are located on the hillsides leading up towards the mountain to elevations of around 1,640 ft (500 m) though some vineyards can be found in lower-lying areas. The wines of northern and eastern regions tend to ripen more slowly and produce more perfumed and lighter wines. The southern and western regions are warmer, and the resulting wines tend to be richer and more intense.<sup>[7]</sup>



Village of Montalcino.

The Brunello variety of Sangiovese seems to flourish in this *terroir*, ripening easily and producing consistently wines of deep color, extract, richness with full bodies and good balance of tannins. In the mid-19th century, a local farmer named Clemente Santi is believed to have isolated the Brunello clone and planted it in this region. His grandson Ferruccio Biondi-Santi helped to popularize Brunello di Montalcino in the later half of the 19th century. In the 1980s, it was the first wine to earn the DOCG

classification. Today there are about two hundred growers in the Montalcino region producing about 333,000 cases of Brunello di Montalcino a year.<sup>[7]</sup>

Brunello di Montalcino wines are required to be aged for at least four years prior to being released, with *riserva* wines needing five years. Brunellos tend to be very tight and tannic in their youth, needing at least a decade or two before they start to soften with wines from excellent vintages having the potential to do well past 50 years. In 1984, the Montalcino region was granted the DOC designation of *Rosso di Montalcino*. Often called "Baby Brunellos", these wines are typically made from the same grapes, vineyards and style as the regular Brunello di Montalcino but are not aged as long. While similar to Brunellos in flavor and aromas, these wines are often lighter in body and more approachable in their youth.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Carmignano

*Main article: Carmignano (wine)*

Noted for the quality of its wines since the Middle Ages, Carmignano was identified by Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany as one of the superior wine producing areas of Tuscany and granted special legal protections in 1716. In the 18th century, the producers of the Carmignano region developed a tradition of blending Sangiovese with Cabernet Sauvignon, long before the practice became popularized by the "Super Tuscan" of the late 20th century.<sup>[8]</sup> In 1975, the region was awarded *Denominazione di origine controllata* (DOC) status and subsequently promoted to *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* (DOCG) status in 1990 (retroactive to the 1988 vintage). Today Carmignano has approximately 270 acres (110 ha) planted, producing nearly 71,500 US gallons (271,000 L) of DOCG designated wine a year.<sup>[9]</sup>



Carmignano was the first Tuscan DOCG to sanction the use of blending Cabernet Sauvignon (*pictured*) with Sangiovese.

## Chianti

*Main articles: Chianti Classico and Chianti*



A glass of Chianti.

Located in the central region of Tuscany, the Chianti zone is Tuscany's largest classified wine region and produces over eight million cases a year. In addition to producing the well known red Chianti wine, the Chianti zone also produces white, other *Rosso* reds and Vin Santo. The region is split into two DOCG- Chianti and Chianti Classico. The Chianti Classico zone covers the area between Florence and Siena, which is the original Chianti region, and where some of the best expressions of Chianti wine are produced. The larger Chianti DOCG zone is further divided in six DOC sub-zones and areas in the western part of the province of Pisa, the Florentine hills north of Chianti Classico in the province of Florence, the Siena hills south of the city in the province of Siena, the province of Arezzo and the area around the communes of Rufina and Pistoia.<sup>[10]</sup>

Since 1996, Chianti is permitted to include as little as 75% Sangiovese, a maximum of 10% Canaiolo, up to 10% of the white wine grapes Malvasia and Trebbiano and up to 15% of any other red wine grape grown in the

region, such as Cabernet Sauvignon. This variety of grapes and usage is one reason why Chianti can vary widely from producer to producer. The use of white grapes in the blend can alter the style of Chianti by softening the wines with a higher percentage of white grapes, typically indicating that the wine is meant to be drunk younger and not aged for long. In general, Chianti Classicos are described as medium-bodied wines with firm, dry tannins. The characteristic aroma is cherry but it can also carry nutty and floral notes as well.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Chianti Classico region covers approximately 100 square miles (260 km<sup>2</sup>) and includes the communes of Castellina, Gaiole, Greve and Radda as well as parts of five other neighboring communes. The *terroir* of the Classico zone varies throughout the region depending on the vineyards' altitude, soil type and distance from the Arno River. The soils of the northern communes, such as Greve, are richer in clay deposits while those in the southern communes, like Gaiole, are harder and stonier. *Riserva* Chianti is aged for at least 27 months, some of it in oak, and must have a minimum alcohol content of 12.5%. Wines from the Chianti DOCG can carry the name of one of the six sub-zones or just the Chianti designation. The Chianti Superiore designation refers to wines produced in the provinces of Florence and Siena but not in the Classico zone.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Vernaccia di San Gimignano

*Main article: Vernaccia di San Gimignano*

Vernaccia di San Gimignano is a white wine made from the Vernaccia grape in the areas around San Gimignano. In 1966, it was the first wine to receive a DOC designation. This wine style has been made in the area for over seven centuries and is considered Tuscany's best and most characterful white wine. The wine is dry, full bodied with earthy notes of honey and minerals. In some styles it can be made to emphasize the fruit more and some producers have experimented with aging or fermenting the wine in oak barrels in order to give the wine a sense of creaminess or toastiness.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

*Main article: Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*

The Vino Nobile di Montepulciano received its DOCG status shortly after Brunello di Montalcino, in 1980. The DOCG covers the red wine of the Montepulciano area. The wine received its name in the 17th century, when it was the favorite wine of the Tuscan nobility. Located in the southeastern region of Tuscany, the climate of the region is strongly influenced by the sea. The variety of Sangiovese in Montepulciano is known as Prugnolo Gentile and is required to account for at least 80% of the wine. Traditionally Canaiolo and Mammolo make up the remaining part of the blend but some producers have begun to experiment with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.<sup>[11]</sup>

The wines are required to age two years prior to release, with an additional year if it is to be a *riserva*. The recent use of French oak barrels has increased the body and intensity of the wines which are noted for their plummy fruit, almond notes and smooth tannins.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Other Tuscan wines



Vineyards in San Gimignano

The Pomino region near Ruffina has been historically known for the prevalence of the French wine grape varieties, making wines from both Cabernets as well as Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot blanc, Pinot Grigio in addition to the local Italian varieties. The Frescobaldi family is one of the area's most prominent wine producers. The Bolgheri region of the Livorno province is home to one of the original Super Tuscan wines Sassicaia, first made in 1944 produced by the marchesi Incisa della Rochetta, cousin of the Antinori family. The Bolgheri region is also home to the Super Tuscan wine Ornellaia which was featured in the film *Mondovino*. The Carmignano region has another Tuscan DOCG and was one of the first Tuscan regions to be permitted to use Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, which the region had long historically grown, in their DOC wines.<sup>[11]</sup>



The Super Tuscan wine *Sassicaia* from the Bolgheri region.

In southern Tuscany, towards the region of Latium, is the area of Maremma which has its own IGT designation *Maremma Toscana*. Maremma is also home to Tuscany's newest DOCG, Morellino di Scansano, which makes a fragrant, dry Sangiovese based wine. The province of Grosseto is one of Tuscany's emerging wine regions with eight DOC designations, half of which were created in the late 1990s. It includes the Monteregio di Massa Marittima region which has been recently the recipient of foreign investment in the area's wine, especially by "flying winemakers". The Parrina region is known for its white wine blend of Trebbiano and Ansonica. The wine Bianco di Pitigliano is known for its eclectic mix of white wine grapes in the blend including Chardonnay, the Greco sub variety of Trebbiano, Grechetto, Malvasia, Pinot blanc, Verdello and Welschriesling.<sup>[11]</sup> Maremma a hidden gem with many wineries, Poggio Argenteria winery makes Morellino di Scansano and other wines.

The wines of Montecarlo region includes several varieties that are not commonly found in Tuscan wines including Sémillon and Roussanne. The minor Chianti grape Cilieggiolo is also popular here. The island of Elba has one of the longest winemaking histories in Tuscany and is home to its own DOC. Some of the wines produced here include a sparkling Trebbiano wine, a sweet Ansonica *passito*, and a semi-sweet dessert wine from Aleatico.<sup>[11]</sup>

## See also

- List of Italian DOC wines
- List of Italian IGT wines
- History of Chianti

## References

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6. ^ *a b* M. Ewing-Mulligan & E. McCarthy *Italian Wines for Dummies* pg 155 & 167-169 Hungry Minds 2001 ISBN 0-7645-5355-0
7. ^ *a b c d e* M. Ewing-Mulligan & E. McCarthy *Italian Wines for Dummies* pg 156-163 Hungry Minds 2001 ISBN 0-

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10. ^ *a b c* M. Ewing-Mulligan & E. McCarthy *Italian Wines for Dummies* pg 147-155 Hungry Minds 2001 ISBN 0-7645-5355-0
11. ^ *a b c d e* M. Ewing-Mulligan & E. McCarthy *Italian Wines for Dummies* pg 164-174 Hungry Minds 2001 ISBN 0-7645-5355-0

## External links

- History of Tuscan wine ([http://www.tuscany-wine.com/Tuscany\\_Wine/History.html](http://www.tuscany-wine.com/Tuscany_Wine/History.html))
- "Are Super-Tuscans Still Super?" (<http://www.foodandwine.com/articles/are-super-tuscans-still-super>) " Food and Wine Magazine, Dec. 2006
- Tuscany wine vintage chart ([http://winegeeks.com/vintage\\_charts/tuscany/](http://winegeeks.com/vintage_charts/tuscany/))
- "Rebels without a cause? The demise of Super-Tuscans (<http://www.finewinemag.com/docs/Super-Tuscans.pdf>) " The World of Fine Wine, Issue 23 2009
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