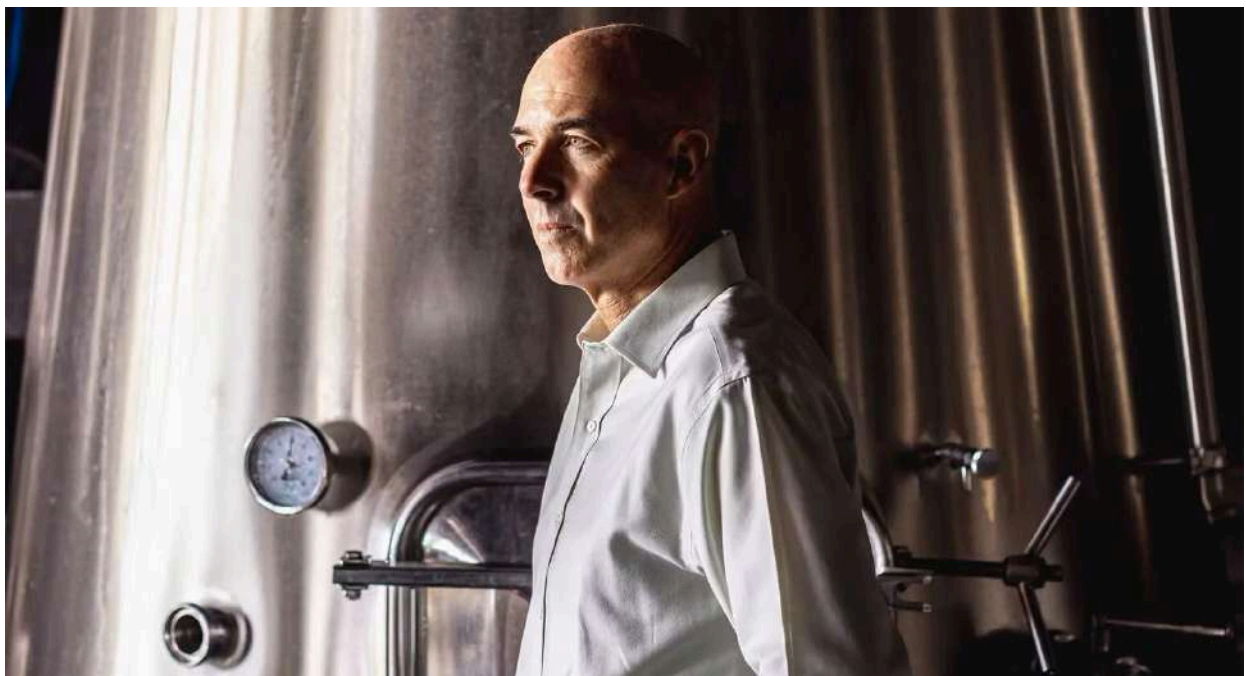




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CHANGE AT CERBAIONA: MATTHEW FIORETTI



You won't have seen any reviews for Cerbaiona since Matthew Fioretti took over the cult Montalcino address – and that's for good reason. We caught up with the notorious American taking charge, and leading change, at the estate

Matthew Fioretti is not everyone's cup of tea. The man at the helm of Cerbaiona doesn't mince his words – and he's got firm views on, well, I suspect pretty much everything. But he's also unwaveringly honest, with a frank approach that is enjoyably refreshing – and rather unusual in the fine wine arena. He's got a vision and story, one that he wants to tell, but it's not one that's been spun by a PR agency; it's his.

Fioretti has long been involved in the world of wine, running an import business in the US (Summa Vitis), which focused largely on Italian wine. He moved to Italy in 2004, and shut down the Summa Vitis operation in 2009 as he set his sights on making wine himself. After a few false starts, he heard that Diego Molinari – the longtime owner of Cerbaiona – was looking to retire. Along with a group of investors (the most significant of which is the American collector Gary Rieschel), Fioretti purchased the property in 2015, reportedly for €5.8 million.

Molinari was in his 80s and it was clear that – while the site itself was exceptional – the property was run down and needed work. As we reported a few years ago, he promptly embarked on a radical project to restore the property and unexpectedly decided to declassify the 2014 and 2015 vintages to Rosso di Montalcino, only releasing the first Fioretti-era Brunello in 2021, with the 2016 vintage – the first to be made entirely by the new team.



Matthew Fioretti (top of page) took over the cult Cerbaiona estate in 2015

Now, almost a decade later, he's starting to be able to realize his vision for the estate – as we discovered on a visit earlier this year, with problems that “aren't easy to solve”. The challenge, he explains, has been evolving from an “artisan” to an “atelier”. Under Molinari, the property developed a legendary reputation, but the operation was rudimentary – a traditional, family business, doing things the way they had always been done. Fioretti wants to bring the estate into the modern era, elevating the terroir with technical precision to craft wines that continue the Cerbaiona legacy. It is, he says, “a transition I wasn't expecting to make”, but one that he feels is essential to safeguard Cerbaiona's future.

The distinction between artisan and atelier is a nuanced one – but one that comes down to an emphasis on craft rather than art, with a commitment to consistency, for which precision and hygiene in the winery are key, as well as a high level of technical knowledge. He confesses that he had envisaged having a more hands-off approach in the winery, having imported a lot of natural wines in his previous career, but has rapidly realized that top-level winemaking is full of “necessary compromises” (diving into issues like the fault quercetin). As a craft, winemaking can't just be subject to the “whims of the producer”, as he suggests is the artisanal way. “I prefer to work more meticulously,” he explains.

The American talks at pace, flitting from TS Eliot and the concept of “the pure critic” to Albertoli and neoclassicism, in amongst technical detail about fining and filtering. The estate is closed to visitors, deliberately to avoid distraction from what Fioretti wants to be spending his time on – making wine. As he whizzes us round the winery, our heads spinning as we try to absorb every detail, he talks us through exactly how he's bringing new exactitude to the operation.



Some of the fledgling vines at Cerbaiona, where the entire site has been replanted over six years

The vineyards have all been replanted and a steep-sloped olive grove replaced with vines, all with selected rootstocks and clones sourced from France's Guillaume nursery, to give them the best possible raw material. Once seen as too labor-intensive to farm, he's convinced the ex-olive grove might just be the best site on the property. The rustic old stables and granary that acted as the cellar and winery have been carefully renovated, with water and drainage installed throughout, and the equipment all updated. Importantly, Fioretti has added a full in-house laboratory – something that is exceedingly rare for a property of this size, let alone Italy where the high-tech approach is far from the norm.

The fruit is now all chilled after harvest, de-stemmed and cold-soaked, using inert gas to protect the must. While he used upright wooden tanks for fermentation for his first five vintages, Fioretti switched to stainless steel to allow for better hygiene and temperature control (preferring a maximum 26°C), as well as allowing him to program them for automated punch-downs and pump-overs. He's started co-inoculating for primary and malolactic fermentation, meaning the wines go into barrel very clean – and can be sulfured right away.

These are tweaks, minor modernizations, but one of the most significant changes Fioretti is making is the time the wine spends in wood. While Molinari favored four-plus years in 500-litre tonneaux, Fioretti has gradually started bottling the wine

earlier and uses a combination of 350-litre barrels and 15-hectolitre casks. “Even two years [the appellation minimum] in wood is too long,” he says – before quickly acknowledging that such a view is far from accepted, and he cannot legally reduce it any further. The various consorzios may not like it, but it’s a view that is increasingly common among younger producers in Italy, who are frustrated by minimum oak-aging requirements and their contrast with the wines today’s consumers want to drink. As Fioretti says, however, “The notion of wood is very delicate.” And while he’d rather be able to age his wine in other vessels during their first two years of life, he acknowledges that *élevage* in oak has a beneficial impact on the chemistry of wine – aiding stability.



In the cellar at Cerbaiona

With such a beloved wine, it might seem controversial to change anything – especially the way it’s made, but that hasn’t stopped Fioretti. Looking back at older vintages from the estate, even the legendary 100-point 2010, he is sometimes underwhelmed, feeling that there’s much greater potential. Part of his plan to reflect that potential is bottling earlier, allowing the fruit to shine through and give the wine better balance – something he feels is key for aging potential. He’s also keen to make sure the wine is moderate in alcohol with maximum 14 or 14.2%, even in the warmest years. And most importantly, he says, good wine has to be delicious. Having tasted the 2019 and 2021 with Fioretti – the results so far really are. There’s a

vibrancy and purity that makes them irresistible, while not sacrificing the structure that will allow these wines to go the distance.

Alongside Cerbaiona, Fioretti has also created the M.L. Fioretti label, one he describes as “part garage, part petit château”. He was keen to explore indigenous grapes, which “are part of the family – but not all thoroughbreds”, as well as plots of Bordeaux varietals (grapes with undeniable pedigree) – provided they’re planted in the right place. The Casaglia Colorino is bright and spicy, while the San Vito (sadly the last vintage of which is 2021) is a beautifully lush and vibrant Merlot. These are fascinating wines that allow Fioretti to experiment more – outside the constrictions of the Brunello di Montalcino appellation.

Controversially, Fioretti has declared Cerbaiona a “No Scores Zone”, echoing the sentiment of Teobaldo Cappellano that numerical ratings are divisive, at best – and don’t do justice to the craft of winemaking. In his notes on the 2018 vintage, Fioretti wrote: “This is another vintage for the connoisseur, that true lover of wine and the vine. So be it if the ‘collector’ misses out.” Feathers might be ruffled by such remarks, but the motivation here is clear: an earnest passion for wine. It’s something that shines through in our conversation – and in the wines he’s making. You won’t find ratings online for new vintages of Cerbaiona, but one thing’s for sure: you’ll want them in your cellar.

– *Written by Sophie Thorpe*

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Categories: Collecting, Italy, Piedmont By Vinfolio Editor July 26, 2024



Author: Vinfolio Editor

Brunello di Montalcino 2020: vintage overview

The epitome of fine Sangiovese, Brunello di Montalcino has rapidly become a staple for collectors. As the latest vintage is released, Sophie Thorpe caught up with some of the region's top producers to dive into the 2020 growing season and the wines it produced

26th February 2025



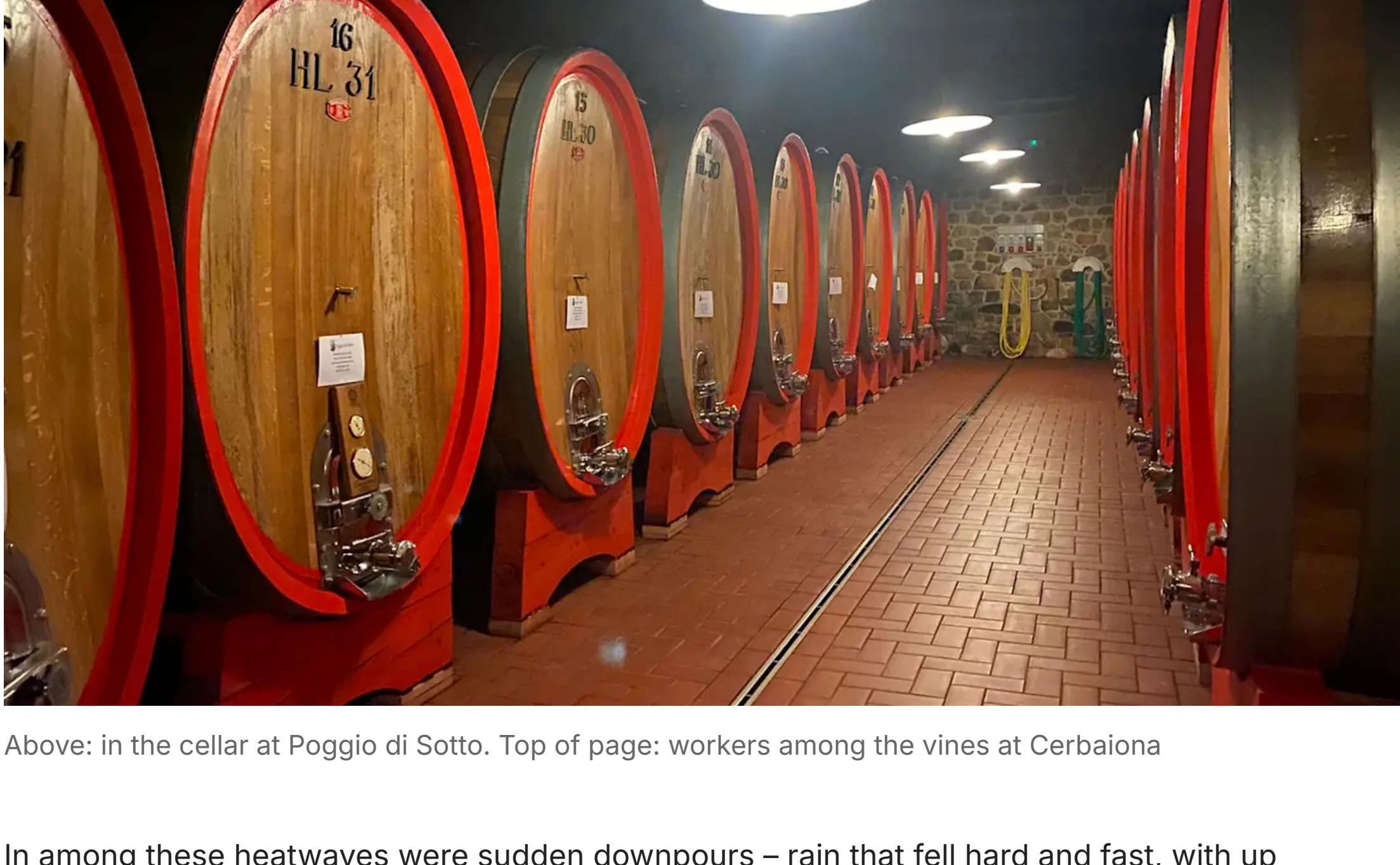
After [the elegance of 2018](#) and [the power of 2019](#), the 2020 vintage in [Montalcino](#) had a lot to live up to.

As [Cerbaiona's Matthew Fioretti](#) told me, "On paper, it looks like a good vintage." Statistically speaking, the median temperature was good, the rainfall plentiful without being excessive – it looks perfect. But the year was much trickier than those numbers suggest, and one that tested producers.

For [Castiglion del Bosco's](#) Cecilia Leoneschi, it was the first vintage where she really felt the effects of climate change in Montalcino – with 64 days without a drop of water over the summer, something she'd never seen before. It was, she emphasised, a vintage that varied significantly across the appellation – especially between lower and higher altitudes – as was reinforced by our conversations about the year.

Nicola Vaglini ([Pieve Santa Restituta](#)) emphasised how important rain in the preceding winter was, replenishing water reserves, which were topped up by additional spring showers. The season started with even budbreak in temperate conditions. Frost hit in late March – striking northern parts of the region most acutely (Vaglini reported losing 15% in some sites), although most escaped unscathed.

The season continued, satisfyingly uneventful, until July, when the weather shifted. It became very warm, with spikes of heat – reaching 38 and even 40°C. In these brief but powerful heatwaves, the vines shut down and development stalled. Fioretti noted how he saw base leaves drop, meaning the grapes were no longer shielded from the full force of the sun. Despite the heat, Poggio di Sotto's Leonardo Berti commented how relieved he was that temperatures didn't hit over 40-41°C, as has now become relatively normal in Castelnuovo dell'Abate – a mark of the changing climate.



Above: in the cellar at Poggio di Sotto. Top of page: workers among the vines at Cerbaiona

In among these heatwaves were sudden downpours – rain that fell hard and fast, with up to 100mm falling over three hours, arriving too quickly for the soils to absorb meaningfully, and causing flooding issues (at [Cerbaiona](#), they were left with 20cm of water in one of their cellars). This is one of the reasons why, Fioretti argues, the year's statistics are so misleading. Although there was technically an average volume of rainfall, the conditions meant that it was – at Cerbaiona – effectively a drought year, because so little made it to the vines' roots.

Leoneschi explained how at Castiglion del Bosco, they are increasingly using cover crops to help retain water in the vineyard. They generally have less rain – shielded by Mount Amiata on one side and coastal winds coming from the opposite direction – but didn't see major water stress in 2020. At Poggio di Sotto, Leonardo Berti commented that 2020 provided just the right quantity and quality of rain, falling at times that didn't disrupt work in the vineyard.

The weather cooled off in late August, with rain falling at the end of the month. At [Poggio di Sotto](#), they've been using a clay spray (zeolite) for several years – spraying the canopy to help protect the leaves against rain in the run-up to harvest, something Berti noted was particularly helpful in 2020. Lower-altitude sites saw more rain versus those higher up the region's slopes. Cecilia Leoneschi explained how the diurnal shift in the final stage of the growing season was key to the vintage for her, allowing the fruit to ripen fully.

Mid-September saw heavier rain – and this provides a divide in terms of harvest dates, with some choosing to pick before and others after. At Poggio di Sotto, where harvest is always early, they started bringing fruit in around 4th September – relatively late for them, Berti explained, as the cooler August weather had slowed ripening by around a week.

Nicola Vaglini reported a wave of warmer weather from 5th to 15th September, with rapid sugar accumulation in the grapes, and they started to harvest on 15th. At both Cerbaiona and Castiglion del Bosco, the harvest commenced on 20th September, while some producers – such as [Casanova di Neri](#) – held out even longer.

Cerbaiona's Fioretti emphasised how important it was to manage yields in 2020, with it being all too easy to over-crop and have green tannins. Most producers agreed that multiple passes were essential this year. At Castiglion del Bosco, Leoneschi explained how even within the same plot they were harvesting vines up to 12 days apart – reflecting the stress of the season.

By early October, all the fruit was in the winery, and most producers said sorting was key – whether by hand or machine, to remove any sunburnt or shrivelled grapes, especially those that also may not have ripened fully.

The risk was potentially high alcohol and hard tannins, from the heat of the year. Extraction was a focus of winemakers' efforts in the winery – being careful not to overwork the must. At Cerbaiona, Fioretti emphasised how a three-day cold soak helped bring out "the exuberance of the fruit", and he kept the fermentation at a cool maximum of 26°C, moving it as little as possible, and taking it off the skins as soon as it was dry (after just seven to 10 days).

By contrast, Leonardo Berti opted for a long but gentle extraction – allowing the wine to stay on its skins for 50-55 days, only wetting the cap as needed during that period; an opposite approach to 2019 where he could pump over as much as he wanted, such was the phenolic ripeness. At Castiglion del Bosco, Leoneschi noted how she used bâtonnage to build complexity (not structure), stirring the fine lees after malolactic to create a fine and elegant, but not full wine.



Casanova di Neri under blue skies

For Berti (Poggio di Sotto), he kept their 2020 Brunello in cask for three years (the norm for them, two years is the legal minimum), while a vintage like 2019 spent an additional 10 months in wood. Many producers seemed to stick to the minimum 24 months in oak, wanting to capture the wines' fruit and freshness as much as possible. Some feel that even that is too long – a sentiment echoed in other parts of Italy when it comes to cask ageing (such as Barolo), with producers suggesting that these minimum requirements are no longer compatible with the climate and style of wines being produced today.

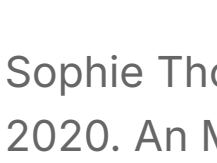
Despite the heat, the 2020s seem to have surprised producers – offering more freshness than they might have expected. It is clear that the best are open and approachable wines, with plenty of fruit and freshness – although this isn't consistent across the region.

For Fioretti, the vintage doesn't quite reach greatness – the phenolics limiting it, not quite having the finesse of the best years. That said, the resulting wine is open and fruit-forward, with moderate, sweet tannins, giving great pleasure already; it is, as he says, "good to go" – a modest appraisal of [a fantastic wine this year](#).

Berti at Poggio di Sotto describes 2020 as "a compromise between the elegance of 2018 and the power of 2019" – and more approachable than either. He thinks perhaps it's closest to [the legendary 2016](#), not quite as structured, but with more elegance and immediacy. Both Vaglini and Giacomo Neri (Casanova di Neri) suggested the vintage is a blend of 2015 and 2016, with finesse, elegance and expressive bouquets, as well as good acidity. Leoneschi echoed this, emphasising the precision and density of aromatics, but added that 2020 is a particularly terroir-driven year – one where site speaks louder than the producer.

The 2020 vintage doesn't reach the absolute heights of a year like 2016, and it's important to be selective. The best wines, however, have an immediate charm and elegance that – as Fioretti said – should not be underestimated. These are still serious wines. Giacomo Neri perhaps put it best, describing 2020 as "an underdog vintage" – one that is set to surprise people over the next two decades.

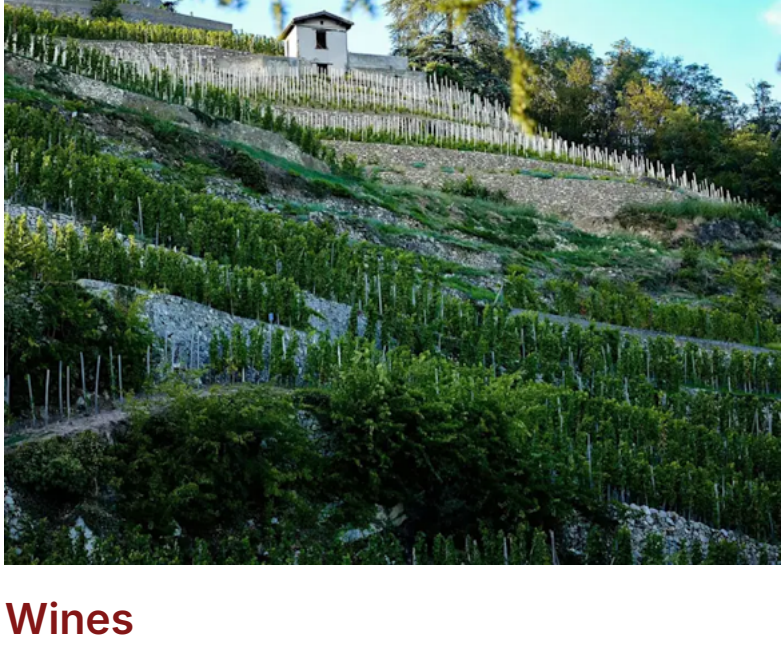
[Explore all current 2020 Brunello di Montalcino listings or read more about Italy](#)



Sophie Thorpe

Sophie Thorpe joined FINE+RARE in 2020. An MW student, she's been short-listed for the Louis Roederer Emerging Wine Writer Award twice, featured on jancisrobinson.com and won the 2021 Guild of Food Writers Drinks Writing Award.

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CERBAIONA

LE RÊVE TOSCAN DE MATTHEW FIORETTI

Petite par la taille mais grande par sa renommée au sein du mythique Brunello di Montalcino, elle a longtemps produit des vins mémorables, preuve de son grand terroir, mais irréguliers, preuve d'une viticulture pas forcément réfléchie. Avec Matthew Fioretti, Cerbaiona entame sa mue au fil de travaux titanesques.

PAR JÉRÉMY CUKIERMAN MW
PHOTOS LEIF CARLSSON

La colline de Montalcino, jadis recouverte de forêts de chênes verts, incarne aujourd'hui toute la grandeur et la noblesse de la Toscane viticole. La bourgade éponyme nichée à 567 mètres d'altitude et coiffée par sa forteresse médiévale domine la plaine et veille sur les vignobles qui enfantent le cru le plus célèbre de la région. Si Montalcino est mentionnée pour la première fois dans les livres d'histoire en 814 lorsque Louis le Pieux, fils de Charlemagne, cède la colline et les terres environnantes à l'abbaye de Sant'Antimo, il faudra attendre le ^{xv}^e siècle pour que les vins du secteur suscitent l'attention des gourmets. Les oliviers, les châtaigniers et les champs de sangiovese grosso sont depuis lors venus recouvrir les paysages accidentés de la *denominazione di origine controllata et*

garantita (DOCG) la plus prestigieuse de Toscane. Une colline qui cache sur ses pentes des trésors de vignobles, reclus, à l'abri des regards. L'Azienda Agricola Cerbaiona est l'un des plus beaux symboles de cette noblesse, de ce mystère toscan, de cette mystique du grand terroir isolé. Regardant Pienza et le mont Amiata, orienté est, ce vignoble miniature de moins de 3 hectares est dominé par un vieux bâtiment datant de 1600, assis sur des fondations du ^{xiv}^e siècle. Une chapelle, la brique rouge toscane, le sangiovese grosso et les sols de galestro – formation géologique schisto-argileuse typique de la Toscane –, voilà un environnement privilégié qui donne naissance à des brunellos di Montalcino intenses et profonds. Cerbaiona est ici un nom qui résonne, un des sommets de l'appellation.





UNE CHAPELLE, LA BRIQUE ROUGE TOSCANE, LE SANGIOVESE GROSSO, LES SOLS DE GALESTRO : SUR LA COLLINE DE MONTALCINO, CERBAIONA ENVOÛTE.

De nombreux écrits attestent de l'implantation de vignes et de la qualité du site, bien avant la reconnaissance de la DOC Brunello en 1968. Le véritable envol de Cerbaiona n'a pourtant démarré qu'en 1977 lorsque Diego Molinari, pilote de ligne pour Alitalia et passionné de vin, décide de changer de vie et de racheter pour une somme dérisoire cette petite parcelle pentue, plantée de vigne, faisant face au levant à 350 mètres d'altitude. À l'époque, il y a moins de 30 producteurs de brunello di Montalcino. Diego Molinari, amoureux des grands bourgognes, s'attache à élaborer à Cerbaiona des vins élégants et fins pour son plaisir et bientôt celui de quelques clients inconditionnels. Il fait appel à un des maîtres du sangiovese, le célèbre Giulio Gambelli, pour apprendre son nouveau métier. Un conseiller de choix et pourtant l'approche de la viticulture de Diego Molinari reste pour le moins "romantique". Le matériel végétal est choisi sans trop de repères, la densité de

plantation définie un peu au hasard. La période est très compliquée pour la viticulture en Toscane. La loi de 1964 a interdit les contrats de *mezzadria* (métayage), système d'exploitation viticole jusqu'alors privilégié dans les domaines italiens. La viticulture rapporte peu et n'intéresse quasiment plus personne. La main-d'œuvre est rare et les hommes quittent les campagnes pour travailler dans les villes et les usines.

Diego Molinari, de son côté, se retrouve les manches : la greffe prend et les galestros de Cerbaiona font rapidement des merveilles. La chimie et les levures sélectionnées sont bannies de son vignoble de poche et les vins parlent rapidement, et avec éloquence. Des vins profonds et honnêtes qui reflètent tant le millésime que la philosophie poétique et hédoniste de leur producteur. Une mystérieuse alchimie qui oublie parfois la technique et ne donne pas toujours satisfaction mais résulte pourtant souvent de vins mémorables, aériens,

subtils, qui jouent plus sur le toucher que sur la chair, à l'instar de ces bourgognes tant appréciés par Molinari. Lorsque les éléments collaborent, la magie opère. Les années passent et la réputation de Brunello di Montalcino et de Cerbaiona se confirment. En 1980, la DOC Brunello di Montalcino devient DOCG tandis que le nombre de producteurs se multiplie dans l'appellation. Ils seront plus de 200 pour célébrer le nouveau millénaire. Malgré cela, Cerbaiona conserve un statut à part, celui d'un vin adulé. Les clients vouent un véritable culte à ce nectar toscan. Même le scandale du "Brunellogate", qui impliquera en 2008 des producteurs de l'appellation peu inspirés – ayant frauduleusement assemblé le sangiovese à des cépages bordelais –, n'écornera pas la réputation du mythique domaine de Diego Molinari.

Depuis l'automne 2015, Cerbaiona vit un nouveau départ. Malgré les fondations, les racines et l'histoire, le vignoble



De grands travaux sont à l'œuvre, au vignoble mais aussi sur les bâtiments historiques, préservés mais optimisés.



LA DÉGUSTATION | JÉRÉMY CUKIERMAN MW

Brunello di Montalcino 2016 Cerbaiona

Un millésime très équilibré. Nez floral et acidulé, sur la violette, la cerise griotte et le balsamique. Bouche d’une finesse superlative. Grand équilibre acidité-alcool-tanins. Extraction très fine. Finale structurée, mais longue, avec des tanins fins, crayeux, mûrs et enveloppants. Le style très élégant et précis est là. Un bébé qui doit s’assagir mais qui deviendra très grand.

Rosso di Montalcino 2014 Cerbaiona

Pas de brunello di Montalcino produit sur cette année très humide et compliquée. Un millésime de transition guidé d’abord par Diego Molinari puis par Matthew Fioretti. Nez très frais et à nouveau très floral, sur la pivoine, la rose, la framboise. Pointe végétale, marqueur du millésime, mais sans pour autant durcir le vin. En bouche, l’attaque est tendre, la texture soyeuse puis la tension prend le dessus. Le vin est étiré, droit, le grain de tanin est précis et fin. Un grand 2014 dans ce contexte climatologique délicat, issu d’une sélection drastique. S’il n’a pas la profondeur des grandes années, il compense par son charme et son élégance.

Brunello di Montalcino 2012 Cerbaiona

Millésime classé excellent par le consortium de la DOCG, dans un registre plus charnu, plus mûr et moins tendu que le grand 2010. Vin commercialisé début 2016 comme l’exige le cahier des charges de l’appellation. Nez d’un grand classicisme toscan : cerise griotte,

balsamique, herbe coupée, garrigue, profond et pourtant aérien. Bouche à l’unisson, intense, multidimensionnelle, sur les fruits acidulés, la noblesse végétale, la réglisse. Les tanins sont marqués mais gras et épais, ce qui confère au vin une certaine rondeur. Vin profond, dense et tellement digeste. Un brunello noble et généreux.

Brunello di Montalcino 2005 Cerbaiona

Une très belle saison végétative clôturée par des pluies lors des vendanges. Un millésime qui aurait pu être exceptionnel sans ces précipitations. Robe pâle et grenat. Un style résolument classique qui s’exprime sur le cuir, la cerise noire et le balsamique. Le tertiaire commence à se livrer. Il y a de l’acidité volatile, mais elle est intégrée et apporte même de la complexité. Bouche sur le sous-bois et la prune. Subtiles notes végétales. Malgré ses 12 ans, il semble si jeune. Beaucoup de fraîcheur en finale. Un très beau Cerbaiona.

Brunello di Montalcino 1995 Cerbaiona

Très beau millésime de l’époque, plutôt ferme dans sa jeunesse. Robe claire aux contours orangés. Cette fois nous sommes passés sur le tertiaire. Vin très tellurique sur la truffe, le sous-bois, le cuir. L’acidité volatile est à nouveau là, mais elle est fondue et ne durcit pas le vin. La bouche est encore très énergique alors que le vin a plus de 20 ans. La qualité du vignoble parle. Les tanins sont encore bien présents, mûrs et nobles. Très grande longueur. Un glorieux Cerbaiona d’une grande complexité qui n’a pas pris une ride.

CERBAIONA



VIGNOBLE REPLANTÉ, TERRASSEMENT TITANESQUE, CONVERSION EN BIO : À LA MAGIE DU TERROIR ON AJOUTE PROFESSIONNALISME ET MÉTHODOLOGIE.

est en train de faire sa mue, de renaître. Diego Molinari, le propriétaire historique, a tiré sa révérence, vendu son petit vignoble, laissé place à de nouveaux guides et l’ambition n’est pas en reste. Cerbaiona a déjà prouvé son incomparable potentiel, pour autant ce n’est que le début de la route et le plus grand reste à venir. C’est la conviction de Matthew Fioretti, qui préside désormais à la destinée du domaine toscan. Directeur technique, il considère son rôle à Cerbaiona comme une véritable mission d’excellence. Fils d’immigré italien installé aux États-Unis, il a débuté son parcours viticole dans la Sonoma, avant de s’orienter très vite vers son pays d’origine. D’abord importateur de vins italiens outre-Atlantique, il reviendra vers ses racines transalpines en 2010 pour travailler à Biondi Santi, domaine fondateur de Montalcino. En 2015, lorsque Diego Molinari, âgé de 84 ans, décide de céder sa propriété, il acquiert Cerbaiona avec un groupe d’investisseurs : “L’Italie n’est évi-

demment pas une coïncidence, ce sont mes racines. Cerbaiona est un endroit très spécial, une opportunité évidente de faire quelque chose de grand. Diego Molinari a produit ici des vins magnifiques mais nous voulons continuer à avancer. Restructurer dans un endroit dont le potentiel a été prouvé est évidemment une sécurité. Il faut protéger ce joyau mais ça ne doit pas être la seule finalité : le plus important, c’est de le sublimer, et cela passe par le travail.”

Matthew entreprend donc immédiatement de grands travaux. La volonté de transmettre de l’émotion est toujours là mais agrémentée dorénavant d’un extrême professionnalisme. Il décide tout d’abord de replanter progressivement le vignoble, sévèrement touché dans certains secteurs par l’esca, et d’étendre les plantations au secteur le plus pentu et le plus élevé qui n’était pas exploité jusqu’alors malgré une exposition et une géologie particulièrement propices. “Nous avons aussi choisi un nouveau matériel végétal, plus qualitatif, sélectionné par la

pépinière Guillaume, résultat d’un long travail initié par Paolo di Marchi [vigneron à Isole e Olena, ndlr]. Nous avons augmenté sensiblement la densité de plantation et changé le système de taille. Les plaies de taille étaient trop importantes et la taille trop proche des bois anciens. Nous laissons aujourd’hui mieux circuler la sève, ce qui permet de lutter contre l’esca.” De nouvelles plantations, une approche de la taille plus pointue et un travail de terrassement titanesque, le bas de la côte étant composé d’une cuvette qui favorise les maladies cryptogamiques : “Le bas du vignoble accumulait trop d’eau et nous avions donc accentué la pente, ajouté des drains sous le sol et construit un grand mur de pierre pour soutenir l’ensemble.” Enfin Cerbaiona entame également sa conversion en bio dès la fin de l’année 2015.

Il s’agit d’apporter de la méthodologie à une magie déjà existante : “Cerbaiona est un tout petit domaine et chaque détail compte pour produire de grands vins. Ce



Le style historique sera respecté, notamment l'élevage en botte traditionnels en bois slavonien.

CERBAIONA



« MÊME LES TERROIRS LES PLUS SPÉCIAUX, LES TERRES PUISSANTES ONT BESOIN D'ÊTRE ENTENDUES, COMPRISES ET TRAVAILLÉES COMME IL SE DOIT. »

n'est pas parce que l'exploitation a déjà produit des brunellos di Montalcino de classe mondiale qu'il ne faut pas remettre des choses en question et avancer. Il y a des terroirs très spéciaux, certes, mais ces terres puissantes ont besoin d'être entendues, comprises et travaillées comme il se doit. Un endroit magique ne veut pas dire qu'il faut rester statique. L'exigence érigée en leitmotiv et un regard lucide sur les méfaits du succès d'une appellation grandissante. *"Ce que nous observons, à Montalcino, c'est que le succès a aussi de mauvais côtés. Il empêche parfois de se donner autant de mal que nécessaire. Pourquoi faire plus lorsque le succès est déjà là ? Pourquoi changer si c'est gagné d'avance ? Je pense pour ma part qu'il faut continuer à se remettre en cause sans cesse. Les vins les plus fascinants peuvent être produits avec une philosophie traditionnelle mais il faut aussi de la précision. Rien ne remplace le travail."* Matthew habite déjà à Montalcino et s'installera bientôt à Cerbaiona lorsque les travaux seront achevés. Il veut être sur

place en permanence afin de ne rien laisser au hasard et a décidé de s'entourer de viticulteurs aguerris, notamment Riccardo Bigi, qui travaillait auparavant aux côtés du non moins célèbre Gianfranco Soldera du domaine Case Basse. Un transfuge qui ne cache pas son enthousiasme : *"C'est un moment de reconstruction intense, mais nous travaillons dans la sérénité. Après Case Basse je voulais continuer à exercer dans un vignoble de très haut niveau. Ici, nous allons maintenir la réputation et aller encore plus loin."*

Les travaux ne concernent pas seulement le vignoble. Matthew a décidé de reconstruire la bâtisse historique et le chai : *"Le stockage des vins était un problème. Ils étaient conservés dans la chapelle : c'était charmant, certes, mais avec très peu d'inertie thermique. Nous allons donc nous doter d'une cave adaptée."* Pour autant, point de matériaux modernes qui dénatureraient le lieu, les murs seront en galestro ou composés de blocs calcaires de la région. Au niveau vinification, le style

historique très élégant est respecté : *"Je fais un foulage très léger pour avoir quelques baies intactes et un peu d'intracellulaire. Cela amène encore plus de floral au style final. L'extraction est ensuite très douce, avec peu de remontages et de pigeages pour affiner les tanins du sangiovese."* S'ensuit un long élevage sans aucun bois neuf, uniquement dans les botte traditionnels en bois slavonien. Pour finir, seuls les très grands millésimes porteront le sceau de la DOCG. Toute année qui n'atteint pas le niveau d'excellence requis est déclassée en rosso di Montalcino. *"Nous avons décidé de ne pas faire de brunello en 2014, année trop humide, puis en 2015, année trop chaude à nos yeux. Ici, à Cerbaiona, nous ne pouvons pas transiger avec l'excellence."*

Les diamants sont éternels. Cerbaiona continue de donner au sangiovese grosso son éclat sans pareil. La minutie et les éléments naturels se sont désormais alliés pour le meilleur, voire l'exceptionnel, année après année. ❖

(Bon à savoir, page 217)

THE COLLECTION

The Italy Report 2023

Following a summer spent tasting her way through Italy's key fine wine regions, Sarah Heller MW presents the Italy Report 2023 - including tasting notes and scores for over 500 of the latest wine releases

WORDS BY SARAH HELLER MW
11 OCTOBER 2023



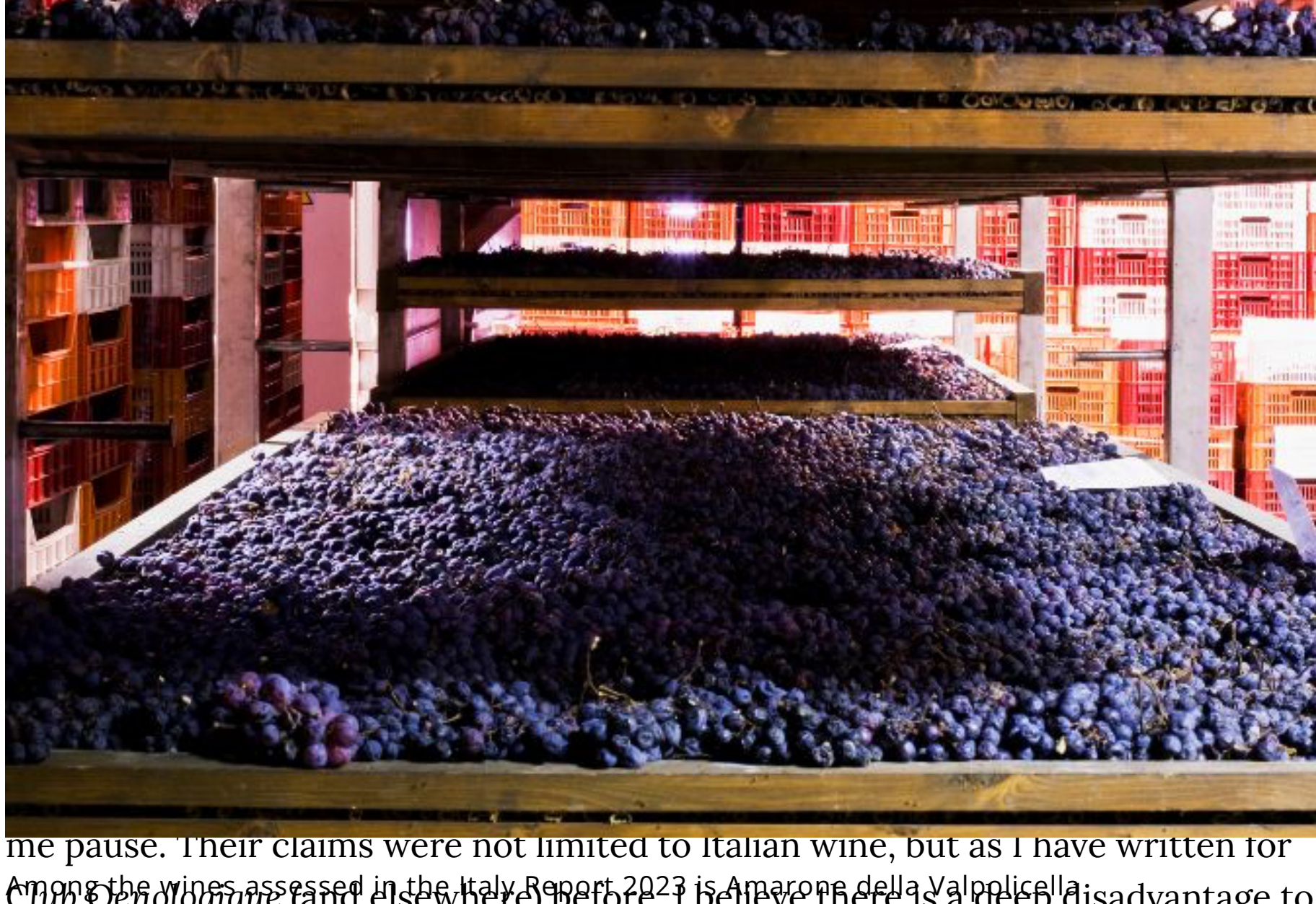
THE COLLECTION

SHARE



The tale of collectable Italian wine's meteoric ascent over the past decade has been repeated often enough that the consensus is that Italy has (finally) arrived. When *Club Oenologique* invited me to produce **The Italy Report 2023**, highlighting wines with the greatest relevance (or at least potential) for collectors from Italy's fine wine regions, I was thrilled for the opportunity to – I hoped – do justice to the wines that have been my focus since I started out in wine.

The next few months, though, came with a creeping sense of trepidation, as I had to acknowledge the deep ambivalence that has always surrounded wine assessment in Italy, particularly using numeric scores. This hit home as we were collecting samples for the very first report, on Brunello di Montalcino, when I stumbled across a Letter to Journalists from Matthew Fioretti of Cerbaiona, a rising regional superstar, titled 'Cerbaiona: A No Points Zone'. In addition to the author's views on the 100pt scale's inappropriateness for assessing wine ('the meaning of these numbers – what the number actually refers to – is completely vague and imprecise'), it contained similar views to those expressed by legendary Barolo traditionalist Teobaldo Cappellano back in 1983, that numerical rankings are divisive and the 'making of dogma by the slothful.'



me pause. Their claims were not limited to Italian wine, but as I have written for *Club Oenologique* since then, I believe there is a clear and a deep disadvantage to Italian wine when judged according to international standards. This approach mostly evolved out of Anglo-French wine culture then spread through the global wine trade. Historically, even Italy's most prestigious wines were mainly enjoyed by local or, at most, regional elites and thus the grapes and styles largely developed outside the systems that produced the wine world's shared aesthetic values.

This phenomenon is arguably exacerbated by the use of a yardstick as implicitly objective and universal as the 100pt scale. While great Napa Cab even Rioja is reasonably compared with Bordeaux, on which both were historically modelled, a great Barolo and great Burgundy are simply trying to do different things, even if they are superficially similar. I have largely sidestepped the 100pt scale in my writing, viewing myself foremost as an educator, especially through my role at the Vinality International Academy, a program with the explicit goal of presenting Italian wine in its full historical, anthropological and even biological context.

I've revisited the traits characteristic of the region and grapes and tried to celebrate wines that successfully interpret these

However, there are more and less sensitive ways to apply any system of assessment and I believe providing context can go a significant way towards what Fioretti calls 'a softer and more inquisitive form of journalism and criticism.' In each of my reports, I've revisited the traits characteristic of the region and grapes and tried to celebrate wines that – in my subjective view – successfully interpret these, rather than adhering to some universal model of quality.

The assessment process for the Italy Report 2023 had to reflect this. Though I'm a firm believer in blind tasting for minimising bias, it has limitations for assessing how well a wine expresses its producer's intentions or site characteristics. Given the acknowledged importance of site specificity for the quality of Barolo and Barbaresco especially, and increasingly for Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino too (somewhat less for Amarone, though this is also changing), I've tried to combine the 'raw' quality assessment of blind tasting with a more context-conscious judgment.

For each report, the wines were first assessed blind (except in Barolo and Barbaresco, where this was not available) then a further assessment was made with complete information about the producer, winemaking and site to hand. For the latter, resources published by Alessandro Masnaghetti's Enogea as well as the relevant Consorzi have been invaluable for gaining a granular understanding of the geological and topographical nuances, particularly in Barolo, Barbaresco and Chianti Classico, where Masnaghetti gave me a personal tour. Many specific site descriptions are made in reference to those maps. Meanwhile, some wines were tasted at the estates – a more holistic approach, but more open to bias – and this has been noted in the reports.



rather than looking at the scores alone. I have tried to pack them with the same context and in front of me when I made my second assessment, in the hopes that this will lead to a deeper understanding of the wines and hunger to learn more. I have also tried to be as clear as possible about my own preferences, acknowledging well-made wines even when they don't fit my taste, but saving my highest praise for the wines that do.

To lay my cards on the table, these preferences are generally for more structure than richness; transparency and definition rather than power and concentration. This can translate as flavours unique to a particular variety or place, even when from a purely hedonic standpoint they might be less appealing than rich fruit or polished oak. These are, unsurprisingly, values I developed while focusing from the start of my career on the great wines of Italy. I hope to present these wines in their best light and, hopefully, come closer to what Fioretti says a wine should do: 'instil wonder and curiosity – and remain free of hubris.'

Find the results from The Italy Report 2023 at the links below, presented via each individual region (and featuring only wines scoring 90 points and above). Tasting notes and scores are available to all registered users of The Collection, the online home of our premium wine and spirits content. To register for free, [click here](#).

The Brunello di Montalcino Report 2023

The Chianti Classico Report 2023

The Barolo and Barbaresco Report 2023

The Amarone della Valpolicella Report 2023

TAGS:
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La visione di Matthew per Cerbaiona

di Stefania Fava | 3 Aprile 2024

Californiano innamorato dell'Italia, Matthew Lawrence Fioretti ha portato nel podere a Montalcino passione e unicità. Tra garagismo e petit château, le etichette sono distribuite da Pellegrini.

Matthew Lawrence Fioretti ha radunato nel 2015 un gruppo di investitori per poter acquistare questo storico podere a Montalcino – precedentemente appartenuta a Diego Molinari – guidando poi l'azienda e occupandosi principalmente dei vigneti e dei vini.

Con l'annata 1981, **Cerbaiona** si solidifica come un riferimento molto importante per il Brunello di Montalcino, acquisendo sempre più fama a livello anche internazionale. Oggi le etichette dell'azienda montalcinese sono nell'importante portafoglio di Pellegrini SpA.



Matthew Lawrence Fioretti, anima di Cerbaiona

MATTHEW E LA SUA VISIONE

Matthew arriva dalla California, precisamente da Palo Alto, con la passione del vino già come importante bagaglio acquisito.

Il nonno italiano e un sentimento per l'Italia (non solo parentale ma anche culturale) lo spingono a varcare i confini e a trasferirsi in Toscana, dove affronta importanti esperienze lavorative in aziende vitivinicole di alto livello.

Poi nel 2015 il grande passo, ovvero l'acquisizione di Cerbaiona. Un podere pieno di storia e di fascino, incastonato tra il monte Amiata e Pienza, vive nel silenzio di un territorio molto vocato, con terreni preziosi, a 400 metri sul livello del mare.

DA INVESTITORE A VITICOLTORE

Per Fioretti, **Cerbaiona** è comunque lontana dalla perfezione che lui immaginava e una volta al comando, sente il bisogno di dare una svolta trasformando la viticoltura e la prassi enologica della storica azienda, con un approccio non comune a un produttore di vino, orgoglioso del suo lavoro ma al tempo stesso schivo perché concentrato esclusivamente sul suo modo di fare vino, facendosi influenzare da concetti filosofici neo classici a lui cari, dove l'idea di grazia a armonia si combina con una quieta grandiosità, lontano da frivolezze e leggerezze.



i vigneti di Cerbaiona

A Cerbaiona non c'è la possibilità di fare visite per esterni, non si vende vino direttamente, non esiste un pos...c'è la concentrazione e il sentimento interiore di Matthew nel produrre il suo vino, che concettualizza la sua azienda come una bottega o meglio un atelier francese che raccoglie l'intento e la visione del maestro: in bottega c'è la semplice artigianalità dove il vino può essere autentico e piacevole, ma solo nell'atelier può diventare fine e raffinato per rappresentare la purezza della materia prima, l'uva.

Un microsistema di alto controllo dove il lavoro viene osservato dall'interno e improntato verso una incessante ricerca di miglioramento.

"Il vino non può essere troppo caro e solo un prodotto di lusso perché rischierebbe di diventare un'espressione di arroganza che non fa parte della sua natura", racconta Matthew con chiara determinazione.

VINI FORGIATI DALLA PASSIONE

Matthew forgia due etichette: Cerbaiona che primeggia con il Brunello e M.L. Fioretti, il cui vino è il frutto di altri vigneti ai quali ha voluto dare una etichetta distinta, con il proprio nome.

In parte garagiste e in parte *petit château*, la produzione di M.L. Fioretti nasce all'interno di Cerbaiona nel 2018 con il primo vino Casiglia Igt.

Con la vendemmia 2021 arrivano San Vito (100% merlot), Santinovo (80% cabernet franc e 20% cabernet sauvignon) e Collalto (80% merlot e 20% sangiovese).



vasche in cemento nella cantina di Cerbaiona

APPUNTI DI DEGUSTAZIONE

Brunello di Montalcino Docg 2019

Colore amaliante, rosso rubino luminoso e scarico. Decisamente intenso all'olfatto con profumi estremamente puliti e nitidi, sprigiona note di rosa, ciliegia matura, sottobosco e rimandi alla terra, si susseguono poi sentori mentolati, di cioccolato e leggero tabacco finale. Entra sottilissimo e costante grazie anche ad una espressione tannica egregia che accompagna verso un finale lunghissimo e armonico.

M.L. Fioretti San Vito 2021 Toscana Igt (Podere Albiano Siena)

Uvaggio: 100% merlot

Rosso inchiostro profondo con sfumature porpora luminose. Attacco potente di frutta nera al naso, ciliegia, lampone e prugna, poi note vegetali, macchia mediterranea e chiusura di eucalipto. Sorso morbido e setoso ma comunque di buona freschezza, non invadente, sapido e lungo.

M.L. Fioretti Santinovo 2021 Toscana IGT (Podere Borgo Santinovo Colle Val d'Elsa)

Uvaggio: 70% cabernet franc 30% cabernet sauvignon

Rubino profondo con sprazzi di luce color porpora. Al naso sprigiona eleganza, con note di mora e ciliegia mature, mentre delicate note di vaniglia accompagnano verso uno sbuffo finale balsamico. Palato intenso e di corpo, mantiene una garbata freschezza accompagnata da un tannino nobile e ben fatto per un finale persistente e gradevole.



DEGUSTAZIONI	TOSCANA
BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO DOCG	TOSCANA IGT



DI TENDENZA



CONSIGLIATI



ULTIME NOTIZIE

Barolo e Barbaresco, accolte proposte modifica disciplinari

Lambrusco, arrivano Sorbara bianco, prima sottozona Doc e fascette Igt

La grappa resiste alla congiuntura e punta sull'export

Agenda del vino, Forum Wine Festival in Salento

Violante Gardini Cinelli Colombini nuova presidente MTV nazionale

UIV, monitorato a Bruxelles: "No a espianti 'mascherati' dei vigneti"



Home / Offers / **New Release: Regal Rosso di Montalcino from Cerbaiona**



Despite winemaker Matthew Fioretti’s best attempts at shunning the limelight, **Cerbaiona is one of the most talked about estates in Montalcino**. Matthew’s reluctance to engage with the press and 110% commitment to his vineyards and cellar – leaving little time for promotional work – have only added to the mystique that’s surrounded Cerbaiona since it was established by former Alitalia pilot Diego Molinari in 1977. But the principal

reason for all the chatter is the quality of the wines being made today by Matthew and his team.

The 2019 Brunello di Montalcino from Cerbaiona, released earlier this year, is among the finest wines we’ve tasted in 2024 – an ethereal, complex yet seamless Sangiovese that more than held its own alongside the 100 Point 2010 Brunello (made during Molinari’s tenure). We described the 2019 Brunello (£130 per bottle IB) as Matthew’s most accomplished Brunello to date, and the same applies to his 2022 Rosso di Montalcino. As Matthew puts it, ***‘This is finally the quality level of Rosso di Montalcino I have been aiming for.’***

Cerbaiona’s 2022 Rosso, offered for the first time in the UK today, is a **concentrated, age-worthy** Rosso, but – like all Matthew’s wines – **bright and uninhibited**, with a real sense of energy. It’s made only from estate fruit, but from the “lesser” parts of the vineyard which still occupy some of the **finest terroir in the Brunello DOCG!**

Matthew rails against the Consorzio’s minimum ageing requirement for Brunello of four years, including two in oak, prior to release, but with his Rosso (a minimum ten months, with no stipulation on the type of vessel), he can do more or less as he pleases. The 2022 was raised for a little over a year, primarily in concrete; perfect, Matthew finds, for rounding out Sangiovese’s rustic tannins without sacrificing any freshness.



2022 Rosso di Montalcino, Cerbaiona

£240 IB – 6x75cl

Lustrous purple, this is instantly expressive on the nose with floral, graphite, herbal and black cherry aromas. The concentrated palate points to 2022’s exceptionally dry growing season (saved by rain at the end of August and into September), but also the tightly controlled yields here at Cerbaiona. All the same, this is a lithe and moreish wine, with shimmering acidity and playfully torquey tannins beneath the swathes of ripe fruit. Soulful yet polished, it will drink well relatively soon, and only improve over the coming decade. Drink 2026 to 2034

*It was bottled in March, and is scheduled to arrive in the UK this October. **A grand total of just 6,666 bottles were produced**, so while, as exclusive UK importers, we have received a generous allocation, we expect demand to outweigh supply. Please therefore register your interest with the Stannary team*

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