



The grounds at Castello Monsanto



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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two superb pastas. With the meat courses, we had the 2016 Pian delle Vigne Vignaferruvia Reserva Brunello Di Montalcino followed by the aristocratic 2017 Solaia. This was a meal which will be a lifetime memory for all of us. I should note that most of the courses included herbs from the most beautiful and extensive gardens I've ever seen. How does one follow such a morning docket and lunch? We were about to find out.

Tuscany, Part 3

THE FOLLOWING DAY, we continued our Piero Antinori focus starting with our visit to San Casciano in Val di Pesa, a castello with the lovely gardens. This is the birthplace of one of Italy's greatest wines—Solaia. One of my fondest wine memories took place in Palatine, Illinois, in the mid-1980s. My wife and I were invited to the first tasting of Solaia in the United States when Piero brought the first six vintages of this wine to a small (12 person) group tasting of his most famous wine. We were mesmerized and I have never recovered from this introduction of one of my favorite wines. Predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon, it has seen an increase in the amount of Cabernet Franc over the years. The wine is rich and lush in the mouth, but with excellent acidity to compliment the outstanding ripe black fruit, blackberry, black currant, chocolate, and Asian spices, wet earth, leather, dried mushrooms, and blood. What a world-class wine it has always been and was the first Italian wine, the 1997 Solaia, to be named the number one wine in the world in 2000 by Wine Spectator. After our visit here we moved to another Antinori facility for the main

production of the Chianti and the original Super Tuscan—Tignanello. We had a quick tour of the cellar and then were treated to a fabulous lunch in the Michelin restaurant Osteria di Passignano.



Wines for lunch at Osteria Di Passignano.

We had five fabulous Antinori wines with accompanying courses each of which was perfectly matched starting with the Jermann's Vintage Tunina which is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Ribolla, Gialla, and Malvasia. Following this wine with a shrimp appetizer, we moved to Antinori reds beginnings with the 2019 Badia A Passignano Classico Gran Selezione and the 2019 Tignanello, both of which went well with



Wine Cellar at Badia a Passignano.

I have long been a fan of wine from Castello Monsanto but had never visited it although I had met the current owner Laura Bianchi many times at wine events. She greeted us upon arrival, but she had to visit her relative in the hospital, so left us in the care of a trusted employee. We had a great tour of the cellars and then walked the superbly manicured grounds. Afterwards we were seated looking out at some of the most beautiful gardens. We tasted several vintages of the Chianti, the Chianti Reserva, and their flagship wine Il Poggio, my favorite Chianti of all time. In fact, I donated two bottles of the 1977 Il Poggio for a centenary



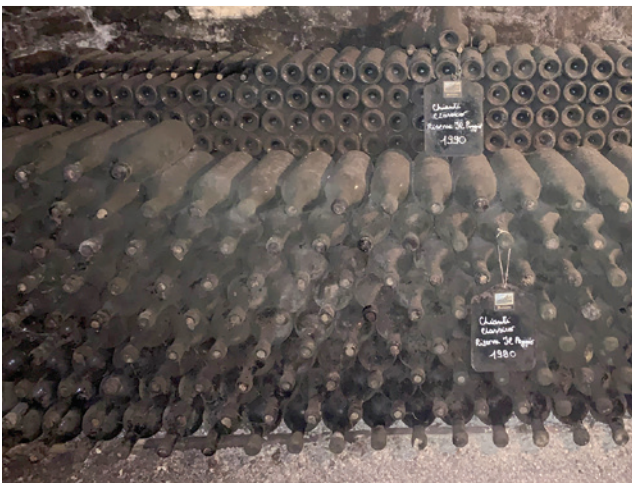
The herb gardens at Barberino Tavarnelle-Badia a Passigneno.



Gardens at San Casciano-Birthplace of Passignano.



This is the last known bottle of my favorite Chianti Reserva, which we enjoyed at Castello Monsanto.



Il Poggio Reserva aging in Monsanto's Wine Cellars.

dinner involving a 100-year-old Château d'Yquem (1893). My offering cost significantly less than that of the host who bought the d'Yquem at auction for \$12,000 and then realized he knew no one who could appreciate such a wine so he asked me to invite another couple. My invited friend brought two bottles of 1961 First Growth Bordeaux (Château Lafite Rothschild and Château Latour) and the Il Poggio served with the Italian pasta was an equally good match with food as were the Bordeaux. After we finished the tasting at Monsanto, I asked our hostess if it would be possible to buy a bottle of the 1977 Il Poggio. She returned from the library with the last two bottles, and we got to experience one of my greatest wines in its birthplace in a perfect setting with the last of their wine on earth. It was one of my most moving experiences. The nice dinner and wine that evening could not compete with this fantastic day.



Wine tasting at Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona.

Our last day in Tuscany was spent in Brunello di Montalcino region. We started with an unforgettable tour and tasting at one of the greatest producers—Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona. Although it is relatively small, it produces one of the best Brunellos. We started with the 2020 Rosso di Montalcino which is made from the same grape as the Brunello (Sangiovese Grosso), but from

younger and less quality vines. This example was excellent and very enjoyable even in its youth. Next, we had the Ateo which is a Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon blend with great black and ripe red fruit notes with cedar overtones.



Wines tasted at Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona

The next wine served was the 2017 Brunello Pianrosso. The nose showed bursts of dark red fruits such as currants and cherries, with a sharp and short finish. Finally, we had the great Brunello from 2010, one of the greatest vintages. The nose showed notes of cherry, tea and leather, spice, smoke, and earth. The color was ruby red and satisfied all requirements of a world-class Brunello.



Bruno di Montalcino

Our final winery visit in Tuscany was Colomaton. We discovered this winery on our last trip to the region, courtesy of our guide who knew the owner and recommended his Brunello at dinner one night. We loved the wine so much that we arranged to buy multiple cases which we secured alongside the autostrade en route to Rome. It showed signs of a roadside heist, but it was legally done. We wanted to visit the property this trip and had a great visit and tastings. The highlights included the 2017 Collemattoni Brunello, Collemattoni Fontelontano Reserva, and the 2004 and 2016 Reserva—both of which were great examples of the typical wines from these vintages. What a great finish to our week in Tuscany.

A Votre Santé. 🍷