

# WINE News

*Our Italian wine experts report on the not-to-be-missed 2010 vintage of Brunello di Montalcino.*



## MARCH 30, 2015 FEATURES

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## Here Comes the Incredible 2010 Brunello Vintage

By Greg St. Clair

**The 2010 vintage is like no other vintage that I have ever tasted, and I've had a lot of them.** For years now, there have been quiet rumblings in the Italian wine world about the quality of this incredible vintage. Unlike in Bordeaux or many other areas of the world where the wines are tasted nine months after they've been harvested, winemakers in Montalcino are a bit shy and like to wait until their wines "are ready." Since the first press has come out, I've been frequently asked the same question: is this vintage more of a fruit-driven "ripe" vintage or is it a more structured, tannic, earthy "classic" vintage? The answer is simple: neither and both. The wines have an amazing savory quality that both shows the complete physiological ripeness the grapes achieved and emphasizes more of the *terroir* (Italians prefer *genius loci*). There's far less primary fruit, and that gives the wines a more complex character

and allows the savory, salty and mineral elements to step forward. I've tasted more than 185 wines from this vintage, and believe me, you are going to want to get in on this vintage. I've never had anything like it before. The wines are so good, so incredibly...well, they are just incredible, and you'll be experiencing something that has never been before.

The pre-arrival sales of this 2010 Brunello di Montalcino vintage have been staggering, and it is really difficult to put in print which wines we will have or will sell out by the time you wish to purchase. We are always on a re-buy campaign, but unlike Bordeaux, where the quantity of production is rather high even for the great estates, in Montalcino production is small. While the top six producers in quantity can make 20,000 cases, most producers fall into the 350 to 1,500-case range, and worldwide interest in this specific vintage is emptying the cellars.



## Pre-Arrival 2010 Brunello from Antinori to Villa I Cipressi

**2010 Antinori "Pian delle Vigne" Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.95 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★★★ The nose is so pretty, a delicate blend of plum, spice and vanilla with bits of dried herbs. On the palate the wine is graceful, balanced, supple, warm and truly inviting while the flavors lean toward a delicate sweetness of, once again, plum, but with some dark fruit joined by touches of earth and spice. The finish is elegant, balanced, long and makes you want to take another sip; a wine so easy to drink and so engaging. For me, this is the best wine this property has ever made.

Mike "Guido" Parres: Clean style of Brunello with loads of crushed fruit on the nose and palate. Full-bodied, with well-integrated tannins and a pretty and smooth finish. 13,583 cases produced. 96 points JS: "Lots of candied-orange, dark-fruit and dried-flower character on the nose. Full body with soft, silky tannins and a chewy finish. Funky and intense. Lots of smoked-meat, berry and dark-chocolate character. Very rich and delicious. Best Brunello from here in a long time."

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**2010 Argiano Brunello di Montalcino (\$54.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ From the first moment the wine's aromatics reach your nose you know this is something extraordinary. Dried flowers, crushed berries, braised meat, juniper, cinnamon and leather all whirl through your glass. On the palate you see this wine's power, the incredible underlying structure that powers layers of rolling textural density. The flavors complement the nose, bringing together the broad spectrum of flavors into one voice. The finish shows supple, fine-grained tannins while the richness and density stretch out over this wine's incredible frame into an unforgettable finish. 8,416 cases produced. 98 points JS.

**2010 Baccinetti "La Saporioia" Brunello di Montalcino (\$39.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ When I first smelled this wine I couldn't believe it, it was like someone had taken out the spice drawer, turned it on its end and poured everything into my glass of wine. It was so aromatic it was hard to concentrate. Incredible layers of wild cherry, marzipan, dried flowers, a kitchen sink of Middle Eastern spice, star



*Mieke Konig of Baccinetti.*

jasmine...it's like the whole alphabet was there. Once on the palate, the wine flows luxuriously across it, displaying layers of wild cherry with hints of leather that gradually focus the wine as it stretches out into a long finish. Fine tannins gradually build, showing the power and structure that lie just under the surface of this delectable wine. Capable of aging 15-20 years but delicious now.

Guido: The wines of Baccinetti are rich, ripe, dense and full, but retain their balance and elegance. The 2010 Brunello is a stellar example of the vintage, and an exceptional bargain at this price. The palate has pretty cherry fruit with a nice earthy, spicy quality, great structure and good balance of acidity and tannins. 441 case production. 97 points JS.

**2010 Baricci Brunello di Montalcino (\$39.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★½ I love the complex earthiness, which has a sort of cherry tobacco, plum mixture that graces the elegant and lithe body. This wine favors grace over power, and needs a curious mind to delve into the layers of spice, earth and fruit. It is a wine without a need to speak loudly and leaves itself to be discovered rather than shouting out its own name. Those who like Baricci love this complexity and find reward in the effort to understand it. This is a great Baricci—you should definitely buy a case to put away. I will. 1,500 case production.

**2010 Banfi "Poggio alle Mura" Brunello di Montalcino (\$52.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★½ The nose of this powerhouse is full of spice, leather and dried fruits all with that vintage savory character highlighting. Yet this wine has another dimension. I feel light, yes, a reflection of sun vibrating through the wine's center and it seems to energize the powerful and structured core. This is a big wine with lots of tannin, yet the tannins seem to stretch and while they are a little gritty they don't seem to overpower the wine. The finish is a powerful, full of flavor and structure crescendo that goes on for a long time. 3,333 cases produced. 97 points JS, 95 points RP.

**2010 Capanna Brunello di Montalcino (\$46.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ Patrizio Cencioni, Capanna's owner, is a man of very few words. He lets his wine do the talking for him. He's the strong, silent type, and you never quite know what's going on behind his eyes. I wouldn't play poker with him, yet I'd buy his wine. Capanna is a powerhouse: the nose is an array of wild cherry, chestnut, cinnamon, smoked meats, plum and cocoa. This is a wine with tannic structure, yet that doesn't really stand out because it is so well integrated, all the pieces lining up elegantly. On the palate the wine is a cauldron of molten fruit, spice, and leather and displays an extraordinary density. This is a powerful wine, it



*94-year-old Nello Baricci.*

has everything: fruit, spice density, palate presence—it is a marvel to behold. However: this isn't a pretty wine, this is a stunningly gorgeous wine that will take a bit of time to take it all in. Drop it in your cellar for another 5-10 years, or if you have anyone you need to gift a birth year wine for, this is it. 2,500 cases.

**2010 Caparzo Brunello di Montalcino (\$32.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★½ I smell restrained ripeness, lots of chocolate in the nose, and it's broad, full, rich, plummy, ripe and intense. On the palate the wine rolls easily, complete with a sweet lushness, while still exhibiting a central focus and balance. The flavors are bold yet less saturated, they're easy and present, and while there isn't any tension behind them, there's lots of flavor and lots of residual finish that begins to show that savory intrigue. A solid, deep and long finish. 13,333 cases produced. 95 points JS.

**2010 Castelgiocondo Brunello di Montalcino (\$49.95 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ Dried flowers lead the nose into an ethereal arena where dark, wild cherry, cedar and leather all come together in an extraordinary thrust. On the palate the wine is multi-faceted, with seemingly at every angle another layer of flavor, this time smoky, the next time cedar, then wild cherry all dancing across your palate. The finish is taut: a bit of tannic grip drags the flavors and textures together and pulls them along to a long, intriguing and texturally exciting finish. 17,500+ cases produced. 97 points JS.

**2010 Castiglione del Bosco Brunello di Montalcino (750ml \$39.95; 1.5L \$96.99 PA)**

4 stars \*\*\*\* The nose is dense, brooding pools of plum, earth, smoke and hints of wood spice. On the palate the wine is powerful, broad, deep, a muscularly vibrant presence that brings the fruit to life. The wine finishes very long, with a great central focus and with hints of wood spice in the finish.

**2010 Ciacci Brunello di Montalcino (\$42.95 PA)**

4 stars \*\*\*\* The nose speaks of sunshine, warmth and sweetness—not floral, just fruity. The flavors begin to expand on your palate and the simple plummy fruit is transformed to more of a kaleidoscope of flavors: Umeboshi (dried and salted Japanese plums), wild cherry, iron and leather. While the nose speaks of ripeness the palate presence is freshened by the perfect acidic balance for this wine, just enough to lift without becoming edgy, a long and complex finish has layers of flavor and textures.

Guido: Very user-friendly Brunelli. Beautiful blackberry, cherry and lightly toasted oak on the nose. Full and silky, with berry and cherry flavors and soft tannins. This is the 2010 you can drink sooner than later. Stock up on the Bosco, so it will keep you hands off the long-term 2010 Brunelli. 3,333+ cases produced. 94 points JS, 93 points AG.

**2010 Collemattoni Brunello di Montalcino (\$44.95 PA)**

5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose is full of spicy, dense plum, with smoky hints and earth, scorched meat and vanilla. On the palate the wine is deep, broad, richly textured and full of chocolaty, plummy fruits spiced with a *fraise du bois*-like intrigue. This wine has a distinctly sensual feel on the palate, it is embracing, full and warm as it stretches out in length. The finish is long, full of plum, vanilla spice, bits of savory meat and smoke. The wine is so supple and smooth that it almost seems New World but has just a level of richness that emulates what I remember Caymus Cabernet had back in the 1970s and early 1980s. Just a delight to drink.

Guido: Collemattoni delivers a mix of black cherry, ripe raspberry and cocoa aromas and flavors, picking up spice and tobacco elements on the very *long* finish. This is to drink now and over the next few years. Stock up with this Brunelli while you can. 1,833 cases produced. 92 points JS.



*Montalcino's southern edge from the Castello di Velona.*

**2010 Fattoria dei Barbi Brunello di Montalcino (\$44.99 PA)**

4.5 stars \*\*\*\*½ I absolutely love this wine, the best thing they've done...that I can remember. The nose is full of earth, spice, leather, dried wild cherries and is a powerful statement from the nose. On the palate a classic, long, slightly leathery character is in the middle of a broad, rich and luxurious follow-through. Layers of spice, plum, wild cherry and wild herbs in a long procession of flavors march to the finish, a long, persistent and so satisfying end. Super wine.

Guido: Classic Barbi, black cherry and ripe strawberry, very well balanced. This is full-bodied and powerful, soft tannins, long finish, slightly rustic, but impressive for its concentration. 16,666 cases produced. 96 points JS, 94 points RP.

**2010 Franco Pacenti Canalicchio Brunello di Montalcino (\$46.99 PA)**

5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose classic, pure, delicately wafting yet bold and distinctive, full of wild cherry, spice and hints of fresh leather but it keeps coming back to that pure wild cherry. On the palate the wine is full, and has a particular density, a thickness that is powerful yet is filled with so much energy that as it stretches out across your palate and it feels as if it is lifting off of your tongue. The wild cherry flavors seem riper and fuller, yet they are incredibly fresh and more savory than sweet. The finish is superbly balanced, elegant, full of spice and fruit couched in that savory background.

Guido: This user-friendly 2010 Brunelli has big and bright fruit that hit you first: black cherries cassis and ripe strawberries and then the terroir, Tuscan dust and lots of acidity make the rest of this wine, giving it a long finish that lingers long on the palate. Drinks very well young and will over the next 10 years. 1,111 cases produced.

**2010 Il Palazzone Brunello di Montalcino (\$inquire)**

5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose is inviting, enchanting, a smoky earthiness shows first followed by sweet plum, leather and a hint of Tuscan brush. On the palate the wine is supremely balanced and supple—it almost seems polished, but more like a river pebble, nothing unnatural, just naturally lustrous. The flavors are ethereal, they just float across the palate in swirls, then wave after wave of supple plum, spice, leather and the savory center of those flavors pulls them all together into a powerful choir of flavors. The finish is absolutely superb, long, balanced, supple, easy, with a warm savory undertone that brings the smoke, plum and spice all together into a long and sensational finish. Outstanding wine. 1,177 cases produced. 95 points JS, 93 points AG and RP.

**2010 Il Poggione Brunello di Montalcino (\$67.99 PA)**

5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose is wildly intriguing, full of Marasca cherry, leather, spice, earth and smoke; just wave after wave flows out of the glass. On the palate the wine is seamless, supple, warm and inviting, deeply textured, luscious and full bodied. The wine's

savory nature takes center stage on the palate, more earth, leather, spice, plum are backed by a wave of umami richness, that seems to salt the flavors (in a good way) making all the flavors more ethereal. The finish is supple, long, and a resurgence of plummy sweetness gives one a feeling of warmth and sunshine while the wine's power slowly begins to show itself in a powerful crescendo. 18,333 cases produced. 98 points RP, 94 points AG, 93 points JS.

**2010 Il Valentiano “Campo di Marzo” Brunello di Montalcino (750ml \$34.99; \$69.99 1.5L PA)** 4 stars \*\*\*\* A bit shy at first in the nose, but slowly this wine begins to release its core: it's a gentle flow, exuding a composed center, no rush or hurry here. The nose shows its western slope origins with hints of ripeness but this is layered between spice and earth as it delicately flows from the glass. On the palate the wine has a really savory quality, salty, iron, leather, then slowly, the fruit escapes from its tightly wound core where hints of wild cherry, plum and cocoa powder mix with fine-grained tannin to give a really focused palate presence. The long, persistent finish, layer after layer gradually makes its presence felt with superb balance, and a growing flavor crescendo. Drink in 2-3 years but capable of aging 10-20 years.

Guido: Here is a wine that packs a wallop and lots of bang for your buck all in one! Give this Brunello about an hour to open up and stand back. On the palate you will find strawberries and black cherries, a little bitter cocoa and some toasty oak and vanilla, fine tannins and a hint of Montalcino dust on the long finish. 733 cases produced. 92 points JS.

**2010 La Fortuna Brunello di Montalcino (\$39.99 PA)** 5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose is dark cherry, yet intertwined with earth, Tuscan herbs and hints of fresh leather in a relaxed flow from the glass. On the palate it is the

texture that grabs your attention. It isn't dense but energetic, and the fruit...the fruit in this vintage is hard to explain, it tastes less fruity and by that I mean it is more complex, less simple, not just sweet and squishy, it is more developed, nuanced—I hesitate to use the word layered, because it seems too simple, but it is enchanting. The wine has tannic structure that is evident but is in the background as the acidic balance lengthens the finish. With such balance and power yet so effortless, the wine is a pleasure to drink now, yet the greatness will be down the road another 5-10 years. The best La Fortuna Brunello ever.

Guido: Gioberto Zannoni and his son Angelo have hit another one out of the ballpark with this vintage. Gorgeous core of perfumed ripe fruit, plum, cassis and kirsch, some leather and cola mid-palate and earthiness that melds into bitter cocoa powder, spices and minerals on the finish. Lush, and flows across your palate with a long finish—just *wow!* This is a classic 2010 Brunello, and needs *hours* to open up or some years of aging. 1,666 cases produced.

**2010 La Gerla Brunello di Montalcino (750ml \$45.99; 1.5L \$89.99 PA)** 5 stars \*\*\*\*\* The nose is full of dark earth, vibrant wild cherry, smoke, crushed stone, and a hint of gaminess. On the palate the wine is impressive; a powerful structure of very fine-grained structure surrounds the core of this wine. A commanding central focus bonds the fruit and spice

to the voluptuous layers of fruit that curl up around the core. Waves of flavor seem to never end, bringing more wild cherry and earth with hints of wood smoke. The finish continues the lustrous richness that is backed up once again by that very fine-grained tannin. It is a superb wine. 2,916 cases produced. 95 points AG, 94 points JS and RP.

**2010 La Lecciaia Brunello di Montalcino (375ml \$19.99; 750ml \$34.99 PA)** 4.5 stars \*\*\*\*½ The nose is full of plum, spice, leather, gravel and smoke. That might seem a disparate blend for some of you, but it is a heavenly flow of aromatics that escape your glass. On the palate the wine is classic, a long, vibrant flow from front to back that is layers

of wild cherry, smoke and leather couched in a richly textured center. Superb balance and vibrant, classic aromatics, and at the price an unbelievable deal.

Guido: Plum, cedar and leather aromas follow through to a full-bodied palate, with a lovely density of ripe fruit and a soft, velvety textured finish with a little Tuscan dust and soft tannins. Ripe and beautiful, an opulent wine that opens with some time in the glass. 5,834 cases produced. 94 points AG, 92 points JS.

**2010 La Velona Brunello di Montalcino (\$34.99 PA)** 4.5 stars \*\*\*\*½ From the southern slope of Montalcino this wine's nose is full of wild earth, spice, wild flowers and hints of leather. While in the mouth this wine has a bold, determined palate presence showing the richness of its location yet never feeling plump, always focused, directional yet lustrous, dense and layered flows of wild cherry, stone, smoke, leather, smoked meats and wild flowers. The powerful yet supple body forges a long and complete finish where freshly cut leather, herbs, hints of smoke and wild cherry continue on and on.

Guido: This 2010 Brunello is beautifully layered, expressive wine bursting with sweet ripe strawberries, black cherries intermingled with subtle earth and toasted oak notes, minerals and a hint of bitter chocolate on the on the finish, round and ripe tannins and a long aftertaste. This is a must for the cellar, if you can try to give it some age (next 5 years), if not give about 2 to three hours of decanting. 1,666 cases produced. 93 points AG and RP.

**2010 Lisini Brunello di Montalcino (\$49.99 PA)** 4.5 stars \*\*\*\*½ The nose is warm, inviting, a delicate flow of fraises des bois is backfilled with a salty, savory plum that slowly exits the glass. On the palate the wine is so smooth, supple with a luxurious feel to it, however it doesn't feel dense, just long and smooth. The flavors pick up with more of the savory; plummy character this time accented with hints of freshly cut leather. The finish builds, fine grain tannins emerge and close the wine with a twist of structure and long savory finish.

Guido: Love the user friendliness of this producer. The wine is highly pleasurable for the integrity of its fruit and its round, enveloping personality. Clean, mineral notes



Guido and Greg on the red carpet in Montalcino.

frame the finish, giving the wine a lovely sense of balance and proportion. 2,500 cases produced. 95 points AG, 94 points JS and RP.

### 2010 Pian dell'Orino Brunello di

**Montalcino (\$99.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ The nose on this wine is wild, untamed, dried herbs, brush, fresh earth, smoked meats, dried floral notes along with a plummy brightness, just incredibly vibrant. While the nose is amazing, it is on the palate that this wine shows the most. It has such a light, energetic feel, yet couched in a rich, powerful body that has an incredibly deep structure. The tannins are extraordinarily well integrated and the acidic balance lifts and powers the palate texture, which is supple yet firm, dense yet effortless. In the mouth more flavors emerge, wild fruits, cherry, and nectarine add to the meaty richness, that umami-like character that is the principle flavor component. Finish is the wrong word for this wine because it is a long, balanced and easy path full of a vast array of flavors layering themselves on a seemingly endless journey. The only negative about this wine is they only make 500 cases. It is fabulous. 97 points AG.

**2010 Poggiarellino Brunello di Montalcino (\$34.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ Since I first tasted the 2010 from their 25-hectoliter barrels I've been waiting for this day to offer it to you. It is simply the best wine they have ever made. When you first smell this wine the gamut of aromas is classic Poggiarellino, wild Marasca cherry, plum with a certain wild *sauvage* that the Italians call *sotto bosco* (the aroma of the forest floor). On the palate the wine shows a broad richness with a decisive tannic structure, not obtrusive or harsh just powerful and fine-grained, and shows the how big the frame of this wine really is. The flavors reflect the aromatics: more Marasca cherry, with plum and red berry, then hints of saddle leather followed by that *sotto bosco* intrigue. The wine's rich, powerful presence glides easily to the back of your palate with a long and elegant finish, impressive for such a powerful wine.



Guido and Jan Erbach (left) at Pian dell'Orino.

Guido: Wow! Is what I first wrote down as this exploded on my palate, this has a lot more Montalcino in the glass than past years. Dark fruit, leather, terroir and good tannin structure, balanced with acidity, this is Brunello at its best! It reminds me of the 2007 that is still in my cellar. A wine to buy for long term, it will age over the next 10 to 15 years. 684 cases produced. 95 points JS.

### 2010 Poggio Antico Brunello di Montalcino (375ml \$39.99; 750ml \$61.99 PA)

5 stars ★★★★★ The nose of this wine is just super elegant, full of rose petals, wild cherry with hints of Middle Eastern spices. On the palate the wine is lively, fresh and savory all at the same time; the wild cherry turns deeper into plum, smoked meats and leather but is propped up by high-toned cherry and rose notes. The finish is just stupendous, so complex, so full, so long, it is hard to choose between these two wines but I like this one just slightly more than the Altero. Both are super. 4,133 cases produced. 97 points JS.

### 2010 Poggio Antico

**“Altero” Brunello di Montalcino (\$74.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ Poggio Antico comes from one of the highest vineyards in Montalcino and the ethereal fragrance in this wine is just

amazing. The fruit is a combination of savory wild cherry, hints of leather, spice, smoke and a bit of porcini. On the palate the wine has body and richness but it is the balance and length that stretch out and gives this wine such an elegant mouth feel. The finish just seems to go on and on, so balanced, so flavorful, one of the best of the vintage. 2,066 cases produced. 96 points JS.

### 2010 Silvio Nardi Brunello di Montalcino

**(\$39.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★★★ The nose is a very complex compote of black fruit, more so than most anything I've had from this vintage, and while it is rather saturated, rich and dense, it is fresh and lively. The wine has good structure, with tannin and acid that balance each other and allow a smoky, spicy cola-like flavor to well up from the depths of this wine to mix with the blackberry jam flavors. Long, balanced and full of flavor.

Guido: Love this wine, classic Old World Brunello. Earthy, wet leather aromas blow off to ripe and decadent fruit. Full-bodied, with soft and silky tannins and a long, luscious aftertaste of ripe fruit and tobacco. It's in my top 10 of 2010. 12,500 cases produced. 95 points JS.

### 2010 Solaria Brunello di Montalcino

**(\$44.99 PA)** 4 stars ★★★★★ Dense, dark fruit that's more plum than cherry, along with bold strokes of vanilla burst from your glass. They are followed on the palate, in a wine

that shows less structure than the nose might portray but has lots of juicy, bold fruit that's accompanied by fine-grained tannin. The finish is full and fleshy and shows a bit of square tannins in the finish. This wine needs a few years to come together to show all the potential it has.

Guido: Patrizia Cencioni's Solaria is really a one-woman operation (she does hire help for harvest), and her philosophy is that great wines start in the vineyard and not in the lab. Patrizia really doesn't put a thumbprint on her wines, she lets the hills of Montalcino and the Sangiovese speak for themselves. I have known and sold this producer's wines for many years and am excited to do so again. With classic dark and ripe fruit, it's full-bodied, with lots of structure. I would give this a couple hours of decanting. 1,500 cases produced. 95 points JS.

**2010 Tassi Brunello di Montalcino (\$59.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★★★½ The nose is full of sweet plummy fruit, wild cherry, earth, Tuscan dust, smoked meats and herb, all flowing gently from the glass giving one the sense of ease and grace, not forceful but full. In the mouth the wine shows a lush, full expression, almost chocolate, with plum and herb and earth, a supple, warm and inviting palate presence that just begs to be drunk, yet for a wine so easy to drink it shows remarkable depth and definition. The finish is long lasting, and carries through the chocolate, cherry, dried herb character, but it's the texture, that luscious, lustrous broad power that catches your attention and makes you go back for another taste.



*Not always work in Italy!*

Guido: This 2010 Brunello di Montalcino fleshes out beautifully on the palate with layers of super-expressive red fruits, coffee, some plum and spices with just hint of dust and well balanced tannins. The supple, forward personality is best suited for drinking over three to five years. 566 cases produced. 93 points RP, 92 points AG and JS.

**2010 Tassi "Franci" Brunello di Montalcino (\$109.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ The nose is smoky, dark, and shows more earthy aromatics with hints of iron, leather, dried herbs, dried meat, more of that umami savory character with hints of mineral salts. On the palate the wine is expansive, powerful while still showing definition in the midst of its richly textured body. The wine comes on in waves, full, powerful, texturally dominating but then the flavors take over, plummy, chocolate, Christmas spice, wild cherry and then to the meaty, more savory flavors—just an incredible array. The finish is long, powerful, supple, complex and really brings this wine to an exciting...well I can't say finish because it just goes on and on.

Guido: The Brunellis from Fabio Tassi always remind me of Montalcino. They have the classic Tuscan dust and a little cedar, tobacco as well as fruit. The "Franci" is no exception, this is a bottle that when you remove the cork, I am almost transported back to this little hill town of Montalcino. This is a wine that is Old World in style with enough fruit and balance to keep everyone at the table happy. I will try to keep my hands off for quite a few years—the longer the time, the more I will be rewarded. 241 cases produced. 95 points JS, 94 points RP, 93 points AG.

**2010 Tenuta di Sesta Brunello di Montalcino (\$34.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★★★½ I find that Tenuta di Sesta's wines are always overlooked upon release: they are never the loudest, tallest or heaviest, they just seem to be pleasant. Yet after years of tasting their wines I find they are slower to develop and end up morphing into silky, elegant masterpieces. In this, the 2010 vintage, their Brunello shows far more upfront earth and mineral than usual at this stage, yet the

pure Sangiovese aromatics of wild cherry and plum cut in behind the earthy elements along with hints of dried roses and freshly cut leather. On the palate the wine is graceful, seemingly plump yet the acidity is present in the finish and the longer the wine is in your glass the deeper and more profound the flavors become and the longer the aftertaste. This wine always puts a smile on my face, it just feels so good, never pushy or demanding just there growing with each minute in the glass. I can't wait to see this wine in another five years, it's stunningly good.

Guido: Love this 2010, Tenuta Di Sesta is a wine that I never cry to drink sooner than later (but if I wait, I am rewarded and a happy camper). Medium to full-bodied, black cherries, Tuscan dust and soft tannins. 3,750 cases produced. 95 points JS, 94 points RP.

**2010 Val di Suga Brunello di Montalcino (\$37.99 PA)** 4.5 stars ★★★★★½ The nose is full of bold, plummy fruit with hints of spice and touches of earth but predominantly darker fruit. On the palate the wine shows loads of structure but is extraordinarily well poised; a density that is coupled with classic length and a balance that surprised me. The wine's flavors are strident, rich, saturated and forthright: echoing the dark plum, slight bits of cherry and leather begin to emerge, but less savory and more straightforward fruits. The finish is powerful, balanced, long and carries the consistent flavors throughout. The best from this winery in years.

Guido: A spice-driven wine with notes of leather, cherry cola, cedar, tobacco, and baked fruit, and some wood on the finish. There's an earthy, dusty quality to the mouth that amplifies the wine's smoothness. 1,000 cases produced. 93 points RP, 92 points JS.

**2010 Villa I Cipressi Brunello di Montalcino (\$44.99 PA)** 5 stars ★★★★★ The nose is a cauldron of earth, Tuscan brush, rosemary, smoke, spice and leather exhibiting that savory quality of the vintage. On the palate the wine has exceptional balance and the plummy, wild cherry flavors emerge first but are swept up in a whoosh of savory exuberance: layers of smoked meat, earth, wild cherry, spice and smoke all come together on the palate. The finish is long, balanced and a replay of this wine's spectacular array of flavors. 500 cases produced. 96 points JS.

# Like Father, Like Even Better at Tenuta La Fortuna

By Greg St. Clair

**One of our longest relationships as Direct Importers has been with Tenuta La Fortuna.** We started importing them with the 1999 vintage, and I remember tasting their wine for the first time in Santa Monica in 2004. The event was in a large venue and I was surrounded by lots of other eager tasters being jostled mostly by those in line to taste Valdicava, Casanova di Neri or a few of the other famous wineries. Surprised by the quality of the wine, I marked my score sheet to return and taste again. When I returned and tasted again, the owners pouring noticed—not many had tasted at their stand, and no one had gone twice! We struck up a conversation, as they didn't speak English and hence had a little difficulty with most of the other tasters. Having spent a fair amount of time in rural Tuscany I was keenly aware these men had the roots of a *contadino* in them—unfortunately there isn't a good translation for this in English because peasants they weren't. They were Gioberto Zannoni and his young son Angelo Zannoni, fresh out of enology school eager to show his *Babbo* (Tuscan for Dad) how modern wines were made, while Gioberto showed the patience of a man involved with agriculture where most responses are usually taken very slowly. They were such honest, fresh faces, I was sure they would be good for us to import.

Gioberto's family has owned La Fortuna since 1907, which is a bit unusual for the region where sharecropping was the mainstay in the area until after WWII. They were also founding members of the Consorzio Brunello di Montalcino. The main portion of the 93-acre estate is located just east and under the hilltop town of Montalcino, adjacent to the well-known producers Fuligni and across a small valley from Siro Pacenti. Here in the pre-global warming days this region was decidedly cooler and the wines had a distinctly higher acidic feel. So Gioberto along with a slew of others including Siro Pacenti bought land just below Castelnuovo dell'Abate close to the southern boundary of Montalcino facing Monte Amiata. There the sunshine lasts longer and the region is much warmer, although the most important thing for a top quality-growing zone isn't outright heat, it is having that diurnal fluctuation of cool nights and warm days. Montalcino's southern border is the Orcia River and each summer night cool air flows over the river and creates air movement, keeping the area free of disease and cooling the grapes while refreshing the acidity.

The grapes from the two zones are blended together, the estate grapes giving a central focus, acidic backbone and structure while the grapes from Castelnuovo dell'Abate give density, richness, palate presence and a bit of a sexy stride. The wine then spends 40 months in the traditional 25-hectoliter Slavonian oak barrels—if you aren't familiar with hectoliters, you could fit 10 standard wine barrels in one of these.



Gioberto Zannoni.

Since our first meeting Gioberto has retired and left the reins of the estate to Angelo. However that doesn't quite mean he's playing golf in the afternoons. He still works daily in the vineyards and has a few sidebar projects of his own—Gioby Brunello di Montalcino, for instance...we may get some. Angelo, after a brief burst of a “let's change everything” attitude, began to understand more of the things his father had gently stated to him about patience, and “you'll understand some day.” However, Angelo learned his father's lessons well and is now teaching *Babbo*!

One of the perpetual issues in modern grape growing is having enough pickers to arrive at the perfect moment or getting in a bidding war for their services. Angelo spent more than a year researching alternatives in machine harvesting—while anathema for some to even hear about, today's machine pickers are amazing. Traditionally a machine harvester was more like a paint shaker, splaying grapes in every direction, and then you'd pick up those that didn't fall into the trough. Angelo worked with a local company to design and help produce a machine that would out-perform human hands. He's done it, too! His harvester, first off, can work at night when the grapes are coolest, the ideal time for picking. It separates out leaves, twigs, and bunches from the berries and then sends the grapes through an optical sorting machine to separate grapes not entirely ripe from those perfectly ripe. It cools the grapes in addition to harvesting them, ensuring that the grapes survive the ride back to the winery in their optimal condition. This step forward and their Ferrari of a harvester will have paid for itself in five years. I talked to Gioberto when Angelo was in the winery fetching some samples and you could hear in his voice how proud he was, firstly of Angelo's understanding the lessons of patience and nature that he had taught him but also how much of his own initiative has made the winery and vineyards operate more smoothly. All their hard work was rewarded this year with a 96 point score for their Brunello di Montalcino from James Suckling. You really owe it to yourselves to try it.



La Velona sunset.

## Guido's Top Picks of 2010

By Mike "Guido" Parres

### 2010 Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona Brunello di Montalcino (375ml)

**\$24.99 PA** Very attractive and very user-friendly Brunello Plum aromas, with hints of dried flowers and cedar, follow-through to a medium-to-full body, with soft tannins and a clean, fresh finish. A wine-der-ful for early drinking. 94 points JS, RP and WE.

### 2010 Villa Poggio Salvi (Sinquire)

Love this very user-friendly 2010 Brunelli. Here is a wine to stock up on, and you can drink this bad boy now and for the three to five years (it will help you keep your hands off some of your trophy 2010 Brunellos). Rich with ripe dark fruit, very smooth with soft acidity, the tannins are soft as well and the length on the finish will bring you in to tomorrow. Yum!

### 2010 Mastrojanni "Vigna Loreto" Brunello Di Montalcino (\$69.99 PA)

A very plummy yet elegant red, with leather and spices on the nose. Medium-to full-bodied, with a sleek and refined tannin structure and a long finish. Yum!

### 2010 Renieri Brunello Di Montalcino (\$41.99 PA)

Very terroir-driven, with lots of earth, minerals & soft fruit. A big steak with this bad boy; drink over the next five years.

### 2010 Tenuta Del Cerro Brunello Di Montalcino (\$38.99 PA)

Lots of fruit, ripe blueberries, flowers and red raspberries, earthy with Tuscan dust and minerals, and soft acidity and well balanced tannins and sweet wood and beautiful viscosity. Keep for several years in the cellar or let it open for three to four hours. A must-have for 2010 Brunelli.

## Saturday Tastings: Wines of Italy in all Three Stores, April 11

After a very successful buying trip to Italy in late February, our buyers and staff for wines of Italy will have new arrivals and plenty of information about upcoming releases for you. A great opportunity to see what is new and hot!

**Noon to 3pm in San Francisco,  
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