

TUSCANY 2006 and 2007: A New Golden Age

by Antonio Galloni

Readers who enjoy the best Tuscany has to offer will find no shortage of compelling wines at virtually all price points in vintages 2006 and 2007. I continue to be impressed with the consistently stunning 2006s. Most of the entry-level wines have been on the market for some time, and as I have written in *The Wine Advocate* previously, the vintage offers incredible quality from top to bottom in all of the region's main appellations. Over the coming months many of the higher-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. 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 Buds). Simply put, it is hard to go wrong with a bottle of Tuscan red in 2006.

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 will be tempting to drink young for their opulent fruit, but the best wines have the potential to age gracefully for many years. Since their initial release, many of the higher-end 2006s have begun to close down, so readers will want to approach these wines with caution. 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. 2007 was a freakish year in Tuscany, as it was in many parts of Italy. The winter was virtually non-existent. Unusually warm, dry weather caused plants and flowers to bloom a full month in advance. The summer was cooler than normal, which brought the plants a measure of equilibrium by slowing down the maturation cycle. Unlike 2006, which was outstanding across the board, in 2007 growers had to do more work to help the fruit ripen fully. Where producers were diligent, the wines offer an attractive combination of perfumed aromatics and soft, generous fruit in a style that is more approachable than the firmer 2006s. I tasted a number of entry-level 2007s that are beautiful for the integrity of their fruit. I am thinking in particular of the 2007 Chiantis, the best of which are especially well-balanced and succulent. Most of the higher-end 2007s will be released next year so it is still too early to tell for sure, but my early impression is that results at that level will also be more variable than in 2006. Overall, the 2007s don't appear to have the structure or potential longevity of the 2006s, but they should drink beautifully upon release. Readers should buy the 2007s for early to mid-term drinking and the 2006s to cellar.

Tuscany offers a huge number of delicious wines in both 2006 and 2007 that can be had for relatively modest sums. 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 purchased vineyards and built expensive new cellars under economic assumptions that are clearly no longer valid, at least over the foreseeable future.

AIA VECCHIA	2006	SOR UGO	CASTAGNETO CARDUCCI (\$42.00)	RED	91
The 2006 Sor Ugo is a rich, full bodied wine bursting with vibrant dark red fruit, flowers, smoke, tar and licorice. The juiciness in the fruit carries through with substantial energy to the refined, poised finish. Like many wines from Bolgheri in 2006, Sor Ugo possesses an			incredibly attractive combination of ripeness and verve. Sor Ugo is 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot aged in Allier oak barrels. Anticipated maturity: 2011-2021. Importer: Dalla Terra, Napa, CA; tel. (707) 259-5405		
ALTESINO	2006	ROSSO DI MONTALCINO	MONTALCINO (\$30.00)	RED	86
Altesino's 2006 Rosso di Montalcino is a relatively soft, floral red. Perfumed cherries, spices and tobacco are some of the nuances that emerge as the wine sits in the glass. The 2006 Rosso di Montalcino			is already rather forward and looks to be an early-maturing wine. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2012. A Leonardo Lo Cascio Selection, Winebow, Montvale, NJ; tel. (201) 445-0620		
AMBRA	2006	CARMIGNANO MONTEFORTINI	CARMIGNANO (\$18.00)	RED	89
AMBRA	2006	CARMIGNANO SANTA CRISTINA IN PILLI	CARMIGNANO (\$20.00)	RED	90
AMBRA	2005	CARMIGNANO RISERVA ELZANA	CARMIGNANO (\$30.00)	RED	92
AMBRA	2005	CARMIGNANO RISERVA LE VIGNE ALTE MONTALBIOLO	CARMIGNANO (\$30.00)	RED	92
Ambra must be one of Italy's most overlooked properties. Once again, this is a beautiful set of wines. Ambra's 2006 Carmignano Montefortini is superb. Dark cherries, earthiness, licorice and sweet herbs come together in a medium-bodied Carmignano of unusual pedigree, especially at this price point. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2014. The 2006 Carmignano Santa Cristina in Pilli is even better than the Montefortini. Here the aromas are a touch more delineated while the fruit is fresher and more vibrant. Violets, dark cherries, flowers, menthol and spices are all supported by a persistent note of underlying minerality that gives the finish its length and poise. This is a ridiculously good wine for the money. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2016. The 2005 Carmignano Riserva Elzana is mostly Sangiovese with a dollop of Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine spent a year in medium-size French oak barrels followed by a year in large Slavonian oak. This is a remarkably harmonious, vibrant wine			bursting with class and sheer pedigree. The round, textured style covers every corner of the palate with gorgeous depth and purity. Sweet notes of herbs, menthol, earthiness and licorice linger on the powerful finish. This is another exceptional wine from Ambra. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2021. The 2005 Carmignano Riserva Le Vigne Alte Montalbiolo (70% Sangiovese, 20% Canaiolo, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon) is another drop-dead gorgeous wine from Ambra. The style is perhaps a touch richer and more opulent than the Elzana, but here too, the balance is simply impeccable. Dark cherries, menthol, new leather and sweet scents of toasted oak emerge from this relatively soft, opulent Carmignano. The wine offers gorgeous length and a long, resonating finish. Simply put, everything here is in the right place. Anticipated maturity: 2010-2021. A Marc de Grazia Selection, various American importers, including: de Grazia Imports; tel. (417) 732-4200		
AMPELEIA	2005	AMPELEIA	ROCCATEDERIGHI (\$50.00)	RED	92
The 2005 Ampeleia is a rich, sensual wine endowed with layers of spiced dark fruit, minerals and flowers. Smoke, tar, leather and licorice nuances develop in the glass, adding further complexity. The Ampeleia shows terrific balance and harmony, particularly within the			context of the vintage. This is a wonderful effort from proprietor Elisabetta Foradori. Anticipated maturity: 2009-2015. Importer: Domaine Select, New York, NY; tel. (212) 279-0799		
ANTINORI	2005	CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA BADIA A PASSIGNANO	SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA (\$50.00)	RED	89
ANTINORI	2005	CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA MARCHESI ANTINORI	SAN CASCIANO VAL DI PESA (\$35.00)	RED	91
ANTINORI	2006	GUADO AL TASSO	BOLGHERI (\$100.00)	RED	91