



Freshness and Vitality Rule in Summer Reds

By Mary Ewing-Mulligan

Vignamaggio, Chianti Classico (Tuscany, Italy) "Terre di Prenzano" 2014

(Montcalm Wine Importers, \$22): A late July afternoon when half of the country is sweltering under a heat dome is probably not the best time to sit down to a tasting of serious Tuscan red wines, such as several examples of Chianti Classico and Brunello di Montalcino. But to my delight, one of the wines took the heat by the horns and delivered actual refreshment. Although it is a serious, well-made Chianti Classico, its style is relatively light and flavorful and the wine is a welcome find for red wine lovers in warm weather.

"Terre di Prenzano" is a traditionally-made, all-Sangiovese Chianti Classico from the Vignamaggio winery, which is situated in the Greve subzone of the Chianti Classico DOCG territory. The hills of Chianti Classico are an ancient seat of wine production with dozens of properties that date back hundreds of years, and so it is not surprising that the Vignamaggio estate has been a working farm, including vine growing and wine production, since 1404. It was originally owned by the noble Gherardini family, one of whose members, Monna Lisa Gherardini Giocondo, was immortalized in the 16th century when Leonardo da Vinci painted her portrait. The property passed through numerous owners over the ensuing centuries; architect Patrice Taravella, has run the property since 2014.

At Vignamaggio, 153 acres of vineyards grow six grape varieties at an average altitude of 1,150 feet. Sangiovese of course is dominant, occupying 82 percent of the vineyards; Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and two native white varieties are the other grapes grown.

Typical of Sangiovese, the key aroma and flavor of the 2014 Terre di Prenzano Chianti Classico is tart red cherry, with a slight floral note. The wine is medium-bodied and dry, with high acidity forming the spine of the wine's taste. Just a moderate amount of chalky tannin emerges along the sides and rear of your mouth as you savor the wine, but nicely concentrated, vibrant cherry and red berry notes dominate the taste impression.

Through most of Italy, 2014 was a challenging vintage and some of the relatively light, energetic style of this wine probably derives from the vintage's style. In terms of winemaking, the wine aged in oak barrels and casks of 20 to 40 hectoliters (about 500 to 1000 gallons); the wine's energetic but delicate tannin component--which contributes to the refreshment value of the wine--most likely is due to the Sangiovese grape rather than to oak.

Vignamaggio produces two other Chianti Classico wines that are fuller and richer, and while they lack the charm (during warm weather) of the basic Chianti Classico, they are certainly fine wines. The two current releases are from the good 2013 vintage. "Gherardino" (\$35) is a Chianti Classico Riserva that combines 10 to 20 percent Merlot with Sangiovese; to me, the Merlot component is evident in the fullness and softness of the wine and in the wine's relatively pronounced fruitiness, making for a fairly generous, soft, modern Chianti Classico Riserva that will appeal to a broad spectrum of wine drinkers. "Riserva di Monna Lisa" (\$55) has 15 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot along with 85 percent Sangiovese, and ages in barriques before moving into larger barrels; for its silky texture, its combination of dark notes and yet bright elements (ripeness and yet liveliness), its sophistication and its ageability, this is clearly the highest quality of the three wines.

Altogether these are three fine Chianti Classico wines of diverse personalities and price points, for different tastes and seasons. Under the heat dome, I will reach for the lightest and most refreshing, the 2014 Terre di Prenzano--which also happens to be a very authentic Chianti Classico.

90 Points

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