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'Amy spreading the love'
Rippon Vineyard, page **14**

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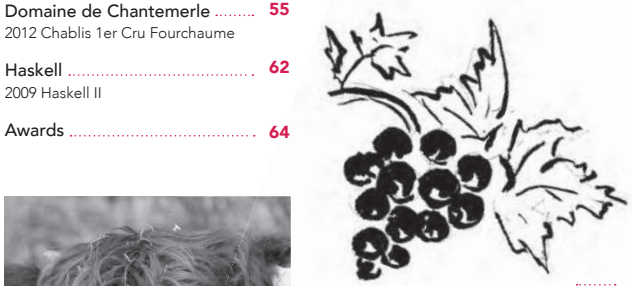

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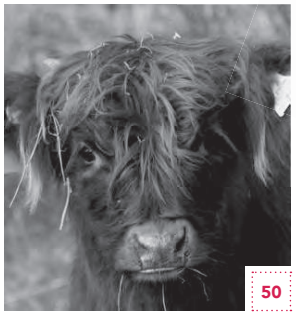

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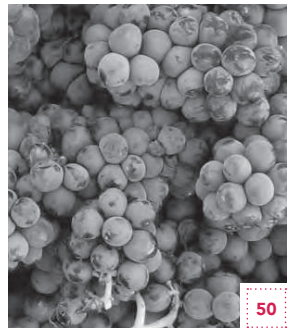

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'Natural' is a magic word, as any marketing man peddling industrial food and drink knows all too well.

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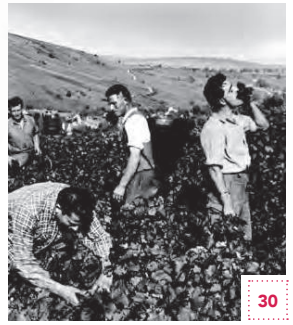

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LE MACCHIOLE

BOLGHERI

HISTORY IN PROGRESS

Le Macchiole was one of the first wineries established in Bolgheri, a medieval village famous for its long avenue of cypress trees leading down towards the sea. Bolgheri is a natural amphitheatre, with rolling hills on all sides. Wine production here is very new; as recently as 1983, the year Le Macchiole was started, Bolgheri was best known for its peaches.

In spite of sea breezes and cool air from the hills, this is a much hotter place than central Tuscany, and the classic Tuscan variety Sangiovese does not thrive. At Le Macchiole they keep one row of Sangiovese to show questioning visitors (muttering about 'autochthonous varieties') just how unhappy it is here.

Bolgheri had no history of quality wine production until the Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta planted the original Cabernet Sauvignon vines of the Sassicaia estate in the 1940s. As a student in Pisa, Mario had tried Cabernet-based wine from nearby that had the character of aged Bordeaux, and he wanted to see if it was possible to make wine like this on his own land. The first commercial release of his Cabernet Sauvignon-based wine did not take place until 1968 and it took until the late 1970s for it to achieve international recognition. It was at this point that the much wider planting of 'French' varieties began along this coastal strip which stretches from south of Pisa all the way down to the Monte Argentario peninsula and beyond.

Le Macchiole's owner, Cinzia Merli, tells her story. 'My husband Eugenio and I started off with very limited, if not no, resources by giving up his parents' retail business to buy a few hectares of land planted with vineyards. That is how our project took off and it is still in progress. I believe that Bolgheri is in the early stages of its development. It has just become aware of its potential and of which grape varieties give their best. Much has yet to be accomplished.' This may be true, but great results have already been achieved here. Paleo Rosso – 100% Cabernet Franc – and Messorio – 100% Merlot – are the most famous wines of this tiny estate, with small amounts of a pure Syrah, Scrio, and a very limited quantity of white made from Sauvignon and Chardonnay. The production is completed with the 'Bolgheri Rosso', a blend of Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah which offers a fantastic value introduction to the range. The idea of using single varieties for the top three reds took shape gradually through tireless experimentation with the help of Luca D'Attoma, the chief winemaker, who arrived in 1991 and is still the consulting oenologist.

Grapes are harvested into small boxes to avoid crushing them before they get back to the winery

GROWING VINES AND MAKING WINE

The 22 hectares of Le Macchiole's vineyards stand on alluvial, rich, clayey, deep and resilient soil. The soil's natural fertility is counterbalanced by high-density planting (10,000 vines per hectare) and the use of weak rootstocks, which results in a small yield of grapes per plant. All the viticulture stages, from pruning to harvesting, are carried out by hand and require hard work. Every year, up to 500 hours of work per hectare are required.

Their winegrowing is based on organic farming practices, 'first and foremost, out of respect for the people who work there', says Cinzia. Her brother Massimo supervises them. Everything is planned very carefully, down to the last detail. Manual harvesting is followed by the sorting of bunches and berries on a double sorting table.

In the wine cellar, under the supervision of Luca Rettondini, very little intervention is required, although like at Terriccio (see page 42) research on different winemaking and ageing methods and on micro-vinification from a single vineyard block never stops.

WINE FOCUS: LE MACCHIOLE – PALEO ROSSO

2009 Paleo Rosso

In the beginning, in 1989, the idea was to make a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese grapes. In 1993, some Cabernet Franc was added to the blend. 'Cabernet Franc is usually seen as the ugly duckling of the family compared to Cabernet Sauvignon. Greener, rougher, untamable, a difficult challenge to manage. In Bolgheri, Cabernet Franc is something thoroughly different. Its tannins are softer, it is extremely fruity and amazingly fresh, characteristics that help us make the best of every harvest,' says Cinzia Merli.

The decisive turn came in 2000: due to the exceptionally warm summer season, the winery was forced to add a higher amount of Cabernet Franc to the final blend to give the wine freshness and acidity. And it was starting to dawn on them that they were ready for the big leap: transforming Paleo Rosso into a 100% Cabernet Franc wine.

Since then Paleo Rosso has come more and more to the fore, a wine which triumphs in blind tastings of Cabernet Franc. (L&S)

Deeply coloured. Lovely ripe bouquet entices us with scents of redcurrant, mint, caramel, spices and smoke. The influence of oak is obvious but not overdone. Big, complex and concentrated on entry, with noticeable tannins. It's a delicious, dense, chewy wine, stimulating intellectually and hedonistically. While this wine will benefit from further cellaring, it's mighty good right now. The wonderful finish turns gamey and spicy. This wine is flat-out superb! 94+/100. Sept 2014. **Howard Kaplan** Executive Wine Seminars, Stephen Tanzer website

It's Fine…

By TAMLYN CURRIN

You know when a woman says, 'It's fine'… Is it? Defining fine wine is like drawing boundary lines around the tide. It's a liquid in a constant state of flux and change, and the people who plumb its depths, or paddle in the shallows, all have a different perspective on the same thing. I could no more hammer out the prerequisites of fine wine than fund a mission to the moon. But with the greatest respect, I can attempt to pencil in the very lightest of boundary lines – adjust them, ink them in, as you will.

While the words 'fine wine' swirl with unattainable glamour, I would argue that most importantly it is not a luxury available only to the privileged few with deep pockets and old-school connections. Fine wine is not a price point. It's not those bottles behind the glassed-in wood-shelved section in the only air-conditioned corner of the wine department, under lock and key, which only a Russian oligarch could afford. There are many high-priced 'icon' wines that are far from fine despite packaging that wouldn't look out of place in a Cartier store. As Jancis Robinson recently quipped, 'Icon: is that one word or two?' Fine wine doesn't start at £30. But the undeniable reality is that it is almost impossible to produce fine wine cheaply. Fine wine takes investment from vine to bottle.

Investment for some means a state-of-the-art architect-designed winery, rows of up-lit brand-new Taransaud barrels, 24 months of oak and a world-famous consultant. But some of the finest wine I've tasted has been made in dimly lit cellars not much bigger than a one-car garage, in ancient foudres, and with winemaking equipment that belongs in a museum. Fine wine, quite simply, requires the investment of time, passion, energy, and more time. Time on the land, time in the vineyard, time in the winery, time with the people who will drink it. It comes with aching muscles, blisters, raw hands, long days, sometimes even longer nights.

'Some of the finest wine I've tasted has been made in cellars no bigger than a one-car garage'

It takes time.

Fine wine has integrity. It hasn't been pumped up with sugar or sculpted with acid. It isn't airbrushed with oak and enzymes and aromatic yeasts to look better, brighter and more expensive. It hasn't had a maquillage of chemicals to hide the vineyard or the vintage or the shortcuts taken to make a lot of wine fast. The label is honest, factual and without specious bylines like 'Reserve' (for a 2012 Sauvignon Blanc at £4.89). It is made without the addition of flavour-enhancing, colour-fixing, tannin-softening chemicals. It is poured into a bottle that doesn't weigh enough to sink a canoe with the carbon footprint of a Hummer. It's made to taste of the grapes that went into it, and the land they were grown on. It tastes of the truth. It may be slightly rustic, a simple story of garrigue and earth and sun-warm sweet fruit wrapped in burly tannins like a bear hug; or it could be as fine as polished silver, so racy and light that it trembles on tiptoes on the tongue… as long as it speaks of itself. And when it comes to selling it, no one has to find a semi-naked woman in red stilettos to drape herself over the bottle, a celebrity endorsement, or a glossy brochure dripping with poetic licence. It is what it is.

Fine wine is quality wine. Quality, however, is hard to measure. It's impossible to bring it down to a set of tick-box criteria and minimum pass marks. Shiny competition-medal stickers on the label do not guarantee quality. Neither does a critic's score, or a mention on Saturday morning TV. The Oxford Dictionary defines fine as something 'of very high quality; very good of its kind: worthy of or eliciting admiration'. Alex Hunt puts it far more elegantly: 'Quality is a composite feature of a wine, arising out of attributes such as harmony, intensity and complexity.' A high-quality wine will not necessarily have more of everything, but it will all be there, in beautiful balance, with the restraint and discipline and emotion-inducing glory of a world-class orchestra. A wine with quality is a wine that will interrupt the moment, draw your attention, however gently. A wine with quality will last – not only in your mouth, lingering on your tongue, but also in your memory.

It has pedigree. And by that I don't mean it's made by famous people, with titles, in a chateau. It has a track record. Newcomers, on first launch, without doubt can make a very good wine. But Aristotle's remark that 'one swallow does not a summer make' could well be applied to wine. For a wine to be fine, it must be proved over several years that the soil, the vines, and the men/women

…no one has to find a semi-naked woman in red stilettos to drape herself over the bottle…

When Cheap isn't Cheerful

By TIM ATKIN MW

It was Napoleon, I believe, who described the English as a nation of shopkeepers. The dismissal, best delivered with appropriate Gallic hauteur, is not as valid as it once was. Shops still exist, albeit in dwindling numbers in most high streets, but these days we are more likely to be consumers than retailers. We have, if you like, become a nation of shoppers.

More significantly, we have become a nation of supermarket shoppers. Even those of us who are aware of the damage that out-of-town retail parks have done to our local communities value the convenience of buying everything in one place, eschewing the human experience of a visit to the butcher, the baker or the candlestick-maker in favour of our very own supermarket sweep.

It's often said that supermarkets have 'democratised' wine and it's largely true. When I was growing up, wine was regarded as something that 'ordinary people' didn't really drink: too snooty, too complicated, too wealth-, class- and tradition-bound. I can still remember visiting my local pub on my first holiday home from university in 1980. I went to the bar and ordered a glass of dry white wine. 'We don't do cocktails here, son,' the landlord replied.

Supermarkets and, in their day, high street off-licence chains, helped to change that, as did popular TV programmes like the BBC's *Food & Drink*, where Jilly Goolden and Oz Clarke turned wine tasting into a cabaret act. All of this was for the better. Wine is a glorious and diverse beverage, but it's only '75cl of fun' in the words of an Aussie winemaker friend of mine.

'Wine is a glorious and diverse beverage, but it's only 75cl of fun'

Critics of supermarkets accuse them of pandering to the lowest common denominator, but that's not entirely fair. In some instances, they have helped to introduce unfamiliar grapes – Albariño and Grüner Veltliner, for example – to the mainstream. Some of them stock fine wines too, both online and in store. And the fact that the likes of Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Morrisons and Tesco win awards for their best wines is no coincidence. But that's only part of the story. Understandably, supermarkets are profit-driven businesses and they know that wine 'drives footfall', as they like to say in the business. Wine is one of the few grocery products covered extensively in the media –

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