

## Tuscan wines of creation



*Most wines are made to more or less the same recipe each year but the makers of two famous bordeaux blends from Tuscany, Tenuta di Trinoro and La Massa's Giorgio Primo, revel in changing it every year according to their personal whims.*

### Vini Franchetti – Tenuta di Trinoro

Andrea Franchetti was a one-off. A rather vague, arty sort of chap, he did not lack determination once he decided to dedicate himself to wine. He founded the extensive Tenuta di Trinoro estate in the warm, open Val d'Orcia south of Montalcino (see above) in the early 1990s when it was virtually terra incognita for fine wine, and went on to play a major part in introducing the world to the fine wines of Etna.

He had four children, three of them with predictably artistic careers, but his third son Benjamin is an engineer and studied at Imperial College, London, a mecca for brainy scientists. And it is Benjamin who has taken on the mantle of running the estate today, in tandem with his career as an engineer in Milan.

As we passed an open field there last June, flanked by the bright red blooms of the local *sulla* plant, he observed, 'we thought it would make a good vineyard and dug a few holes there before realising it would be hopeless. My father acted on instinct but with my engineering background, I test everything.'

He had sent me a very moving email back in March, describing the process of blending Tenuta di Trinoro for the last time with his father:

'It has been a strange first year since my dad's passing. In a way I got to rediscover the depth of some of his qualities in a way I had not fully appreciated. For example his perseverance in achieving his vision.

'During last week's tasting of 13 different vintages between 1998 and 2020, I felt I was reading a diary of a person that changed quite a lot, but maintained his uncompromising desire to do a wine which most reflected his year, his *annata*.

'I also thought about those early years, in the late 1990s, when in a determined solitude he would try the wine from the different parcels and put together a Tenuta di Trinoro blend.

'This solitude changed in the last few years, as myself together with the technical team he built, composed of Lorenzo [Fornaini, winemaker] and Calogero [Portanesse, estate director] took on more responsibilities. I especially have such a strong memory of when we did the 2020 blend. It was a cold, yet extremely sunny day with snow covering the vines. We were all together cramped in a room: my father, Lorenzo, Calogero and I together with my wife Verde and our newborn Alma, and my mum Fiora also happened to be there. It was very joyful. In a way it felt like the start of a new cycle, although I could not know it would be my father's last blend.

'The 2020 blend was put together in a few hours, composed of mostly Cabernet Franc, 92% and the rest Merlot.'

Franchetti senior's vision for his beloved Tenuta di Trinoro red wine varied so wildly from year to year that the Cabernet Franc component was anything from 39 to 92% of the blend, Merlot 8 to 60%, Cabernet Sauvignon zero to 13% and Petit Verdot zero to 4%. Petit Verdot was omitted from the blend for many years but apparently has come back into the picture from 2022 when it ripened fully for the first time. As Benjamin Franchetti admitted as we settled down to a vertical tasting of this delicious blend, 'it's unusual to have an iconic wine that's so different from year to year'. Wine rejected from the final blend, made after tasting the estate's 40 or 50 different plots (see below), goes into the second wine, Le Cupole. Average price of Tenuta di Trinoro is just under £200 a bottle according to Wine-Searcher.com whereas Le Cupole averages less than £30.

2022

1 MN VENTO N	03/09	28.8
2 MN VENTO N	05/09	32
3 MN VENTO V	04/09	43
4 MN VENTO V	06/09	60
5 MN VENTO V	08/09	28
Semillon 1	07/09	14.6 → 8.6 hl
6 MN VENTO V	10/09	55
7 MN INOVA	10/09	50.4
8 MN T. NOVA + Pinote P.	12/09	69
9 MN SOTTO COCCO SUD	14/09	8
10 MN TENAGIA EST. V	14/09	2.8
11 MN TENAGIA EST. G.	14/09	15.5
12 MN TENAGIA WEST	14/09	16.8
Semillon 2	14/09	11.9 → 6.5 hl
13 MN PIANO III PESA GIUNTA	21/09	48.5
14 MN PIANO III PESA - II PIAN	22/09	60.4
15 MN PIANO III PESA	22/09	60
16 MN PIANO III PESA - WEST	22/09	12.7
17 MN CAVALLI SUD	22/09	15.5
18 MN SOTTOCOCCO N	23/09	30.7
19 MN SOTTOCOCCO S	23/09	10
20 MN CAVALLI N	23/09	34.4
21 MN STRADA VECCHIA	23/09	11.7
22 MN STRADA VECCHIA	23/09	5.6
23 CF LAGO	04/10	15.4
24 C/CF II PESA	04/10	64.2
25 C/CF III PESA	04/10	64
26 CF FARMACIA	04/10	36.3
27 CF PIANO I P.	05/10	13.7
28 CF STRADA NUOVA	05/10	38.8
29 CF PIANO II P. ND	05/10	3.3
30 CF PIANO II P. ND	05/10	34.7
31 CF PIANO II P. DIR	05/10	13.2
32 CF STRADA VECCHIA	05/10	24
33 CF VCC 2013	05/10	57.2
34 CF BUCA DI CANALI	05/10	4.5
35 CF VCC 2013 DIR	05/10	7.6
36 CF COSTACCOCCO	06/10	26.75
37 CF TENAGIA W	06/10	18.8
38 CF TENAGIA di Negro	06/10	16
39 CF CAHAGI	06/10	38.8
40 CF SOTTOCOCCO	06/10	7.5
41 PV Tenuta, Fossa, Campi	06/10	23.6
42 CS Sottoc. Tenuta, Campi	06/10	10
43 CS Campi Hilar	06/10	9
44 CS Piano J Pesa	06/10	45
45 PV PALAZZI	07/10	35.5

The first vintage of Tenuta di Trinoro was 1997, with Le Cupole having seen the light of day from 1995. Until about 2010 Franchetti was very much under the influence of Bordeaux. He had worked there, at Ch de Landiras in Graves (see this [fascinating account](#) of Franchetti's background by Danish wine writer Peter Winding), and for many years would show his wine during the primeurs season at the busy gathering organised in a St-Émilion backstreet by Jean-Luc Thunevin. He was a huge admirer (like me) of Ch Cheval Blanc, which is why he introduced Cabernet Franc, one of the first to plant it in Tuscany where it is now all the rage. Franchetti got very interested in the Lazio grape Cesanese at one point but it didn't prosper and has been grafted over to Cabernet Franc.

Initially, Franchetti made the blend each year entirely alone but, according to his son, he started to listen to his senior winery staff from about 2017. But apparently, once he'd decided on the final blend, which he seems to have treated as a bit of an artwork (shades of his relative Cy Twombly?), that was it. 'He never went back', according to Benjamin.

The estate is very much more extensive than the (closely planted) vineyards, which total 25 ha (62 acres), of which about 10 ha are Cabernet Franc, 9 ha Merlot, 0.5 ha of four clones of Sémillon for Trinoro Bianco and a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. After careful consideration, Benjamin is planting two more hectares of Cabernet Franc and one of Merlot, at ever higher elevations up to 750 m (2,460 ft) in some steep, rocky sites, pushing up into the forest. The winery is on flatter land at about 400 m (1,310 ft) and when we visited it was rather dominated by brilliant white mountains of anti-frost candles next to it.



Benjamin, above, who says he never felt pressured to take over the estate – 'my father wasn't at all pushy; he just saw that I really love wine' – is proud of some of the more modern equipment, and sustainability initiatives, he has introduced and is planning to erect wind turbines to counter the increased frost risk that has resulted from climate change. Other challenges such as the vine trunk disease [esca](#) and soil erosion are more difficult to combat. As for earlier ripening, 'we need to compromise alas', he says. He described the 2022 growing season as akin to desert conditions whereas 2023 had brought tropical storms 'almost daily', he reported in mid June.

With his architect wife Verde and young daughter Alma, Benjamin stays as often as possible in the atmospheric fortified farmhouse that overlooks the estate and Monte Amiato in the distance. We had visited there once before in the Andrea era and saw that his artistic fingerprints were still everywhere. Even now there is a whole rustic table with his beautiful hand-made shoes lined up on it, another with a pile of coins flung in one corner that looks like an artwork. And so on.

But the artworks that everyone can appreciate are his wines, such as the vertical of Tenuta di Trinoro described below that was hugely pleasurable, together with his single-vineyard Cabernet Francs and a few other wines, including a Pinot Noir made nearby by Andrea's nephew.

The wines are sold in the UK by Astrum and Fine + Rare and in the US by a range of different importers led by the commercial team at Passopisciaro, the Franchetti estate on Etna. Our visit coincided with one from Trinoro's importers in Wisconsin.

## **Tenuta di Trinoro vertical**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 1999 IGT Toscana**

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*70% Cabernet Franc, 20% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot. Harvest: Merlot 2–3 October; Cabernet Franc 5–17 October; Cabernet Sauvignon 24–25 October and Petit Verdot 25 October. Yield 26 hl/ha. Fermentation took 12–15 days in open vats, using only indigenous yeasts. Small proportion fermented in barrique. Malolactic conversion in 100% new French oak. 12,000 bottles produced. Chosen because this is one of the vintages they really like.*

Pale crimson. Subtle, evolved nose of dried herbs. Delicate and nuanced though quite sweet on palate entry shading into a strongly balsamic palate. Very long and vibrant. No tannin evident.

15%

Drink

2008

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2030

18

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2009 IGT Toscana**

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*'One of the best wines ever made at Trinoro', according to Andrea Franchetti. 2009 was when he decided to restart Palazzi after 10 years because the Merlot was so good. Franchetti: 'rainless storms rumbling over the unyielding green of the vines ... leaving us at Trinoro with a feeling of the tropics ... Seeing the fertility and forecasting a blazing summer (which then came) I cut very much down the vines' canopy hoping that some of the water in the berries would be absorbed to fight the heat's stress; that happened and in September the plants had also lost their deeper green – but they still had lots of energy and resumed gathering water. At picking I found that cases were coming in the cellar weighing much heavier than what would have built our average of 3.4 tons per hectare, and that led to the second important step taken during this vintage: opening the valve under every tank we filled and bleeding it for 20% of its weight.' 42% Cabernet Franc, 42% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot from 4.8 ha of vineyards at 600 and 450 m above sea level.. Harvest: Merlot 27 September to 1 October; Cabernet Franc 5, 9, 13 and 20 October; Cabernet Sauvignon 21 October and Petit Verdot 27 October and 1 November. 8,400 bottles produced.*

Still deep lustrous crimson. This smells quite Cabernet! Very rich aroma and then rich undertow but not especially sweet. Some meatiness and great balance. Fresh finish with some fine tannin still in evidence.

15.5%

Drink

2020

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2033

18.5

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2013 IGT Toscana**

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*Mild summer – average 26 °C (instead of 36 °C) – delayed veraison to mid August. Harvest: 4–23 October. Each ingredient was kept separately on its lees, unusually. 50% Cabernet Franc, 33% Merlot, 13% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot. 7,200 bottles produced. Rereleased in 2023 from library stock.*

Lustrous crimson with an evolved rim. Relatively subtle nose and drier than some of the earlier vintages. Racy and refined. Polished tannins. Savoury and lifted.

14.5%

Drink

2020

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2033

**18**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2014 IGT Toscana**

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*39% Cabernet Franc, 39% Merlot, 11% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Petit Verdot – high Petit Verdot content and relatively low alcohol. Wet and mild winter led to early flowering (from 15 May). Andrea Franchetti: 'Fast coloring of berries in all the vineyards during the last days of July confirmed to us how the plants were full of energy. We dropped a third of the grape load from our plants, and because of repeating rains, we hired more people to work in the vineyard throughout the summer.' Sunny end to September then rain again in October: 'On the 13th, a storm broke on the farm, and rain fell hard for two days. The grapes' health in the valley's bottom was getting bad, and we had to organise a hurried picking there with lots of people working in the rain on the 15th.' The weather finally improved and held for the harvest of the remaining Cabernets and Petit Verdot. Harvest: Merlot 29 September to 2 October; Cabernet Franc 10–21 October; Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot 28 October. 7,000 bottles produced.*

Floral nose and very juicy palate with real refreshment and polished tannins. Definitely very mineral, stony finish and very 21st century. Needs food but has lovely elegance. Belies the poor reputation of the vintage, which I had forgotten until after tasting it!

14.5%

Drink

2022

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2035

**18.5**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2015 IGT Toscana**

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*Warm spring was followed by a mild summer and cool, protracted ripening period. Andrea Franchetti: 'rains fell intermittently but were light, with happy drying periods, until November; that cool moderate weather let us go harvesting in each vineyard after the proper waiting time.' Great vintage for Trinoro, according to Franchetti. 50% Cabernet Franc, 36% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot. Harvest: Merlot 21–25 September; Cabernet Franc 8–12 October; Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot 25–30 October. 8,400 bottles produced.*

Lustrous crimson. Sweet and rich and what a contrast to the 2014! Luscious and velvety. Spreads right across the palate. Rich, hedonistic impact and lots of ripe tannin still. Still quite youthful. Lots of development still to come.

15%

Drink

2025

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2042

**18 +**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2016 IGT Toscana**

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*Mild winter and spring with uniform flowering; relatively cool summer, and some very localised hail in early July 'that was a first at Trinoro which sits protected between two mountains'. First vintage made up exclusively of Cabernet Franc (48%) and Merlot (52%). Harvest: Merlot 24–30 September; Cabernet Franc 6–13 October. 6,000 bottles produced.*

Dark crimson. Heady, quite animal nose. Rich and sweet and utterly opulent. The tannins are a little less obvious than in the 2015 though they are certainly present. Great, dramatic wine. Some animal Merlot flavours – more than a hint of the right bank of Bordeaux! Stops a little suddenly. Juicier and more transparent than 2015.

15.5%

Drink

2023

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2040

**18.5**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2017 IGT Toscana**

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*Frosted vintage. Then drought, so every morning they sprayed water above the vines pre-dawn to 'make a mist over the vineyards which would fall upon the foliage at the first light of dawn, when the plants open their pores. This we did every night, for three months until the reservoirs were emptied but, also, fall had arrived.' Decision to fight the effects of frost and drought. Result was a lack of juice – tiny berries and dense musts that were hard to ferment. Winemaker Lorenzo Fornaini's first vintage. 69% Cabernet Franc, 23% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Sauvignon. 7,000 bottles produced. Harvest: Merlot 27 September; Cabernet Franc 12–15 October; Cabernet Sauvignon 17 and 24 October.*

First bottle: TCA. Second bottle: very fragrant, complete nose. Gorgeously complete. Maybe very slightly dry but the balance and stage of evolution are truly delightful.

15%

Drink

2022

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2040

**18.5**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro 2018 IGT Toscana**

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*Very hot before July then a wetter, cooler summer. Dry September so they 'misted the fields [see note on the 2017] to give the grapes the final push'. 59% Cabernet Franc, 41% Merlot. Harvest: Merlot 16–21 September; Cabernet Franc 10, 13, 14 October. 7,000 bottles produced.*

Very deep crimson. Classic ripe-vintage bordeaux smell. Really sweet and glamorous. Maybe a little less typically Tuscan but a glorious wine with the fruit (just) trumping the tannin. More accessible than most. Neat balance.

15.5%

Drink

2023

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2043

**19**

### Tenuta di Trinoro 2019 IGT Toscana

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*Estate director Calogero Portanese's first vintage. He came from Rampolla. 'Ideal vintage.'* 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Franc. Harvest: Merlot 14 September and 4–5 October; Cabernet Franc 14–18 October. 8,200 bottles produced.

Luscious and sweet – perhaps just a little sweeter than my ideal. Still lots of ripe tannin in evidence. Gorgeous balance but still very youthful. Recalls the 2015.

15.5%

Drink

2027

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2047

**18.5 +**

### Tenuta di Trinoro 2020 IGT Toscana

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*Exceptionally high Cabernet Franc: 92% (8% Merlot). Very good vintage but released after Andrea Franchetti's demise by those who survived him. Harvest: Merlot 30 September to 2 October; Cabernet Franc 8–10 October. 6,000 bottles produced.*

Velvety purple. Lots of tannin and a much more structured wine than earlier vintages. A slower developer. Tea-leaf flavour. Kept back for a year before releasing it.

15%

Drink

2028

–

2048

€350 RRP

**18 ++**

### **Other Franchetti Tuscan wines**

### Tenuta di Trinoro, Le Cupole 2021 IGT Toscana

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*56% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Franc, 11% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Petit Verdot. The winemaking process is the same as for Tenuta di Trinoro but the result is very different. 'Most of what we make – 80% – goes into Cupole', according to Benjamin Franchetti. 'We want to keep it accessible.' There is no library stock of this wine.*

A little skinnier than Tenuta di Trinoro. Edgy. Lots of tension and a bit fresher than Tenuta di Trinoro. Big difference in price! Just a little inky. **GV**

15%

Drink

2023

–

2029

€33 RRP

**17**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro, Campo di Magnacosta 2020 IGT Toscana**

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*Cabernet Franc from a single vineyard at 400 m facing west and relatively flat. From around the winery, frost prone. Deep alluvial soil with pebbles. 1.5 ha of a 2-ha vineyard.*

Easy and friendly and well balanced, minerally.

15%

Drink

2023

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2033

**17.5**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro, Campo di Tenaglia 2020 IGT Toscana**

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*Cabernet Franc from a steep, west-facing 0.8-ha single vineyard at 500 m on clay.*

Rich and sweet and a bit animal.

14.5%

Drink

2025

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2035

**17**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro, Campo di Camagi 2020 IGT Toscana**

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*Cabernet Franc from a west-facing single vineyard at 550 m and very steep on limestone and quartz, with an erosion problem. 1.5 ha.*

Racy, lively and a little fragile and delicate. Tense.

15%

Drink

2024

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2034

**17.5**

### **Tenuta di Trinoro, Palazzi 2020 IGT Toscana**

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*All Merlot. Blend from various plots on the hill. Lots of good Merlot was left in 2020 when Trinoro was 92% Cabernet Franc!*

Very deep crimson. Very aromatic and lively. Pure pleasure! Inky and sweet. Edgy and not exaggerated. Energetic. There's a little chocolate note but it's unsweetened chocolate. But just a tiny bit fragile.

15%

Drink

2023

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2035

**17.5**



### Tenuta di Trinoro, Bianco 2021 IGT Toscana

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*All Sémillon. Four different clones and four different rootstocks planted in 2002. The first vintage was 2017. Benjamin Franchetti told me about his late father, 'I think he wanted a white that would age. Not necessarily as a commercial wine initially, but then he saw how well it aged.' No oak; just tank and concrete. They like the wine to go through malo fully if possible but acid levels, like the vineyard, are the highest on this property – so far.*

A little floral on the nose but not very generous on the palate.

12.5%

Drink

2025

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2030

**16.5 ++**

### Sancaba, Petit Sancaba Pinot Nero 2022 IGT Toscana

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*Nephew Carlo Franchetti started to make a Pinot near Trinoro with guidance from Andrea Franchetti about 10 years ago. 20% whole bunch and concrete and old oak.*

Transparent and pretty and lively. Sweet. A little spicy oak in evidence, but this is a nice summer wine.

12.5%

Drink

2023

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2025

€20–€25 approx

**16.5**

### Sancaba Pinot Nero 2020 IGT Toscana

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*This was the last vintage made at Trinoro before Carlo Franchetti established his own winery. Pinot is planted at 500–600 m on north-facing vineyards. Galestro limestone with marl.*

Deep crimson. Sweet and fresh and racy. Lots of fruit and good balance and truly burgundian. Long, fresh and lively.

13.5%

Drink

2023

–

2027

€50 approx

**17**

(...)