

TASTING REPORT: SUPER SUPER TUSCANS

August 6th, 2015

Great vintages may come about no more than two or three times a decade, yet Italy's most famous wine region manages to make awe-inspiring wines just about every vintage. This was only further confirmed to me after tasting the current releases this year of the wines now commonly referred to as "Super Tuscans", which as far as I am concerned essentially means those bottled under the Toscana Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT), Bolgheri or Costa della Toscana designations.



Take for example my best wine from Tuscany this summer: 2012 Fattoria Le Pupille Toscana Saffredi. I

scored this fabulously balanced red 100 points, and it shows such mesmerizing harmony and intensity. It's a wine that begs you to drink it now but will continue to satisfy and amaze for years ahead. The cabernet sauvignon, merlot and petit verdot blend comes from a single vineyard on the hillside of the Tuscan coast near the city of Grosseto in an area better known for the pedestrian morellino di scansano, but this is a red that is noble in every sense of the word.

Or buy a bottle of the pure cabernet franc wonder, 2012 Duemani, originating from the appellation of Costa della Toscana. I scored it 99 points. The handmade wine is produced from a biodynamically maintained vineyard on the hillsides south of Pisa near a village called Riparbella. The wine shows incredible depth and purity of fruit, redefining cabernet franc in Italy.

What's fascinating is that it was Tuscan enologist Luca d'Attoma who oversaw the production of both wines. In addition to consulting for Le Pupille, d'Attoma also owns Duemani together with his wife Elena Celi. His other famous red from Tuscany, Tua Rita Toscana Redigaffi 2013, was a top-scoring wine as well, and I rated it 99 points. The pure merlot, which is one of the hottest collectible wines in Asia, is pure magic with balance, richness and clarity.

Nevertheless, "The 2012 vintage was not a perfect one," admitted d'Attoma to me, during a tasting together this summer. "The key was to pick at the right time. In fact, you had to do everything at the right time in 2012 to make outstanding quality wines."



Indeed, none of the recent vintages have been perfect, or at least easy in any sense of the word. The 2011 was very hot with heat spikes in August, the 2012 was inconsistent with a mixture of hot and wet weather, the 2013 was more mild and uniform, yet to top things off, 2014 was wet and cold. To tell the truth, 2014 is the worst vintage in over a decade.

Even so, Tuscany is making some of its best wines ever. The current high quality of winemaking in the region is down to a combination of vineyards and winemakers, who are becoming more mature. Older vines planted in the right places are providing much better quality grapes. In turn, winemakers in the region have developed more knowledge and understanding of their vineyards and winemaking over the years since Tuscany catapulted itself onto the oenological world stage. Another factor is that these vintners have become more and more adept at coping with difficult vintages in the face of extremely hot and dry ones such as 2011 – not to mention cold and wet ones such as 2014. "We know so much more now than we did before and it shows in the wines," says Carol Ferrini, one of the top winemakers in Tuscany.

The maturity that is beginning to shine through in Italy explains why the quality and diversity in the region's winemaking are ever expanding. Perhaps the fact that white wines are finally showing true quality does the most to highlight this trend. Clearly, the most exciting white in Tuscany at the moment is the new release from Ornellaia. The 2013 Ornellaia Toscana Bianco is a superb white reminiscent of a top dry white Bordeaux with just a hint of Rhone-like undertones. A blend of sauvignon blanc and viognier, I rated it 97 points. There's a wondrous clarity of fruit and beauty to the wine with sliced melon, papaya, mineral, stone and apple character – all mixed in with just the right amount of new wood. Other high-quality whites from Tuscany are primarily made with vermentino or chardonnay, of which I prefer the former since vermentino, particularly when made in coastal vineyards, represents a white style true to Tuscany.



There are so many outstanding Tuscan wines to choose from this year that are on the market or will soon be released. Below are more than 300 outstanding wines to buy and try from Tuscany this year. Stay tuned for other reports on such classic Tuscan appellations as Chianti Classico and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.

Photo 1: Sean O'Callaghan of Reicine made a fabulous single vineyard pure sangiovese in Chianti Classico. Photo 2: Francois Alessandro of Castello di Querceto made a new super Tuscan red with petit verdot. Photo 3: Luca d'Attoma made a perfect wine at Le Pupille with 2012 Saffredi, owner Elisabetta Geppetti and daughter with Luca. Photo 4: 2012 Duemani Cabernet Franc Costa Toscana is amazing quality and made from biodynamically grown grapes. Photo 5: A perfect red this year - 2012 Le Pupille Toscana Saffredi.

FATTORIA LE PUPILLE TOSCANA SAFFREDI

COUNTRY	Italy
REGION	Tuscany
VINTAGE	2012
SCORE	100

TASTING NOTES

A phenomenal Saffredi with so much structure and length. It's full-bodied yet remains agile and lively. Aromas and flavors of currants, mint and wet earth. Full-bodied, chewy and powerful. A blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and petit verdot. This has a special label celebrating the 25th anniversary of the production of this wine. It's the greatest Saffredi ever, cementing its reputation as the Lafite of Tuscany. This needs at least five years in bottle but it's entrancing to drink now. A must-buy for Super Tuscan lovers.

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