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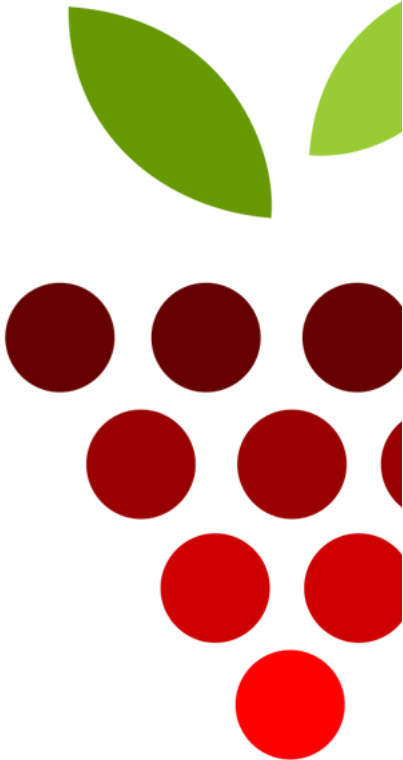
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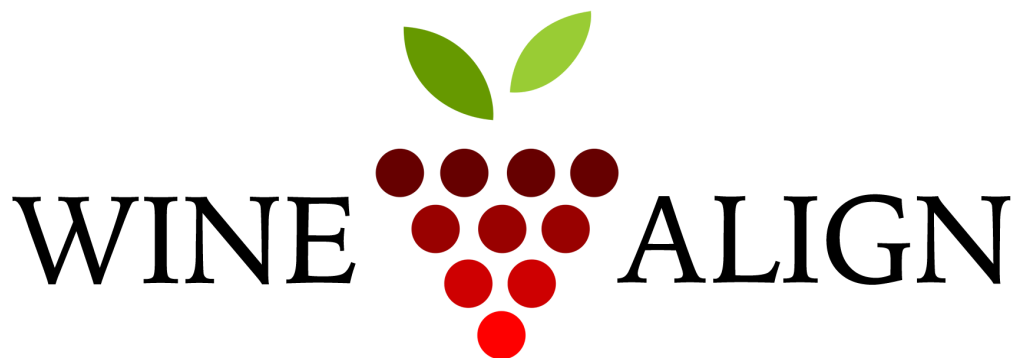


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## Benvenuto Brunello 2017 report

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### Rethinking Rosso and disciplined Brunello

by Michael Godel

It was a milestone edition of Benvenuto Brunello and also a gathering of symmetrical proportions. Looking back a half century, just after recognition of the D.O.C., it was in 1967 that the consortium was set up as an association of producers, “as a free association between winemakers bent on safeguarding their wine and on accentuating its qualities.” Twenty five years later the Benvenuto concept was conceived and now fifty years later this 2017 and 25th Benvenuto Brunello presented a preview of Annata 2015 Rosso di Montalcino, Annata 2012 Brunello di Montalcino, Riserva 2011, Moscadello and Sant’Antimo. Every year in February the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino organizes Benvenuto Brunello and by my count in 2017 there were 133 producers and 379 wines on hand to taste and evaluate, grouped together on February 17th and 18th in the Chiostro Museo Montalcino.



The vintages on hand offered up a study in contrasts beyond the obvious connotations served by the youth of Rosso Annata contrastive to aged Brunello. So many Mediterranean wine regions reaped huge benefits from the 2015 growing season but I’ve not personally seen such an across the board level of quality from a group of structured wines as I saw in the Rosso Annata. You would have to go back to 2010 to find a vintage with a near-chivalrous level of generosity and as far back as

2001 for its equal. That said I would suggest with extreme prejudice that 2015 Rosso di Montalcino is the vintage to change your mind about its quality and its ability to stand alone. As an entity, the Rosso are produced from grapes farmed explicitly for a purpose and it is this '15 vintage that can be used to back up that very proposition. Rosso are fashioned to make a young sangiovese distinctive and antithetical to Brunello, but with the resolution to forge ahead with an intrinsic and personal level of structure.

The Brunello vintage at the 2017 Anteprima is the one that growers, producers, marketers and critics will chime in with a wide variance of opinion. There are many ways to look at the 2012 growing season. It is prescribed as a five-star vintage by the Consorzio, putting it on par with the best of the last 20 years, including 2010, 2007, 2006, 2004 and 1997. Critics remain skeptical and producers seem content to say "we'll see," knowing that structure is a guarantee but that fruit may peak early. There is little doubt that fruit quality is prodigious to say the least and that to a wine, these are fine and refined sangiovese. The producers who resisted temptation to make huge wines and the ones who took a step away from the machine will likely be the ones who found the best balance and in turn will have forged the longest aged Brunelli. I for one see 2012 as closer to 2008 and 1998, firm, a little misunderstood in the early days and capable of improving dramatically with five to seven years of age. The fruit just seems to speak this truth.



La Fortezza di Montalcino

Buongiorno #montalcino La Fortezza di Montalcino

Montalcino is one of the most iconic Tuscan hilltop villages, a high density designed labyrinth of winding streets with the medieval La Fortezza di Montalcino at the peak and heart of the city. La Fortezza is a monument rich in history and a symbol of the last glorious defence of the Sienese Republic in 1555 against Spanish-Florentine troops. Begun in 1361 to improve the fortifications of the city, the fortress became a symbol of the then dominant Sienese power, however, counterbalanced by the opportunity that was offered to the residents of Montalcino to have Sienese citizenship while delocalised. It was precisely this fact that led to important political, economic and administrative relations between the inhabitants of the two cities. By the time the 16th century came to a close the fortress had lost its military significance. La Fortezza Wine Shop and Wine Bar founded in 1980 by Mario Pianigiani and Marzio Giannelli sits inside the main tower of the fortress.

Montalcino rests at 564 meters above sea level between the valleys of three rivers; Ombre, Asso and Orcia. This island city has for centuries been cut off from major transit roads and subsequently avoided or missed out on the typical economic practices of the surrounding region. So it developed wine and olive oil as its primary industry. The world and Montalcino are all the richer for this fortuitous destiny.

Brunello di Montalcino is referred to as "a very modern and ingenious intuition," a phrase that so aptly depicts how it has separated itself from other sangiovese producing neighbours, namely Chianti Classico and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. Only the Brunelli are possessive of a very certain and special sort of sangiovese aromatic liqueur, an amalgamation of deep, dark cherry, fresh leather, earth and flowers that differs from the others. Brunello also carries its own unique type of acidity and a fineness of tannin that speaks to how the grapes develop on the slopes and in the valleys below.

Only 15 per cent of a surface area totalling 24,000 hectares is planted to vines, just under 60 per cent to Brunello, approximately 15 to each Rosso and Sant'Antimo, 1.5 to Moscadello and 10 per cent to other grape varieties. The vineyards are set in a charmed square amphitheatre of geology, with the 1,740m high Mount Amiata to the south acting as protector and climate mitigator. Soils vary but at its most beautiful the decomposition of quaternary rock gives way to marl and albarese. The area is blessed with a Mediterranean climate, thankfully free of frost, great temperature fluctuations, the disease combative frequent presence of wind, mild and full days and in the end long, phenolic developing growing cycles.

Brunello's rules call for maximum yields of eight tons per hectare and an obligatory ageing period in wood of two years in oak casks. A further four months (six for Riserva) is required in bottle. Bottling must take place in the production area and the wines can be made available for sale on the first of January in the fifth year following the harvest (sixth for Riserva). Only Bordeaux style bottles are permitted.

Rosso's rules call for maximum yields of nine tons per hectare, bottling must take place in the production area and the wines can be made available for sale on the first of September of the year following the vintage. Like big brother Brunello, Rosso can only be housed in Bordeaux style bottles.

Moscadello's yields climb to 10 tons per hectare for both natural and bubbly (five for Late Harvest) made from moscato bianco. The wines may be made available for sale on the first of January of the second year after the harvest, for the Late Harvest type. Sant'Antimo's yields are set at nine tons per hectare for the Bianco and Rosso and eight for the other reds. It can be produced from all grape varieties recommended and authorized in the province of Siena, with specific limitations for the types with a variety name and for the Vin Santo. Bottling must take place in the province of Siena.



Sommelier service at Benvenuto Brunello

The Cooperative Cellars Biondi-Sant & Co are mentioned in the volume “Vini Tipici Senesi,” published by the chair of agronomy at the Università di Siena in 1933. The cooperative winery Biondi Santi & Co. was established in Montalcino in 1926 by a group of enthusiastic land owners who were also wine producers. They understood the necessity and importance of promoting two of Tuscany’s classic wines, Brunello and Moscadello from Montalcino. The Brunello di Montalcino style did not emerge until the 1870s, soon after Il Risorgimento (the unification of the Italian regions into a single state). Its evolution was expressly due to the efforts of Ferruccio Biondi-Santi. A soldier in Garibaldi’s army, Biondi-Santi returned home from the campaigns to manage the Fattoria del Greppo estate belonging to his grandfather Clemente Santi. It was here that he developed some state-of-the-art winemaking techniques which would revolutionize wine production in Montalcino and greater Tuscany.

The word we know as Brunello translates loosely to “little dark one”, in reference to the local vernacular name for sangiovese grosso, “fat sangiovese,” the large-berried form of sangiovese which grows in the area. While Brunello di Montalcino and the clonal sangiovese grosso have been symbiotically synonymous for decades, in today’s modern Brunello lexicon it is simply sangiovese that speaks to the grape of the famous wines.



Vancouver’s Michaela Morris, Godello and our amazing sommelier Leia

Montalcino’s reason for breathing, loving and living is to celebrate the wines of its immediate territory and the most noble locally-produced sangiovese has made the history of Brunello while the younger Rosso have taken up the challenge to become the protagonists of the new market.

This report is due and with great thanks to the producers from Montalcino, Patrizio Cencioni, Chairman and President of The Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino and Vice Presidents Tommaso Cortonesi, Andrea Machetti and Riccardo Talenti. Benvenuto Brunello is the culminating visit for the larger, week long roadshow of Anteprime di Toscana and so thanks is also afforded to Regione Toscana, Tuscany Wine Consortiums, PromoFirenze and the entire Anteprime di Toscana team. My reviews cover 22 Rosso Annata, 26 Brunello 2012, 34 Brunello Vigna.





Rosso '15 highlights from #benvenutobrunello 2017

Rosso Di Montalcino 2015

[Fattoria Dei Barbi Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

Quite delicate and elegant in Rosso from Barbi so perfectly executed to suit the effects of the vintage. A poster child actually, with brightness belied by red fruit and then enough grip to solidify the future. This will drink perfectly consistent from now and to the end of these '10s. Drink 2017-2020.

[Podere Brizio Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

From warmest of warm southwest sandstone and marl Montalcino vineyards of solid rock and altitude. Marks the old school/new school twain as an undisguised expression and honestly prepares you for more structured Brunello without ever abandoning what Rosso must be. Red fruit, chalky liquidity and some fine tannins. Drink 2017-2021.

[Castello Romitorio Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

As young, fresh, beautifully whole-bunch startling and come get me by the trunkful as Rosso di Montalcino can really be. Strawberries soaking in their own macerating juices and straight out of the vat lithe tartness and beauty. For every day and just a hint of what tannin will want to be in the bigger, slowly rendered wood-spiced Brunello. Drink 2017-2019. Tasted February 2017.

[Collemattoni Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

Firmer than some other Rosso but not in sacrifice of charm or elegance. Depth of berries and even a hint of plum both in aroma and on a silky, pleasurable and meaningful palate. Grown-up is one way of naming it but I prefer to think of Collemattoni's Rosso as in a category of its own, neither Rosso nor Brunello but something to take pleasure without needing any supply from either or. Rosso for next year and five after that. Drink 2018-2023. Tasted February 2017.

[Cortonesi La Mannella Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

The advance is a young winemaker's approach, using fruit from the youngest vines but from the same vineyards used for Brunello production. Clonal selection permits early success from the fourth to fifth leaf for precocious wines off vines so young. Others may use vineyards dedicated to Rosso, so farmed with ulterior motive and expectation, neither better nor worse, but different. The old way was simply a matter in selection of grapes, something young winemakers are abandoning for now one or the other ways of making Rosso. Tommaso Cortonesi's is luminous and bright within a frame of ascension in reference to the darker cherry sangiovese point spectrum, with three levels of variegated hue and aromatic profile. Char, fennel and fruit. Great structure, agreeable and yes, drinkable now Rosso. Drink 2017-2021. Tasted February 2017.

[Donatella Cinelli Colombini Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

Donatella's is a beacon at the shore, up on the fortress and statuesque at the central piazza, standing sentinel to draw attention to the 2015 vintage. Rarely will you find this combination of bright and firm, lithe and intense, ripe and in charge. All the attributes of Montalcino sangiovese are ingrained, albeit with a feminine hand, into its bricks and mortar. Perfectly sculpted and executed, with grace and humility. Drink 2018-2023. Tasted February 2017.

[Gianni Brunelli Rosso Di Montalcino Le Chiuse Di Sotto 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

Le Chiuse Di Sotto, "the closed below," is beautiful, full and yet not so generous on the nose (above) in sangiovese pure and simply wanting to give Rosso expressly to the palate. The mouthfeel graces better than most, not wanting for anything more than what it knows and has. Nothing astringent about this firm grip and of a concentration yet elegant in tension. Drink 2018-2023. Tasted February 2017.

[La Togata Rosso Di Montalcino Carillon 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy

If an imagining of the 2015 Brunello vintage can be foretold in the eyes, nose and mouth of a Rosso, La Torgata's Carillon, "a group of small bells," may just be the oracle. Sweet fruit in red cherry, ripe plum and then the dusting of fennel pollen will turn this to flow fluidly over river stones. So bright, light and pleasant. Could drink this with my pasta every night, no matter the preparation. Rosso like this is perfect, come questo è perfetto, for right now. Drink 2017-2020. Tasted February 2017.

[Ventolaio Rosso Di Montalcino 2015](#), Doc Tuscany, Italy (Winery, WineAlign)

More than just rustic and charming, here carefully considered to present a modern expression of sangiovese and what it amounts to is a refined, purposed and most excellent expression. There is this anaerobic, aerified inhalant impression that really takes away from expression so think about waiting a year to let the two fronts come together for a more perfect storm. Nothing precious about such a Rosso, only the sort of pure sangiovese roots laid down for success. Drink 2019-2024. Tasted February 2017 #ventolaio #ventolaio @Ventolaio



Eyes on Annata 2012

Brunello di Montalcino 2012

[Argiano Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

A solidified crust of earth and red fruit intertwine in Argiano's 2012, a Brunello that resides on the firmer as opposed to brighter side of the 2012 vintage. Argiano will always deliver the goods, in quality fruit, from important terroir and with the building blocks to carry it for 10 to 15 years. The palate brings viscosity, unctuousness and more than enough finishing chocolate ganache. Drink 2019-2027. Tasted February 2017.

[Fattoria Dei Barbi Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Barbi accomplishes an Annata Brunello just haste in 2012, taking expressly written sangiovese red fruit and pushing it to the limits of its natural tendencies, in hue and expression. I would have to say that consistency from this house is an absolute guarantee and that its style trumps vintage as much as any other. This is simply more Barbi than 2-12. That's all there is to it. Tannins are firm, acidity is strong and fruit is up to the 15 year task. Nothing time sensitive about it and its timeless structure cements the absolution. Drink 2019-2027. Tasted February 2017.

[Podere Brizio Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Brizio's is quite fresh for Brunello in a style that won't knock you down, from marl and galestro soils expressive of plum fruit and non-quelling oak. The warm southwest Montalcino corner rolls out a convection of buttered savoury pastry as though this were like Champagne in a sangiovese, Brunello style. Red velvet brioche and gingery exoticism from Montalcino with the fineness of tannin. Drink 2018-2026. Tasted February 2017.

[Cava d'Onice Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Brunello 2012 in the hands of Cava d'Onice is blessed of a most heady and pretty perfume in a decidedly gregarious expression, though with no danger of inching over the strada. Really tests the limits of fruit and wood and comes out clean and fresh, with much liquid ruby, chalky and spiced addendum. It's the sangiovese equivalent of old school charm in modernist, retro clothing. Drink 2018-2024. Tasted February 2017.

[Collemattoni Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Gorgeous red fruit as generous and dare it be said, magnanimous as it gets. Collemattoni is a fruit machine, but also a mineral maker and a long-distance, slow-evolutionary walker. The calcareous-clay impression (from San Angelo in Colle on the southern hill of Montalcino) leaves a lasting imprint on your Brunello soul. This carries fine millefoglie layers of fruit, woven in lattice and with alternative material from that fruit, of ground stone, acidity and sweet, fine-grainy tannin. No shards, no cruising and no need for rehydration. Carries it all in one bag, or bottle. Drink 2020-2032. Tasted February 2017.

[Il Marroneto Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

High on the red liqueur but not equally so with high-octane tones, this is more accessible than you might think. It's really big on its fruit, both on the nose and the palate. Quite classic in every respect and wholly respectful to the vintage. Bright and firm, direct and down to earth. Plenty of new wood will send this deep into the next decade. Drink 2018-2028. Tasted February 2017.

[Pian Delle Vigne Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

A perfectly perfumed Pian Delle Vigne from 2012 is vintage-relegated and vintage-captured. You need to appreciate how the Antinori team has kept the handling and the sheathing to a comfortable minimum, allowing fruit and collection of place to shine. Well made Brunello for 10 years easy. Drink 2018-2027. Tasted February 2017.

[Poggio Di Sotto Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

The present and the future are only bright coming from the heady and purposeful red fruit in the Poggio di Sotto glass. This is pure, clear and distinctly 2012, so very well made and quite elegant. I'm not sure what more you could ask from the vintage in a Brunello prepped to drink beginning of next year and for five equally lustrous more. Drink 2018-2023. Tasted February 2017.

[Scopetone Brunello Di Montalcino 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Scopetone is higher in tone and alcohol warmth but balanced by top quality and the clarity of fruit. Though the vintage does not necessarily bring such a fractive sort of behaviour the Scopetone sections itself into fruit, acidity and tannin, after it has stopped acting so bloody reductive. The hematic and ferric aspects mix with burgeoning acidity and a return of that exceptional fruit. This will live so very long and as such it's deferential attitude to the vintage is easily forgiven. Drink 2020-2032. Tasted February 2017.



Brunello Di Montalcino 2012 (Vigna)

[Altesino Brunello Di Montalcino Montosoli 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

In its present state Montesoli is a beast. There, I've said it. Shut tight, chains securely in place, reduction the retaining wall to keep predators out and so good luck on unearthing any early secrets. You know there is classic and earthy red fruit hiding but you can't quite feel it. The palate is chewy, crunchy, propitiously and indubitably enriched. This is a massive Brunello with underlying elegance and charm but ultimately all-powerful. Drink 2021-2037. Tasted February 2017.

[Castello Banfi Brunello Di Montalcino Poggio Alle Mura 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

As expected a rich, preserved and developed liqueur from Poggio Alle Mura but what is exceptional is the lesser or lack of barrel on both the nose and the palate at such a young stage. This is the most red-fruit reasoned PAM I have ever tasted and I can only say that Banfi has listened to the vintage and the land with great exception and care. The chocolate and the viscosity are left behind so that purity and traditional (or is it forward-thinking) tenets of sangiovese can take centre stage. Bravo. Drink 2019-2028. Tasted February 2017.

[Cortonesi La Mannella Brunello Di Montalcino I Poggiarelli 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

This is Cortonesi's single-vineyard sangiovese from the warmer, southern part of Montalcino at 420m of elevation. Expectation allows for deeper, and darker yet the display comes without the La Mannella block crimson and cimberian variegation, perhaps instead more like the single-brushstroke, dark side of dusk angle created by a fuzzy, warm blend of fiery colours. More Galestro soil influence here as opposed to clay at La Mannella and two years in part new French tonneaux followed by stainless steel vats. A deferential élevage to the one exercised with La Mannella and one to encourage depth and structure without too much power. Classic, modern, elegant and an apple to La Mannella's orange. Drink 2019-2025. Tasted February 2017.

[Donatella Cinelli Colombini Brunello Di Montalcino Prime Donne 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

With a nod to an all female produced Brunello, Donatella Le Cinelli Colombini's Casato Prime Donne vineyards specific Brunello is rich, traditional, firm, seamless and structured. Really fine. Exceptional purity from red fruit and an ideally calculated transference of rusticity gives it that supplicated balance, from what was and going forward must be. There is this cooler site and climate-controlled type of phenolic fruit ripeness managed for a struck accord that will see this age gracefully for two decades. In a vintage that in many ways was predicated on a called for requiem of combined blocks and sites this is a true blocks of specific vineyards success. Drink 2019-2033. Tasted February 2017.

[Fattoria La Lecciaia Brunello Di Montalcino Vigna Manapetra 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

La Lecciaia's Vigna Manapetra delivers a fair bit of welcoming Montalcino demure and the lithely floral aromas are the entry-point for this pulchritudinous sangiovese. Manapetra is a wine that just seems to jest and tease what is to eventually come. The feminine rapport is a lovely side-track to the ripe vintage away from the producer who failed to manage the duality of ripeness and over-bearing tannin. The presence, precision and clarity here edges forward and nears the divine. One of the best so far. Drink 2019-2035. Tasted February 2017.

[San Polino Brunello Di Montalcino Helichrysum 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Depth and reserve make cause to wonder what will be though it is the combination of breaching ripeness and warmth that seem to dominate the internal, in the present moment's discussion. Richness of fruit is undeniable, from red clay depths and the advancing severity of tannin make this a formidable and virtually irreproachable '12. Five undisturbed years lay ahead for this Helichrysum sangiovese from San Polino and one should hope the fruit will outlast the bitter chocolate, grainy tannin and chalky sensibility. Probability, recent track record and a heavy hunch say this will work out just fine. Plain and simple, put this away. Drink 2021-2030. Tasted February 2017.

[Azienda Di Franci Franca Brunello Di Montalcino Tassi Di Franci Franca Selezione Franci 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy (WineAlign)

A small production of this Brunello out of Castelnuovo dell'Abate develops a deeper clay-influenced and markedly darker black cherry-raspberry fruit rendered sangiovese. This Tassi Di Franci Franca Selezione Franci is distinctly polar to Tassi's Franci Franca normale. As a result the wood is more on top while the acidity and tannin wait, but only for a few moments, before attacking with fervour. So much chocolate swaths the palate with that fine-grainy brushstroke of tannin. This selezione is a big wine that needs a few years to back down. Drink 2020-2027. Tasted February 2017.

[Tenuta Buon Tempo Brunello Di Montalcino P.56 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Tenuta Buon Tempo's plot specific p. 56 is quite full-throttle on the nose but a bit reserved or rather locked in within that aromatic structure, as if it needs some sort of catalyst to find its way out of the shell. What I reach for is fruit but I get a mineral streak first, something almost calcari but certainly argilo in origin. This must be from a higher location as it is cool-tempered and very refined. The palate is cool again, not so much herbal as it is swelling with the holy trinity of fruit, acidity and tannin. Were the acidity just a touch elevated I think this would travel over mountains, rivers and valleys to decades ahead. It's just that close but will still commit to being a 15-20 year wine. Drink 2021-2036. Tasted February 2017.

[Tenute Silvio Nardi Brunello Di Montalcino Vigneto Manachiara 2012](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

In opposition to the Poggio Doria, Nardi's second Vigna delivers a complete about face turn around to see the other side of the moon, this time the landscape where Brunello is found in the Manachiara. If at first it seems a bit rendered in stencilled acetone keep drifting into its fine liqueur and patiently wait out the

transformation. It deepens, condenses and then breathes. This is a fine-grained, tight coiling, re-coiling and fanning out across the moonscape sangiovese. The wood is very much in charge, with baking spices and cool, sapid and savoury edges. It needs time. Drink 2020-2027. Tasted February 2017.

Brunello Di Montalcino 2010 (Riserva)

[Col D'orcia Brunello Di Montalcino Riserva Poggio al Vento 2010](#), Docg Tuscany, Italy

Poggio al Vento Riserva 2010 is so very smoky and wood charred so you wonder about the fruit but air brings a fleeting glimpse of that red toned life before the wind swirls to send it back to the smoky embers beneath the roasting bones of the cinghiale. Charm in Poggio al Vento is hard to come by so early and this is far too early. The palate is richer than you think and again with wood so prevalent. There is no doubt that a wait of five more years is needed before beauty can be coaxd out of this formidable Brunello. The vintage, the vineyard and the traditional house style all conspire for this Etruscan structure, meant to impress, influence and last just long enough. Drink 2021-2031. Tasted February 2017.

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Godello

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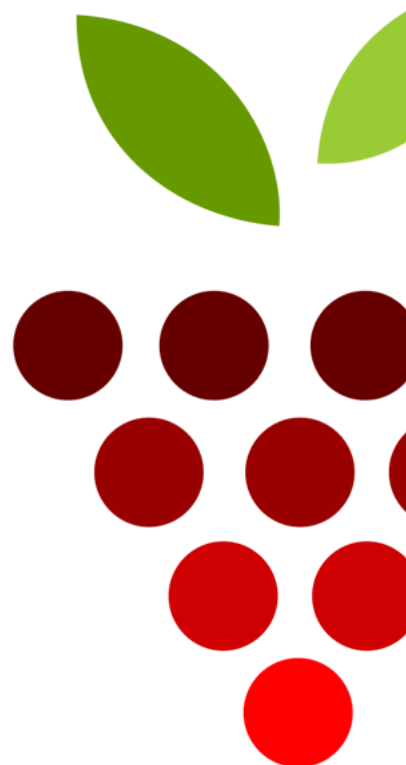
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