



Spin the Bottle

Tuscany

Chianti might be the local hero in this thriving Italian wine region but there are plenty of other stellar reds to discover – and some great places to eat and stay.

STORY BY **PETER BOURNE & LEE MARSHALL**

AT THE foot of a sunny slope divided into neatly combed rows of vines stands a handsome stone farmhouse. Wayfarers dawdle outside, tempted, presumably, by the farm's sideline in good local food and wine. Welcome to Tuscany – almost seven centuries ago.

The bucolic scene is part of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effects of Good Government on the Countryside* fresco, painted circa 1338, which still adorns the walls of the council chamber in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico. Now, as then, this glorious medieval edifice is the city's town hall. And now, as then, vineyards dominate the Tuscan landscape.

Tuscany currently ranks fourth among Italy's 20 wine regions in terms of area dedicated to viticulture but only Piedmont challenges its global fame. The area's rapport with fermented grape juice goes back a few years. A winemakers' guild was founded in Florence,

Tuscany's capital city, in 1282; landowner Giovanni di Piero Antinori, the ancestor of a family that is still one of the region's leading producers, joined it in 1385.

Names sure to set a wine buff's pulse racing among Tuscany's more than 50 "controlled origin" DOC and DOCG wine zones include Brunello di Montalcino, Montepulciano and the coastal strip of Bolgheri. But it's the Chianti area between Florence and Siena that best flies the flag for the region – particularly its Chianti Classico heartland.

A 72,000-hectare paean to sangiovese, the sinewy, savoury local red grape variety, Chianti Classico is a living fresco of vine-draped hills, hilltop villages that seem to be carved from the rock they're built on and dense, truffle-rich woodlands. An age-old meeting of vine, nature and man, it proves Lorenzetti's point – that vines in a landscape are as much about culture, ethics and social living as they are about land use.



Tasting notes

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**ISOLE E OLENA
CEPPARELLO
TOSCANA**

2013 / \$134

Paolo de Marchi is universally acclaimed as one of Tuscany's leading wine growers and Cepparello is his ode to sangiovese in its purest form. Aromas of black cherries mingle with star-anise and fresh tobacco spice, while concentrated savoury flavours reveal a fine balance of acid and tannin. Try it with a baked lasagne.

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**BARONE
RICASOLI
BROLIO CHIANTI
CLASSICO
RISERVA**

2013 / \$54

Barone Francesco Ricasoli is the 32nd generation to preside over Castello di Brolio. At least two years' maturation – typically in oak barrels – is necessary to gain *riserva* status. The 2013 is a well-structured, dense red, its solid punch of dark berry fruit an equal match to venison pie.

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**FRESCOBALDI
CASTEL-
GIOCONDO
BRUNELLO DI
MONTALCINO**

2012 / \$155

The Frescobaldi family has been making wine for over 700 years and CastelGiocondo is their gem, producing this deep, bold brunello from the sangiovese *grosso* clone. Blackberry and ripe currants flow to a dense, inky palate defined by powerful tannins. Pair it with beefsteak Florentine.

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**TUA RITA
ROSSO DEI
NOTRI TOSCANA**

2013 / \$44

In 1984, Rita Tua and her husband, Virgilio Bisti, planted vines on the Maremma coast near Tuscan megastars Sassicaia and Ornellaia. This entry-level red is 50 per cent sangiovese blended with French varieties. Juicy black fruits, mocha and cinnamon unfold to a smooth and supple palate. Perfect with lamb cutlets.

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**CAPEZZANA
BARCO REALE DI
CARMIGNANO**

2014 / \$36

Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici recognised Capezzana's wines way back in 1716. The Carmignano DOCG requires a minimum 10 per cent cabernet sauvignon in this sangiovese-dominated blend, which gives a firm backbone to the dark cherry, clove and bitter chocolate flavours. The sinewy tannins would suit osso buco.

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