

Pour



The Road to Bolgheri

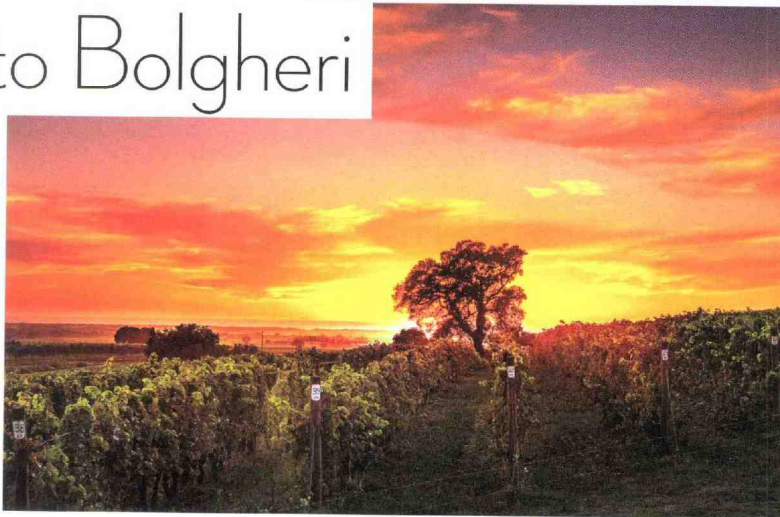
Tucked away in coastal Tuscany, the Bolgheri region specializes in grand Super Tuscans

BY MARK SPIVAK

In the beginning, there was Sassicaia. Legend has it Mario Incisa della Rocchetta planted Cabernet vines in Bolgheri during World War II to compensate for the shortage of Bordeaux. Sassicaia remained his personal wine for many years, until his son, Nicolò, and nephew, Piero Antinori, convinced him to release the 1968 vintage to the public in 1971. A few years later, Sassicaia beat a field of top-ranked Bordeaux bottles in a blind tasting, and the Super Tuscan gold rush was on.

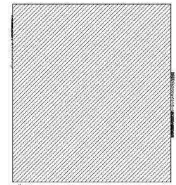
Initially, Super Tuscans, wines made from foreign grape varieties not permitted by Italian wine law, had to be labeled as *Vino da Tavola*, or table wine, the lowest rung in the classification. As years passed, it became obvious the Cabernet and Merlot of Bordeaux thrived in Italy and were most successful in the coastal Tuscan region of Bolgheri.

The Rocchetta family continued to experiment in Bolgheri. Piero's brother, Lodovico, planted vines near Sassicaia in 1981, and in 1985 unveiled a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc called Omellaia. The wine struggled for recognition at first, but eventually came to rival Sassicaia in reputation and price (the 2013 vintages of both wines sell in the range of \$175). Both display the power and



elegance characteristic of all great Cabernet Sauvignon, and it's now common to find the two labels side by side with First Growth Bordeaux in the cellars of many collectors.

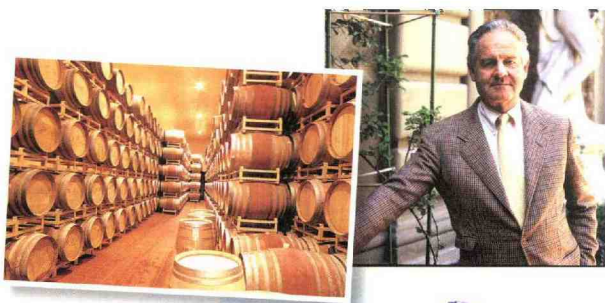
As the Bolgheri region expanded, there was an influx of winemaking talent and capital, and the offerings became more democratic. Piero Antinori led the way, establishing the Guado al Tasso estate in an amphitheater-shaped site nicknamed "the bowl of Bolgheri." While the flagship wine—a blend of Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah—sells for \$90, there are also some delicious value options. The Vermentino (\$20) is a clean, fresh white wine with good acidity, ripe citrus flavors, and a firm mineral backbone. Il Bruciato (\$25), Guado al Tasso's entry-level red, has enough structure to stand up to game dishes and red meats, with supple tannins that make it a pleasure to drink.



Angelo Gaja, a name associated for generations with Barbaresco, also couldn't resist the region's allure. In 1996, he bought the Ca' Marcanda estate in Bolgheri and continued the experiments with Bordeaux varietals he had begun years before in Piemonte. Despite Gaja's reputation and the lofty price of Ca' Marcanda's namesake wine, the property does offer two value wines: Magari, a Cabernet/Merlot blend (\$52), and a combination of Merlot and Syrah called Promis (\$40).

There are nearly 40 wine producers in Bolgheri today, and many are turning out exceptional bottles for everyday drinking. A good example is Aia Vecchia, owned by the Pellegrini family, who have grown grapes in the region for several generations. Their entry-level wine, the Merlot-dominated Lagone (\$16), entices with scents of dark berries, fresh herbs, anise, and mocha. It's ripe, generous, and focused on the palate; earth notes frame the lush berry fruit and soft tannins carry the flavors onto the finish.

Sor Ugo (\$35)—a blend of 50 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 30 percent Merlot, 15 percent Cabernet Franc, and 5 percent Petit Verdot—is even better. The wine is beautifully balanced and a pleasure to drink, with hints of spiced plum, blackberry, and mint that intertwine on the palate. It's a good way to experience the uniqueness of Bolgheri at a great value. <<



ONE OF THE LEADING NAMES IN BOLGHERI SUPER TUSCANS, DIERO ANTINORI (LEFT) FOUNDED GUADO AL TASSO WINERY.



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