



# AMBIENTE 06/08

## A CLOSER LOOK AT CHIANTI CLASSICO

'The old road that winds south from Florence's Roman gate up into the hills that overlook Sienna is called the Chiantigiana. It opens up a landscape like no other: of castles and villas among vines, olives and cypresses against a background of wild oak woodland. This is Chianti: a country that has never been entirely tamed.'

– Hugh Johnson  
Tuscany and its Wines

### CHIANTI CLASSICO WINES

Those who really love wine want it to be the essence of its country: the landscape in a bottle. And the best wines from the Chianti Classico region of Tuscany do just this. They speak of the earth, the sun and of life's simple pleasures.

Chianti is best known for its indigenous grape variety, Sangiovese. Wines from Sangiovese grown on heavy lime soil at the high altitudes of Chianti are characterised by their lively fresh acidity and a strong tannic backbone. The palate typically shows dark fruit flavours of cherries and plums, with hints of Tuscan earthiness.

So how do you choose a great wine from this region? First, you need to appreciate the distinction between 'Chianti Classico', 'Chianti Classico Riserva' and 'Supertuscan' wines.

### CHIANTI CLASSICO VS CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA

A Chianti Classico Riserva must be aged for a minimum of 2 years and released 3 months after bottling. A Chianti Classico must be aged a minimum of 1 year and can be released after 3 months in bottle.

One important characteristic that these wines share is they must contain a minimum of 85% Sangiovese. The remaining 15% can be any other red variety, but it must originate entirely from within the Chianti Classico region.

### DOES THIS MEAN A CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA IS SUPERIOR TO A CHIANTI CLASSICO?

Not necessarily. It's best to think about these wines as two separate styles. A Riserva is a wine with more body and structure and needs time to grow into itself and evolve, which is why there is the minimum of 2 years aging.

The Chianti Classico is a lighter, livelier style than the Riserva and needs less time to reach its optimum drinking potential. It is a style that is fresh and fruity, making it an easy drinking option for everyday fare.

Try our 2005 Le Fonti Chianti Classico against the 2004 Le Fonti Chianti Classico Riserva to experience the difference between the two styles.

### HOW DO WINEMAKERS DECIDE WHAT IS RISERVA AND WHAT IS CHIANTI CLASSICO?

This comes back to the vineyards. From experience, winemakers know the blocks that produce wines of great structure and body (Riserva style) and more often than not this is determined by the exposure of the vineyard. In the Chianti Classico region, those vineyards with a south, south-east exposure ripen Sangiovese the best. Those vineyards with northern exposures produce a lighter style of Sangiovese as they intercept less direct sunlight. There are many other factors that contribute to the quality of fruit produced, but exposure is an integral part of the viticulture.

### WHAT IS A 'SUPERTUSCAN'?

The technical name for a Supertuscan wine is Indicazione Geografica Tipica (I.G.T). This is a classification of wine (similar to the French classification system) that is less strict than the 'Chianti Classico D.O.C.G.' classification. The name 'Supertuscan' came about in recent times from wine writers/critics seeking to give an identity to this style of wine.

Supertuscans can be comprised of any red variety that the winemaker desires. It is often seen as a style that allows winemakers to express themselves without the strictures of regulations that apply to Chianti Classico wines. Generally, a Supertuscan is a blend of Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The wines are often aged in new French oak for up to 24 months. They are full-bodied and rich and are sometimes reminiscent of 'New World' wines.

CHOOSING A VINTAGE '2004 is what Tuscany does best – the wines have matured slowly and there is room for the bouquet to develop. I think the closest vintage in style is 1999, which in my book is high praise.'

Sebastian Payne MW –  
Decanter magazine UK.

2004 is considered one of the classic vintages from Tuscany. Mild to warm conditions through July and August allowed even ripening of the fruit. The key, however, was September and early October which saw minimal rainfall coupled with warm days and cool nights. This allowed the vignerons to keep the Sangiovese hanging on the vine, without pressure from disease, giving the fruit the best possible chance to reach optimum flavour ripeness. The wines of this vintage have a generous bouquet and an elegant but defined structure which will carry them for years to come.

Try the 2004 Le Fonti Chianti Classico Riserva and the 2004 IL Borghetto Chianti Classico and experience this classic vintage for yourself!

