

# Wine Spectator

WineSpectator.com

## ITALY'S FRESCOBALDI

Lamberto Frescobaldi  
Talks Masseto, Ornellaia,  
Mondavi and More

**CALIFORNIA  
VALUES**

REDS, WHITES  
AND MORE  
UNDER **\$25**

**PIEDMONT**  
TASTING THE  
FANTASTIC 2016s

**SAUVIGNON  
BLANC**  
CALIFORNIA'S  
FRESH NEW TAKES

## THIS ISSUE

## Frescobaldi: An Italian Wine Dynasty

I hope all *Wine Spectator* readers have had a chance to enjoy our previous issue. The March 31 cover story, "Dogs of California Wine Country," was a departure from our usual coverage. I must admit that all of us here are extremely proud of this effort. The cuddly California winery dogs, along with a gallery of pets from more than three dozen M. Shanken employees, triggered a joyful response from readers.

So we have set up a special photo gallery on [WineSpectator.com](http://WineSpectator.com) for readers to share their own dogs with us! Hundreds of readers already have, and my guess is we may reach thousands. You can share a photo of the puppy you love by visiting our gallery submission page at [WineSpectator.com/DogPhotos](http://WineSpectator.com/DogPhotos) (and check out the full gallery at [WineSpectator.com/Dogs](http://WineSpectator.com/Dogs)). We'd love to add your pooch to our family of wine lovers' companions.

It's no surprise that Lamberto Frescobaldi, who appears on our cover this month, elected to name his dog Brunello. Marchesi de' Frescobaldi produces two bottlings of the famed Tuscan red from Montalcino and has been making wine in the region for more than 700 years, with Lamberto representing the 30th generation to head the family business. Under his leadership, and that of his father, Vittorio, before him, the company has achieved ever greater heights, improving quality, acquiring estates and overseeing icon wines such as Ornellaia, which earned our Wine of the Year honors, and Masseto, one of the world's great Merlots.

*Wine Spectator* editors often go to great lengths when writing an intimate profile like this issue's story on Lamberto, but senior editor Bruce Sanderson may be the first to have required prison security clearance. Sanderson accompanied Lamberto on a 22-mile boat trip to the Italian island of Gorgona—a penal colony—in order to spend the day with him and about a dozen select prisoners whom Lamberto is personally teaching to grow grapes and make wine.

"There was quite a bit of preparation, including a background check. It's an actual prison with high security and penitentiary police. Other boats aren't even allowed to come within a kilometer of the island," shares Sanderson of his unusual adventure. With its fascinating history and bright future, Frescobaldi is a winemaking dynasty worth investigating.

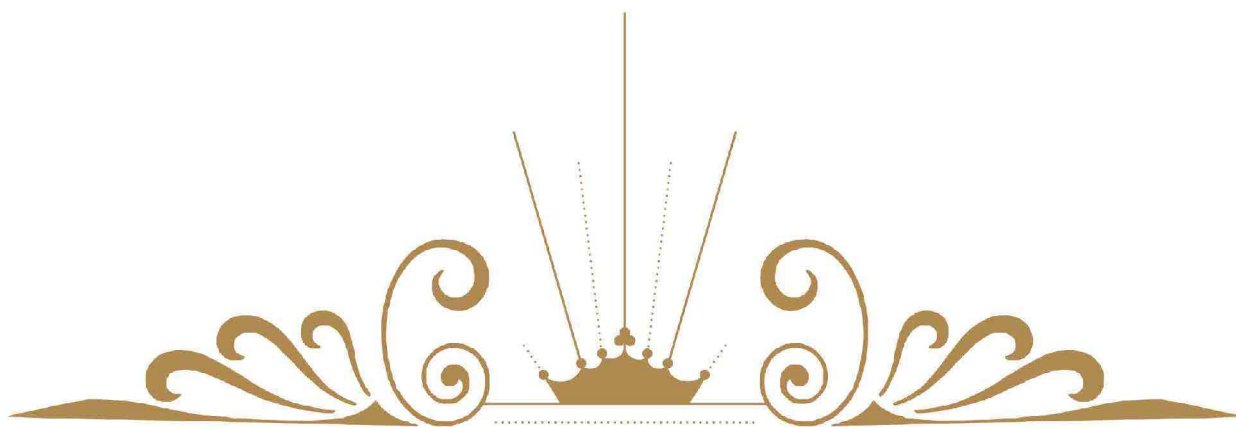
Lovers of Italian wine have even more to look forward to in this issue, including Sanderson's tasting report on Piedmont, headlined by the arrival of Barolos from the classic-rated 2016 vintage. Beyond Barolo, you may discover other Piedmontese wines that deserve your attention, including affordable reds from Barbera and fresh and fruity whites from both traditional and international grapes.



In preparation for warmer weather drinking, we also delve into two widely available white wines. Starting on page 75, senior editor Alison Napjus reports on Pinot Grigio, Italy's most widely planted white, exploring its wide range from light and crisp to rich and creamy. California Sauvignon Blanc offers similar diversity in style, and it is now truly hitting its stride, given the impressive group of flavorful wines reviewed by senior editor MaryAnn Worobiec, our lead taster for these wines; see her report beginning on page 56.

The average price of the California Sauvignon Blancs reviewed remains less than \$30, and this varietal is certainly not alone in offering great value from California. Should your preference lean toward sparkling, rosé or red, check out our California values roundup starting on page 69. Our editors offer some personal picks to ensure you're getting a great buy.

Marvin R. Shanken  
Editor and Publisher



# RENAISSANCE

## MAN

**LAMBERTO FRESCOBALDI  
LEADS HIS FAMILY'S HISTORIC  
WINE BUSINESS TOWARD THE  
FUTURE IN TUSCANY**

***By Bruce Sanderson***

*Photographs by Lorenzo Cotrozzi*

**C**affè Quattro Mori sits near the harbor in Livorno, a bustling city on Italy's Tyrrhenian Sea. On a Thursday morning, it is packed with dockworkers, police personnel and businesspeople. They're dispatching espressos in a single shot and sandwiches and pastries almost as quickly. ☉ Lamberto Frescobaldi is clearly at home here; the down-to-earth Tuscan aristocrat greets acquaintances with a clasp of the shoulder, and the two brothers working behind the bar like long-lost friends,





Lamberto Frescobaldi carries the torch for 800-year-old Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, but has a flair all his own.





Gorgona is the site of a penitentiary that includes 6 acres of vines and a small winery, where inmates participate in a viticulture and winemaking program sponsored by Frescobaldi. Since taking on the project in 2012, he has regularly made boat trips to the island, which lies 20-plus miles off the coast of Livorno in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

coming across more like a co-worker than a nobleman. Yet Frescobaldi, 57, represents the 30th generation of his family to head the Marchesi de' Frescobaldi empire, where he has been president since 2013. Its holdings include the prestigious Masseto estate, home to one of the world's greatest Merlots, as well as wineries both historic and contemporary all around Tuscany.

**F**rescobaldi knocks back his espresso and heads out, on his way to catching the 8 a.m. police boat to Gorgona, a prison island 22 miles off the coast. It's a trip he's made once a month since August 2012, when he began working with the inmates there to make wine from the island's vineyards.

"That first day, I was together with one of the inmates and he understood I was quite enthusiastic about the place—August, sunny, warm," Frescobaldi says. "Suddenly, the guy looks at me, into my eyes, and he says, 'This is a prison. It's not holiday, not Hawaiian island and fresh fish. No, no. A prison, heh.' So this is something serious, something that we always have to remember."

As the police boat nears Gorgona, the island appears like a shadowy mirage out of the mist and rain. The sea is choppy, forcing the boat to yaw and pitch. Two days earlier, the trip had been canceled due to rough seas and inclement weather. Frescobaldi notes that it requires a particularly calm sea when they are ready to load up the wine barrels and transport them to the mainland for bottling at a company facility near Florence. He has faced many challenges in his business, but the obstacles posed by a prison island are unique.

A dozen Gorgona prisoners are hired by the Frescobaldi company each year to work the vineyards and help in the tiny cellar, where two rooms hold three stainless steel tanks and a handful of barrels. Upon an inmate's release, the income he's saved helps provide a fresh start. Frescobaldi also hires the men for 12 months after release to help them gain work experience and hopefully ease their re-entry into the free world.

Making wine with prisoners on Gorgona began in the 1990s as a project by the University of Pisa, but it was soon abandoned. The prison director wrote to Frescobaldi asking if he would be interested



in helping the inmates. Although Frescobaldi's lawyer and his wife both advised against it, he decided to check it out.

"Why me, why our company?" Frescobaldi asked the director. "Did you ask other wineries?"

"Yes, hundreds," she replied.

"So why did you choose me?"

"Easy—you were the only one that answered."

Frescobaldi says his company will never make a dime from the Gorgona project, despite a \$150 price tag for a bottle of the 2018 white. A blend of Vermentino (70%) and Ansonica (30%), its floral, citrus, apple and saline flavors are pronounced in cooler years, while warm vintages enhance the fleshy, almost oily texture. There are always notes of Mediterranean flora, such as wild sage and pine. He hopes to eventually make about 1,200 cases from the 5.7 acres of vines, including a red made from Sangiovese and a little Vermentino Nero. But he's not in it for money. He's passionate about the project, and has earned the respect of law enforcement officers and prisoners alike.

**F**rescobaldi joined Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, the family business, officially in April 1989, when he was 25. His innate qualities of enthusiasm and respect have helped him expand the company's holdings and improve the quality of its wines.

His father, Vittorio, deserves a lot of credit. Vittorio ran the company from 1980 until 2007. During his tenure, the firm expanded vineyard holdings, purchased the Castelgiocondo estate in Montalcino and created a joint venture, Luce della Vita, with the Mondavi family of California, a collaboration that paid off handsomely for Frescobaldi when Mondavi was purchased by Constellation Brands in 2004.

Lamberto brought his viticultural knowledge, years of study and work in California and an understanding and appreciation of other



Vittorio Frescobaldi, Lamberto's father, celebrated his 92nd birthday in December. He led the acquisition of Castelgiocondo and formed the Mondavi partnership, Luce.

wines and other wine regions back to the family business. Moreover, his vision and philosophy for the company have made each estate independent and poised for future success.

When Lamberto began, Marchesi de' Frescobaldi was, based on sales, a medium-size company in Italy, with four estates in Tuscany comprising about 1,200 acres. It made wine, but also sold bulk juice to other companies who made and bottled wine.

One month after Lamberto arrived, the family company bought Castelgiocondo in Montalcino.

"[Castelgiocondo] was definitely an important deal, especially in those days," he recalls. "I knew Castelgiocondo because I was going there with my father when he developed it for a French company called Société Viticole Européen. I was going with him over 10 years before, because the vineyards at

Castelgiocondo began in 1974."

Société Viticole Européen had planted Sangiovese but also, being from Bordeaux, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc. A pure Merlot made from that estate, called Lamaione, caught the attention of Tim Mondavi, winemaker for Robert Mondavi Winery, and at the time his family's company went public in 1993, vice-chairman of Robert Mondavi Corp.

Tim Mondavi had been interested in making wine in Italy, and on one of his reconnaissance trips, met Vittorio Frescobaldi and subsequently visited the Castelgiocondo estate. Its location and vineyards impressed Mondavi and he thought the site could produce a pure, elegant wine.

"I felt their Merlot, Lamaione, was better than many of the Cabernet Sauvignon-based super Tuscans and that it was a better Merlot than what was found in Napa," Mondavi recalls.

That initiated a relationship that led to the partnership between Frescobaldi and Napa Valley's Robert Mondavi Winery; called Luce

TOP: COURTESY OF FRESCOBALDI; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF FRESCOBALDI; PIERRE/KETTY IMAGES; USA AUREMMA

## FOLLOWING FRESCOBALDI

13<sup>TH</sup> C.

### FIRENZE

The Frescobaldi family establishes its base in Florence as cloth merchants and bankers.



Portrait of Lamberto Frescobaldi, 13th C.; today's Ponte Santa Trinita, Florence

1252

### BUILDING BRIDGES

An ancestral Lamberto Frescobaldi constructs a wooden bridge over the Arno to connect his newly established properties to the city center of Florence.



1308



### WILL PAINT FOR WINE

The Frescobaldi family begins producing wine in Tuscany. Among their notable clients are artists like Michelangelo, who bartered paintings for their wine.



della Vite, it was completed in 1995. At the time, Frescobaldi's total annual sales were \$20 million.

With the Mondavis as partners, Frescobaldi continued buying vineyards in Montalcino and then Maremma in 1997 and I Poderi della Captiana (now called Ammiraglia), near Scansano, in 1999.

The crown jewel came in 2002, when the company partnered with Mondavi to purchase the Bolgheri estate of Ornellaia; in 2005, Frescobaldi bought Mondavi's shares to own this globally renowned estate outright. Along with the Cabernet-based Ornellaia, the estate also produces Masseto, a pure Merlot that's one of the benchmarks of Italy and which now sells for \$800 per bottle.

Most recently, in 2014, the company bought its first estate in Chianti Classico, the high-elevation Tenuta Perano in the commune of Gaiole.

Lamberto's role has grown substantially over the years. Beginning in 1995, he oversaw Luce and at the same time was appointed vice-president in charge of production for all of Marchesi de' Frescobaldi. In 2005 he became the managing director for Castelgiocondo and Luce. He became president of the entire company in 2013.

The company's current annual revenue is approximately \$120 million. Its vineyard holdings have increased to nearly 3,000 acres, making it the third-largest private vineyard owner in Italy. Though Frescobaldi wines are sold in 95 countries, its largest market is Italy itself, where roughly one-third of its wines are sold.

Lamberto views Marchesi de' Frescobaldi as a federation of independent republics, which he oversees with the help of two central advisors. His righthand man, Nicolò d'Afflitto, was hired in 1991 and oversees all the estates as the company's technical director. The other key player is Michele Brandi, Frescobaldi's vineyard manager.

Reflecting on his 30 years working alongside Frescobaldi, d'Afflitto says, "I think it is a great luck to be working with a person at 360 degrees—starting from the vineyard, through the experience of making wine. It all started with a deep investigation of



Longtime friends and mutually esteemed wine collaborators Tim Mondavi of California and Frescobaldi reunite at the 20th anniversary of their 1995 joint venture Luce della Vite in Tuscany, wholly owned by Marchesi de' Frescobaldi since 2004.

our vineyards in all their aspects: terrain, altitude and exposure. We have always tried to plant varieties, clones and rootstocks that would magnify the value of our territories.

"Lamberto knows all the estate's vineyards extremely well, he drives through them on Sunday with his motorbike and on Mondays he always comes back to me asking new questions," he adds.

Frescobaldi's approach is to give autonomy to the estates. "In our company, we want people to feel the estate is theirs more than anyone else," Frescobaldi says. "So I ask Michele and Nicolò to approach the estate like you are a consultant, like you are suggesting what to do. Do not impose yourself. Because if you are imposing yourself, when you jump in the car and leave, the person is going to do what he wants. If it's a decision that's taken together, maybe you're going to have to spend 10 minutes more, but it's a more powerful decision."

It also takes dedication, motivation and vision. "If the guy managing Perano, or Nipozzano or Ammiraglia, if I tell him 'It's good enough, take it easy, you will never be Masseto,' he's going to be a loser all his life," says Frescobaldi. Tapping the table with his index finger for emphasis, he continues, "He has to have the vision of beating Masseto. This is the first thing. He has to go to bed at night

1716



## GIVEN THE ROYAL TREATMENT

The Grand Duke of Tuscany recognizes Frescobaldi's Pomino vineyards as a source of quality wine.



1855

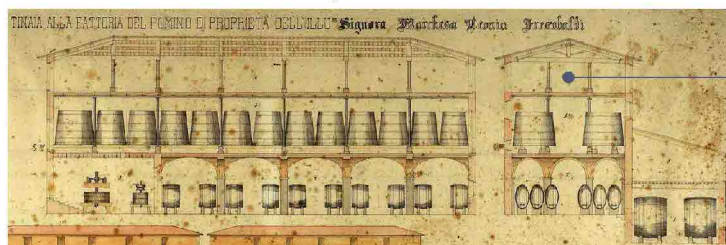
## THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Marchese Vittorio degli Albizzi introduces French grape varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to Tuscany. His daughter would soon marry into the Frescobaldi family and inherit these vines.

1869

## GORGONA

Gorgona, the smallest island of the Tuscan archipelago is established as a penal colony.



1894

## GO WITH THE FLOW

Frescobaldi's newly constructed wine cellar at Castello Pomino is the first in Italy to use a gravity-flow system.



saying, did I do everything possible to maximize quality. I don't want to be second best to anybody."

Frescobaldi has a personal winery called Collazzi, with 40-acres of vineyards around Florence and in Chianti Classico. The wines are mostly made from Bordeaux varieties and labeled as IGTs (Indicazione Geografica Tipica), with the exception of the Chianti Classico, a blend of 80% Sangiovese with Merlot and Malvasia Nera. While Frescobaldi is adamant about keeping it separate from the family business, it serves as an important reference point.

"Sometimes I have experienced in the past that people look at you like you're a big company, and a big company is perceived as a non-quality company," he says. "The most difficult task sometimes is to share a vision of being of a certain size, but think details and think about everything."

"Collazzi has helped me to think smaller and try to understand every little bit and piece. And this is what we are trying to do with all the estates we have. Because quality is details, it's nothing more than details," Frescobaldi explains.

**T**hough Frescobaldi can now look back on a successful 30-plus year career and an enduring marriage, both were almost cut short just a few years after he joined the company.

In June 1991, while on their honeymoon, Lamberto and Eleonora chartered a small boat to take them to an island lagoon where small sharks gather. Eleonora looked up from the book she was reading and realized Lamberto was missing. Without anyone noticing, he had fallen overboard from the small boat and been left behind and alone somewhere in the vast South China Sea.

He exhales deeply and pauses to gather his thoughts before recounting the incident. "That has been quite an experience. Hmm ... that was some years ago. Time dilutes what happened, but of course I remember yet very well," he says, measuring his words.

"One thing I experienced was to see ... I saw my life from when I was a kid to that moment. It went through very quickly, bits and pieces of my life. Then the boat disappeared so I was floating in the sea. ... One feeling I strongly had was, I think, what a shame, I wanted to do lots of things in my life and I will not be able to do it, because, I'm going to die."



Lamberto and his wife, Eleonora, celebrate their 30th anniversary this year. Their three children, all in their twenties, have been schooled in the rigors of the family business.

He estimates that he was in the water for about two and a half hours before the charter was able to locate and rescue him.

"So every year, on that date, June 29th, I kiss Eleonora, thanking her, and thanking God she looked around and said, 'Where is my husband?' We were married on the 21st of June, so it was eight days we were married, and I'm here."

During the following year, Frescobaldi experienced feelings of

1953

## FATHER KNOWS BEST

Vittorio Frescobaldi (Lamberto's father) enters the family business and oversees a transition of the vineyards from the *mezzadria* (sharecropping system of cultivation) to estate management teams.

1963

## BIRTHDAY

Lamberto Frescobaldi Franceschi Marini (Lamberto Frescobaldi) is born. He spends his early years in the countryside at Castello di Nipozzano.

1986

## FIASCO

Unscrupulous Italian wine companies add methanol to their jug wines, resulting in 17 deaths and a scourge on the industry.



Laudemio olive trees

1986

## AN OLIVE BRANCH

Frescobaldi is a founding member of the Laudemio consortium, 21 estates committed to producing high quality Tuscan olive oil.

1987

## A QUICK STUDY

Lamberto Frescobaldi earns a degree in viticulture and enology from the University of California, Davis, in just two years.



invincibility, driving too fast and living life over the top, until the priest that had performed his marriage advised him that if he went looking for death, he would surely find it one day. He calmed down, but for 10 years, he couldn't talk about the incident without being overcome by emotion.

"It's a hell of an experience and I don't recommend [it] to anybody, but in the end I think it's given to me, I think, some extra power in tough moments of my life. But definitely it's given me the desire to, sometimes we daydream, but having the desire to do something and then do it, don't wait until tomorrow, just do it. Be a person with guts and do it."

**B**orn in 1963, Lamberto spent his earliest years at Castello di Nipozzano. "My father and mother moved to the countryside after they got married in 1958. They were living in Florence and they moved to Camperiti, that was a house next to Nipozzano."

To the young Frescobaldi, it felt like nothing much had changed there for centuries. There was the cellar, the olive oil mill, there were cows and horses, and not even a key for the front door.

"There I had the opportunity to fall in love with the beauty of the seasons," he reflects. "Staying close to the vineyards and the people that were working the vineyards and learning to love it. Then there was this beautiful product that was wine."

But his family soon moved to the nearby town of Pontassieve. There, he recalls being trapped in the house and dreaming of going back to the country.

"I was 11 and I cried every tear that I had when we left the countryside," he notes. "I left the dogs that I grew up with, I left the freedom of going out in the fields, and in the city you had to be cautious. We're talking about 1975, there were some political things in those days and you had to be very careful."

"Quite a tough time," he adds. "I always had this dream of going back to the country."

When he was 14, Frescobaldi received a motorbike. He spent as much time as he could in the country exploring the various estates his family owned. Driving around on his dirt bike, he got to know every vineyard, the perimeter of each estate, the lay of the different lands. What started out as a game, driving up and down the vineyards, turned serious when the young Frescobaldi returned from California's U.C., Davis, with a degree in viticulture and enology in 1987 and set about developing new vineyards and replanted existing ones.



**1991**

**ON THE JOB**  
Enologist Nicolò d'Afflitto is put in charge of wine-making across the Frescobaldi estates.

**1992**

**SUPER TUSCAN**  
The wine category of Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT) is established in Italy, representing a tier above Vino di Tavola for creative wines like super Tuscan blends.





Castello di Nipozzano holds special memories for Frescobaldi, located in the countryside where he spent his early childhood.



**B**y the mid-1970s, the Frescobaldi wine business was a growing company with more than 1,000 acres of vineyards. But Tuscan viticulture and wine-making still had one foot in the past, while the other was about to step into the future.

In the mid-1950s, landowners in the Chianti areas didn't know what to do with their lands. Located mainly between Florence and Siena, Chianti is a very steep, rocky area, with a shallow amount of arable topsoil. A University of Florence study reported that the only opportunity to make a living there was to have sheep. Set against the backdrop of developing the difficult Chianti terrain and a crumbling *mezzadria*, or sharecropping system, the European Community (EC), founded in 1956 in Rome, began a massive subsidy program to plant vineyards.

Using post-WWII caterpillars from a nearby American military base, locals worked the steep hills of central Tuscany. "Somebody had the idea of using them to start plowing and making these hills more user-friendly, if we may say that," chuckles Frescobaldi.

When the sharecroppers left the rural areas for jobs in the city, Frescobaldi's father Vittorio told him that they had the land, but didn't know how to manage it. "So not only did we have to learn how to cultivate it, but we had to be efficient, because you weren't paying by a percentage of what was produced, but you were paying employees by the hour, with cash," he says.

With growing production, export markets became more important. Vittorio, with Lamberto's uncles Ferdinando and Leonardo, began looking beyond Italy to sell their wines. That in turn drove the company to produce more commercially agreeable wines.

With the expansion of vineyards under the EC subsidies, production went from a shortage to a surplus in a few years. By the 1980s, Europe was drowning in wine. Prices dropped. "I remember, my family, my dad struggling because he was so worried that he could not make a living for his family and also the people that were working with him."

Then the other shoe dropped. In 1986, some Italian wine companies (four according to a 1986 *New York Times* article) had added methanol to their wines to increase the alcohol content. Seventeen people died and 60 were hospitalized. Though the adulterated wines were cheap versions sold primarily in Italian supermarkets,

a shadow was cast across quality Italian wines as well, driving Frescobaldi to contemplate bankruptcy.

But there was a silver lining. The methanol scandal "shone the light on the wine industry," according to Frescobaldi. "People understood that if you wanted something that wasn't harmful for you, you had to allow the [wine] industry to make a living. You couldn't go less than a certain price. You couldn't squeeze these people."

**A**t the time of the scandal, the young Frescobaldi was pursuing a golden opportunity at U.C., Davis, in California. Frescobaldi did all the paperwork and benefited from a program favorable to foreign students. "I moved there and I started to take the most classes possible in viticulture," he says. "Viticulture has always been my greater passion. Viticulture is this balance between the land and the potential output of the land."

According to him, the agricultural program at the University in Florence was not evolving at the speed of the wine industry. There was a semester of viticulture, but no exam; enology didn't exist. "We're in Florence, in the cradle of Chianti. Enology didn't exist," he exclaims, laughing.

California made a huge impression on the student. "What blew my mind was the opportunity that that kind of university was giving to students," he recalls. "A huge library, open 24 hours. Any book you wanted. You could search by computer and if it wasn't there you could get it in two days. I was given a vineyard plot where



Above: Lamberto's father, Vittorio (front), with Vittorio's brothers Ferdinando (center) and Leonardo (rear) pose in 1986, then recreate the historic family portrait in 2020.

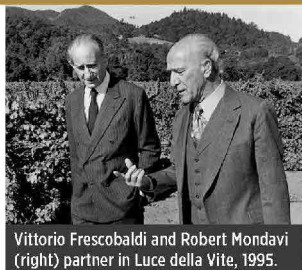


TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF FRESCOBALDI; ANDREW KURALEV; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: COURTESY OF FRESCOBALDI; BILL NEUNE

1995

## JOINING FORCES

Marchesi de' Frescobaldi partners with Napa's Robert Mondavi Winery, resulting in the founding of Tuscan winery Luce della Vite.



Vittorio Frescobaldi and Robert Mondavi (right) partner in Luce della Vite, 1995.

1997

## A VERY GOOD YEAR

A benchmark vintage in Tuscany. Frescobaldi's Merlot Toscana Castelfiorentino and Brunello di Montalcino Castelfiorentino each score 96 points.

2000

## BEYOND TUSCANY

Venturing beyond Tuscany for the first time, Marchesi de' Frescobaldi purchases the Attenu estate in Friuli.



2001

## NUMBER ONE

Wine Spectator names the 1998 Ornellaia (produced by Lodovico Antinori at the time) as Wine of the Year.



2002

## SUPER MEN

Frescobaldi partners with Mondavi to purchase Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, the Bolgheri estate responsible for the Cabernet-based Ornellaia and Maso, a pure Merlot.



I was following everything I was doing, a number of things that didn't exist back home."

He completed a three-year program in two years. Nonetheless, he had a good time. "I bought a dirt bike [and] I was dirt biking around. I had a red Firebird I was driving around, a 1973 red Firebird. And thanks to some people my parents knew, I was visiting some wineries."

Frescobaldi also met Darrel Corti, of Corti Brothers market in Sacramento. A local source of fine imported and California wines, as well as food, it came recommended by Frescobaldi's importer.

"So I jump in my car and go to this place and there were pallets in the cellar of Frescobaldi," he recalls. "I go in the basement and I ask the guy 'Hi, you have a lovely place and I see a lot of Frescobaldi down the row, a lot of cases. Aren't you selling it?' Corti shrugged and retorted, 'Do you think it's easy to sell these wines?'"

Frescobaldi ended up doing a client dinner for Corti and began working on Saturdays in exchange for the Wednesday evening staff tastings. "I didn't know shit," he laughs. "Zero. Big fault on wine-grower families. They concentrate on what they are doing and they do not look at somebody else's [wines]."

Frescobaldi's mind and palate were expanded. He tasted wines from Bordeaux, from Australia, from Argentina, from Chile. "I had no idea, no idea," he says. "That was a terrific experience. It's always keeping a door open in your brain and empty space in your luggage to take home some experiences. It's the greatest thing."

Once back in Italy, Frescobaldi did his obligatory two years military service, then began working for the family company. His father wanted to develop the family's vineyard holdings.

"When I joined the company officially, we were selling juice to other important wineries because we didn't have enough ability to sell all that we were producing in the bottle," he explains.

He decided to replant the vineyards, beginning in 1991. The



Nicolò d'Afflitto (left) joined Marchesi de' Frescobaldi in 1991. As technical director for all estates, his responsibilities include Tenuta Perano, in Chianti Classico, which the company purchased in 2017 for its top-quality, high-altitude vineyards.

prevailing thought was it's doing well, but if I replant it, it will probably do better. Since then, 90% of all the vineyards have been replanted.

They also stopped supplying other bottlers. By 1995, an increase in quality was evident. The Frescobaldis were able to charge a little more for their wines, reinvesting in the vineyards: "When you are able to sell all of what you are producing, it gives you the strength to be even more severe in your vineyards and look at the details of quality." Frescobaldi was making 500,000 cases, led by the super Tuscan Mormoreto, Chianti Rufina Montesodi and from Castello di Pomino, the Chardonnay Benefizio.

Yet it was an alliance with an American company that would change the future course of the Frescobaldis' wine business and develop it into the powerhouse it is today.

When the Frescobaldis purchased Castelgiocondo in 1989, they pulled out the Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon vines from the previous owners, but kept the Merlot. It was good, according to Frescobaldi, but was either sold in bulk or made in a Beaujolais style because it ripened early.

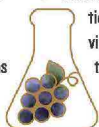
When d'Afflitto was hired, he suggested making a 100% Merlot, but a real wine. Thus began the production of Lamaione. Tim

BOTTOM LEFT: LISA AURIGEMMA

## 2005

### PERFECT SCORE

Frescobaldi acquires full control of Luce della Vite and Ornellaia. Tenuta dell'Ornellaia Toscana Masseto 2001 earns 100 points from Wine Spectator.



## 2008

### BRUNELLO-GATE

Battling government accusations that their Brunello does not meet DOCG regulations, Frescobaldi is vindicated by laboratory tests that confirm the wine contains only Sangiovese.

## 2012

### GREEN LIGHT

Frescobaldi leads in sustainable farming, with all estates awarded the AgriQualità certification by the Region of Tuscany.



## 2012

### PRISON WINE

Lamberto Frescobaldi assists with winemaking to benefit prisoners on the penal island of Gorgona. The white is made from Vermentino and Ansonica.



## 2013

### HEIR TO THE EMPIRE

Lamberto Frescobaldi becomes president of Marchesi de' Frescobaldi, the 30th generation of his family to lead the wine empire.

## 2017

### CHIANTI EXPANSION

The company purchases its first estate in Chianti Classico, the high-elevation Tenuta Perano.



Mondavi's interest and subsequent visit to Castelgiocondo was the beginning of the Luce della Vite joint venture between the Frescobaldi and Mondavi families, in 1995. Luce is a 50/50 blend of Merlot and Sangiovese. The first vintage was 1993.

"The Frescobaldis at that time were land rich, but not recognized internationally," says Mondavi. "Luce was born with a broad concept of Merlot and the local Sangiovese, based on a specific site."

Today, Luce consists of 136 acres of vineyards: 106 designated for IGT and 30 for Brunello di Montalcino. Lying between 1,155 and 1,385 feet in elevation, Sangiovese is planted in the higher parcels on *gallesiro* (schist) soils, while the lower portions where clay predominates are devoted to Merlot. A winery was built in 2016. Wholly owned by the Frescobaldi family since 2005, Luce is one of the independent estates and brands in the portfolio.

"People thought because it was a joint venture with Americans it would be a big, juicy wine," recounted Frescobaldi at a 20-vintage retrospective tasting of Luce in 2013. "Tim always said it should be in the style of what Montalcino does best, with its integrity of the soil and ability to age. 'I initially disagreed, but now I'm glad we kept to this path,'" he said.

Over time, the joint venture bought more land in Montalcino and Maremma, and later, Ornellaia, which at the time included Masseto (the two brands were separated with the 2011 vintage and

"BUYING LUCE,  
MASSETO AND  
ORNELLAIA  
WASN'T EASY.  
OUR DEBT  
SKYROCKETED."

LAMBERTO FRESCOBALDI

a facility for Masseto was completed in 2019).

The Mondavis invested first in Ornellaia, in 1999, with founder Lodovico Antinori. Antinori had decided to sell the company and hired an investment banking firm to entertain potential investors on the condition it wasn't a local family. According to Mondavi, his family was the third party to show serious interest, but the Mondavis had an agreement with Frescobaldi that they could not do anything else in Italy except in partnership with Frescobaldi.

Vittorio Frescobaldi, president of Frescobaldi at the time, gave his blessing to the Mondavis to buy the majority of shares of Ornellaia and drew up papers rescinding the exclusivity agreement. Then, when Antinori wanted out completely in 2002, Frescobaldi was approached by the Mondavis to invest in Ornellaia.

"In 2002 when Lodovico left the company and sold the last shares he owned, that same day [the Mondavis] asked us to step in 50/50. So we had 50/50 in Luce and 50/50 in Ornellaia and Masseto. That happened in February 2002," Frescobaldi recounts.

"We were able to secure Ornellaia with the luxury of having the Frescobaldi family, who knew the area, as partners," notes Mondavi.

"We were able to secure Ornellaia with the luxury of having the Frescobaldi family, who knew the area, as partners," notes Mondavi.

The next year, when the structure of the Mondavi company began changing, the Frescobaldis bought back the Maremma property, now Ammiraglia, which had been intended as the vineyard



Marchesi de' Frescobaldi gained full stewardship of the iconic Ornellaia in 2005 as part of a reciprocal buy-out deal with the Mondavis in which either of the two families in the then 50/50 ownership of the estate had the first option if the other wanted to sell their shares in the brand, originally founded by Lodovico Antinori.



source for Lucente, the second wine of Luce.

When the initial joint venture was set and all the papers were signed at the end of 1995, Mondavi Corp. was already on the stock market. So their lawyers asked if the Frescobaldi would like to have an agreement that if their family lost control of their company, Mondavi would have the first right to buy the joint venture. "So my father said, "Fine, let's do a reciprocal [agreement]. If you lose control, we can buy back what we have done together,"" Lamberto explains.

This would result in a huge opportunity for the Frescobaldi, because they were tiny compared with Mondavi. According to Lamberto, when the first agreement was inked, Frescobaldi was doing \$20 million in sales, while Mondavi showed 35 times that at \$700 million.

In December 2004, Mondavi was bought by Constellation. Frescobaldi had to decide whether to stay with Constellation or buy everything back.

"We came from a family relationship," explains Frescobaldi. "Mondavi was much bigger, but we were talking about Bob, Tim, Michael, Marsha. Then there was Margrit Mondavi, she came up with the name Luce. They were very polite. I must say, I have great respect for them. And then we find ourselves with Constellation. I'm sure they were good people, but we couldn't have that family relationship, so we decide to buy back what we had together."

Tim Mondavi, who made the Luce wines with Lamberto, has similar feelings. "I have great admiration for the entire Frescobaldi family and consider Lamberto a good friend," he says. "There is something very special about a family who has an 800-year legacy. Vittorio, and now Lamberto, have tremendous wisdom, perseverance, passion and the vision to carry on the legacy."

In December 2004, the Frescobaldi bought the Luce joint venture and on April 1, 2005 they bought Ornellaia and Masseto. "It was quite something," Frescobaldi recalls. "But it wasn't easy. Our debt skyrocketed, it was more than our turnover," he says, shaking his head. Fortunately, it was 2005, several years before Lehman Brothers collapsed and the financial crisis; banks were still very generous. "So we did that and started to pay it back right away and [were] just surviving."

The gamble paid off, and today the Frescobaldi empire is much more diverse, internationally recognized and successful than when Lamberto Frescobaldi joined the company three decades ago.

His willingness to think outside the box with projects like Gorgona reveals Frescobaldi's endless curiosity and desire to enjoy life. And there are new projects that intrigue him, possibly a winery outside Italy and outlets and restaurants that specialize in Tuscan ingredients and cuisine.

In the end, for Frescobaldi it's all about the people. "Quality is



Frescobaldi wears the mantle of 30th generation winemaker with ease. At the same time, the family tree reminds him of the impact of the Frescobaldi name on the Italian wine industry and its greater recognition in the world.

made primarily by people. So you need to have a certain size to allow yourself to have a certain quality person and hopefully to be able to keep them with you. It's about having the sensibility to have your best people grow and to be a solid part of the company."

It also requires leadership, a quality that Frescobaldi has consistently demonstrated over the 30 years since joining the company. He leads by example, works hard, is unafraid to take risks, and follows his vision and philosophy for each estate.

With an unwavering vision and by building a solid financial base, Lamberto Frescobaldi has brought change, increased holdings and built on the foundation of the company in his generation, laying the groundwork for the next. □



# 10 TO TRY

RECOMMENDED  
WINES FROM  
FRESCOBALDI

## MASSETO TOSCANA 2017

95 Points | \$814

There's a meaty character to this intense, polished red, adding a seriousness to the dark plum, blackberry, iron, vanilla and chocolate flavors, while a beam of bright acidity keeps it all focused. Merlot.

## ORNELLAIA BOLGHERI SUPERIORE 2017

94 Points | \$260

Though nicely oaky, this shows ample black cherry, plum and loam flavors to match the notes of vanilla and sweet spices. Harmonious, vibrant and long. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot.

## LUCE DELLA VITE TOSCANA LUCE 2017

92 Points | \$135

Ripe black currant and cassis fruit is shaded with violet notes and embraced by toasty oak accents. Richly textured and well-proportioned. Sangiovese and Merlot.

## COSTA TOSCANA WHITE GORGONA 2018

89 Points | \$150

A flash of vanilla shades the peach, apple and rosemary flavors of this white, which is balanced on the fleshy side, with a saline aftertaste.





**T**he Frescobaldi portfolio spans Tuscany's many strengths, from pure Sangiovese and pure Merlot to Bordeaux blends and more. The individuality of the estates is on display at all price points, delivering everything from fruity reds and whites for everyday enjoyment to world-class collectibles with decades of aging potential. The selection here represents Bruce Sanderson's recommended bottles.

**CHIANTI CLASSICO TENUTA  
PERANO RISERVA 2016**  
93 Points | \$33

Pure and saturated flavors of black currant, blackberry and violet are the hallmarks of this fresh red, which is harmonious and approachable albeit its solid structure.

**CHIANTI RUFINA  
NIPOZZANO RISERVA 2016**  
89 Points | \$20

This densely built and compact red reveals black currant, cherry, tar and tobacco flavors, showing terrific length and freshness.

**TOSCANA TENUTA  
CASTELGIOCONDO  
LAMAIONE 2015**  
91 Points | \$90

Pure cherry and blueberry fruit is framed by toasty oak in this sleek red, with grace notes of cedar, olive and wild herbs adding depth and complexity.

**CHIANTI CASTIGLIONI 2018**  
89 Points | \$14

Filled with rich dark cherry and plum fruit, this is balanced and charming, with accents of earth and iron adding detail on the finish.

**POMINO BENEFIZIO  
CASTELLO POMINO  
RISERVA 2017**  
90 Points | \$48

A vibrant, elegant style, this white relies on delicate floral, apple and lemon cake flavors, showing fine balance and length.

**ATTEM'S PINOT GRIGIO  
FRIULI 2018**  
87 Points | \$20

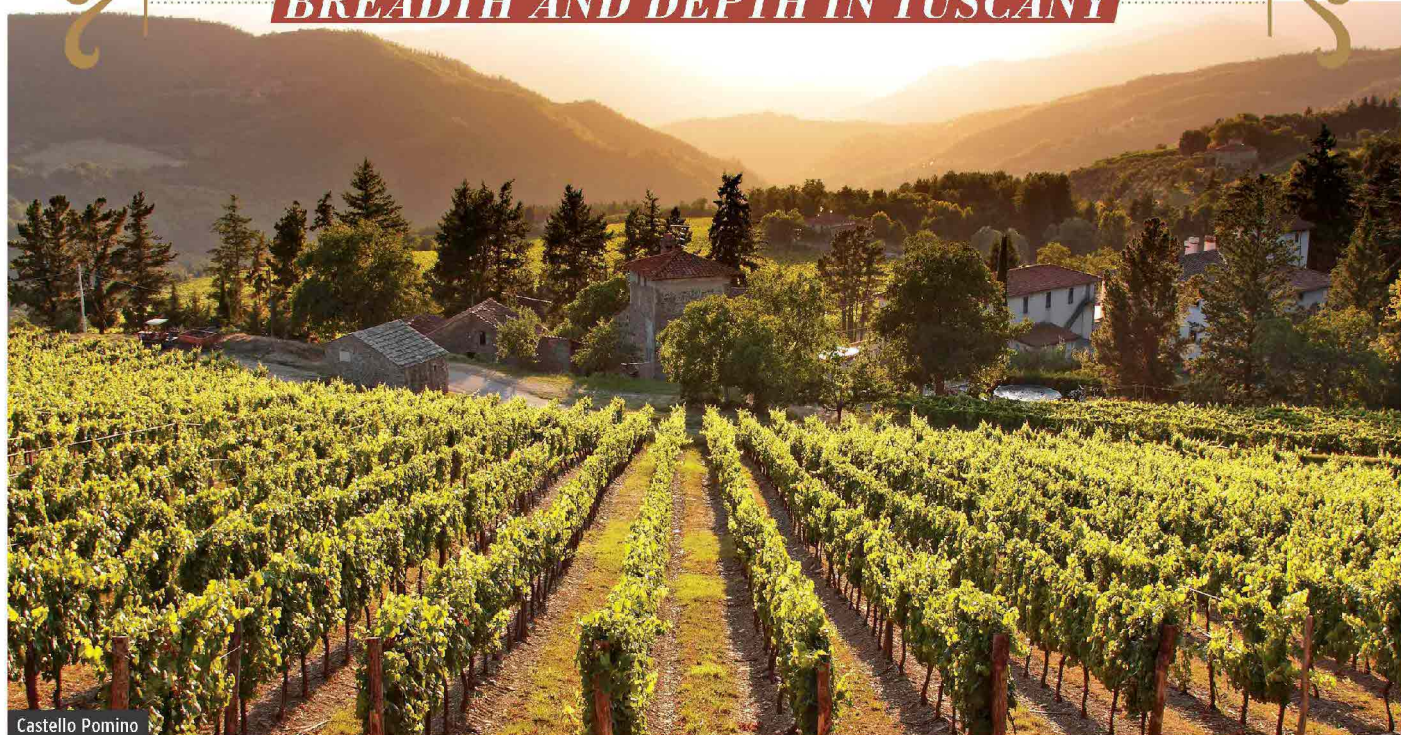
A light-bodied, fresh and easy-drinking white, with elderflower and ground ginger accents to the ripe pear and apple fruit.





## FRESCOBALDI ESTATES

BREADTH AND DEPTH IN TUSCANY



Castello Pomino

**F**rescobaldi wineries produce 788,000 cases annually on average. The properties include eight under the Marchesi de' Frescobaldi umbrella, plus four independent estates. Within that structure, the wineries profiled below are organized by year of founding or acquisition; scores and prices for recent releases are included. For Sanderson's selected recommended wines, see page 44.

**MARCHESI DE' FRESCOBALDI****Tenuta Castiglioni**

LOCATION: Chianti Colli Fiorentini | FOUNDED: 1056 | VINEYARD ACRES: 445  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 100,000 cases

The most historic estate in the family, this was the Frescobaldis' first venture into wine production, following their success in the banking and textile industries in Florence and abroad during the Renaissance.

Chianti Castiglioni 2018 | **89** | \$14

Toscana Tenuta di Castiglioni 2015 | **87** | \$25

**Castello Pomino**

LOCATION: Pomino | ACQUIRED: 1863 | VINEYARD ACRES: 270 |  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 50,000 cases

Despite its proximity to Florence, Pomino is a different world, with its quaint castle nestled in a pine forest. Its creator, Vittorio degli Albizzi, was an enologist who introduced French grape varieties and viticultural innovations to Tuscany. His sister married Angelo Frescobaldi in 1863, bringing Pomino, Nipozzano and Rèmole into the Frescobaldis' holdings after Vittorio's death.

Pomino Benefizio Castello Pomino Riserva 2017 | **90** | \$48

Pomino Red Castello Pomino 2016 | **87** | \$33

Pomino White Castello di Pomino 2018 | **87** | \$19

**Castello di Nipozzano**

LOCATION: Chianti Rufina | ACQUIRED: 1863 | VINEYARD ACRES: 600  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 120,000 cases

Nipozzano's Chianti Rufina Riserva is always a solid value, and a wine I have enjoyed since the 1980s. The Vecchie Viti ("old vines") bottling was introduced with the 2011 vintage. This estate came to the Frescobaldi family through the 1863 marriage of Leonia degli Albizzi to Angelo Frescobaldi.

Chianti Rufina Nipozzano Riserva 2016 | **89** | \$20

Chianti Rufina Nipozzano Vecchie Viti Riserva 2015 | **90** | \$33

Toscana Montesodi del Castello di Nipozzano 2016 | **90** | \$45

**Poggio a Rèmole**

LOCATION: Chianti | ACQUIRED: 1863 | VINEYARD ACRES: 375 |  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 240,000 cases

Rèmole is the lowest-priced brand in the portfolio, with IGT wines in the \$10 range. This estate came to the Frescobaldi family through the 1863 marriage of Leonia degli Albizzi to Angelo Frescobaldi.

Toscana Rèmole 2018 | **85** | \$9

Toscana White Rèmole 2018 | **87** | \$10

**Castelgiocondo**

LOCATION: Montalcino | ACQUIRED: 1989 | VINEYARD ACRES: 472  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 42,000 cases

This estate is surrounded by dense forest on the wilder, western side of the Montalcino zone. Initially developed in 1974 by Vittorio Frescobaldi for the French company Société Viticole Européenne, it was acquired by Marchese de' Frescobaldi in 1989. Some parcels of the Castelgiocondo vineyards are the source of Luce, a joint venture wine created with the Mondavi family in 1995.



Brunello di Montalcino Castelgiocondo 2015 | **93** | \$75  
Brunello di Montalcino Castelgiocondo Ripe al Convento Riserva 2014 | **90** | \$138  
Toscana Tenuta Castelgiocondo Lamaione 2015 | **91** | \$90

## Ammiraglia

LOCATION: Maremma | ACQUIRED: 1997 | VINEYARD ACRES: 395  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 40,000 cases

Land was purchased and vineyards planted for the production of Lucente, the second label of Luce, as part of that joint venture with the Mondavi family. However, production has recently shifted to a rosé focus, based on Syrah.

Morellino di Scansano Pietraregia Ammiraglia Riserva 2015 | **92** | \$35  
Cabernet Maremma Toscana Terre More Ammiraglia 2017 | **87** | \$20  
Vermentino Toscana Ammiraglia Massovivo 2018 | **87** | \$20

## Gorgona

LOCATION: Tuscan Archipelago, between Corsica and Livorno  
BEGINNING: 2012 | VINEYARD ACRES: 5.6 acres | AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 1,000 cases

This steep and ruggedly beautiful island is the only island penitentiary in Europe. It includes a working farm and vineyards. In 2012, Marchesi de' Frescobaldi was approached to oversee the viticulture and winemaking endeavor. The project became a personal passion of Lamberto Frescobaldi, whose mission there includes helping prepare inmates for life after incarceration.

Costa Toscana White Gorgona 2018 | **89** | \$150

## Tenuta Perano

LOCATION: Chianti Classico | ACQUIRED: 2017  
VINEYARD ACRES: 160 | AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 29,000 cases

Frescobaldi began managing this estate in 2014, then purchased it in 2017 as it was going through bankruptcy proceedings. Its high-altitude vineyards are in one contiguous site in the eastern part of the Gaiole commune of Chianti Classico.

Chianti Classico Tenuta Perano 2016 | **92** | \$25  
Chianti Classico Tenuta Perano Riserva 2016 | **93** | \$33  
Chianti Classico Tenuta Perano Rialzi Gran Selezione 2015 | **94** | \$60

## INDEPENDENT ESTATES

### Luce della Vite

LOCATION: Montalcino | FOUNDED: 1995 | VINEYARD ACRES: 210 |  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 39,000 cases

Sourced from the Castelgiocondo property, this brand began as a 1995 joint venture between the Frescobaldi family and the Robert Mondavi family of Napa Valley. Frescobaldi bought Mondavi's 50% stake in 2004.

Toscana Luce 2017 | **92** | \$135  
Toscana Lucente 2017 | **88** | \$30  
Brunello di Montalcino Luce 2015 | **94** | \$130

### Attems

LOCATION: Collio (Friuli-Venezia Giulia) | ACQUIRED: 2000  
VINEYARD ACRES: 99 acres | AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 49,000 cases

The only Frescobaldi project outside Tuscany, this Friuli estate was purchased in 2000. Four years ago, Frescobaldi bought another piece of fallow land in Friuli. During the vineyard development, unexploded bombs from WWI were discovered.

Pinot Grigio Friuli 2018 | **87** | \$20  
Pinot Grigio Friuli Ramato 2018 | **87** | \$20



Sauvignon Blanc Venezia-Giulia 2018 | **88** | \$58  
Ribolla Gialla Collio Trebes 2017 | **89** | \$58

## Masseto

LOCATION: Bolgheri | ACQUIRED: 2002 (50%); 2005 | VINEYARD ACRES: 27  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 2,600 cases

Initially bottled as a 100% Merlot from the Tenuta dell'Ornellaia estate in 1986, Masseto's first commercial release was the 1987 vintage. The vineyard sits on a layer of blue clay, unique to Bolgheri and Tuscany. In 2014, with the release of the 2011 vintage, Masseto and Ornellaia (see below) were positioned as separate estates. A new winery was completed in 2019.

Toscana 2017 | **95** | \$814  
Toscana Massetino 2018 | **92** | \$335

## Ornellaia

LOCATION: Bolgheri | ACQUIRED: 2002 (50%); 2005 | VINEYARD ACRES: 285  
AVERAGE PRODUCTION: 75,000 cases

One of Bolgheri's iconic estates, Tenuta dell'Ornellaia was founded by Lodovico Antinori in 1982. The Mondavi family became partners in 1999 and when Antinori sold his remaining shares in 2002, Mondavi invited Frescobaldi to become its 50/50 partner. Frescobaldi acquired Ornellaia outright in 2005.

Bolgheri Superiore 2017 | **94** | \$260  
Bolgheri Le Serre Nuove 2018 | **90** | \$80  
Toscana Le Volte 2018 | **88** | \$34  
Toscana White 2018 | **91** | \$260  
Toscana White Poggio alle Gazze 2018 | **90** | \$82