


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

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Primitivo tasting.



Gezzi of Camigliano and Guiseppe Cossu of American Wines.

The Italians are coming! Well, at least it seems that way recently – I’ve co-hosted dinners featuring the wines of Sicily and Tuscany and attended dinners focusing on the wines of Camigliano and Puglia. The Montalcino wine dinner was hosted by Gualtiero Ghezzi, owner of the Montalcino (read: Brunello) winery [Camigliano](#) (named after the small village of 25 that is the winery’s home). The guests, apart from me, were all local restaurant owners: an ideal audience.

The session began with the **Camigliano 2002 Rosso Di Montalcino** (\$20), which was smooth, with good tannins – a very straightforward wine. The *1998 Brunello di Montalcino* (\$34) was a big, full-bodied, fruity wine with an earthy nose yet sweet overtones. The *1998 Brunello di Montalcino* earned a 92 from [Wine Spectator](#), as did the 1999 vintage. The *1999 Brunello di Montalcino* displayed a good color and was also full-bodied, but subtler, with more refined and complex nuances. The wine was so alluring we included it, and its lovely finish, in our Wines of Tuscany dinner later in the month. I also found the *1998 Brunello di Montalcino Gualto* (\$60) admirable, a lighter, yet more earthy wine. We finished the evening with the *1997 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva* (\$51), with a striking nose. The Riserva was somewhat austere in flavor, but complex and richly colored. The winery also produces a very popular *Cabernet Sauvignon Sant’ Antimo*.

[Camigliano](#) was acquired by the Ghezzi family (originally from Milan) in 1957, and now has over 1000 acres registered as DOC Brunello di Montalcino. They produce 180,000 bottles of wine from those properties, and another 100,000 bottles of DOC Rosso di Montalcino from other properties totaling some 17 acres. Another 90 acres, registered as DOC St. Antimo, are planted with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Sangiovese. This interesting, educational, and altogether pleasant evening was coordinated by Guiseppe Cossu, the Italian wine specialist for American Wines.

Also visiting from Italy (though from Puglia, further south) were the charming Gregorio and Betsy Gorla. They own property in the **Accademia dei Racemi** (an association of Apulian producers), from which they produce a number of different wines, and also smaller lots from various smaller estates. Their company has been praised as the “most significant Primitivo producer of the moment.” You remember Primitivo is a clone of Zinfandel, right?

Assisted by the wonderful Peter Birmingham, Sommelier of [Normans](#) on Sunset, the evening began with the *2001 Fruilani Primitivo del Tarantino* (\$10) which combined prominent fruit and nutty spices alongside bright cherry overtones and darker notes of tobacco and oak. Their *2003 Alcione* (\$16) is made from the Aglianico grape, an ancient varietal brought to Italy by Greek settlers! The wine was expressive, with strong fruits and notes of cocoa, vanilla, and other spices. The next selection, the *2002 Sinfarosa Primitivo del Tarantino* was interesting, made from old vine grapes, and very much a classic primitivo. Their *Sinfarosa Zinfandel Primitivo di Mandurio* D.O.C. is made from, of all things, Zinfandel rootstock imported a decade ago from [Ridge Vineyards](#) in Northern California. Revealing dark garnet colors, the wine presents vivid and intense fruits accompanied by strong aromas of vanilla and cinnamon. It tasted like the best of California’s Zinfandel – a spicy, concentrated wine with true elegance. Very nice, indeed.

Enjoying these wines with me were Genevieve Edwards, of [Villa Italia wines](#), Allan Stark of [Maddelena Wines](#), William Bloxsom-Carter, Executive Chef of Playboy Mansion West, and his Chef de Cuisine Jeffrey Scott.

But the Italians are not the only visitors at the moment. I received an invitation from the French Embassy Trade Commission to attend the *French Wine and Spirits Road Show*. While there I tasted the entire line of **Rene Barth and Michel Fonne** Alsace wines. Both the Pinot Blanc and Riesling were quite nice and sell in New York for \$10-12. Their attractive, floral Riesling Reserve sells at \$15. Barth and Fonne also have a Pinot Gris (\$15) and a Grand Cru (\$30) which is well worth the price. Next in the lineup was a Gewurtraminer (\$16). They also release a *2000 Late Harvest Pinot Gris* (\$14), an intriguing change of pace. The last bottle tasted was the lively *2003 Pinot Noir* (\$16), a varietal that represents less than 10% of the region’s total production. I tasted Barth’s wines in Alsace several years ago and felt they held up nicely against those of larger producers. Fonne, Barth’s nephew, took over the business a few years ago. Amongst his other qualifications, Fonne spent some time in California at [Hafner Vineyards](#) back in 1987. His Rieslings have received scores of 92 and 93 from [Wine Spectator](#).

Kudos to the French wine people for their good efforts and for introducing some exciting new faces – and wines! – to the U.S.