

# DOWN CELLAR BY JIM BRYANT



Castello di Verrazzano is located in Greve, in the Chianti Region of Tuscany, Italy.

## Tuscany, Part 2

**WE** BEGAN the last week of September with a visit to one of my favorite Sangiovese wine producers, Fontodi. The winery tour was very impressive and best captured in the photo of wine resting in amphorae as well as barrels. We were treated to six wines which were all excellent. The highlights were the top two Sangiovese based wines, Vigne del Sorbo 2019, and the wine from the previous dinner, Flaccianello 2019. Both are truly great expressions of the Sangiovese grape and already sing the praises of the 2019 vintage. They both demand food and both are extremely great matches with hard cheeses, wild game, red meats, and pastas with Bolognese sauce. If drinking at the same meal, start with the Vigne del Sorbo, as the Flaccianello simply has to be experienced to be believed. Few wines on earth can match the profound impact of this food and wine pairing. Flaccianello is the second largest volume wine in my cellar behind only Château de Beaucastel Château Neuf du Pape.

After the tour and tasting, we visited Castello di Verrazzano owned by my friend Luigi Cappallini. We had a very nice lunch after the interesting tour of the castle and winery. Unfortunately, Luigi could not join us for lunch as he was busy preparing his bike for an imminent race.

### A VISIT TO ORNELLAIA

The next day started with a two-hour drive to Ornellaia, one of Italy's and the world's great wineries. It, along with Sassacaia, are the most famous wines from Bolgheri on the Mediterranean coast. This was my third visit and second lunch at Ornellaia. Words are not enough to convey this 'out of body' experience. The winery is known not only for producing one of the world's great wines, but there is a distinct emphasis on art both on the grounds, inside the winery, and on the bottles. Each year, one artist is chosen to design the etched label for Ornellaia and the winner's large bottle and personal biography is kept in the library. The six packs of Ornellaia each contain one bottle with the artist's label.

We were treated to seven wines in a beautiful setting overlooking the courtyard through floor-to-ceiling windows. All were perfect examples of their type of wine. The Poggio alle Gazi Dell'Ornellaia deserves mention. Predominantly Sauvignon Blanc, it has a beautiful aromatic intensity with aromas of box wood, white flowers, white peach, sage, and other herbs. The wine is fresh and dense with a lively finish.



The wine cellar at Fontodi Winery.



Vin Santo dessert wine grapes drying before fermentation at Castello di Verrazzano.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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*Wines tasted at Fontodi.*

The Ornellaia 2019 is 62% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Merlot, and 4% Cabernet Franc. It is still very closed and requires several hours of decanting to be better appreciated. Tasting shows deep, dark red fruit, great tannic structure, medium acidity, and significant minerality. This will be a great wine in time (2030–2045) or earlier with aeration. (Remember, to cheat when drinking great wine, one hour in a decanter roughly equals one year of bottle age.)

We finished with the Ornus Dell’Ornellaia, a dessert wine with an intense and particularly complex nose with citrus notes of orange peel, dried apricot, and amaretto with slight hints of cinnamon and vanilla. The wine shows great balance of sweetness and acidity with an uplifting finish. Finally, we had the Eligo Dell’Ornellaia Grappa Reserva, which was a very pleasant grappa with soft aromas, silky texture, and a beautiful golden color. What a finale to a great and memorable visit and meal at one of the greatest wineries.

### SUPER TUSCAN WINES

Our final stop of the day was Guado al Tasso, located next door to Ornellaia and owned by Italy’s most famous wine person, Piero Antinori, the 24th generation whose family has been in the wine business since 1385. Although Piero is best known for giving birth to Super Tuscan wines (more on that in the next article), he is also well known for the Bolgheri wine Guado al Tasso. This was my third visit and I always look forward to visiting the most famous Italian pigs on his farm and vineyard. Even well-known people can’t resist feeding the pigs. We had a very nice tasting, and after finishing with the best Guado al Tasso ever (2019), we left for our hotel. Our trip took longer than we had expected, so we were late for dinner and had to resort to pizza from a nearby restaurant as our kitchen was closed.

Suffice it to say, we were glad we had such a grand experience during the day to offset this disappointing meal. At least the wine was good—Flaccianello and Le Pergole Torte—buried the taste of average pizza.

A Votre Santé! 🍷



*Wines tasted at Ornellaia. Each year, an artist is chosen to design the label.*