

£3.95

May 2010

THE WORLD'S BEST WINE MAGAZINE

Decanter

www.decanter.com

ITALY

- Best of Brunello's new vintage
- 242 top Chiantis & Barberas
- Affordable Tuscany
- Insiders' discoveries

> HOW FRENCH
WINE LOVERS
ARE BEING
VICTIMISED

> AUSTRALIA'S
BRAVEST
WINEMAKERS

GAJA

SORI SAN LORENZO®
2005

LANGHE
DENOMINAZIONE DI ORIGINE CONTROLLATA
NEBBIOLO

IMBOTTIGLIATO DA - BOTTLED BY GAJA, BARBARESCO, ITALIA
RED WINE, PRODUCT OF ITALY

750ML 14%VOL



PLUS: Bordeaux 2009 – will it pay to buy en primeur?
> New Zealand: beyond Sauvignon > Bordeaux by bike

Chianti Classico riserva 2006: results

Modern and traditional styles; lighter, minerally wines and big, concentrated ones. Something for everyone in this fresh, approachable vintage, says **GUY WOODWARD**

2006 was well received, so expectations must have been fairly high. Were they met?

On the whole, yes. Five Awards is no mean feat, and there was a general consensus among the panel that the vintage had much to recommend it. Chianti can polarise opinion, notably on the topic of typicity and international grape varieties. But here, the overriding emotions were positive. 'A pretty strong tasting,' said Peter McCombie MW. 'Really exciting,' said Emily O'Hare. 'Overall, a very good tasting,' added Margaret Rand.

What were the hallmark qualities?

The word that kept coming up again and again was 'freshness'. The best, said Walter Speller, had elegance to go with their 'fragrant, perfume-like' qualities; O'Hare found 'a real sensitivity' in many, 'regardless of whether we're talking about the lighter, minerally wines or the more powerful, concentrated styles'.

So can we put the typicity debate to bed and just concentrate on good wines?

Not totally. 'I'm not entirely sure what "typical" Chianti should be now,' said Rand. 'These were mostly modern Chiantis, but very good ones – almost unrecognisable from a generation ago in terms of improvements in quality.'

What is a 'modern' Chianti?

That's the problem – no one's sure. It probably contains some foreign grapes and oak, but as McCombie said, 'there was a range of styles, with a reasonable blend between modernity and tradition.' Marcia Waters MW felt 'a dollop of Syrah or Cabernet worked well in adding an extra dimension – except when the foreign varieties got too fleshy and you lost that fresh quality you expect from Chianti.' McCombie 'didn't have a problem with foreign interlopers', but criticised wines that were 'trying too hard', leading to overextraction and astringent tannins. Yet Speller felt that 'international varieties alter the character of Sangiovese too much'. To him, a Chianti Classico riserva offers (as did the top examples here) 'a fantastic mix of intense cherry fruit sweetness and refreshing, lifting acidity'. He added that,

THE SCORES

107 WINES TASTED	
★★★★★ Decanter Award	5
Outstanding (18.5–20pts)	
★★★★★ Highly recommended	15
Very good to excellent (16.5–18.49pts)	
★★★ Recommended	64
Good (14.5–16.49pts)	
★★	20
Fair (12.5–14.49pts)	
★	3
Poor (10.5–12.49pts)	
Faulty	0
£	
Good value (under £18)	14

while legal, fleshing this out with Merlot and Syrah 'to give it more body, alcohol and sweetness' did not 'represent Chianti Classico riserva'. Waters, though, made the point that this is Riserva, meaning that the wines 'spend all this time in wood, so perhaps that freshness is not what this level of Chianti is looking for?'

Ah yes, oak treatment. Another barrel of worms, so to speak?

Thankfully, no. 'The days of over-oaked wines appear to be gone,' said McCombie: 'The oak was better balanced and more restrained [than in the past].' Waters agreed: 'There was a variety of wood treatments, but few were overpowering. Perhaps oak is no longer the new toy and they're learning to use it well?'

BEST VALUE

SAN FELICE, IL GRIGIO (18.83) ★★★★★

£15  £

'Sweet, ripe, dark-fruit nose. Cherry and plum on the palate, with firm acidity and ripe, rich, yet dry tannins. Good length. From 2012.' (PM)

Stockists: Amp, Bcn, BiT, Cks, DBY, WBR



Does this makes the wines more or less approachable?

Riserva wines are meant to last – the idea being to drink the *normales* while the riservas mature. Yet many tasters felt differently. McCombie said 'there were wines you could drink in the medium term, and not many I'd keep for a long time'. O'Hare agreed some were delicious now, arguing that this 'isn't such a bad thing if winemakers are looking for a younger audience'. Waters, though, felt the tannic structure of riservas means the wines should be made to keep. 'I marked wines down if the longevity wasn't there – but I've put most of them as drinking fairly soon. There weren't many you'd need to leave for five years.'

I feel more confused than ever...

Don't be. It's a good vintage, just tricky to summarise, so you need to go for the style you favour. There were several modern wines, with international grapes, that worked, but most tasters preferred what McCombie called 'a touch of austerity'. Speller feels this is the style producers are moving towards, noting that 'the wines are lighter in colour than in the past' – a welcome sign that producers are moving away from the 'jammy, stewed fruit character I don't associate with Sangiovese' and towards 'lifted acidity with less oak' that he feels consumers are starting to embrace – especially with food. The 'with food' element was picked up by several tasters, Rand typical in stressing how 'we're almost doing them a disservice by tasting them without food'.

I'll get the veal marsala in the oven.

So you should. Most tasters rated the 2006s as up there with the lauded 2004s, Speller hailing it as 'fresher' than the more 'stewed' 2005s, and likely to develop more complexity than the 'concentrated' 2007s. Improvements dating back to clonal research in 2000 mean that 'Chianti is now a very reliable wine,' said Rand. O'Hare admitted she often shied away from recommending Chianti as a sommelier as it was such a cliché, 'but its medium weight, fresh acidity, good-but-not-overt fruit and supple oak make it an almost perfect wine.'

