



The Ancient Romans were growing grapes in northern Italy 3,000 years ago, before the empire rose to power. As **Colin Foreman** reports, Bacchus casts a protective gaze over the region to this day

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Archaeologists have discovered that vineyards have been growing in the Tuscany region since pre-Roman times, or about 3,000 years ago. One of the more recent vineyards to have been created in Tuscany is Tenuta di Trinoro, established in 1992 by Andrea Franchetti. He had been searching for a suitable site to build a vineyard since the late 1970s. His search brought him to the picturesque Orcia Valley in southeast Tuscany. The valley cradles two mountains, Mount Amiata and Mount Cetona, with the valley stretching 10 miles in between the two. The valley floor is 450 metres above sea level, and gently rises a further 1,500 metres to the peak of the Amiata. Franchetti's 25-hectare vineyard sits in the valley about 600 metres above sea level, on the side of

the Cetona. The Cetona shields the vineyard from the humidity of the inland valleys to the east, while the Amiata allows a coastal breeze that moderates the temperature all year round.

When Franchetti bought the site there was no vineyard or even agriculture, as farming had been abandoned in the 1960s. This meant that terraces needed bulldozing before vines could even be planted. When it came to planting the vines, Franchetti knew instinctively where and what to plant. The *terroir* of the vineyard is rich in minerals that were left by coastal deposition, from an age now long forgotten. The grape varieties benefiting from this rich soil are cabernet franc, sauvignon, merlot, petit verdot, cesanese and uva di troya. These grapes have been used to create the vineyard's wine since 1995.



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The wines that the vineyard produce are Palazzi and Tenuta di Trinoro – both Bordolais type wines – and Cesanese d’Affile, a red made from grapes of southern Lazio. These wines are now regarded as some of the best Italian wines on the market.

Franchetti attributes his success to producing the lowest yields in Italy and waiting longer before harvesting. By producing less than 3,000 cases of wine each year the vineyard is able to focus on making quality wines, although Franchetti would be just as happy to produce much cheaper drinkable wines in greater quantities.

One of Franchetti’s most successful years was 1998, even though it was

grown and harvested under some testing weather conditions. The care taken over these low yields is exemplified in that year’s crop. Budding began as normal in April, and flowering began on 10 June after the area was hit with an extraordinary heat wave, subjecting the vines and their tenders to unusually high temperatures. The high temperatures meant that many of the grapes turned to pepper-like berries. It forced work to be continued throughout the night to remove about 90% of them. The weather then improved in September with temperatures dropping and a little precipitation. The fruit was then rushed on further in October with dew forming in the mornings. Consequently the grapes were ready for picking on 6 October. The first grapes to be picked were the merlot, followed by the cabernet franc between 11 and 14 October, and then two weeks later the cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot

were harvested. The grape juice was then fermented using local yeast in open tanks. All of the wine, except the merlot, was then poured into French barrels. The blending began in the following February to create the wines. The Tenuta di Trinoro consisted of 80% cabernet franc, 10% cabernet sauvignon and 10% petit verdot. The Palazzi was a 50-50 split of merlot and cabernet franc.

The success of 1998 and other outstanding years like 1997 and the 1999 prove that concentrating on smaller yields is not narrow minded, rather great success can be achieved. It is also reassuring for the drinker to know that such meticulous care has been taken to ensure that their wine is as near to perfection as possible. It is this relationship between the drinker and the vineyard, and the obvious quality of the wine, which has undeniably been a major factor in the success of the vineyard. 