

Exploring New Releases from Coastal Tuscany

Readers will find much to admire in new releases from the Tuscan Coast. Vintage 2020 is a bit uneven, but the best wines offer notable freshness and aromatic intensity, with less heft than is typical, not a bad thing for a region where wines can be a bit heavy. Based on what I have tasted so far, 2021 appears to be a much more even vintage endowed with all the classic signatures of textural richness that make the wines of Coastal Tuscany so distinctive. Although this report focuses on the coast, I include notes on a handful of other wines from other inland appellations that are too small to be covered on their own.

Vintage 2020 – Uneven Yet Intriguing

Navigating the 2020s on the coast will take some work, as the vintage is uneven. Although there was a quite a bit of rain, the year was very hot and dry at many critical moments, most notably in July, which was marked by severe heat spikes. Conditions moderated in August in the weeks leading up to harvest, only to be interrupted by the return of intense heat and also several days to a week of rain during picking. Wines made from fruit picked before and after the rains, either because of stylistic choices or varietal mix, can almost give the impression of two different years.

"It was the last in a trio of vintages with more rain than usual and no drought, but quite a bit of heat during summer," Estate Manager Axel Heinz explained at Ornellaia. "Temperatures moderated in August, with the arrival of cool evenings. We picked quite a bit of Merlot early for the aromatics. Temperatures then rose markedly, leading to a week of rain, and then finally to good weather through to the end of harvest." Late season rains were challenging at some properties, such as Antinori's Guado al Tasso, where the Cabernet Sauvignon was compromised.

"In most years, what we fear is late season heat, and even more importantly, intense dry winds that can literally dehydrate fruit on the vine," highly regarded winemaker Luca D'Attoma explained. "In 2020, we did not have those conditions." Nevertheless, selection in the vineyard was critical. At Tenuta San Guido, production is down 30% for the flagship Sassicaia in a vintage in which harvest took place during a very condensed period.



A panoramic view of Suvereto, one of the districts in Tuscany's Maremma.

What most wines share, though, is a slight edginess of tannin that is the result of uneven conditions during the critical months of ripening. Top estates were able to mitigate less than perfect tannins to some degree through choices in the cellar, but some wines come across as overdone and marked by heat.

"In years like these, which are now common, we have learned we have to use a lighter hand in winemaking in order to preserve freshness," Cinzia Merli explained over a discussion of her releases at Le Macchiole. "Two thousand-twenty was also the first year we used alternative aging vessels for a small amount of the wine, as we find 100% oak can be too much in a hot year," she added, echoing the sentiments of many producers who are making changes in response to today's climatic conditions. These refinements include picking earlier, working with gentler extractions, using less new oak and in some cases also shortening time in wood. The best 2020s are quite aromatic, at times surprisingly so, with good energy and less opulence than is the norm. This is especially true at estates that have been moving towards greater freshness in their wines over the last few years, as many have. While the finest 2020s are appealing for appellations in which the wines at times come across as overdone – especially in our climate change-challenged world – some selection is necessary.

A First Look at 2021 – A Classic in the Making

My first look at the 2021s, both from barrel samples and the bottled wines I have tasted so far, point to a very strong and perhaps exceptional vintage for the Tuscan Coast. The wines are rich, layered and explosive, with all the generosity that is so typical of these appellations. More importantly, though, the polished quality of the tannins in many 2021s points to a vintage with even ripening and therefore ideal conditions for making wines of very high quality.

Looking Farther Afield

Although this report focuses on the coast, I include reviews on a number of wines from other regions that I tasted around the same time. Many of these new releases merit serious consideration. Readers will want to look at the accompanying producer profiles for more details on the top wines of both vintages.

I tasted the wines in this report starting in September of 2022 with 2021s from barrel. Most of the bottled wines were tasted from February to June 2023.

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Producers in this Article

(...)

2021 Le Cupole

Release Price: \$42

Color: Red

92

Drinking Window: 2023 - 2029 ^

Antonio Galloni, August 2023

The 2021 Le Cupole is terrific. Bold, punchy and super-expressive, the 2021 offers up an exciting mélange of dark-toned fruit, leather, grilled herbs, lavender and bittersweet chocolate. Trinoro's entry-level Cupole delivers tons of intensity and richness a very affordable tariff, which is sure to make it a crowd pleaser.

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2020 Tenuta di Trinoro

Release Price: \$420

Color: Red

94

Drinking Window: 2025 - 2035 ^

Antonio Galloni, August 2023

The 2020 Tenuta di Trinoro is sensual and racy but also not as opulent as it can be. That's not necessarily a bad thing at all. Sweet floral, spice and savory top notes meld into a core of dark-toned fruit. Overall, the 2020 feels like a smaller-scaled, somewhat slender Tenuta that is likely to drink well on the early side, given that aromatics are developing. Pretty floral and spice notes lift the finish nicely. This is a classy Tenuta but not quite the powerhouse of most years. This is the first time Tenuta di Trinoro is being released with an extra year in bottle. I suspect it may be going through a closed phase given how the rest of the 2020s showed last year. We will see.