

The Wines of Antinori

Written by Terry Connor

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The first amazing fact about the Antinori family is that they have been producing wines for an unbroken string of 26 *generations*. The original date was 1385, when a man named Giovanni di Piero Antinori starting producing wines, not knowing that 627 years later his family would still be in business. I guess that we could call it an oenological legacy.

Since none of us were around in 1385, let us move forward to more recent times. The Antinori Family is now producing and shipping wines world-wide. Early in the 1970's Antinori took a bold step and introduced a wine called TIGNANELLO. The original thought on this wine was to emphasize the character of the Sangiovese grape. The product was presented as a blend of 80% Sangiovese, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 5% Cabernet Franc. A second wine was introduced a few years later and was called SOLAIA. This wine was a blend in the reverse; 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Sangiovese, and 5% Cabernet Franc. Both of these wines were a success. Both caused a minor disturbance, as they were not blended in accordance Italian wine law, but the exceptional quality of the wine was eventually recognized. The wines achieved DOCG status and later were given the title of Super Tuscan. (See Winespeak.) Both of these wines are available in the Lowcountry.

For the Antinori Family, producing wine globally happened as a result of travelling to potential wine producing areas. The travel was the product of curiosity, passion and the desire to explore different vines and terrain which had the potential for great winemaking. Piero Antinori visited the United States in 1966. Ideas were conceived but nothing happened for twenty years. In 1986, The Antinori Family purchased shares in a joint venture with England's Whitbread and France's Bollinger to develop a 1200 acre Napa Valley wine estate on a high plain in the eastern mountains of Napa Valley. The hilly terrain was considered, above all, to be ideal wine growing country as it included rocky soil and high elevation. It took a few years to clear the land, plant the vines, and receive from mother earth a crop of Cabernet Sauvignon Grapes that would yield the quality grapes that Antinori knew was possible. Today it is an estate called Antica Napa Valley – the name being a combination of Antinori and California.

For Antinori, this land in California was love at first sight. So it seemed like fate when he was offered an opportunity to buy the shares of Whitbread and Bollinger. This was completed along with an additional 40 acres adjacent to the property. From this 40 acres, called the "Townsend" vineyard, is produced the Antica Cabernet Sauvignon. This is a premium wine available in the Lowcountry restaurants and retailers.

Marchese Antinori added two more wineries to his American Portfolio by way of a joint venture

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with Chateau St. Michelle of Washington State. In 2007 this venture was able to purchase Stag's Leap Cellars in California, and Col Solare Winery in Benton City, Washington. Wines produced at either of these wineries are mostly in the Cabernet Sauvignon Premium Class and therefore are expensive. Stag's Leap can be found in most retailers and restaurants in Low Country. Col Solare is found mostly in Restaurants in Hilton Head.

Let's talk about an Antinori Restaurant. The same passion that exists for wine has been passed on to the restaurant arena. Allegra Antinori manages many restaurants for the Antinori family in Italy. Recently, a restaurant was opened in New York City at The Mondrian Hotel in Soho. The Restaurant is called Cantinetta Antinori. The featured wine is the 2008 Tignanello. Allegra believes that wine should be an emotional experience. She would love for her guests to respond to wine in much the same way as they do to a piece of music or art. In short, the restaurants seamlessly reflect the passion the entire family possesses.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the Antinori family. I am sure that you would also. As you learn more about them, try to imagine the world wide connections that the Family has accumulated. Truly remarkable.

WINESPEAK. What is a Super Tuscan? A Super Tuscan wine is a wine produced with a guarantee that at least 85% of the grapes used for the particular wine in question are grown in the region stated on the label. Be it a Rosso or a Bianco, the grape variety, the vinification, aging, and final blend are all up to the creativity of the winemaker. (The actual term "Super Tuscan" was coined by Robert Parker.) The first Super Tuscan was Sassicaia from Tenuta San Guido, presented in 1968 and made from Cabernet Sauvignon. The third Super Tuscan was presented in 1971 by Marchese Antinori and made from Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon. Both are available in the Lowcountry.

Sincerest Best Wishes for a Merry Christmas. Spoil yourself and try a Super Tuscan with your Christmas Dinner.

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