



Le Cupole 2020 – IGT Toscana Rosso by Tenuta di Trinoro



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The late Andrea Franchetti created the Tenuta di Trinoro estate during the 1990s. Returning to Italy (he had been a wine broker in New York), he wanted to make the best Italian wine. For this, he chose a remote site in Tuscany, without any wine history, in the Val d'Orcia. The estate is high up and close to the border with Umbria and Lazio, near the small town of Sarteano. Furthermore, Bordeaux was Franchetti's inspiration. Hence the first planting was Cabernet Franc in 1992. By 1999, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot had joined it. Later he added Sémillon for white wine. Just like in St Émilion. In total, twenty-three hectares occupy clays and gravels between 450 and 620 metres. The first vintage produced by the estate was in 1995, released after 18 months of ageing in new French barriques. It was named *Le Cupole*. The rest, as they say, is history.

Tenuta di Trinoro

Le Cupole is the "second wine" of the estate. The eponymous flagship wine, (Tenuta di Trinoro), is a Bordeaux blend with extended ageing, released in 1997. Subsequently, it saw off several prestigious Bordeaux Châteaux when participating in a blind tasting. It all helped Trinoro become a cult estate, and its reputation (and prices) rose rapidly.

Franchetti would later be a key player in the wine renaissance on Mount Etna in Sicily (with his Passopisciaro estate) and also operate the Sancaba estate. While close to Trinoro, Sancaba produces Burgundian-style Pinot Noir, a Tuscan rarity. However, Le Cupole will always have the distinction of being Franchetti's first wine from his first venture.

These days, claret-style wines like Le Cupole are found throughout Tuscany, particularly in Chianti and Bolgheri/Maremma. But it's important (at least to me) to recall the time when these wines were still uncommon. As the rebellious new kids on the block they significantly influenced the revival and prestige of Italian wines. Lest we forget, here's a quotation from Nicholas Belfrage MW*, taken from his 2001 book, "Brunello to Zibibbo":

"A relative newcomer to the claret-style scene in Tuscany is Andrea Franchetti's Tenuta di Trinoro, at Sarteano, in the province of Siena just south of Montepulciano. Franchetti, a wine broker with a passion for the wines of Bordeaux, and specifically St Émilion (he is a great friend of Jean-Luc Thunevin of Chateau de Valandraud) began this operation from scratch in the early 1990s. Both [Le Cupole and Tenuta di Trinoro] have attracted enthusiastic praise from pundits like Parker and Wine Spectator, and it may be safely predicted that they will soon be up there with the likes of Sassicaia and Masseto in the eyes of the world."

Le Cupole

Returning to Le Cupole, it's a biodynamic blend where the mix of the four Bordeaux grapes changes according to the specifics of the vintage. Even the vines came from Bordeaux, and their plots face southwest in a natural amphitheatre. Viticulture is Bordelais, with high-density plantings and Guyot training. Furthermore, grape bunches are thinned out as a green harvest, leaving only the best, resulting in low yields of 30 hl/ha.

Franchetti's harvest notes say that August and September 2020 were rainy. However, dry weather returned at the end of September, and handpicking commenced with Merlot on 3 October 2020 and finished on 10 October. Fermentation with indigenous yeasts was in stainless steel vats, followed by eight months of ageing in once- and twice-used French oak barrels. After blending, (49% Merlot, 36% Cabernet Franc, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon and 3% Petit Verdot), the wine matured in concrete vats for another ten months until bottled under cork in March 2022.

Estate Director Calogero Portannese described this wine on release as possessing "*a vibrant life force, harmonious complexity, and silky elegance.*"

The French style inspires this wine, but it's an Italian thoroughbred. It has a richness and warmth that's altogether Tuscan, an opulence that St Émilion wines cannot emulate, even in these days of Climate change. 2020 is still a young wine, designed to age over the next decade and more besides. It's drinking well now if decanted for at least an hour, ideally for two, and matched with food.



Tasting

The colour is a deep and dense garnet, showing its youth with the bluish-hued rim. Leggy, the pronounced tears in the glass suggest the 14.5% alcohol level, though, given the concentration, those may also indicate glycerol. At this stage, aromas are primary, mostly dark cherry and plum fruit with hints of green herbs and graphite.

Bright acidity leavens muscular power and concentration on the palate. Though the tannins need to resolve further, they don't mask the fruit and are perfect for big meats. The fruit is again densely primary at this stage. However, coffee and cocoa peep through the mass of dark fruits, and there are hints of the subtleties that will develop, with tangerine, fennel, spice notes and balsam appearing on a long slow fade.

Food suggestions

This exuberant wine demands powerfully flavoured food and also shows at its best in autumn and winter. Hence Roast Beef and Venison make for excellent partnerships. Ostrich would be a suggestion for a healthier red-meat alternative.

As for pasta, then try a rich Florentine Sugo with Penne pasta. Aside from meats, mushrooms are a good choice, especially Cep, Porcini and truffles.

This example made an excellent pairing with vegetarian Haggis – simple, tasty and healthy fare.

UK Stockists

Single bottles of 2020 are available from [Tannico](#) for **£33.41**. Expensive but affordable, especially as you can expect to pay 5x that for the 2020 Tenuta di Trinoro flagship when released in 2023.

And Finally

Le Cupole may be a so-called "second wine", but that descriptor confers connotations of inferiority, which would be wrong. Le Cupole has a distinctive personality and style, making it a super SuperTuscan in its own right.

Some (like me) may sometimes consider the best wines as being Art. So it's telling that Andrea Franchitti's uncle was the American painter Cy Twombly, a contemporary of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

Hence the artwork at the top of this article is by Cy Twombly, painted in 2008. Appropriately, it's called Bacchus, and it seems to capture the essence and vigour of Le Cupole.