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### Super Tuscans: Keep Your Sassicaia, I'll take the Sangiovese #ItalianFWT



Sangiovese loving Sue shows off her purple teeth: we asked these three after a practice for the US Wine Tasting Team!

“Sassicaia, Sassicaia, all they want is Sassicaia!” wailed the young sommelier from China during a tasting lab of Sangiovese and other Italian indigenous grapes during the VinItaly Wine Ambassador Course in Los Angeles in February 2019.

“How can I get them to try something else?” she asked plaintively. The group of wine professionals gathered weighed in, but none of the suggestions seemed to click.

In China at the high end establishment where she works, she explained it wasn't about how the wine tastes or how it would pair with the food they were eating. No, she explained, instead it was all about the prestige of the wine, about the brand, about the name. And Sassicaia was it: the wine that cost a lot, that people knew and wanted.

And if they couldn't get Sassicaia, then nothing. They had little or no interest in the vibrant, acidic, tannic Italian wines I was falling for.

I listened to this exchange partly in shock, and partly bemused. Here was a wine I knew nothing about that had such strong enthusiasts: was it a grape? a brand? a region? a religion?

None of the above: Sassicaia is a "SUPER TUSCAN!" And according to Wine-Searcher, it's consistently in the Top 10 most wanted wines in the world each year, and as of 2019, it placed at number 15 for searches for most wanted wines of all time.

By definition, a Super Tuscan is a wine made in Tuscany from international grapes, and may include Sangiovese or other Italian grapes, but doesn't have to.

The most popular Italian wine in the world, Sassicaia retails for around \$250 and is made from mostly Cabernet Sauvignon with Cabernet Franc rounding out the blend.

The story of Sassicaia goes that "in the 1920s the Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta dreamt of creating a 'thoroughbred' wine and for him, as for all the aristocracy of the time, the ideal was Bordeaux." In a letter to a wine critic in June 1974, he wrote:

"...the origins of my experiment date back to the years between 1921 and 1925 when, as a student in Pisa and often a guest of the Salviati Dukes in Migliarino, I drank a wine produced from one of their vineyards...which had the same unmistakable "bouquet" as an aged Bordeaux..."

In the 1940s, his experiments on the Tenuta San Guido on the Tyrrhenian coast ended with the conclusion that Cabernet had "the bouquet I was looking for" and the decision to plant Cabernet Sauvignon, a huge change to the Tuscan and Piedmont tradition of Sangiovese and Nebbiolo. Why here? Soils: Tuscany's Tenuta San Guido, Mario Incisa noted, had similar soils as that of Graves in Bordeaux. In fact the same Sassicaia refers to the stony fields — *sasso* means stone in Italian.

The seminal Super Tuscan did not fare well at first, so family and friends drank it and held on to it in the Castiglioncello di Bolgheri cellar discovering that time was what this wine needed most. The 1968 Sassicaia was first commercially released in 1971, and in the following years, winery improvements included temperature control, steel fermentation vats instead of wooden vats, and French barriques were used for aging.

While today we have no Sassicaia, we do have three far more affordable Super Tuscans for you to consider, and you might also consider wines from Gaja.

If you keep scrolling, you'll find links to more from the Italian, Food, Wine Travel group of wine writers. You're also invited to join our twitter chat at 8am Pacific Sat. June 27; discussion questions follow.

What to pair with an Italian wine made from French grapes? Since it's summer, we went with food from the grill



## MENU

### Cheese plate:

Pecorino Cheese, Manchego, Brie, Fresh Strawberries, Creme cheese, jalapeño jelly, Cranberry crusted goat cheese,

### Pan roasted:

homegrown yellow and green zucchini squash

yukon gold and sweet potato rounds

### From the grill:

Corn on the cob

Filet Mignon

Beef Burger Sliders

## WINES

2015 Torre Matilde Molin Novo – Rosso Toscana – IGT

2015 **Cecchi** Maremma Toscana – DOC

2016 Prelius Maremma Toscana DOC Cabernet Sauvignon

2015 Torre Matilde Molin Novo – Rosso Toscana – IGT

12.5% alcohol; SRP \$19

Sample for my review consideration.

We loved Torre Matilde's fresh take on Sangiovese last month, so I was excited to learn from importer, Sheila Donahue of Verovinogusto that she had a Super Tuscan from them even though she doesn't have it listed on the website and doesn't carry it because it doesn't fit as well into her profile of wines made with passion from indigenous grapes.

But we LOVE this wine and we told her she should definitely include it in her portfolio because it definitely has sangiovese character but it also is a Super Tuscan because the balance is 20% merlot. And I bet people would buy this wine just because it has such a beautiful label!

According to the Vero website, "With vineyards along Via Francigena, the ancient road and pilgrim route running from France to Rome, in the heart of Tuscany, Torre Matilde produces organic wine on its estate which has vineyards going back to 780 AD. The winery's namesake, Matilde di Canossa, was one of the few powerful women ruling in the Middle Ages in Europe." Sheila told me when I interviewed her earlier this month that Italians are really proud of their history and of this leader; monuments to her are common.

Color: Ruby with a garnet rim, a bit brickish.

Nose: Cherry, Cherry Cola, Cherry Snuff, Eucalyptus. Nice earthiness, herbal characteristic, cranberry cherry, interesting old world funk.

Palate: A bit hot, eucalyptus, fresh tart cherry, bright acidity, nicely herbacious. This is a very pleasing wine, easy to enjoy without food, but will be so much better with food. Nicely balanced, integrated, grippy tannins, with a nice long finish.

Pairing: This wine would be fantastic with Italian red sauced foods. Great with pecorino. Sue loved the wine with the cranberry crusted goat cheese. Fantastic with the potatoes and yams — you would think the yam would be too sweet for the wine, but the sweet and savory compliment the wine— and with the yukon gold seasoned with rosemary, salt and pepper, the wine loves the herbacious rosemary which mellows out the tart fruit in the wine. Great with the grilled sliders and filet; the wine works well with the richness of the meat. It was fine with the zucchini, it might not pair so well if it were not for the garlic.



2015 Cecchi Maremma Toscana – DOC –

13.5% alcohol SRP \$15

Sample for my review consideration.

Blend of cabernet and merlot.

If you remember from the tutorial above, the Italian region of Maremma is memorable for Super Tuscans, and this is an affordable example. The label testifies to the long history of horses in the region— La Mora means horse in Italian, and indeed there are horses on the property.

On Sue's birthday in May 2017, we attended a press lunch with Andrea Cecchi of Cecchi Family Estates where we learned that

Cecchi pioneered the Maremma as one of the first producers to establish vineyards



CECCHI

TENUTE DELLA  
FAMIGLIA CECCHI

Maremma is commonly referred to as the “wild, wild, west”

In 2017, Andrea Cecchi was invited to present a special bottle of Chianti to the Italian Ambassador in Washington DC in commemoration of Chianti’s 300th Anniversary

Their estate at Villa Cerna has an award-winning restaurant and a cooking school

Read about Cecchi’s sangiovese wines [here](#).

Color: Deep rich ruby red.

Nose: Some sulphuric funk, volcanic soils, red fruit, cherry, musky.

Palate: Bright tart fruit, red cherry, dark fruit, lots of fruit and acidity.

Pairing: Fantastic with pecorino– the salt in the cheese brings out beautiful fruit in the wine. Nice with the manchego as well. While you normally would not think that brie would work with a Super Tuscan, this creamy cheese brings out nice fruit in the wine and tames a bit of the acidity. The sweetness of the yams were a bit much for this wine, however it loved the rosemary in the potatoes, so the yukon gold worked much better than the sweet potato with this wine. Perfect with the beef sliders, great with the filet mignon as well.

Read more about Cecchi on their website [here](#).

2016 Prelius Maremma Toscana DOC Cabernet Sauvignon

14.5% alcohol SRP \$15

I purchased this on clearance at WineHouse LA for \$6.

Organic!

Regarded as leaders in Tuscany’s organic viticulture movement, the Stianti Mascheroni family began revitalizing the village of Volpaia in the heart of Chianti Classico near Radda in Chianti in 2007 when the family established Prelius. Thirty years later, presented Prelius to their daughter, Federica Mascheroni Stianti, who has a background in the arts and worked as restoring paintings. She manages the estate with the assistance of Lorenzo Regoli, vineyard manager and first resident winemaker at Castello di Volpaia since 2001. Cabernet Sauvignon is made to enjoy young and aged for nine to 10 months in large French oak casks and then in the bottle for approximately three months.



The organic vineyards are located on a hilltop along what was once the shore of the ancient lake, two miles from the Tyrrhenian Sea; the award winning label represents this ancient body of water.

Continual breezes keep humidity low which prevents fungus and mold, sexual confusion by releases pheromones to confuse the males aids in pest control, and organic manure aids fertilization of the soil.

Read more about Prelious here.

Color: Deep, rich, very dark purplish red, with a blood red rim.

Nose: Black fruit, cassis, black cherry, fresh fruit, earthen, slate, clean minerals, clay,

Palate: Juicy and bold, cherry, light oak, cherry snuff, blackberry,

Pairing: The wine fought with the pecorino cheese, great with the manchego, really fabulous with the cranberry crusted goat cheese: the two would totally work on a dessert cheese plate with this wine. Cab is definitely a steak wine. This is no exception; the acidity cleanses any fattiness from the meat. It also bounces off the rosemary in the potatoes nicely. The squash made the wine tart; Sue did not think this was the best pairing even with the garlic.

