

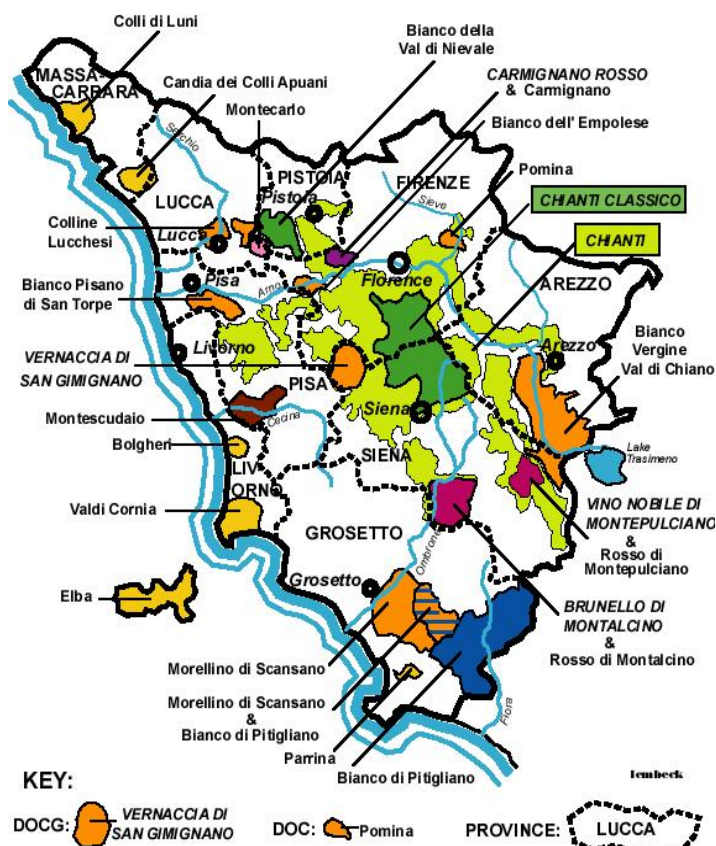
WINES OF TUSCANY, ITALY

Tuscany is west-central Italy. Its large city is Florence. The Italian spelling is Toscana.

The great success of the past few decades, which continues to broaden, is the so-called **SUPER-TUSCAN** wines. In 1968, the wine named [Sassicaia](#) was first commercially produced from Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc grapes grown in Tuscany. (It is said the vines came from the Chateau Lafite-Rothschild; the wine was made for family and friends starting with the 1948 vintage.) This wine was successfully received. In 1971, another producer took the juice with a majority of the native grape Sangiovese and mixed that with about 20 percent Cabernet Sauvignon. This was Piero Antinori, and the wine was called [Tignanello](#) after the name of the vineyard. Until recently, all “Super-Tuscans” contained a substantial amount of the Cabernet Sauvignon or other Bordeaux grapes.

More recently, the make-up of a Super-Tuscan wine is simply a red (or rarely white) wine of Tuscany not made using the traditional recipes of mostly Sangiovese with other prescribed native grapes. Thus, these wines may now include 100% Sangiovese grapes, 100% Merlot grapes, 100% Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, and wines with one or more of these grapes plus the possible addition of Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir and others. Super-Tuscan wines you

should know include Tenuta Dell' [Ornellaia](#), [Cepparello](#), [Sammarco](#), and the wines of [Querciabella](#). The wines I have named here usually sell for \$65 to \$200 a bottle, but other Super-Tuscans are all over the place.



VINO NOBILE DI MONTEPULCIANO

is a “noble wine” of a small place, the area around the village of Montepulciano. Unlike Super-Tuscans, this wine has borne this name and been made under a specific set of requirements for very long time. Among other requirements, it must consist of at least 70% of a specific version of the Sangiovese grape (misleadingly called a specific “clone”) which is named Prugnolo Gentile. The town is near a lake that is part of the border with Umbria, in the Southern half of Tuscany. The leading producers are *Avignonesi* and *Boscarelli*. These wines generally will sell for \$20-45.

BRUNELLO DE MONTALCINO means “brown” grape of the town of Montalcino. The “brown” is a specific clone of the Sangiovese grape named Brunello; the wine must be 100% Brunello. This wine (actually now, wines of this place, this appellation) was introduced in the late nineteenth century by *Ferruccio Biondi Santi*. In recent decades, *Biondi Santi* is one of the top two producers of Brunello, the other being *Soldera Case Basse*. Generally, this wine has needed 15-20 years to be able to be

drunk, but today many producers make wines that can be drunk in less than 10 years, which may not be that long after shipment since the wine must age in barrels for 3-4 years and so are shipped five or more years after the harvest. There was a dust up a couple of years ago, and after investigation several producers were found to in fact have used some grapes other than the Brunello. Despite this violation of the rules by some, the quality of Brunellos is almost uniformly high. Upon release (usually still needing to be stored for a few years), the wines generally sell for \$60-125 a bottle for the wines other than the top two named above, the riservas of which sell for up to \$400 (the 2004 is the current riserva release).

CHIANTI is by far the most well known appellation of Tuscany. The old, traditional and “best” part of Chianti has its own appellation, **CHIANTI CLASSICO**. While Chianti must be at least 75% Sangiovese, the Classico must be at least 80% Sangiovese; the remainder in Chianti cannot consist of more than 10% of any single grape among several varieties inclusive of two white varieties, while the Classico allows only red grapes. (The centuries old recipe had always included 10% or so of one of two white varieties.) These wines are in all price points from \$10 to \$100, with most of them in the \$15 to \$35 range.

Smaller and less well known, but important, appellations include **CARMIGNANO** (similar to Chianti’s recipe); **BOLGHERI** which is the birthplace and home to several Super-Tuscans, but is itself a specific appellation whose wines must go in either of two directions with up to 80% Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot on the one hand, or up to 75% Sangiovese on the other; and **MORELLINO DI SCANSANO**, which must contain 85% of the Sangiovese clone called Morellino.

Be aware that a wine which is approved for an appellation will always show the appellation name prominently on the bottle. This is true for French, Austrian, Spanish, German, and Portuguese wines as well as Italian. An appellation is always a place marked by boundaries on the ground, but will also include further requirements that vary.

Houston Restaurants (From my [Top Twenty Restaurants for Wine](#) List):

Pappas Steakhouse	Soldera Case Basse Brunello di Montalcino 1995 \$400 P. Antinori Sangiovese “Tignanello” 2005 \$157 Felcina “Rancia” Chianti Classico 2006 \$78
Masraff’s	P. Antinori Chianti Classico Riserva 2005 \$50 P. Antinori Sangiovese “Tignanello” 2007 \$155
VOICE	Vitanza Brunello di Montalcino 2003 \$105
Café Moustache	P. Antinori Sangiovese “Tignanello” 2005 \$110
Quattro	Altesino Brunello di Montalcino 2004 \$140 P. Antinori Chianti “Peppoli” 2007 \$58
Monarch	Tenuta Cabreo “Il Borgo” 2006 \$115
Damian’s	Avignonesi Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2005 \$52 Casanova di Neri Brunello di Montalcino 2004 \$125
La Griglia	Argiano Cabernet+++ “Solengo” 2004 \$180
Mingalone	Il Poggione Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1999 \$140 P. Antinori Sangiovese “Tignanello” 2005 \$1220 P. Antinori Chianti Classico Riserva “Marchese” 2005 \$62 Monastero Chianti Classico 2006 \$44

Sterling Minor is a Certified Specialist of Wine, Houston business attorney, and wine consultant. Visit him at www.sterlingwineconsultant.com

Written April 17, 2011