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## Italian wine: Tasting Through the 9 Communes of Chianti Classico



A couple weeks ago I attended a Masters class in Boston hosted by the Consorzio Vino Chianti Classico and led by Jeff Porter. It was a horizontal tasting discussing the diversity of Chianti Classico and its 9 communes including: San Casciano in Val di Pesa; Tavarnelle Val di Pesa; Barberino Val d'Elsa; Poggibonsi; Greve in Chianti; Castellare in Chianti; Gaiole in Chianti; Radda in Chianti; Castelnuovo Berardenga.

We tasted through 10 wines so I honestly can't say coming out of the event that I can completely tell the difference between the communes since we didn't taste through every commune. Without also trying multiple wines from each commune it would be hard to characterize them right here and now.

Many of the owners were in attendance each representing their winery giving a lay of the land to best describe what makes them unique. What was completely evident from the tasting was even when we compared wineries from the same commune some were very different in comparison. With some it was the variety of grapes used, the altitudes of the vineyards or the soils in which the grapes are grown. This to me is one of the most fascinating aspects of wine.

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The wineries present included: Castello di Gabbiano (San Casciano in Val di Pesa); Casa Sola (Barberino Tavarnelle); Cinciano (Poggibonsi); Il Molino di Grace (Greve in Chianti); Castello Vicchiomaggio (Greve in Chianti); **Famiglia Cecchi** (Castellina in Chianti); Fattorie Melini (Poggibonsi); Cantina Castelvecchi (Radda in Chianti); Felsina (Castelnuovo Berardenga); Vallepiciola (Castelnuovo Berardenga).

Although I'm sure many folks know, the wine region of Chianti Classico is located in Tuscany, which is in central Italy. It is almost the same size as Burgundy, France and is home to about 600 producers with 7,200 hectares total (almost 18k acres). Interesting fact is that about 40% are certified organic or eco-certified.

## The history of Chianti Classico

- 1716 the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de Medici defined the Chianti Classico territory
- 1848 Baron Bettino Ricasoli created the recipe for Chianti Classico including primarily sangiovese with canaiolo, malvasia and other local red grapes
- 1924 the Chianti Classico Consortium was created
- 1932 the term Classico was added to distinguish those wines from the rest of Chianti
- 1984 Chianti Classico becomes a DOCG
- 2006 trebbiano and malvasia are banned from production of Chianti Classico
- 2014 Gran Selezione is born

## The soils of Chianti Classico

For those that love the chemistry of the land and geology this part is for you. Understanding soils is very important and something I myself need to dig into more. It will help you understand what lends certain characteristics to the wines. The soils of Chianti Classico I learned mostly consist of galestro, albarese and macigno. Galestro is a highly powdery clay schist that is hard and compact. It forces the vines to struggle resulting in wines with power and intensity. The albarese soil is a hardened marl stone and limestone that results in wines with high acidity and finesse. Lastly the macigno, a sandstone, dusty rock lends aromatics and florality.

## Types of Chianti Classico

There are 3 levels of Chianti Classico including the annata, riserva and the new Gran Selezione created in 2014.

Annata is the standard wine that requires a minimum of 12% alcohol and 12 months of aging. These wines are fruity, approachable, fresh and pleasant. Jeff mentioned that he has had 20 to 40 year old annata that were "stunning" proving the impressiveness of these wines even at the basic level.

The Chianti Classico Riserva wines require a minimum of 12.5% alcohol with at least 2 years of aging with 3 months in the bottle. These wines are fruity, consistent and persistent, well-integrated with the oak to go along with its structure.

The new Chianti Classico Gran Selezione is based on single vineyard sites or the best selection of grapes from a particular winery. The alcohol minimum is 13% with 30 months aging with 3 months in the bottle. Wines of fruit, spice, depth, elegance and a balance of acidity and tannins.