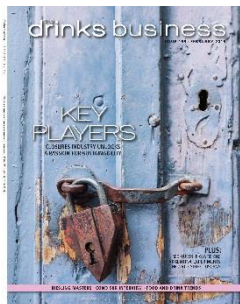


FAMIGLIACECCHI

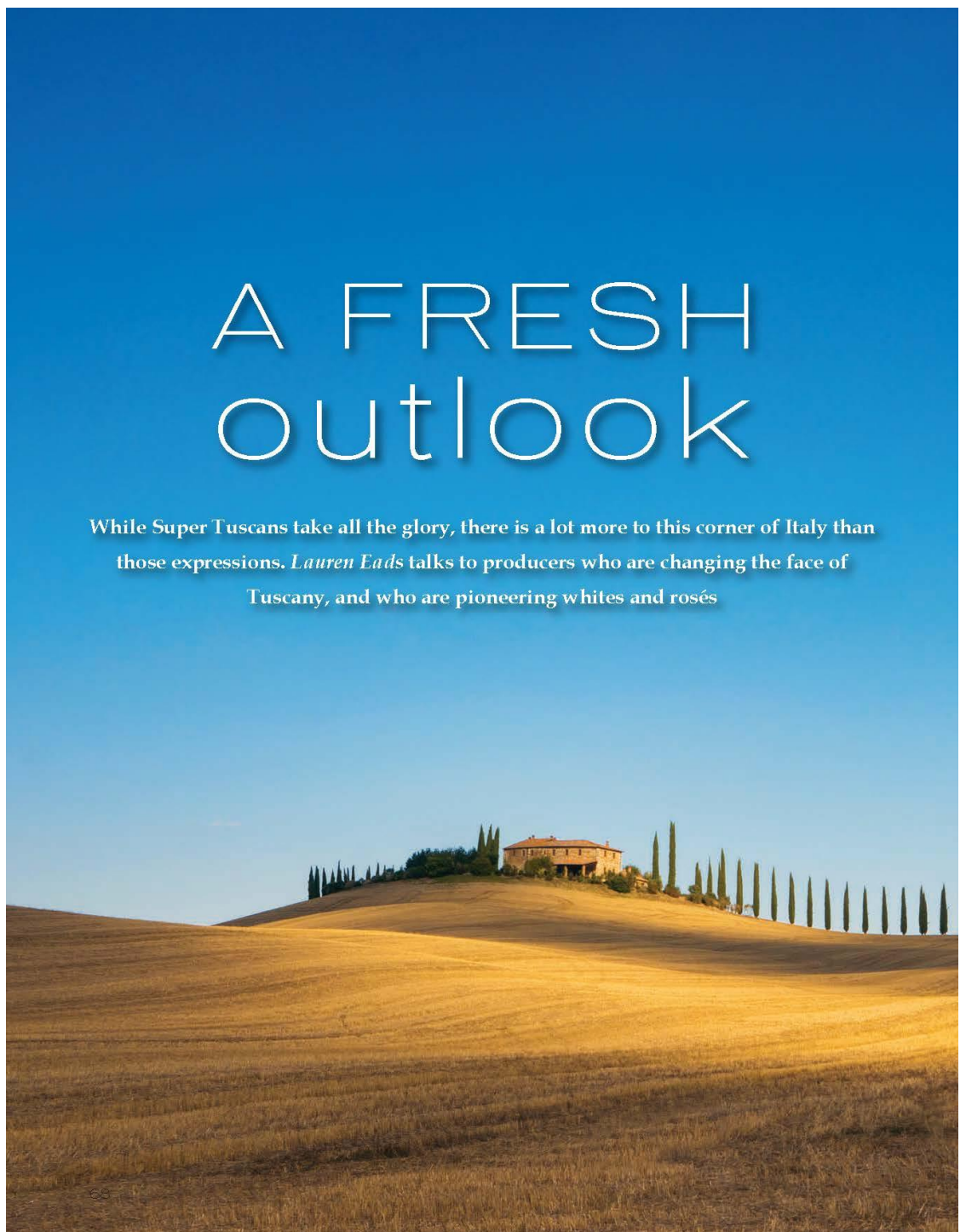
the drinks business

THE DRINK BUSINESS – FEBBRAIO 2019



A FRESH outlook

While Super Tuscans take all the glory, there is a lot more to this corner of Italy than those expressions. *Lauren Eads* talks to producers who are changing the face of Tuscany, and who are pioneering whites and rosés



FAMIGLIACECCHI

tuscany

LAST YEAR marked the 50th anniversary of the first Super Tuscan wine being released. Depending on your stance, the rebellion that helped propel Tuscan wine into the fine wine stratosphere began with a 1968 Sassicaia, or a 1968 Vigorello from Azienda Agricola San Felice. Both lay claim to the milestone.

Regardless, it marked a turning point in the fortunes of Tuscany. Winemakers didn't completely turn their backs on the indigenous varieties of Sangiovese, Colorino, Canaiolo, Malvasia Nera and Trebbiano but created a new category that existed outside of appellation laws that allowed for the use of non-indigenous grapes, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. This was the Toscana IGT label, and drew on grapes from throughout Tuscany. The Super Tuscans represented the region's modern face, and were successful in scaling the Liv-ex ladder, offering consumers and collectors a simple and marketable concept that cut through any confusion about their quality.

Save for the few brands that have scaled the Liv-ex Italy 100, much of the wine produced in Tuscany, and Italy, remains undervalued, or, to put it another way, offers excellent value

Appellations such as Chianti DOC, Chianti Classico DOCG, Bolgheri DOC, Brunello di Montalcino DOCG and Montepulciano DOCG maintained tradition, but were somewhat left behind. As Susan Harper, sales and marketing director at Armit Wines, notes: "The Super Tuscans laid the groundwork, and in terms of collectors, these remain the driving force behind sales of premium Italian wines. Some of the best Super Tuscan producers also make Chianti Classico; the difference between the two isn't generally understood by all consumers. The rules and regulations

make it quite confusing unless you are willing to delve in. Many consumers still view Chianti Classico as 'cheap plonk', but we have well-informed customers who get it."

Indeed, save for the few brands that have scaled the Liv-ex Italy 100, much of the wine produced in Tuscany, and Italy, remains undervalued, or, to put it another way, offers excellent value. Why? Marketing, a lack of education in the broader sense, and a (somewhat) complicated appellation system, which can be a barrier to understanding the region, are all factors. But when it comes to fine wine, both inside and out of the appellation laws, there is "absolutely no sense that [producers] are resting on their laurels", adds Harper. "There is a desire to continue to raise standards and try new innovations. Above everything, quality still attracts buyers and collectors."

PRODUCERS INVEST

So, 50 years on from that momentous rebellion, how are Tuscan winemakers taking their offer forward, and where are producers choosing to invest? While Montalcino, Montepulciano and Bolgheri remain classic pillars of the Tuscan wine scene, much of the innovation is taking place throughout Chianti Classico and to the west in the newly founded Maremma DOC. "Tuscany is experiencing an interesting period of renaissance," says Andrea Cecchi, CEO of Cecchi Winery. "This isn't consistent across the board, but on the whole one can perceive positive feelings. These developments do not depend on the size of the winery, but on their forward vision and professionalism, on where they are located, the designation of the origins and the estate's terroir. It is well known that in recent years the market has been very harsh towards this region, but now there is a strong desire for renewal, starting with those companies that are themselves ready for such change."

Sangiovese, the grape that spans the region, is a typically high-acid, high-tannin variety. Known for its notes of red

Feature findings

- > 2018 marked the 50th year since the first Super Tuscan was released, setting Tuscany on a fine wine path.
- > Tuscany is experiencing a "period of renaissance", says Andrea Cecchi of Cecchi Winery, with a strong desire for renewal and innovation among producers.
- > Investment is growing in Chianti Classico DOCG, which in 2014 introduced the Gran Selezione classification.
- > Work in the vineyard to define microclimates and sub-regions is giving rise to single-vineyard Sangiovese in Chianti Classico.
- > Demand for Tuscan whites is growing, with producers, including Ornellaia in Bolgheri DOC, keen to produce the first white Super Tuscan, and the wider Maremma DOC championing Vermentino and Provence-like rosé wines.

berry and violet, it benefits from light oak, and is also capable of expressing overtones of leather, smoke and tomato. An aging period of between four and seven years is typical, with the best examples capable of positive development for the best part of two decades. "In recent years, Tuscan red wines have generally evolved, mainly because of two reasons: climate change, and the 'new taste' determined by the combination of health trends and needs, and evolution of food," says Andrea Agostinelli, oenologist at Bottega. "The trend in red wines is to obtain examples that are aged in wood but with an olfactory balance that includes a floral and fruity part, as well as tertiary aromas given by oxidation and the wood itself. For example, many Brunellos, for the past two years, are more fruity than 'toasted'. This favours matching with modern cuisine."

Cecchi agrees, noting a "profound transformation" throughout Tuscany. "No more concentrated and tannic wines, no longer dark colours with opulent

>

FAMIGLIA ECCHI

tuscany



Tenute Piccini

structures but elegance, freshness, drinkability and true typicity are the key words of our region," he says.

CHIANTI CLASSICO DOCG

But while style has evolved with tastes, work in the vineyard has played a greater role, particularly in Chianti and Chianti Classico. Since the late 1970s, producers have worked to fine tune clones of Sangiovese in an effort to find those best suited to individual plots. With much of that work now complete, the future is bright, says Giovanni Mazzei, export director of his family's wine estate, which spans Chianti Classico and Maremma to Sicily. The next step will be to define sub-regions within Chianti Classico, he says, as producers further their understanding of terroir. "From now on everything is phenomenal, and you are going to get results," he says. "There was a revolution with the Super Tuscans in Chianti, but the viticulture wasn't exactly there. It hadn't caught up with the ambition of winemakers. Now, we have the right materials and we have vines that will be there for another 30 years. The most

'There was a revolution with the Super Tuscans in Chianti, but the viticulture wasn't exactly there. Now, we have the right materials'

Trade talk: What are the current trends among winemakers in Tuscany, and what's driving them?



Andrea Agostinelli, oenologist, Bottega

"A small revolution in the world of food and (therefore) taste, has affected the production of wines such as Brunello, Chianti and other famous Tuscan DOC wines. Producers have to stay up to date in a gradual way, keeping traditions but adopting small variations in vinification. For example, before fermenting the grapes we make a crio-pre-maceration at around 10°C. This allows us to extract floral aromas in grapes such as Sangiovese (for example, violet). Other techniques have been introduced in the aging. We are moving from larger barrels (above 50 hectolitres) to barrels between 30hl and 10hl. In the past, wines were left in these barrels for two to four years in the same wood. Now we diversify by varying the size or type of wood."



Enrico Viglierchio, general manager, Banfi

"Tuscan wine producers are pursuing economic investments that help enhance the territory and their visibility. The value of diversity is growing in Montalcino through the zonation of micro areas, which will need to be well communicated. There is also a renewed attention to native grapes and to bio-diversities associated with them. The grape and territory remains at the top of research, with the analysis of the expressions of each variety and the oenological evolution of the wines produced through vinification techniques that exalt the characteristics of the different varieties."



Lamberto Frescobaldi, winemaker and president, Frescobaldi

"Terroir continues to be the first focus for quality winemaking, but at the same time Tuscany's new trends of consumption are emerging: Vermentino wines from the Tyrrhenian coast, with their freshness and minerality, are becoming increasingly popular; also outside of Italy. Pale rosé is another new interesting trend. With the influence of the sea these wines are very qualitative, and with an attractive and seductive colour are able to attract new targets, such as millennials."



Alessandro Lunelli, CEO, Tenute Lunelli

"Cabernet Franc is a variety that some great oenologists of the past underestimated, but is developing more and more, especially in Bolgheri and Costa Toscana. The other trend is the Super Tuscan style. When they were born in the 1970s, these wines were powerful and rich with tannins. An evolution is going on. People are looking for more balanced and refined wines. At Tenute Lunelli we demonstrate this concept with Teuto, a Super Tuscan made of Sangiovese, Cabernet and Merlot. To refine it, we use different containers: Sangiovese in large barrels and Cabernet and Merlot in barriques, to bring out the qualities of each variety before the final blend."



Antonio Capaldo, owner, Feudi di San Gregorio

"By observing the overall competitive landscape, I see two major trends: on one hand the reduction of oak ageing on wines (both having a shorter time in oak and the usage of other ageing methods) and the progressive emergence of single-vineyard wines to enhance the specificity of selected terroirs."

tuscany



Frescobaldi's Tenuta Ammiraglia

important thing is the viticulture – having better knowledge and understanding of each individual plot so we can anticipate any problems.”

Demonstrating the eagerness of producers to dig deeper, last year a branch of the Chianti Classico Consorzio launched an experimental project with the aim of identifying Chianti's 'grand cru' estates. Led by Classico Berardenga, an association of Chianti Classico producers, the project is called Caratterizzazione dei Cru Aziendali (Defining the estate's crus). The collective aims to spend two years analysing the soil in select vineyards in Castelnuovo Berardenga, as well as the phenolic maturation of Sangiovese during the growing season, to compare the evolution of grapes from each vineyard, followed by analytical analysis of the wine as it ages.

“Chianti Classico is extremely wide and we need to go a little bit further,” says Giacomo Panicacci, brand ambassador for Tenute Piccini. “Even the villages are pretty big, so the idea is that we want to give consumers as much information as possible. Not just at the village level but also at a soil and macroclimatic level.”

All wines in the project must be obtained by a standard microvinification method from single vineyards registered in Chianti Classico – two vineyards minimum for each participating winery, with around 20 producers taking part. The project is indicative of a wider trend among producers to move towards single-variety, single-vineyard, terroir-driven wines, especially with Sangiovese, as the result of a renewed focus on vineyards and the use of non-invasive winemaking techniques, says Panicacci.

“The idea is to go a little deeper in the understanding of soils and Sangiovese to

Trade talk: What are the current trends among winemakers in Tuscany and what's driving them?



Giacomo Panicacci, brand ambassador, Tenute Piccini

“We have noticed a consolidated push towards single-variety and terroir-driven wines, especially with Sangiovese, as the result of a renovated focus on vineyards and the use of non-invasive winemaking techniques. Namely a balanced use of extraction techniques, new oak barrels together with sustainable practices adopted in the vineyards. Conversion to organic farming practices is proceeding at a fast rate. The surge in demand for Italian sparkling wines is supporting a growing interest and, consequently, research in crafting local Tuscan sparkling wines – including Maremma and Chianti Classico – based on either Charmat or Champenoise methods.”



Elvira Bortolomiel, vice-president, Bortolomiel

“The trends that are driving investments towards Tuscany are due to the peculiarity of the territory. Tuscany has always been a land of research and great wines. Peculiarity and richness are combined with the desire and curiosity that every winemaker has – to challenge and confront each other and overcome the boundaries of one's land. Bortolomiel has thus invested in a small vineyard in Montalcino, on the border with one of the most famous areas in the world for great Tuscan reds. This is the place where Il Segreto di Giuliano was born, a Sangiovese that bears the signature of the winemaker Roberto Cipresso and of which just under 3,000 bottles have been produced, all of them from a single hectare.”



Vitaliano Tirrito, export director, Vino Terra Moretti

“From a 'body builder' to a swimmer' is the main trend followed by many winemakers in Tuscany in recent years. This means less new oak aging and less concentration in the glass to reach a more elegant and drinkable wine. At the same time lot of attention is dedicated to more sustainable agriculture (organic, biodynamic and natural) because the consumer is increasingly drawn to this. But it's not only a client's right, it's actually our duty to be transparent in regards to what we do and to put a healthier product on the table. At Petra, all our wines are going to be organic from the 2018 vintage. We have a solar-energy system to meet the wineries' needs, and we decided to change the bottle to a lighter one to lower our carbon footprint.”



Massimo Sensi, owner, Sensi Vini

“The current trends in Tuscany include double fermented wines called Governo. These wines are made by adding half dried grapes of a Tuscan red or Chianti to re-start a second fermentation which adds body, flavour intensity and an explosion of fruitiness. Rose Toscana IGT is following a worldwide trend for rosé and Tuscany stands out with the Sangiovese grape vinified in pink. Morellino di Scansano, Maremma DOC and Bolgheri DOC, together with Vermentino IGT Toscana, represent the new classics of Tuscan production due to the diversity of land, soil and sea breezes which create a unique microclimate and consequently a new taste profile for Sangiovese, red blends and Vermentino.”

FAMIGLIACECCHI



The art of the matter: an installaiton at Ornellaia

reflect and respect the terroir. It's a work of premiumisation."

Backing up this work in the vineyard, and efforts to premiumise the appellation, in 2014 the Chianti Classico Consorzio introduced its Gran Selezione category – a top-tier classification positioned at the top of the region's DOCG in terms of quality, ahead of Chianti Classico Riserva and the entry-level Chianti Classico Annata. Accounting for approximately 10% of the Chianti Classico production, wines that carry this label must be made from estate-grown grapes, have a minimum ABV of 13% and be aged for at least 30 months, compared with 12.5% ABV and 24 months for a Chianti Classico Riserva. It's not a vast distinction, but its introduction has proven to be a useful reminder of the region and its quality tiers. "We didn't invent anything new," says Mazzei. "Most of the wines already existed; we

just added a name. It turned on the lights and stimulated the curiosity of sommeliers and wine lovers."

While it's too early to judge its impact, being less than five years old, it's a positive step for the Consorzio in raising the profile of Chianti Classico, and investment in the region is growing.

In 2017, Frescobaldi made its first foray into the Chianti Classico region, taking full ownership of the Castello di San Donato in Perano estate for €13.3 million (£11.6m) after many years of searching for the perfect property. This historic estate is based on a 250-hectare site, with 250ha under vine at 400m-600m above sea level, including 52ha of steep sloping south-facing vineyards in the Gaiole commune of Chianti Classico.

"A lot of capital and investment has arrived in the region," adds Mazzei. "This is a slow-motion industry, but Chianti has been one of the most underestimated regions, and now people are realising its potential. It's more financially accessible for investors compared with other regions, and it's very well known.

"There's a gap between what you pay and where the brand stands. Burgundy is very well known, but expensive, and the tourism we have in Tuscany is phenomenal. From a wine

and gastronomic point of view the potential is huge."

While Tuscany will probably always be known as a red-wine-producing region, its ability to produce both white and rosé wines is growing, as is demand, particularly from the coastal areas of Bolgheri DOC, and its wider Maremma DOC. "We believe that there is an opportunity at every level for more Tuscan whites, with customers looking to Italy as an alternative to 'more traditional regions'," says Armit Wines' Harper. "Tuscan white wines have traditionally had even less airtime than their red counterparts, but wines such as Batar from Querciabella, which are made in a more Burgundian style, with real aging potential, are shifting perceptions and, ultimately, demand."

SERIOUS WHITE WINE

Leading the pack, in 2015, Ornellaia, known for producing some of Italy's most collectible red wines, released its first serious white wine as part of an effort to explore the potential of white varieties in Bolgheri DOC (a region dominated by reds) despite its Mediterranean climate.

Ornellaia Bianco 2013, a blend of 70% Sauvignon Blanc and 30% Viognier, took seven years to reach fruition. Just 4,000 bottles of the inaugural Ornellaia Bianco 2013 were produced, barrel-fermented in 30% new and 70% used oak barriques, aged on its lees for 12 months and finished in steel vats for a further three. Changeable from year to year, the 2014 Bianco was a blend of 74% Sauvignon Blanc, 13% Viognier and 13% Petit Manseng, while the 2015 expression was 100% Sauvignon Blanc. While Ornellaia Bianco is not the first white to be produced by the Tuscan estate, it is the

"Tuscan white wines have traditionally had even less airtime than their red counterparts, but wines such as Batar from Querciabella are shifting perceptions and, ultimately, demand"

FAMIGLIACECCHI



The rolling hills of Chianti Classico

tuscany

most serious to date. Poggio alle Gazze dell'Ornellaia is typically a 100% Sauvignon Blanc, but can include varieties including Viognier, Vermentino and Verdicchio. It has been produced by the estate for many years, but is considered a more simplistic expression by winemaker and director Axel Heinz.

"Bolgheri has now established its reputation as an area for great red wines, but we feel its potential for white wines has been largely underestimated, even if whites have always been present in Bolgheri," says Heinz. "There is still much to be discovered in terms of best suitable vineyard sites, choice of varieties and vinification methods, but so far we have been thrilled by the results, and have seen some parallels with the red wines in the way the whites express themselves; a similar combination of lush ripeness and vibrant, firm acidity."

MAREMMA DOC

The larger Maremma DOC, which was established in September 2011 after 16 years as an IGT, runs north to south from Livorno to Grosseto, along the Tuscan coast. The topography of Maremma ranges from white sandy coastline and

flat low-lying marshes to steep hills and forests. Soils vary from volcanic to clay and black rock. Grapes range from Italian varieties including Sangiovese, Vermentino and Grechetto to international varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Petit Verdot. However, its unique appeal is its ability to produce crisp, coastal whites from Vermentino, rosé and even sparkling wines. But only now is it starting to gain investment. Driven by a surge in demand for Italian sparkling wines, Piccini is working on a 100% sparkling Vermentino from the Maremma DOC, made using the Charmat method, under its Tenuta Moraia label, which will be unveiled at ProWein in March.

The producer is also making a Sangiovese Rosato from Maremma, where wines are often "easier to approach, and offer a fruitier, softer and rounder style of wine for everyday drinking, compared with Chianti," says Panicacci.

Frescobaldi has also moved into the Tuscan rosé category, having launched a Provençal-style wine from the Maremma in the UK, under the guidance of Sacha Lichine of Château d'Esclans in 2017.

Named Alie, the pale pink rosé is a blend of 90% Syrah and 10% Vermentino. A third of the blend is barrel fermented for texture, stability and colour.

"In the Anniraglia Estate on the coast of Maremma we produce an interesting Vermentino named Massovivo, and a pale rosé from Syrah and Vermentino, that we consider a tribute to the sea. It is called Alie, the name of the sea nymph that has inspired all of us to produce this amazing wine. Another

interesting project is at 700m above sea level on the Tuscan Appennine, where Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were first planted to Tuscany in 1855 by my ancestor Leonia. Five years ago, after nine years of experimentation, we decided to dedicate to Leonia a *Metodo Classico* – a tribute to her audacity and vision."

Mazzei also produces a Toscana IGT rosé under its Belguardo label, made from grapes grown in Maremma. Giovanni Mazzei believes there is real potential to not only establish the region as a rosé specialist, but to create a wider coastal appellation for Tuscan rosé. "Rosé is very popular, and so is Provence," says Mazzei. "I don't see why we can't have a coastal appellation for rosé wines in Tuscany. We are not far from Provence, and I think someone should do something. It should cover the northern coast all the way down – including the provinces that attach to the sea. Why isn't anyone thinking about this? If I had time I would do it in a second, to produce a legacy, and to have winemakers promote the idea of coastal wines."

It might be some time before Tuscan whites, rosés or even sparkling wines become commonplace, but there's still plenty of room to grow, be it with single-vineyard, terroir-driven Sangiovese, or serious whites or rosé wines. After all, as the Super Tuscan movement attests, Tuscan winemakers have never been afraid to colour outside of the lines.

As Heinz concludes: "Tuscany has spent the past 40 years constantly innovating, taking the very best from historical wine regions and blending it with its own traditions. Today it is important to focus on the truest expression of the incredibly varied terroirs of Tuscany to exalt what makes each of the great wines unique. As always, this is going to be achieved through the right synthesis between tradition and innovation." **db**

'It might be some time before Tuscan whites, rosés or even sparkling wines become commonplace, but there's still plenty of room to grow, be it with single-vineyard, terroir-driven Sangiovese, or serious whites or rosé wines'