

FAMIGLIACECCHI Decanter

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Decanter PANEL TASTING

Chianti Classico 2010

With its diverse growing conditions, range of wine styles and quality-driven focus on organic winemaking, Chianti Classico is the star region of Tuscany says Monty Waldin

Chianti Classico is currently Tuscany's most exciting red wine region in terms of quality and value.

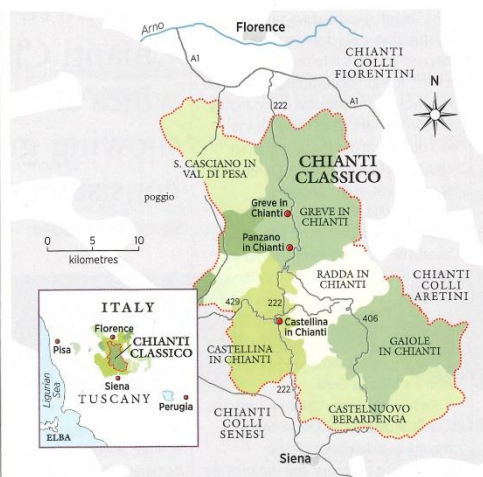
The best Chianti Classicos, which are increasingly 100% Sangiovese rather than Tuscan-Bordeaux-Rhône hybrids (though up to 20% of French grapes can be blended in) have as much smooth intensity as the (always 100% Sangiovese) Brunellos from Montalcino, but with less obvious muscle and helpfully lower price tags.

Texturally, Chianti Classicos are crunchier than Brunello, as the region is less directly influenced by hot winds from the western Mediterranean. Unlike Brunello, neither Chianti Classico nor Chianti Classico Riserva need spend even a minute in oak. The same 'no oak required' rule applies to the recently created top-tier Chianti Classico Gran Selezione category. Unlike Classico or Classico Riserva, Gran Selezione can only be made from estate-grown grapes.

Cool customers

Chianti Classico also has plenty of hill sites, especially around its historic centre in the towns of Radda in Chianti, Castellina in Chianti and Gaiole in Chianti. Here vineyards are often at 400m or higher. Cool night air is stored by the thick surrounding forests until morning. Once released, this cool air helps the grapes retain aromas, flavours and inner freshness. This makes low intervention winemaking much easier (flabby wines lose their fruit much quicker). It also gives Chianti Classico wines their long drinking windows and great suitability for richer dishes.

In terms of texture and mouthfeel, Chianti Classico can vary widely. For example, wines



from sandy soils such as in the Lamole area of Greve in Chianti, give pale, perfumed, overtly fruity wines with easygoing textures. Chianti Classicos from cool, compact limestone-based, alberese soils are darker, showing a flinty, mouthwatering character that can be equally good with or without food.

Finally, wines from galestro – a clay-schist soil that, despite being compact, crumbles in your hand – show soft yet compressed layers of mouthwatering fruit. This creates a sense of depth without making the wine feel heavy, and provides Chianti Classicos with wide potential drinking windows.

Great wine regions are not just about grapes, soils and winemaking but about the people too. The influx of 'let's move to Tuscany' lifestyles which began in the late 1960s (and is ongoing) kick-started not only Italy's agriturismo movement, but also one of the wine world's strongest and most quality-driven movements to organics (and

biodynamics). A remarkable 95% of growers in Panzano, a dynamic village in the wider township of Greve in Chianti, are now organic. Overall, 30% of Chianti Classico estates are organic, compared to less than 5% globally.

This region has an incredible past – it was the wine of the Renaissance after all – but it has a bright, biodiverse future too.

Monty Waldin is DWWA Regional Chair for Tuscany and a widely published wine writer and author

CHIANTI CLASSICO: KNOW YOUR VINTAGES

2017 A 35% drop in yield due to spring frosts, then drought. Some unusually dense wines, which are still finding their feet and need food. Drink 2019-2024.

2016 Hot summer, followed by some opportune autumn rain. Best wines are velvety, drinking beautifully now. 2019-2030.

2015 A torrid summer meant those fitness-fanatic vines with already deep roots found enough moisture to give the most integrated tannins and ripe rather than roasted fruit. 2019-2025.

2014 A rainy season meant lighter, more fluid wines with agreeable digestibility and crunchiness suited to fattier foods. But drink up.

2013 Underated wines, brightly coloured and firm-fruited thanks in part to cool harvest nights. 2019-2025.

2012 A snowy winter and a chilly, damp spring, then a Sahara-like summer. Small and healthy grapes gave clear if densely weighted wines. 2019-2022.

CHIANTI CLASSICO: THE FACTS

Chianti Classico comes from 7,200ha of vineyards located in nine townships between Florence and Siena. These are: **Radda in Chianti, Gaiole in Chianti, Greve in Chianti and Castellina in Chianti** (the largest in terms of vineyard area), plus parts of **Barberino Val d'Elsa, Castelnuovo Berardenga, San Casciano Val di Pesa, Tavarnelle Val di Pesa and Poggibonsi** (the smallest in terms of vineyard area).

Average annual production of Chianti Classico DOCG between 2011 and 2016 inclusive was around 35 million bottles, which is about four times as much as Brunello di Montalcino.

The verdict

A classic vintage that's showing well now, 2010 produced some outstanding wines right across the Chianti Classico region. Monty Waldin shares the highlights of the tasting

The 2010 Chianti Classico growing season got off to a tricky start but ultimately produced really classic wines. There were two key factors. First, a difficult spring in some areas reduced the potential crop, providing the pre-conditions for concentrated flavours. Second, ripening was slow in autumn, but warm days and cool nights made for wines with precise fruit flavours and appealing but not over-bearing depth.

Growers could pick methodically according to flavour (not just sugar or potential alcohol) ripeness, while also eliminating any sub-standard berries and stems, allowing them to make rich wines with an uplifting inner crunch. In the main, tannins had enough texture to give a robust but agreeably smooth mouthfeel. This was balanced by fruit with enough density to create absolutely classically Tuscan reds: firm but not aggressive, rich and savoury.

In short, everything you'd hope for from a 'long hang time' vintage. And our panel tasting did not disappoint.

As Susan Hulme MW noted, about a third of the 75 wines tasted gained scores of 92 points or above. 'This is very high for such a tasting,' she said. 'Only a handful of scores were very low,' she added. Andrew Jefford summed up the 2010 wines as: 'Terrific and in great shape, almost a decade down the line.'

Overall we collectively felt that the 2010 Chianti Classicos we rated as Outstanding were drinking beautifully now and will hold into the mid-2020s at least. It was encouraging to see how the seven wines deemed Outstanding came from right across what is the very definition of a heterogeneous region. Castelnuovo Berardenga in the far south was represented by Castell'in Villa, Gaiole in Chianti (southeast) by Castello di Cacchiano, Castellina in Chianti (southwest) by Tenuta di Lilliano and Villa Pomona, Greve in Chianti (northeast) by the top-scoring Villa Calcinaia, and San Casciano in Val di Pesa (northwest) by Castello di Gabbiano and Principe Corsini's Villa Le Corti.

Radda in Chianti, Chianti Classico's high altitude and central watershed commune, missed out on the Outstanding category, but did provide two Highly Recommended wines from Montemaggio and Castello di Volpaia.

On the role, good or bad, of French grapes in Chianti Classico (up to 20% are allowed) Jefford commented: 'I have to say very honestly that many of the wines with a percentage of French grapes tasted delicious, and were often less severe and confronting than the pure Tuscans.' Hulme avoided looking at the crib sheet when tasting in order to remain completely objective about whether wines had any French varieties. 'But results for

'The 2010 Chianti Classico wines are showing great consistency'

the wines which indicated additional grape varieties all scored well and by two if not all three judges,' she said.

Regarding oak use, Hulme noted: '2010 is a snapshot in the history and development of Chianti Classico when bolder, oakier wines were the fashion.' Yet very few wines showed too much of what Jefford dubbed 'crass oak', because in his words: 'This lesson has been well-digested in Tuscany'.

Overall, the 2010 Chianti Classico wines are showing really well and there is great consistency. 'The wines are well structured with good intensity and very good concentration but without being heavy,' said Hulme.

The best of these 2010s open beautifully over two or three days, with no need to decant – just put the cork back in. Start with dinner, continue at lunch the next day and end with a valedictory preprandial as you open another bottle!

THE SCORES

75 wines tasted
Exceptional 0
Outstanding 7
Highly Recommended 29
Recommended 31
Commended 8
Fair 0
Poor 0
Faulty 0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit Chianti Classico Riserva and Chianti Classico Gran Selezione wines only from the 2010 vintage

THE JUDGES

Susan Hulme MW



Hulme is a wine writer, judge and consultant, specialising in Italian wines. She regularly travels to all the main wine regions of Italy. A Master of Wine since 2005, she won the Bollinger Medal for excellence in tasting in the MW exam. Since 2016 she has written regularly for Decanter magazine and Decanter.com on Italian wines.

Andrew Jefford



Jefford has been writing about wine since the 1980s, winning many awards. He is a contributing editor to Decanter magazine and writes a popular blog for Decanter Premium.

After working as a senior research fellow at Adelaide University from 2009-2010, he now lives with his family in Languedoc, France.

Monty Waldin



Waldin is a widely published and awarded wine writer, author, broadcaster and consultant with a particular interest in biodynamic, organic and natural wines. A regular contributor to

Decanter and the DWWA Regional Chair for Tuscany, he is also a frequent visitor to Tuscany where his Italian partner and their son live.

CHIANTI CLASSICO 2010

RECOMMENDED (Continued) 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SH	AJ	MW	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Villa Cerna, Riserva	89	85	91	92	Lively, pure and long, with admirable concentration and drive, though it relies on its prominent acidity. At or near its peak.	14%	2019-2021	N/A UK	www.villacerna.it