

WINE News

*Victory in Italy: we came, we saw,
we got a lot of great wines.*



JULY 18, 2016 FEATURES

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Bringing Home the Bounty of the Boot

By Greg St. Clair

It is a daunting task to represent all of Italy on the tiny bit of shelf space that we have allocated for our Italian wine selection. Italy contains hundreds of different grape varieties, 20 political regions, multiple languages and a myriad of different winemaking and grape growing methods, all across a landscape that includes volcanoes, islands and mountain ranges—yes, daunting is the right word. Yet it is with a smile that I think of the endless opportunities this offers us to show these unique wines to you. Recently, K&L's Mike "Guido" Parres, John Downing and I returned from a 2,300-kilometer tour of Italy.

Our aim was to visit as many places as possible and taste as many wines as possible. We do this so we can bring the best deals to you—our buying power allows us to secure some of Italy's premier producers at sensational, below-market prices. This issue of our newsletter highlights a few of our Direct Import producers, and each of the following months for the rest of the year we're going to feature more of our Direct Imports in our Italy-targeted emails. We also welcome back one of our old favorites, La Massa, on page 3. This has been our most popular wine for the last two years, so if you haven't tried it yet, now's the time!

San Venanzio Prosecco Valdobbiadene Superiore Brut (\$12.99) It's back—one of our best-selling value Proseccos! San Venanzio's Valdobbiadene Prosecco Brut is just delicious. The nose is full of white flower blossoms, and the palate shows a hint of creamy white peach. This low-dosage Brut Prosecco really shows its focus. Long and deliberate, so clean and refreshing, this is the ideal Prosecco for a sunset aperitivo or as the finishing touch to an Aperol Spritz! With our Direct Import pricing this is just a fantastic value.



2012 Terre del Palio Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (\$24.99) This is a sensational Vino Nobile. The nose is full of saddle leather, spice and iron, coming on bold and straight-forward—no wafting around here! While this Vino Nobile's structure shows unflinchingly on the palate, it takes a more claret-like direction, slowly opening to reveal a richer, more complex center that shows through the long finish. You should try this wine with Pici, Montepulciano's hand-rolled spaghetti-like pasta, with a beef ragu!



2013 Tenuta Novare Valpolicella Ripasso (\$19.99) I always find the aromatics in Valpolicella intoxicating—that wispy, ethereal character calls to me each time I try it. The Tenuta Novare Valpolicella Ripasso is no exception: the nose is enticing, the palate presence is seductive, layered with complex fruit character, and the finish is rich and lifting in the same moment. The wine has exceptional balance and moderate alcohol at 13.5%, and is perfect for summer barbecue, roasted chicken or your favorite pasta!





Mineral-Driven, Volcanic Whites

By Greg St. Clair

Although I've always liked Soave, I never really "got" what was going on until I visited for four days in September 2014. I toured the Soave Classico region, which is a different DOC from "regular" Soave, and was just blown away by the stunning vineyards and the incredible soils of the extinct volcano that encompasses it. One of the most unique producers we visited there is Le Battistelle, a very small winery that's been growing grapes for generations but has only begun to bottle its own wine in the last decade. I secured the rest of the vintage for the two "Cru" Soave Classico bottlings, and they have just arrived. John and "Guido" had never been to Le Battistelle before, so a complete

vertical tasting was in order for them on our recent trip—you can read their notes on the wines when you click through the product line at KLWines.com. We tasted the upcoming 2014 and 2015 vintages with Cristina and Gelmino Dal Bosco, and they are just exceptional wines, with minerality, complex fruit character and aging potential. Those wines should arrive closer to Christmas, but here are my notes for the wines just in now.

The 2013 Le Battistelle "Roccolo del Durlo" Soave Classico (\$15.99) vineyard is a mix of *tufo*, basalt and clay but is so dark it's called "Le Carbonare," referring to the coal-like color it has. Gelmino took me out in this vineyard to show me a whole section where the vines are more than 100 years old—incredible to look at but even harder to imagine. I love this wine—the nose is full of spice and white flower, and on the palate it has a certain depth...I balk at saying power, because it is so delicate, but it will age very well for up to 10 years.

The 2013 Le Battistelle "Battistelle" Soave Classico (\$12.99) vineyard is on the steepest slope of the estate. It faces more southwest, and here the soil is basalt rocks that alternate with tuff, or *tufo* (which in their dialect is called *togo*). This gives the wine a more savory, salty character—it just makes your mouth water. The nose is full of white flower aromatics, balanced with incredible persistence and only 12.5% abv.



Fan-Favorite Friuliano from Blason Wines

By Mike "Guido" Parres

The biggest surprise of Tour Italia 2016 came as we drove up the driveway to Blason Wines. Here, in Friuli, is a Ford truck proudly flying a San Francisco Giants car flag! Giovanni and his son, Andrea, came here in 2014 to watch the Giants play at AT&T Park, and they have been *big* fans ever since.



We discovered that the unofficial motto at Azienda Agricola Blason di Blason Giovanni seems to be: Forza Gigantis!

Blason is located in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, which borders Austria and Slovenia and faces the Adriatic. The soil here is rich in iron and laden with pebbles, and grapes prosper in the ideal climate. We have been bringing in Blason since the early 2000s and have made many friends with their undervalued wines. Giovanni Blason and his enologist, Andrea Rossi, make great wines that speak of the region and the varietals. Our customers look forward to the boat landing with each new vintage, and we have a long waiting list for their boxed wine.

Blason Isonzo Bianco (3L Bag-in-a-Box \$19.99) This is 100% Friuliano, as it has been the past few years, so no change there for our loyal fans of this great value (three liters equals four 750ml bottles of wine). One of the questions I always get asked is, "How long can this wine last inside the box?" I usually reply that it lasts about a week, *at my house*—while this box empties fast after the first glass, it can actually last for months in this format. Sorry, cannot ship.

2014 Blason Friulano Isonzo (\$10.99) This varietal (formerly Tocai Friulano, the pride of Friuli), although so much less-known than Pinot Grigio, has become the staff favorite at K&L, as well as among our more adventurous customers. Not like the thin, simple Italian whites of yesteryear, this wine is a mouthful. It has really great aromatics, with hints of tarragon and acacia blossom, and a stunning complexity that comes from its unique soil composition in this distant corner of Italy. So when the heat is on this summer, reach for a cool Friulano—we know you'll love it! By the way, all of Blason's wines are under 12.5% abv.





La Massa owner Giampaolo Motta awaits your glass!

La Massa Has Arrived!

By Greg St. Clair

Fruit of the Earth, Spirit of Man: La Massa's mission statement is passionately lived by owner Giampaolo Motta. Giampaolo is an interesting man. Having studied winemaking in Bordeaux, he loves the wines of Bordeaux, and it is all he drinks besides his own wine and the wines of Champagne and Burgundy. Not exactly the quintessential Italian winemaker, he's a former rally car driver and is fervently interested in motorsports (be careful if you get in his car—buckle your seatbelt), so much so that his winery is designed like a Ferrari engine and the flooring is a checkered flag—really! Yet Giampaolo has truly been on the cutting edge of winegrowing and winemaking in Chianti since he got there.

He started by making Chianti Classico, as he wanted to fit in (he's from Naples), but he became frustrated with the regulations that govern production and basically protect the large producers. He left the Consorzio and stopped making Chianti Classico—a significant move for someone whose winery is in one of Chianti Classico's best vineyard sites, the Conca d'Oro in Panzano. And in an act of supreme aggravation (you can add in your own Italian hand gestures here), he took the famous Black Rooster logo, the symbol of the Consorzio of Chianti Classico, and converted to a dead rooster hanging by its neck on his back label. The guy was seriously annoyed!

Yet Giampaolo's insight and determination to produce the best possible grapes and wine from his property led him to hire a geologist who dug six-foot-deep trenches over his entire estate and made one of the most exacting soil maps of any vineyard today. Geologically speaking, Chianti Classico has one of the most diverse collections of soil types you've ever seen, and Giampaolo realized that much of his vineyard was planted to the wrong varietal. So, at great expense, he either grafted over or replanted great swaths of his 66 acres of vineyard in a surrealistic checkerboard pattern to match the soil types. Since a good part of what Giampaolo felt his soils cried out for was Bordeaux varieties, he hired Stéphane Derenoncourt, perhaps Bordeaux's most famous consulting winemaker, to help him with his transition to those varieties.

You might think that Giampaolo would have thrown out all of the Sangiovese and just go French, but he really loves that grape—it's what brought him to Chianti in the first place. But he was truly scientific about it: he kept Sangiovese where it grew best. In fact, in a newly replanted parcel he's planted 100% Sangiovese. The **2011 La Massa "Carla 6" Toscana (\$74.99)** is a tiny production of pure fruit (named after his daughter and the vineyard parcel number) that shows that classic, high-toned Sangiovese cherry-like note on the nose. On the palate, the wine is modern, flashy and sleek. Made in new French oak, this is supple, warm and soft, with a delicate, lingering finish.



The estate's pride is the **2011 La Massa "Giorgio Primo" Toscana (\$Inquire)**, a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot. The grapes are all hand-harvested and pass under an optical sorter. Nothing but indigenous yeasts are used, and the grapes are gravity fed into the aforementioned Ferrari engine-like stainless steel fermenters. The wine then spends 18 months in 80% new French oak. It's a big wine that seems more New World than Panzano. The nose screams of currants and toasty oak, and it's lush, broad, supple and full of spice and plum flavors that drift across the palate. The finish is a full-blown New World style full of fruit, spice and toasty oak that will give most Napa Cabs a run for their money!

The winery's flagship is the **2013 La Massa "La Massa" Toscana (750ml \$19.99; 1.5L \$44.99; 3L \$99.99)**. For me, it is really a superb reflection of all of Giampaolo's vineyard work. The wine is a delicious blend of 60% Sangiovese, which gives the wine a structural backbone, 30% Merlot, which adds some meat, density and richness, with Cabernet Sauvignon lending authority and direction even at this small amount, while Alicante Bouschet adds some personality, spice and a little bit of nastiness—it kind of reminds me of Giampaolo—and it all seamlessly blends together. It is a superb blend, and once again, highly awarded: 93 points JS, 93 points VN, 92 points RP and 90 points WS.





From Montalcino to You: Poggio Salvi Delivers Quality and Price

By John Downing

There were many highlights during our recent spring travels in Italy, and our visit to Poggio Salvi remains among the fondest. The winery is nestled in a picturesque forested area on the south side of Montalcino where the combination of clay soils and Tyrrhenian Sea breezes create ideal terroir for their outstanding Sangiovese.

The estate has been owned and operated by Pierluigi Tagliabue since 1979, with a very simple philosophy: “*traditional wines produced with modern methods.*” Through judicious farming, minimal intervention in the winery and aging in large Slavonian oak casks, Poggio Salvi is producing wines of exceptional character and purity. What truly impressed us is that, no matter the vintage, their wines remained excellent across the board. Much credit goes to Tagliabue’s grandson, Luca Belingardi, who is currently in charge of winemaking. We had the privilege of tasting through their current releases and are pleased to offer the latest arrivals from this storied winery.

Poggio Salvi 2014 Rosso di Montalcino (\$14.99) The 2014 vintage was one of the more difficult for vintners in Italy of late, and many in the wine world have been quick to write it off in favor of others. However, after having tasted so many successful wines from this year, we’re looking forward to offering a number of outstanding 2014s. Due to the cool weather, Poggio Salvi took extra steps in the vineyards to ensure that only the best grapes were harvested for their wines, which is why this Rosso is so good. We expected to find a least a touch of herbal or green aromas, but instead were treated to a fragrant bouquet of bright strawberries with a pleasant hint of earthiness. The wine is bright,

vibrant and lively, with a nice zip of acidity and plenty of delicious red fruit on the finish. Pair this with pastas, meats and cheeses.

Poggio Salvi 2011 Brunello di Montalcino (\$29.99) This was a very warm vintage from around August 10 until harvest, so our friends at Poggio Salvi picked a bit earlier to preserve the acidity needed to make good Brunello. We were, once again, impressed, as this wine delivers some serious Sangiovese goodness. It’s immediately soft and round, with great extract and a flavor-packed palate of rich cherry fruit along with just the right touch of grippy acidity. We couldn’t ask for more at this price, and we think Sangiovese fans will agree.

Poggio Salvi 2010 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva (\$69.99) Some have argued that Brunello Riservas are not the best values and not always as good as the regular bottlings. In some cases that may be true, but we’ve found that the producers we import directly make outstanding Riservas, and this is no exception. This stunner was aged for three-and-a-half years in large casks and an additional six months in bottle before being released. The result is a full-bodied Sangiovese with polished tannins and juicy acidity imbedded in a mouthful of weighty strawberry fruit. There’s also a hint of the classic Tuscan dust, my colleagues often note, that adds to the overall complexity. There’s nothing not to love, and this is truly a testament to great wine from a great vintage that delivers—and at a price that’s close to most non-riserva Brunellos.



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