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Antonio Galloni

Gems from Tuscany's Spectacular 2006 Vintage

December 2008

I continue to be impressed with the consistently stunning 2006s from Tuscany. Most of the entry-level wines have been on the market for some time, and as I have written in *The Wine Advocate*, the vintage offers incredible quality from top to bottom in all of the region's main appellations. Over the coming months many of the high-end bottlings will be arriving on retailers' shelves. The best of these wines offer breathtaking richness in a style that marries ripeness with structure to a degree that has seldom, if ever, been seen in Tuscany. Although 2006 is very strong across the board, I couldn't help notice that Maremma in particular was graced with a number of simply profound wines that readers won't want to miss out on. Additional reviews of 2006s from Tuscany can be found in the following recent issues of *The Wine Advocate*; #176 (Montalcino), #177 (Chianti Classico, Maremma, Scansano) and #178 (Best Buys).

The 2006s are big, full-bodied wines loaded with super-ripe fruit, but with plenty of stuffing underneath. In many cases the wines were made in the last month or so of the growing season, particularly in Chianti Classico, where warm daytime temperatures alternated with cool evenings. These conditions extended the grapes' hang time and allowed the fruit to reach full phenolic ripeness while achieving maximum development of aromatics, acidity and structure. Growers had the luxury and peace of mind to harvest without being rushed. In a few spots producers reported harvesting into October, particularly for the Sangioveses. The 2006s

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will be tempting to drink young for their opulent fruit, but the best wines have the potential to age gracefully for many years. If the vintage has a weak spot it is the dry tannins that show up in a few wines where the warm conditions did not allow growers to achieve the level of sweetness and ripeness in the tannins that was evident in 2004.

Based on what I have tasted so far, 2007 is shaping up to be another potentially outstanding vintage in many parts of Tuscany. Weather was much more irregular in 2008, but where hail and the cool, wet spring weren't too much of an issue, early reports are promising. This is especially for true for later-ripening varieties such as Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon which had time to recover from the difficult spring and benefited fully from the gorgeous late September and early October weather.

Unfortunately, prices for many of Tuscany's top bottlings have reached stratospheric levels. While some of this is undoubtedly a result of the weak US dollar, the simple reality is that prices for a number of bottlings remain very high, and it is hard to see the wines selling through at this level, particularly in an environment where importers, distributors, retailers, restaurants and the final consumer are all trading down and seeking wines that deliver considerable value. While long-established estates likely have the financial resources, and therefore stability, to weather the storm, I am increasingly concerned for the long-term viability of newer properties that have purchased vineyards and built expensive new cellars under economic assumptions that are clearly no longer valid, at least over the foreseeable future.



ANTINORI	2006 GUADO AL TASSO	BOLGHERI	(\$100.00)	RED	91
ANTINORI	2006 TIGNANELLO	SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA	(\$99.00)	RED	92
ANTINORI	2006 SOLAIA	SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA	(\$285.00)	RED	94

This is a beautiful set of wines from Antinori. All of these new releases are dense, primary and endowed with tons of fruit. At the same time, the firm tannins require at least a few years of aging to allow them to start melting away. The estate's 2006s are beautiful, but they don't appear to possess the elegance of the superb 2004s. Antinori's **2006 Guado al Tasso** is a dark, sensual beauty imbued with the essence of black pepper, earthiness and dark fruit. Today the wine remains quite fresh and in need of further bottle age. As outstanding as the Guado al Tasso is, it doesn't quite have the level of fleshiness and depth that is found in so many wines from Bolgheri in 2006. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022. The **2006 Tignanello** is especially opulent in this vintage. Masses of dark red fruit, scorched earth and sweet oak

emerge as this richly-textured Tignanello flows from the glass. The wine possesses superb density; all it needs is another few years to come together. This is a remarkably vibrant and primary Tignanello. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2024. The estate's **2006 Solaia** is a big, powerful offering loaded with ripe blackberry jam, herbs, minerals and French oak. Like all of the 2006s from Antinori, the Solaia remains extraordinarily dense and primary. Readers will have to be patient with this wine and give it plenty of bottle age before the full range of its aromas and nuances blossoms fully. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. Importer: Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Woodinville, WA, tel. (425) 415-3738

BRANCAIA	2006 TRE	TUSCANY	(\$25.00)	RED	88
BRANCAIA	2006 ILATRAIA	GROSSETO	(\$65.00)	RED	93
BRANCAIA	2006 IL BLU	RADDA IN CHIANTI	(\$65.00)	RED	95

This is another highly successful line-up from Brancaia, particularly at the top end of the range. The **2006 Tre** is an accessible, perfumed wine with attractive dark raspberries, flowers and spices. The wine offers lovely density and richness, yet some uncharacteristic green notes in the background detract from the wine's overall balance. Tre is 80% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2012. The estate's **2006 Ilatraia** is an unqualified success in this vintage. Super-ripe dark cherries are intermingled with spices, minerals and French oak in this generous, expansive wine from Tuscany's Maremma. There is tons of length here to go along with the wine's sumptuous, generous personality. This is probably not a long-term ager, but it should drink beautifully over the mid-term. Ilatraia is 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Sangiovese and 10% Petit Verdot. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2021. The **2006 Il Blu** (50% Sangiovese, 45% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon) is a striking wine loaded with vibrant dark cherries, violets, sweet spices and French oak in a powerful, structured style. Naturally the Blu doesn't show the warmth of the Ilatraia but it does possess a touch more freshness and finesse, attributes which will allow the wine to age gracefully over the coming years. Once again, Brancaia has produced a gem in the Blu. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. Importer: William Grant and Sons, USA, New York, NY; Tel. (212) 246-1760

FONTODI	2006 CHIANTI CLASSICO	PANZANO	(\$36.00)	RED	91
FONTODI	2006 FLACCIANELLO DELLA PIEVE	PANZANO	(\$110.00)	RED	96

My visit to Fontodi a few months ago was fascinating, as I spent several hours with proprietor Giovanni Manetti and oenologist Franco Bernabei tasting through multiple barrels of all of the estate's wines. The **Chianti Classico** is typically one of the last Chiantis to be bottled, but the

2006 shows all the qualities I encountered when I tasted various lots earlier this year, prior to final assembly and bottling. It is a big, super-ripe Chianti that captures all of the best qualities of the vintage in its rich fruit and beautifully defined aromatics. This is a serious, structured Chianti that can be enjoyed now, but that also has the stuffing to age gracefully for years. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2016. The **2006 Flaccianello della Pieve** (Sangiovese) is just as phenomenal as it was when I tasted it from barrel. This spectacularly ripe and concentrated wine reveals masses of dark cherries, plums, licorice, smoke, violets, French oak and minerals that coat the palate with extraordinary richness. The wine possesses plenty of structure, but the sheer density of the fruit provides stunning balance. The 2006 Flaccianello is one of the more primary wines of the vintage, and it will require considerable patience. Flaccianello continues to prove that Panzano's Conca d'Oro is one of the most privileged spots for Sangiovese in Tuscany. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. Importer: Vinifera Imports, Ronkonkoma, NY; tel. (631) 467-5907

BIBI GRAETZ	2006 BUGIA	ISOLA DEL GIGLIO	(\$80.00)	WHITE	91
BIBI GRAETZ	2006 TESTAMATTA	FIESOLE	(\$130.00)	RED	93

I continue to be impressed with the beautiful wines of Bibi Graetz. These are highly singular, expressive wines that merit serious consideration. Graetz's **2006 Bugia** is a unique white made from the indigenous Ansonica grown on the Isola del Giglio, which lies just off the Tuscan coast. This soft, generous wine flows from the glass with intricate layers of sweet, perfumed fruit, showing remarkable finesse and silky, polished tannins. Bugia is one of the few Tuscan whites that is worth a special effort to find, and in 2006 the wine is truly beautiful. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2012. The **2006 Testamatta** (Sangiovese) is a pretty wine redolent of crushed flowers, raspberries, toasted oak and spices, with lovely inner perfume that emerges as the wine sits in the glass. As outstanding as this wine is, the 2006 doesn't appear to have the polish, generosity and overall balance of the very finest vintages. Today the wine comes across as linear in style, with drying tannins that clamp down on the finish, qualities I found in both bottles I tasted. In 2006 Graetz opted for a super-selective approach in which he produced just 10,000 bottles of Testamatta as opposed to the more normal 18,000-20,000. One can only wonder is some amount of balance and harmony was sacrificed in the process. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. Various American importers, including Michael Skurnik, Syosset, NY; tel. (516) 677-9300, Trilussa Wine Company, Greenbrae CA; tel. (415) 499 8466, Siema Wines LLC, Springfield, VA; tel. (703) 455-1200, MS Walker, Sommerville, MA; tel. (617) 776-6700

ISOLE E OLENA	2006 CEPPARELLO	BARBERINO VAL D'ELSA	(\$80.00)	RED	93
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Isole e Olena's **2006 Cepparello** (100% Sangiovese) reveals superb density and richness in a surprisingly medium-bodied style for this vintage. Candied red fruit, flowers, menthol and sweet herbs emerge from the glass with almost liqueur-like sweetness. The wine possesses outstanding balance and a long, sweet finish, with subtle notes of tar, licorice and herbs that make an appearance on the close. This is an elegant Cepparello that combines the ripeness of the vintage in a mid-weight, ethereal style. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2019. Various American importers including: Petit Pois, Merion, PA; tel. (856) 608-9644; Carolina Wine Company, Norwood, MA; tel. (781) 278-2000; Giuliana Imports, Boulder, CO; tel. (303) 449-5477; The Country Vintner, Louisa, VA; tel. (804) 784-2886; Grape Expectation Inc., Richmond, CA; tel. (510) 412-5969; Bommarito Wines, Saint Louis, MO; tel. (314) 961-8996; Connoisseur Wines, Chicago, IL; tel. (773) 561-8705

LE MACCHIOLE	2006 SCRIO	BOLGHERI	(\$230.00)	RED	92+
LE MACCHIOLE	2006 MESSORIO	BOLGHERI	(\$320.00)	RED	98

Like many estates in Bolgheri, Le Macchiole has some beautiful wines that are coming into the market shortly. I visited the estate at the tail end of the 2006 harvest and already the early buzz in the air was palpable. The **2006 Scrio** (Syrah) is a rich, intense wine loaded with ripe dark fruit and plenty of toasted oak. With time in the glass the wine's signature floral, minty notes gradually emerge, yet this remains a vibrant, youthful Scrio in need of serious bottle age to integrate its oak. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2024. The **2006 Messorio** (Merlot) is off the charts. This extraordinary wine possesses a breathtaking combination of super-ripe fruit that has been achieved with remarkable freshness, vibrancy and clarity. There is superb transparency to the wine's fruit, along with a sublime finish that lasts forever. Ideally a few years of cellaring are called for but readers will have a hard time exercising such patience. This profound Messorio from proprietor Cinzia Merli and oenologist Luca d'Attoma left me speechless. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2026. Importer: Domaine Select, New York, NY; tel. (212) 279-0799

MONTEPELOSO	2006 ENEO	SUVERETO	(\$45.00)	RED	95
MONTEPELOSO	2006 NARDO	SUVERETO	(\$135.00)	RED	96
MONTEPELOSO	2006 GABBRO	SUVERETO	(\$180.00)	RED	97

I have been following these wines from proprietor Fabio Chiarellotto for two years. Now that his 2006s are in bottle their true potential is clearly evident. It appears I underestimated these wines from barrel, as all three offerings are showstoppers of the highest level. My scores from bottle are in some cases significantly higher than from barrel. In short, these are marvelous wines that readers will absolutely not want to miss. The **2006 Nardo** possesses the essence of

melted road tar, bacon fat, smoke, ripe red cherries and spices. The Nardo is the most linear and sinewy of the 2006s but it continues to grow in the glass as its inner core of perfumed red fruit gradually emerges. This structured, brooding red finishes with incredible purity and length. Today the wine is holding back much of its potential, but readers who can be patient will be rewarded with a breathtaking wine. Simply put, this is gorgeous stuff. In 2006 Nardo is 50% Montepulciano, 30% Sangiovese and 20% Marselan. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2026. The **2006 Eneo** has developed beautifully since it was bottled. It is a remarkably soft-textured, seamless wine loaded with black cherries, blackberry jam, mint, tar and graphite in a vibrant and utterly spellbinding style. The wine's sheer extract covers the potent yet silky tannins that lie beneath. Clean, minerally notes linger on the long, satisfying finish. This is a spectacular effort. In 2006 Eneo is 40% Montepulciano 40% Sangiovese, 10% Marselan and 10% Alicante. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. The **2006 Gabbro** (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) is a spectacularly ripe, opulent wine endowed with layers of fresh dark cherries, blackberries, smoke, minerals and French oak. This primary, dense wine exudes profound balance in all of its components, with phenomenal length on the palate and spellbinding purity in its fruit. The tannins build on the finish, suggesting the wine needs at least several years of aging before it offers its fines drinking. This is another superb achievement from Montepeloso. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026

Importer: The Rare Wine Co., Sonoma, CA; tel. (707) 996-4484

PETROLO	2006 IL TORRIONE	MERCATALE VALDARNO	(\$45.00)	RED	90
PETROLO	2006 BOGGINA	MERCATALE VALDARNO	(\$120.00)	RED	93
PETROLO	2006 GALATRONA	MERCATALE VALDARNO	(\$120.00)	RED	95

The **2006 Torrione** (Sangiovese) is another in a series of consistently outstanding wines from Petrolo. A generous, soft-textured wine, the 2006 Torrione possesses captivating aromatics that meld seamlessly into a palate of ripe red fruit. This beautifully-balanced offering reveals gorgeous inner perfume and tons of balance. It is not to be missed. Torrione is mostly Sangiovese but in some vintages a small dollop of Merlot and/or Cabernet Sauvignon is added. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2016. This year proprietor Luca Sanjust has a new wine, which is essentially his finest barrel of Sangiovese fruit from the old-vine Boggina vineyard that supplies much of the Sangiovese that goes into the entry-level Torrione. The **2006 Boggina** (100% Sangiovese) is sweet and layered in its expression of super-ripe red fruits, spices, flowers and sweet toasted oak, all of which come together with notable style. The wine possesses terrific overall harmony, with a long, vibrant finish. Today the Boggina comes across as quite youthful, but it should develop into a gem once the tannins soften a little. Sadly there are a mere 250 bottles of this wine, but perhaps the 2006 will convince Sanjust that he can spare a few more barrels for his latest creation. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2026. The estate's **2006 Galatrona** (100% Merlot) is especially large-scaled in this vintage, with tons of super-ripe dark fruit, new leather, spices and minerals. The Galatrona presents an intriguing

combination of soft-textured, generous fruit wedded to sheer power in a sumptuous, full-bodied style. The tannins are present, but the wine's sheer density creates an impression of seamless opulence. This immensely rewarding Galatrona should continue to develop beautifully in bottle. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2021. Importer: Vintus LLC, Pleasantville, NJ tel. (914) 769-3000

PODERE MONASTERO	2006 LA PINETA	CASTELLINA IN CHIANTI	(\$NA)	RED	92
PODERE MONASTERO	2006 CAMPANAIO	CASTELLINA IN CHIANTI	(\$NA)	RED	90

Proprietor Alessandro Cellai is best known for the wines he makes at Paolo Panerai's numerous properties, including Castellare in Chianti Classico and Rocca di Frassinello in Maremma. Podere Monastero is Cellai's own property located in Castellina in Chianti, in the heart of the Chianti Classico zone. Cellai produces just two wines, a Pinot Noir and a Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot blend, both of which are made in an opulent fruit-driven style that owes much to Cellai's love of New World wines. The **2006 La Pineta** is 100% Pinot Noir from a relatively cool site on the property. The wine is fermented in oak vats and spends 12 months in new French oak barrels prior to being bottled. This is an intense, super-ripe Pinot that readers will have a hard time placing as Tuscan, yet the wine possesses superb richness and length, with notable inner perfume. To be sure, this is a full-throttle style of Pinot, but the wine shows terrific balance and tons of harmony. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2018. The **2006 Campanaio** is equal parts Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The wine is fermented in steel and aged in French oak barrels, of which 50% are new. The Campanaio reveals a similar style to the Pineta in its intense, super-ripe style, but it doesn't quite have the level of aromatic complexity or varietal character. Still, it is a beautiful wine that remains quite vibrant and in need of further bottle age. The vines are young, and there is undoubtedly much to look forward to here. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2018. A Leonardo Lo Cascio Selection, Winebow, Montvale, NJ; tel. (201) 445-0620

ROCCA DI FRASSINELLO	2006 ROCCA DI FRASINELLO	GAVORRANO	(\$79.99)	RED	92
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This ambitious young property located in Maremma continues to show significant improvement. Proprietor Paolo Panerai's newest project is an as yet unreleased 100% Merlot designed to compete with the region's elite bottlings. It will be very interesting to see what he and oenologists Alessandro Cellai and Christian Le Sommer come up with. I was very impressed with the estate's top of the line **2006 Rocca di Frassinello** both times I tasted it. Super-ripe aromas lead to an attractive core of vibrant dark fruit, spices, minerals and sweet toasted oak, all of which are framed by firm yet well-balanced tannins. This generous, inviting wine possesses tons of freshness and terrific overall harmony, with pretty notes of sweetness

on the long finish. Rocca di Frassinello is 60% Sangiovetto, 20% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon aged in French oak. The 2006 is the best vintage yet. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2018. Importer: Vias Imports, New York, NY; tel. (212) 629-0200

TENUTA DELL' ORNELLAIA	2006 LE SERRE NUOVE	BOLGHERI	(\$NA)	RED	94
TENUTA DELL' ORNELLAIA	2006 ORNELLAIA	BOLGHERI	(\$NA)	RED	97
TENUTA DELL' ORNELLAIA	2006 MASSETO	BOLGHERI	(\$NA)	RED	99

This set of new releases from Tenuta dell'Ornellaia leaves me looking for words that can adequately capture the pure magic and sheer profoundness the property has achieved in this important, hallmark vintage. I will try with one word: Monumental. The Ornellaia team led by



Oenologist Axel Heinz and Agronomist/General Manager Leonardo Raspini has done a fabulous job with these wines, which have never failed to literally send shivers down my spine on the multiple occasions I have tasted them. The **2006 Le Serre Nuove**, the estate's second wine from Ornellaia, will challenge many of the top bottlings in this vintage for years to come. The 2006 is a rich, sumptuous wine bursting with ripe dark fruit, smoke, tobacco, grilled herbs, new leather, minerals and tar. The wine possesses superb density and explosive, utterly irresistible personality. At roughly one-third the price of its big sibling Ornellaia, the 2006 Le Serre Nuove is a must-purchase wine. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022. The **2006 Ornellaia** flows from the glass in a profound expression of ripe, dark fruit. With time in the glass layers of minerals, cassis, tar, sweet herbs and French oak emerge, adding further complexity. This harmonious Ornellaia combines the richness of the vintage with superb freshness and awesome balance. Today the wine's sheer density almost manages to hide the tannins, but they are there, and the wine will

ultimately benefit from a few years in the cellar. The 2006 Ornellaia is one of the highlights of this sensational Tuscan vintage. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2026. I can still remember nearly falling out of my chair the first time I tasted the **2006 Masseto** (100% Merlot) from barrel. The wine is now in bottle, and it is every bit as monumental as I had hoped. The wine possesses staggering richness in a style that perfectly captures the essence of this great Tuscan vintage. Black cherries, flowers, licorice and sweet toasted oak are just some of the nuances that emerge from the 2006 Masseto. A wine of breathtaking depth, it also reveals superb clarity, freshness and vibrancy in sumptuous, beautifully-balanced style. Simply put, the 2006 Masseto is a masterpiece from Tenuta dell' Ornellaia. According to Agronomist/General Manager Leonardo Raspini the dryness of the vintage slowed down the maturation of the sugars, leaving the wine with an unusually high level of acidity, and therefore freshness, considering its overall ripeness. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2031. Importer: Folio Fine Wine Partners, Napa, CA; tel. (707) 256-2700

TUA RITA	2007	ROSSO DEI NOTRI	SUVERETO	(\$25.00)	RED	90
TUA RITA	2006	PERLATO DEL BOSCO	SUVERETO	(\$48.00)	RED	93
TUA RITA	2006	GIUSTO DI NOTRI	SUVERETO	(\$110.00)	RED	96
TUA RITA	2006	SYRAH	SUVERETO	(\$220.00)	RED	97
TUA RITA	2006	REDIGAFFI	SUVERETO	(\$330.00)	RED	97

This is a breathtaking set of wines from proprietor Stefano Frascolla and consulting oenologist Stefano Chioccioli. Although Suvereto is one of the warmer micro-climates in Tuscany, the estate's vineyards also contain a relatively high percentage of minerals, which allows the wines to maintain a surprising level of freshness, even in warm vintages. 2006 is quite possibly the most consistent vintage yet from top to bottom for Tua Rita. Simply put, the wines are not to be missed. Tua Rita's **2007 Rosso dei Notri** is simply beautiful in this vintage. It offers up an enticing bouquet, along with an array of sweet herbs, ripe red fruits, spices, tobacco and minerals. This is an especially complex Rosso di Notri that overachieves in 2007 and delivers superb value for the money. If the Rosso is indicative of the estate's other 2007s Tua Rita fans will have a lot to look forward to when the top wines are released next year. Anticipated maturity: 2008-2013. The **2006 Perlato del Bosco** is a deep, dense wine endowed with impressive concentration in its mineral-infused dark blueberries, blackberries, spices and French oak. Cool notes of mint give the wine a pretty, floral lift on the finish. Although the wine continues to blossom in the glass this remains an extraordinarily primary Perlato del Bosco that needs a few years to come together. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2026. The estate's **2006 Giusto di Notri** is another weighty, powerful offering bursting with tons of primary fruit. Sweet herbs, cassis and graphite swirl around in the glass, adding further complexity. Like the other wines in this line-up, the Giusto di Notri needs time to reach the full range of its potential, but it is awfully impressive even at this early stage. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2026. I was blown

away by the **2006 Syrah**. This fresh, vibrant wine possesses endless layers of perfumed dark fruit, mint, minerals and sweet toasted oak. Despite its extroverted personality, the wine reveals superb clarity and detail in a rich, massive style. The tannins build mightily on the finish, suggesting a minimum of a few years of cellaring is warranted. It is impossible not to admire this wine's exceptional pedigree. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2026. The **2006 Redigaffi** is another deeply-colored, intense offering. Blueberries, blackberries, grilled herbs, minerals and French oak emerge with tons of inner sweetness as this beautifully delineated wine opens up in the glass. This gorgeous, sculpted Redigaffi possesses tons of harmony and class all the way through to the polished, energetic finish. Although the tannins are rather firm, they are virtually buried under the wine's fruit. This is an awesome effort from Tua Rita. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2021. A Leonardo Lo Cascio Selection, Winebow, Montvale, NJ; tel. (201) 445-0620

—Antonio Galloni

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