

The Successful Collector – By Julian Hitner

~ Chianti Classico – the classic wine of Tuscany ~

Saturday, October 15th, 2011

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Constant improvement:

Outside of Brunello di Montalcino and (perhaps) Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, the Chianti Classico zone is nowadays home to some of the greatest Sangiovese-based wines in the world. Awarded its own DOC between Florence and Siena in 1966 (promoted to DOCG status in 1984), the finest examples of Chianti Classico have undergone nothing short of a colossal leap in quality



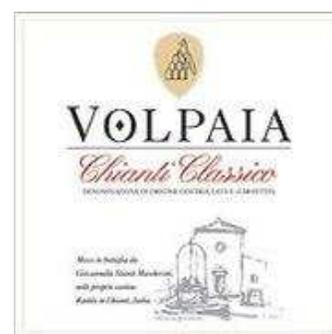
over the past dozen or so years, becoming an increasingly viable source for even the most discriminating of collectors.



Indeed, the advancements have been incredible. Compared to fifteen years ago, today's Chianti Classicos are far better suited to the modern palate: fresher, rounder, and oftentimes just as complex, with better clones of Sangiovese being planted to full advantage on the famous *galestro* soils (schist-based, or shaly clay) and *alberese*

(limestone-based) deposits found throughout much of Tuscany. Together with state-of-the-art winemaking facilities and an impassioned drive to craft the best wines possible, the finest bottlings of Chianti Classico have emerged, quite legitimately, as some of the greatest, most terroir-driven wines of Italy.

The blend for Chianti Classico is fairly simple. Producers are permitted to use 80-100% Sangiovese (80% being the proscribed minimum), along with up to 20% international varietals, with Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Merlot being the most common. Even so, some producers still prefer using permitted local varietals in lieu



of French ones: Canaiolo or Colorino. Yields in the vineyard may not exceed 52.5 hl/ha, though the best producers will often harvest far lower than this. The wine must be aged for at least 7 months in oak and may not be released to the public before at least 1 October the year following the vintage. Chianti Classico Riserva, on the other hand, requires longer aging: 2 years in oak

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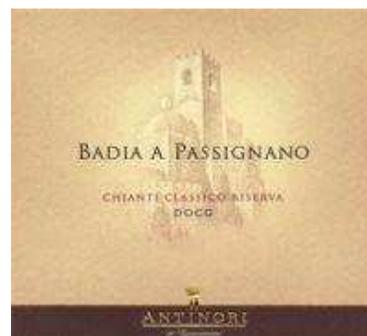
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and at least 3 months in bottle. The type of oak used is decided by the producer, with some preferring Slavonian oak for a more ‘traditional’ style, while others may opt for French oak for a more modern, fuller, and slightly less austere type of wine.

Still, serious collectors should remember that not all Chianti Classicos are created equal. Despite enormous improvements in quality over the past fifteen or so years, there are still plenty of wines that simply do not measure up to the standards set by the finest estates, such as the labels shown in this column. At their best, a first-rate Chianti Classico ought to revel in beautiful,



slightly rustic aromas of dark wild cherries and plums, cedar, undergrowth, light herbs, and spice; with more modern examples boasting additional scents of subtle black cherries, vanillin, and mild (never dominant) toasted oak.

Just as important, the best Chianti Classicos should have little trouble aging for well over ten years; though it is generally advisable to drink up between four and six years, especially when the wine hails from only a moderate vintage—as of late, I have begun drinking '06 with absolute pleasure. Once again, it goes without saying that collectors should stick with the best producers. And yet, at the rate that overall quality keeps on improving, we can all trust to have many more choices over the next several years.

[Click here for a few gems from the 15 October 2011 Vintages Release and other items](#)

A few gems for collectors:

White Wines:

Pahlmeyer 2008 Chardonnay, Napa Valley, California: Though best known for their excellent, powerful reds, Jayson Pahlmeyer and winemaker Erin Green seem just as adept at crafting magnificent Chardonnays as they are at Cabernets. Starbright, light green in colour, the '08 is beautifully toasted, featuring seriously rich scents of delicate, caramel-infused pears, quince, lemon citrus blossom, white flowers, nuts, orange peel, and spice. Very complex, with amazing, Burgundian-inspired fruit, balanced acidity, and a bold, decadent hint of caramel, quince, and pears on the finish. Simply superb: beautifully fashioned and elegant; this in spite of 14.9% alcohol, which only barely seems apparent. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, July 2011)

93+ \$79.95 (#222117) Vintages Online Exclusives

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Pahlmeyer 2009 Chardonnay, Napa Valley, California: Sensational follow-up to the '08, the exquisite 2009 Chardonnay comes short of equalling its most immediate predecessor by the most insignificant of margins. Starbright, light-medium green in colour, the wine features a near-dazzling array of intense toasted quince, butterscotch, pears, ripe apricots, custard, orange zest, and just a hint of vanillin. Very complex, offering deliciously round, well-styled fruit, slightly milder acidity, and a lingering, polished hint of (exceptional) pears, caramel, and quince on the finish. Extremely enticing and rich. Still noticeably Burgundian, though perhaps not elegant as the '08—not that this really matters. Now-2019+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92++ \$79.95 (#147454) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Grosset 2010 Polish Hill Riesling, Clare Valley, Australia: Hands down the greatest Riesling in Clare Valley, if not all of Australia, the 2010 Polish Hill flawlessly meets all expectations of exquisiteness, vibrancy, intensity, and charm. Starbright, pale lime in colour, the wine remains extremely youthful at present, delivering remarkable, almost ethereal, scents of delicate lime, lemon, minerals (especially slate), dried pears, wild white flowers, and spice. Decisively complex, with exceptional mineral-laden fruit and acidity, ending with a wonderful hint of intensely elegant lime and minerals on the finish. In the end: simply outstanding. Such harmony, clarity, and refinement! Screwcap closure. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, July 2011)

92 \$45.95 (#932962) Vintages Online Exclusives

Domaine La Roquette 2010 Clos La Roquette, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc AOC, Rhône, France: One of the more typical white Châteauneufs I have tasted of late, the 2010 offers much more of a streamlined yet still-superb illustration of this otherwise idiosyncratic blend. Starbright, pale straw-lime in colour, the wine engaging 'Provençal' scents of rosemary-driven white flowers, ripe yellow pears, lemon, white chalk, anise, orange zest, and a very subtle, lovely hint of dried quince and earthy loam. Very complex, with marvellous fruit expression, balanced acidity, and a polished hint of pears, white flowers, and chalk (seriously) on the finish. Great regional character and approach. 35% Clairette, 30% Grenache Blanc, 25% Roussanne, and 10% Bourblanc. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, August 2011)

91+ \$48.95 (#236919) Vintages Online Exclusives

Red Wines:

Luce della Vite 2008 Luce, IGT Toscana, Tuscany, Italy: Now owned solely by the Frescobaldi family, the 2008 Luce is a monumental Super Tuscan crafted in the ever-controversial 'blockbuster' style. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine is richly saturated in oak and exhibits extraordinary, abundant aromas of dark mocha and cherried black currants, kirsch, crème de cassis, licorice, leather, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with exceedingly sumptuous fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a mightily long hint of mocha shavings and plums (very powerful) on the finish. Utterly resplendent, enticing, and unerringly robust. In the end: ideal for North American collectors. 55% Merlot and 45% Sangiovese. Now-2024++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

93 \$99.95 (#685263) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

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Château Troplong Mondot 2007, St-Emilion Grand Cru Classé AOC, Bordeaux, France: Coming off a well-deserved promotion in the St-Emilion classification system in 2006, it is highly gratifying to see the 2007 Troplong Mondot perform as superbly as this. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine features undeniably attractive, inviting aromas of intense pain grille-infused currants and plums, blackened kirsch, charcoal, asphalt, and a hint of dried black cherries, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with amazingly decadent fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an abundant hint of dried mocha and plummy currants on the finish. Exquisitely well done for the year, with beautiful structure, balance, purity, and breed. 90% Merlot and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Now-2022+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92++ \$115.00 (#102723) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Château Pontet-Canet 2007, Pauillac AOC, Bordeaux, France: The most improved estate in Pauillac over the past decade, now vying with Lynch-Bages as the most revered Fifth Growth on the market. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the '07 Pontet-Canet reveals spot-on aromas of 'seasoned' toasted oak (very elegant) that quickly gives way to currants, plums, black cherries, graphite, dried licorice, forest floor, pain grille, and a beautiful hint of vanilla and spice. Very complex, featuring surprisingly well-structured fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a superbly crisp, sincerely elegant hint of currants and graphite on the finish. Dazzling for the year: a claret of real poise, style, and character. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Now-2021+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

92+ \$105.00 (#100768) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Clarendon Hills 2006 Hickinbotham Syrah, Clarendon, Australia: Acutely massive—indeed fortifying in style—the '06 Hickinbotham Syrah is an immensely powerful wine that Roman Bratasiuk crafts from extremely old vines grown on compact, gravel/iron-based soils terraced over steep slopes. Brilliant, very dense ruby-red currant in colour, the wine offers opulent aromas of (really baked) eucalyptus, stewed brownies, currants, black fruits, dates, tar, leather, Oreo cookies, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, offering delicious, powerful forward fruit, firm tannins, mild acidity, and a long, polished hint of baked black mocha, currants, and eucalyptus on the finish. In the end: one powerful, tempting wine. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2011)

92 \$99.00 (#64535) Vintages Online Exclusives

Jonata 2007 La Tierra de Jonata Sangiovese, Santa Ynez Valley, California: Time and time again, premium Sangiovese has proved a hit-and-miss affair in California, with only a small list of successes to date. Indeed, the '07 La Tierra de Jonata can be considered among them. Brilliant, opaque ruby colour, this deliciously intriguing specimen boasts characterful, idiosyncratic aromas of truffles, cherries, plums, forest floor, leather, loamy earth, and spice. Very complex, with highly satisfying, superbly structured and focused fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting hint of 'truffled' plums, cherries, and (even) incense on the finish. A real eye-opener: resplendent, 'California-ized' Sangiovese. Also contains 3% Syrah. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92 \$84.95 (#221150) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

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Two Hands 2008 Sophie's Garden Shiraz, Padthaway, Australia: One of several different 'Garden' series Shirazes from Two Hands, Sophie's flower patch (?) hailing from the increasingly impressive Geographical Indication of Padthaway. Brilliant, very dense ruby (plus a touch of purple) in colour, the '08 displays enticing aromas of eucalyptus, plums, 'silky' blackberries and blueberries, lavender, white pepper, violets, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, boasting utterly delicious, sumptuously forward fruit, supple tannins, mild acidity, and a very long, polished hint of velvety eucalyptus and plums on the finish. A Shiraz of amazing power, integration, and style. But at 15.8% alcohol, I'm glad it's under Screwcap—it'll have to stay longer because it'll just be one glass per person an evening (with lots of food). Now-2024. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92 \$46.00 (#62380) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Château La Pointe 2005, Pomerol AOC, Bordeaux, France: From the magnificent 2005 vintage, it has been said that the larger-than-average estate of La Pointe has long has the potential to produce great wines, and I would tend to agree. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby-red current in colour, the wine seems to be maturing beautifully, revealing rich aromas of burgeoning currants and elegant cedarwood (very mild), switching to black coffee, forest floor, tar, and a hint of dried cherries and spice. Complex, with superb fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an opulent hint of 'roasted' mocha and plums on the finish. Ultimately: a real beauty of remarkable depth, serious flesh, and elegance. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2011)

91++ \$65.00 (#205997) Vintages Online Exclusives

Bodegas Peñalba Lopez 2006 Torre Albéniz Reserva, Ribera del Duero DO, Spain: Powerful, appetizing Ribera, the '06 Torre Albéniz Reserva is a tempting offering from one of the most prestigious sub-regions in Spain, albeit an area where far too many mediocre wines are still made. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine is very finely toasted, offering impressive aromas of baked black fruits, stewed cherries, leather, tar, camphor, and beautiful hints of vanilla and spice. Complex, with delicious, exceptionally integrated fruit, very firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a lengthy hint of baked plums and walnuts (subtle) on the finish. Big and bold—not to everyone's taste, yet the quality is there. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2011)

91+ \$39.00 (#209445) Vintages Online Exclusives

Podere di Luigi Einaudi 2009, Dolcetto di Dogliani DOCG, Piedmont, Italy: From the (supposed) traditional heartland of Dolcetto production, the 2009 Einaudi Dolcetto di Dogliani indeed has a lot going for it. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, the wine reveals delightfully 'dusty' dried plums, wild cherries, and a hint of flowers and spice—pretty. On the palate: lovely fruit showing, with firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an endearing hint of fresh 'tree' plums on the finish. Quite proper, nicely structured wine—splendid. Now-2015+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

88 \$18.95 (#232454) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Dessert Wines:

Château Guiraud 2007, Sauternes AOC, Bordeaux, France: One of my favourite Sauternes estates, the 2007 Château Guiraud is a sweet wine of great finesse, delicacy, and refinement. Starbright, light orange-gold in colour, it delivers wonderfully nutted

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scents of honeyed nectarines and peaches, switching to lemon blossom, apricots, almonds, honeycomb, and just a hint of spice. Very complex, with dazzling sweet fruit expression, balanced acidity, and an outstanding hint of honeyed nectarines on the finish. Distinctly 'feminine' in style, while those looking for sheer power may want to venture elsewhere, the underlying grace of this marvellous wine cannot be ignored. The vineyard is planted to 65% Sémillon and 35% Sauvignon Blanc. Now-2028++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92++ \$39.00 (#98582) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release

Château Doisy-Daëne 2007, Barsac AOC, Bordeaux, France: Having emerged as a leading 'second-tier' Barsac over the past several years, the 2007 Château Doisy-Daëne retains all the personality and refinement of a truly superb sticky. Starbright, light-medium gold in colour, the wine shows lots of flint in terms of primary aromatics, giving way to superlative scents of natted lemon, honeysuckle, orange peel, white flowers, custard, and candle wax. Complex, with amazing sweet fruit, balanced acidity, and a brilliant hint of lemon and honeysuckle on the finish. A Barsac of exemplary personality, focus, and polish. The vineyard is planted to 100% Sémillon. Now-2026+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, September 2011)

92 \$32.00 (#97899) Vintages 15 October 2011 Release