

Wine Spectator & Vinitaly present

FINEST ITALIAN WINES, 100 GREAT PRODUCERS

Journey Notes: *OperaWine meets with the tenors of Tuscan wines: Biondi Santi, Casanova di Neri, Antinori and Frescobaldi*

Tuscany has perhaps the greatest concentration of Italy's finest wines; in fact names such as **Ornellaia and Sassicaia** have gained international fame for their outstanding quality. The most interesting part of the Tuscan success story is that it can be found in different forms: from ancient noble family producers such as **Antinori** and **Frescobaldi**, to Italian winemaking pioneers such as **Biondi Santi** or **Casanova di Neri** who has only been producing Brunello since 1971, yet has already been named number one wine in 2006 by Wine Spectator.

First stop: Montalcino, land of the famed "Brunello"

Giacomo Neri has been known to have beaten the French of Bordeaux, humiliated the rampant Americans and brought big and pretentious Italian names into line, according to Marisa Fumagalli, a well-known Italian journalist. "I am a farmer, un contadino" this is how Giacomo Neri of **Casanova di Neri** describes himself. Founded in 1971 by his father who passed away soon after, Giacomo found himself at an early age, taking care of the winery on which he lives.

Passionate, "sans chichi", agrarian with his own signature style, he would say the recipes of success are 80% vineyard, 20% philosophy, using traditional methods on an exceptional plot of land, resulting in a Brunello which Neri says is "elegant and simple with a bouquet of flowers of the Mediterranean forest that surrounds the vineyards". Though the winery only released its first bottle in 1978 it quickly gained the attention of the wine world with a gold medal at the Bordeaux Expo in 1987 and number one wine from Wine Spectator in 2006. Exports currently account for 75% principally in the US, Canada and Germany but it is quickly gaining fame in Hong Kong, Singapore and one of Giacomo's new favorite cities, Seoul.

At **OperaWine** Casanova di Neri will be presenting his **2006 Tenuta Nuova**. Brunello has had a succession of fantastic years but it seems the best is yet to come according to Giacomo "2010 is the best grape of my life". For Giacomo, there is very special quality to Casanova di Neri: "The key is to remain true to your own style, know what you want to get from your wine and strive for reaching the highest quality in doing so."

One producer that has certainly done so is the very pioneer of Brunello di Montalcino, Biondi-Santi. To understand the true importance of Biondi Santi, suffice it to say that they are to Italian wine what Pavarotti is to opera. Upon arriving at **Tenuta Greppo**, one feels like entering into a place filled with heritage, tradition and great passion for the wines that are produced here. Dottore Franco Biondi Santi, now 89 years of age, still has his infectious laugh and ardor for his family's wines. A very special pleasure for each visit to **Tenuta Greppo** is hidden behind a door with a modest inscription "Antiche Riserve", which hides a little cellar and surely could be described as a holy grail of Brunello di Montalcino. Only Franco holds the keys to a treasure trove with bottles dating back to 1888. Wine Spectator's "Wine of the Century" and numerous other awards are associated with the excellence of the winery. Franco Biondi Santi selected the 2006 Annata to present at OperaWine. The choice for him came easy: "Perché a me mi piace" (Because I like it)!



Second stop: Florence, home of the great Florentine winemaking families: **Antinori** and **Frescobaldi**, both of which are also part of the grand tasting in Verona on the 24th of March. Antinori is inherently intertwined with the history of Tuscany as their wine making can be traced back 26 generations. The winery is said to be the creator of what has been called the "renaissance" of the Bel Wine country at the turn of the 20th century. The company's history and its 70 labels including such iconic ones as Tignanello and Solaia are also laid out in Piero Antinori's new book *"The Scent of Chianti. The story of a family of Vinattieri"*. The book describes for the first time, the story of the Antinori family, at a time when the company is moving towards a new, long-term future under the guidance of three daughters, Albiera, Allegra and Alessia. Albiera Antinori, eldest

daughter of Marchese Piero Antinori and vice President of the winemaker is enthusiastic about the opportunity to show their passion for wine at the Palazzo della Ragione at the opening event to Vinitaly 2012.

Via Santo Spirito in Firenze is office and home to the Frescobaldi. As Antinori can offer an impressive 26 generations of wine making, the Frescobaldi's can even look back onto a history that stretches 30 generations. Florence's first bridge Porta a Santa Trinita, dating back to the Renaissance has been build by the ancestors of Lamberto Frescobaldi, the vice-president of the prominent wine makers and also shows how connected his family is with the past of the city. The charismatic winemaker's modest office however does not directly reveal the eminence of their winemaking tradition for Tuscany and Italy. Frescobaldi's motto rightfully says: *"700 years of Tuscany in a glass"* and visitors of **OperaWine** will be able to learn just about how nice that Tuscan tradition will taste.