



SASSICAIA'S MARCHESE NICOLO INCISA DELLA ROCCHETTA AND ORNELLAIA'S AXEL HEINZ

The two men responsible for Bolgheri, Italy's famed Super Tuscans talk about what to buy, when to buy it, and why their bottlings are prized.

The wines that have come to be known as Super Tuscans are not made with the traditional grape of the Tuscany region, Sangiovese, but instead from what are known as the "Bordeaux" varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc, which are sometimes blended with Sangiovese. Although they were met with great acclaim, the original Super Tuscans, in the 1970's, did not meet DOC(G) rules for Tuscan wine, and were labeled as "table wine." Since 1994, they can be labeled DOC Bolgheri, providing the grapes are grown in the region and they are in compliance with regulations. Although soils vary from vineyard to vineyard, the soils of the region are often compared to those of Bordeaux.

The heart of Super Tuscan territory is the tiny medieval village of Bolgheri, which sits to the west of central Tuscany in the Maremma, close

to the Mediterranean Sea. Two of the best-known Super Tuscans are Ornellaia and Sassicaia. Tenuta San Guido, the home of Sassicaia, guards the entrance to the Via Bolgherese, also known locally as the Cypress Avenue for the stately trees which guide visitors to the ancient town gates. Tenuta Dell'Ornellaia is a short distance away from this famed road, and most discussions of Super Tuscans begin and end with these two well-known names.

Wine Enthusiast recently had the pleasure to visit both wineries and meet with their winemakers: Tenuta San Guido's Chief Enologist Marchese Nicolo Incisa della Rocchetta, and Winemaker Axel Heinz at Ornellaia.

About Sassicaia: Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta grew and vinified the first Cabernet Sauvignon at Tenuta San Guido from 1948 to 1967, but these bottles were held only for fam-

ily and friends. The first commercial release of Sassicaia was 1968. The name means "place of the stones," referring to the vineyards. Today, Mario's son Nicolo carries on the tradition with a team of enologists and viticulturists, and in addition to Sassicaia also produces Guidalberto and La Difese. The Sassicaia vineyards cover 75 hectares, planted over a total of 2,500 hectares of forest and open land. The vineyards have been given their own appellation: D.O.C. Bolgheri Sassicaia. This is the only winery in the region to have received its own vineyard designation.

The Tenuta San Guido Sassicaia 2009 is a blend of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Cabernet Franc. For a young wine of this stature, it is drinking remarkably well. The Tenuta San Guido Guidalberto 2009, named for the current Marchese's great-great-great grandfather, is a blend of 40% Merlot and 60% Cabernet Sauvignon. Tenuta San Guido Le Difese 2009 combines 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Sangiovese, and was awarded 90 points by *Wine Enthusiast*. We asked the Marchese a few questions about the 2009 vintage and some of his favorites.

WINE ENTHUSIAST: Could you describe some of the characteristics of Sassicaia 2009, which is currently for sale on the market?

NICOLO INCISA DELLA ROCCHETTA: I think that when you taste it, you may disagree, but I think that Sassicaia 2009 is very approachable and elegant. We think the wine has a good structure, so it is a wine that you can drink young, and then it will certainly improve a lot with age.

WE: The 2009 is the vintage which is currently available, but if you were to open a bottle with lunch or dinner today, what vintage would

you be drinking?

NR: Maybe 2004, or something older. Maybe 1998 or 1990. Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of those bottles left, but 1998, 1996, or 1995.

WE: Which vintages do you think collectors would be most interested in trying to buy right now?

NR: I think that it is not easy to find very old vintages. Of course the best vintages today are from the 1970s and 1980s, especially 1982, 1985, and 1988. We were quite surprised two weeks ago at a vertical tasting in Germany: The 1984 was originally considered an off vintage, and on that day it was the second-best wine of the tasting, and was given 96 points. I think that Sassicaia will always surprise you with a few years of aging.

About Ornellaia: Tenuta Dell'Ornellaia was founded by Marchese Lodovico Antinori, and the first vintage of Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore was 1985. The estate consists of 99 hectares of vineyards, growing Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Sauvignon Blanc. The two flagship wines of the estate are Ornellaia, which is primarily Cabernet Sauvignon blended with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, and Masseto, which is produced from a 7-hectare vineyard of the same name. Lower-priced labels are Le Serre Nuove dell'Ornellaia, blended of the same grapes, and Le Volte dell'Ornellaia, a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sangiovese. Today the winery is owned by the Frescobaldi family. Wine-making is under the direction of Axel Heinz, who consults with famed "flying winemaker" Michel Rolland.

Beginning with the 2006 vintage, released in 2009, Ornellaia initiated a project called "Vendemmia d'Artista," in which international artists are invited to create unique label art for the bottles. In May 2012 Chinese born Zhang Huan was chosen as the artist for the 2009 vintage. He was born in 1965 in Yang City (Hunan Province) and currently lives in Shanghai. His beautiful label art is inspired by Confucius and his teachings. Only 100 double magnums (3 liters,) 10 imperials

(6 liters,) and 1 Salamanzar (9 liters) were adorned with Zhang Huan's art from the 2009 vintage, making them highly sought after by collectors. We had a chance to view Zhang Huan's original sculpture, now in the central courtyard at Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, and also the series of bottles featuring his artwork.

WE: Could you explain the correlation between this year's artist and work of art and the 2009 vintage of Ornellaia?

AXEL HEINZ: I think it was probably a less obvious choice than previous editions have been, those where we had a very good correspondence with the character of the wine and the character of the growing season. In 2009 that was not so obvious. We called it "The Equilibrium," which was a very balanced wine, which I wouldn't have guessed right after the harvest. 2009 was very hot, and the evolution of the 2009 has been in a different way than what we initially expected. When we arrived, we didn't get that exuberant, flashy style, but it was going in a direction of serenity, balance, and equilibrium, and that is obviously something that is related to Confucius and his sayings. The theme that underlies Zhang Huan's piece of art is the change of state of mind of the young. He speaks about the path to wisdom once you get old, and I thought that is a nice metaphor for what goes on with wine. Wine has this path to wisdom which is its aging process—there is youthfulness, power, exuberance, which can be excessive, which then runs into something very balanced, complex, and refined.

WE: What can you tell us about the 2011 vintage?

AH: First, it is definitely a great vintage. We are very excited about it. It was a vintage that had its challenges. There were two critical elements. First of all, it was a very dry year, with approximately 25% less rainfall than in a normal year. The second challenge was that by the end of August, for a very short period, we had a heat spell that was more or less pronounced than in several parts of Tuscany. Here we are at the coast with the cooling effects of the sea and it was far less hot than in more interior Tuscany. There have been some conditions that made it more difficult to

make great wines. Dry years are always challenging for the shallower soils and the young vines. Fortunately, even though Ornellaia is a young estate, we have a series of mature and old vineyards, and these alluvial soils with a lot of depth helped to keep enough moisture to prevent the vines from suffering with drought. For us there were ideal conditions: Concentrated fruit, a very easy and early ripening vintage, quite a quick harvest, one of the quickest we have ever seen at Ornellaia, but beautiful wines.

WE: If you were to drink a bottle of Ornellaia today, what vintage would you choose?

AH: There are a few different options. I think today I would try a vintage everybody has almost forgotten about, 2002. It's a vintage that everyone said, "It's a poor vintage, the wines are not interesting," and then you realize five years after that it hasn't got the concentration of a 2001 or 2006, but it is now one of the most enjoyable wines to drink. You could think about 2000 as well, which is drinking perfectly today. Obviously, there have been a lot of great vintages recently, the 2008, 2006, and 2004, but of the younger vintages, I would drink 2009, which is very charming and very forward.

WE: And if you weren't going to drink Ornellaia, if you were going to drink wine from one of your neighbors, whose would it be?

AH: We have the neighbor next door, Le Macchiole, and I very frequently drink their wines and love them and appreciate them. I think Guado al Taso has been doing some wonderful things recently. Obviously, one who stays in Bolgheri can not stay away from drinking the wines of Sassicaia.

WE: What makes the Masseto so special?

AH: It is a limited vineyard of only seven hectares, and it has a type of soil that you won't find anywhere else in Bolgheri, or even anywhere else at Ornellaia. You wouldn't think of it as a typical Merlot—it's structured and has a lot of aging potential. Luckily for us, you won't find these conditions or this wine anywhere else. —MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSEN