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**Bottoms Up**  
by Ed Finstein  
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From our March 8, 2011 edition

### **Tuscan wines are magically good**

Tuscany is an absolutely magical part of Italy. It produces many famous wines all based on the Sangiovese grape. Every year in February, the DOCG consortiums of Chianti Classico, Vino Nobile de Montepulciano, and Brunello di Montalcino invite journalists from around the world to preview the last several vintages of their wines that are about to be released, and barrel samples of the most recent vintage as well. Once again this year, I was there and I am happy to report that we consumers are in for a treat with the upcoming vintages.

The huge Chianti Classico denomination is recognized by the black rooster symbol on the bottle. Made from a minimum of 80% Sangiovese and aged for about one year (two years for Riservas), the vintages that are currently being released or available are the 2007 to 2009 vintage.

In the few days in Florence, there were some 400 wines from 152 producers available for tasting. A massive undertaking indeed, if you chose to taste absolutely everything. From what I tasted, the 2007 appears to be very good showing plenty of ripe, forward fruit. Real crowd pleasers indeed! Drink these now as the 2008s come on stream. This classic vintage is full of textbook flavours of toasted bright cherry, leather and violets...very harmonious. Although there were some mixed weather conditions throughout the country in 2009, Chianti Classico seemed to fair pretty well. The wines are well structured with solid fruit focus.

Some barrel samples of the 2010s proved interesting and promise some nice surprises. Although it's very difficult to judge a barrel sample because the wine is still developing, the colour looks good, the aromatics are intense and the acidity balanced. The alcohol levels seem high but this will probably mellow as the wines evolve.

Vino Nobile is produced around the hilltop village of Montepulciano and made from at least 70% Sangiovese (known locally as Prugnolo Gentile) and aged at least two years (three years for Riservas) before being released. Its sister wine, Rosso di Montepulciano can be released after seven or eight months.

Most of what was available for tasting were the 2008s. They show balance and elegance with red fruit and floral notes. Not excessively rich in extract but infinitely enjoyable over the shorter term. The occasional 2010s out of barrel I tried show good extract and varietal character. If they develop well, they will be wines worth aging.

Perhaps the king of Tuscan reds, Brunello, is produced around the hilltop village of Montalcino, exclusively from the grape of the same name (local name for Sangiovese). The wine is generally aged two years in oak and at least four months in bottle. However, most producers will not release their regular bottlings until approximately 50 months after the harvest and an additional 12 months for the Riservas. As a result the 2006 vintage was front and centre and it is a gem (five stars as awarded by the consortium). Rich fruit and solid structure abound. From my tasting, it is exceptional and could be one of the best vintages ever providing wines

with great aging potential. You'll want to stock up on these babies for the cellar when they start to make the scene.

There were numerous barrel samples of the 2010s, so I took full advantage of trying them. Although way too early to really get a handle on these wines, they seem to have good fruit extract with lots of aromatics and backbone. The consortium here declared this a five-star vintage. Brunello's kid sister, Rosso di Montalcino must age for six months in oak and six months in the bottle before release. Many 2009s were available for tasting. Declared a four-star vintage by the consortium, the wines are much softer with tasty red fruit and round tannins...drinking beautifully at present.

Lovers of Sangiovese will not be disappointed with the recent vintages of wines from Chianti Classico, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and Brunello di Montalcino. Remember, the 'good doctor' told you so. Cheers!

Copies of the Doc's book, Ask the Wine Doctor, are available at the BMN office for \$24.99 each.