

SUPER TUSCANS *at* 50

These superstar wines, created as a reaction against restrictive Chianti Classico rules, took on near-mythical status and began to command very high prices. As the SuperTuscans celebrate their half-centenary, how are they faring today?

STORY ALDO FIORELLI

Fifty years since their inception, the wines known widely as SuperTuscans represent some of the top expressions of Italian winemaking today. Produced outside Tuscany's most reputable denominations, sometimes using grapes not authorised within those DOC or DOCG regions, often – in a wider region well known for the typical large Italian botti – aged in small French barrels, and always having been sold at incredibly high prices, SuperTuscans have faced something of an uphill battle.

DEFYING AUTHORITY

The term SuperTuscan was first coined in the mid-1980s by the English journalist and Master of Wine Nicolas Belfrage and was then adopted by the English and American press. 'Super' – literally 'above' – referred to their superiority in both concentration and quality over other Tuscan wines at the time. Just as a supernova is a nova with exceptional energy, or superstar a leading

protagonist, SuperTuscan wines exceeded Tuscan traditions. The category first came about in the previous decade and brought with it 'a great stir', as Marchese Piero Antinori describes it, 'because the first Tignanello was labelled as "vino da tavola", which would have been at the bottom of the pyramid of quality, whereas this was proposed on the market at a higher price than the DOCs'.

It was a kind of anarchy against the authorities and their winemaking regulations. Not by chance, one of the most prominent proponents was Luigi Veronelli, an Italian gastronome, wine journalist, philosopher – and wine anarchist.

'I must say, it was thanks to Veronelli that I produced Tignanello in 1971,' says Antinori. 'In 1973, I let him taste the wine blind. He was enthusiastic but I was filled with doubt: I told him I couldn't have bottled it as Chianti Classico since it was produced with 100% Sangiovese, and at that time "Gallo Nero" [Chianti Classico's official black rooster logo] required the inclusion



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SUPERTUSCANS: investment potential

According to global wine trading platform Liv-ex, in 2020 three of the world's top 10 wines [based on Liv-ex trading data from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020] were from Tuscany: Sassicaia, Ornellaia and Masseto. With the exception of Piedmont-based Gaja, the other Italian wines in the top 50 were Solaia and Tignanello.

Liv-ex notes: 'Italy saw the largest gain in brands in the Power 100 [list of 'most powerful brands in the fine wine market'], adding nine, to reach a total of 17, cutting Italy's deficit to Burgundy by half.'

The average trade price [for the full year to 30 September 2020] for Sassicaia was £1,305 (+9.31%); Ornellaia £1,171 (+9.56%); Masseto £5,457 (+5.71%); Solaia £1,908 (+14.98%); Tignanello £850 (+8.92%).

'SuperTuscans are great investments,' says Mattia Tabacco, head of buying at consultancy Oeno, 'but they must be interpreted. Exit strategy is



crucial. Solaia and Tignanello are great products, but margins are low as they are primarily targeted at restaurants – you need quantity to make a profit.

'We suggest buying the fresher vintages and looking at small producers. Consider, for example, Montevertine's Pergole Torte, despite its market volatility; or Fontodi's Flaccianello, as well as Tenuta di Trinoro due to the consistency of [the late] Andrea Franchetti's wines in terms of ageing potential. Masseto, of course, has seen severe speculation, while Sassicaia is always a good investment as a blue-chip, but it ultimately depends on the primary or secondary market.'

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TUSCANY



Taste of the top: Fiordelli's SuperTuscan top six recent releases

① Antinori, Solaia 2018 98

£208.34 (ib)-£295 Bordeaux Index, Cru, Farr Vintners, Goedhuis & Co, Honest Grapes, Lay & Wheeler, Millésima, Starling Wines
Produced since 1978, Solaia comes from a 20ha vineyard with a southwestern exposure at 350m-400m. The wine opens up with restrained bramble fruits, meaty hints, clove and dark chocolate framed with balsamic notes. The attack is full and soft with lively acidity, focused on the vibrancy of Cabernet Sauvignon from Chianti, with impressively refined tannins. Polished and concentrated, it finishes with an amazing salty persistency. **Drink 2022-2045 Alcohol 15%**

② Masseto 2018 97

£550 (ib)-£790 Asset Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Bordeaux Index, Cru, Crump Richmond Shaw, Delivery Wine Co, Farr Vintners, In Vino Veritas, Starling Wines, Wineye
The bright intensity of both aroma and flavour in this wine is intoxicating. Dark crimson in colour with savoury aromas of plums, bramble fruits and black cherry highlighted by graphite minerality. The subdued character of the new French oak confirms the outstanding concentration of fruit. Dense, full, smooth and velvety, with great extraction on the mid-palate, it is delicious now but has the balance to age for decades, improving in complexity as it goes. **Drink 2022-2040 Alc 14.5%**

③ Antinori, Tignanello 2018 96

£110-£160 Widely available
Today producing 300,000 bottles annually, Tignanello was reimagined and refined through the years. The classic 2018 vintage enhances, if possible, the wine's restrained style. Tignanello is almost never fruity and this vintage shines for clove and black pepper aromas with blueberry yoghurt. Full, firm and velvety with great mid-palate weight and extraction, it shows long acidity, which carries the exotic finish of spice and cocoa. A classic with a long life ahead. **Drink 2022-2045 Alc 14.5%**

④ Fontodi, Flaccianello della Pieve 2018 96

£124.99 Alex Marton, Cru, Fine & Rare, Liberty Wines, Mother Vine, Petersham Cellar, Valvona & Crolla, Vinum Fine Wines, Wine Invest
Produced since 1981, Flaccianello was a single-vineyard wine until 2003, then a selection of the estate's best grapes. Stainless steel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, then racked into barrels for malolactic fermentation, it ages for 24 months in the wood. Enticing Mediterranean aromas with liquorice stick, bergamot, helichrysum, raspberry and cherry. On the palate it shows extremely good volume for the 2018 vintage. Firm and youthful, with refined tannins and crisp acidity. **Alc 2022-2045 Alc 15%**

⑤ Montevertine, Le Pergole Torte 2018 96

£193.99 AGS Vintners, Buon Vino, Brunswick, Falcon Vintners, Les Cave de Pyrene, Natty Boy Wines, Petersham Cellar, Starling Wines, The Vices York, Turville Valley Wines, Wineye
Owner Martino Manetti describes the 2018 vintage as a true Radda style, which means fierce acidity and reluctance of the wine to open up. Full of reserved character, the high-flying nose climbs with liquorice stick, potpourri and incense, while on the palate a restrained red cherry character emerges. The attack is firm yet graceful, the wine solid on the palate, with noble tannins, refreshing acidity and full body composing the tightly knit structure. **Drink 2022-2045 Alc 13.5%**

⑥ Tenuta di Trinoro 2019 95

£182.50 (ib)-£260 Astrum Wine Cellars, Cru, Field & Fawcett, Sociovino, Vinum Fine Wines
According to owner and winemaker Andrea Franchetti, '2019 was the latest-ripening vintage we've seen in 10 years'. Bottled during the waning moon in early June 2021 after eight months in new oak and another 12 in concrete, this is less austere than usual, with an extremely pure bramble fruit character. It's lifted and mineral, with subtle aromatic herbs. The fleshy palate shines for its balance, with brilliant integrated acidity and tannins that are chiselled to perfection. **Drink 2022-2040 Alc 15.5%**

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