

“Tuscany Report: Brancaia”

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[Tuscany Report: Brancaia](#)



Over the period of several days last week I had full-immersion of the wines from **Brancaia**. I have to admit I knew very little about the wine other than the estate was somewhere in Tuscany.

What a pleasant surprise it was for me to spend time with the wines and then the winemaker, tasting the wines and getting the story. My friend Carmen Castorina runs the communications in the US for the winery, as it is an agency brand for E&J Gallo Winery. I'll probably lose those of you who think nothing good comes from the big guys. I'm used to that. But what happened to me was nothing short of an epiphany.

The wines that come into the US are four, a [Rosso Toscana TRE, a Chianti Classico, a Maremma red ILATRAIA and a Super Tuscan, IL BLU.](#)

Spending time over three days with the wines in diverse settings, I really got to feel the wines and taste them. Or I should say I was more exposed to them than say in a judging setting where you spend a brief few minutes with the wine and move on to the next wine.



The [TRE](#) is the entry wine. [TRE](#), because the wine is blended from the three properties, two in the Chianti Classico zone and one in the Maremma. [TRE](#) is of the new wave of wines that tastes young and modern, fresh but not gloppy. It's like the winemaker Barbara Widmer says, a wine for many purposes and for many different times of the year. Does the wine reflect a Tuscan terroir? I could go out on a limb and say, yes, it has a Tuscan timbre. But it isn't a terroir driven wine. Partially that is due to the reality that the wine comes from three sources, miles apart. So yes, it feels Tuscan.

What it isn't is more telling. It isn't gob-smackingly fruity. It has healthy acidity. It reminded me more of wines from the Maremma, but if I were to taste it blind I probably wouldn't be able to make that statement. Therefore from a purely subjective point of view, it reflects an attitude that I taste in many wines from the Tuscan coast. Refreshing, great with food, versatile. Is it earth shattering? No, and it is not meant to be. It's for every day, not for an audience with God.

The [Chianti Classico](#) I tried both in the Regular and Riserva mode. The idea was that the wine they made didn't need to say Riserva on it, it was good enough. I get that. I am familiar with another winery, Querciabella, and they feel the same way. However, in today's post Wall-Street crash era, a \$30 bottle of Chianti Classico that doesn't say Riserva on it will be judged with the other Chianti Classico wines on the shelf. So, put the darn Riserva moniker on it and let's move on. The winery made that decision. Essentially though, if you taste an earlier version before the added the name Riserva, it is the same wine. So how is the wine?



I have been tasting Chianti Classico lately. I drink them at home. As long as they reflect the Sangiovese soul, I am good with it. **Brancaia** is not 100% Sangiovese, so it isn't a traditional Chianti Classico to me. But I spent some time with the wine and, like all of these wines, they grew on me. The wine smells like Tuscany, and the vineyards are smack-dab in the heart of the Classico zone in Radda, near Castellina. The Widmer family bought land in Tuscany when the prices were deflated and everyone wanted to move out of the countryside. They got 1) more than they were bargaining for and 2) a heck of a deal. They spend a lot of time in the vineyards, many man-hours (women too) applied, more than usual.

The wine is gorgeous. The **2009 Riserva** I will put in my wine closet (taking over some Brunello space) and be very happy with this wine in the autumn of my years, if I make it that far.

The next two wines challenged me. Or rather I should say my preconceptions. We all have them. Some folks love natural wines. Some folks love to hate on them. Some folks love buying wine at the store. Some folks aren't happy unless they can get something no one else has and it has to be shaken and shipped to their front door. Whatever. The point is, we all have this little punch list of things we think will make us happy in life. For me SuperTuscans are a mixed bag, when I am looking at them in the abstract. But when I open a bottle and have it with food and friends, it's a whole 'nother story.



Last Saturday night we opened these wines with some of my favorite Texas BBQ, ribs and two kinds of brisket (fatty and lean). We opened the [ILATRAIA](#) and the [IL BLU](#). The [IL BLU](#) is 50% Sangiovese, 45% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon from the Castellina vineyards. The [ILATRAIA](#) is, get this, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Petite Verdot (???) and 20% Cabernet Franc (Huh?). Yeah, you heard right. So hang on, sit down, take a deep breath.

The [IL BLU](#) is an iconic SuperTuscan red. It is delicious, and it challenges the idea of what a Tuscan wine is (or is supposed to be). And I'm OK with that. Sometimes you want to wear stone washed jeans and a comfortable pair of shoes. And sometimes you have to put on a tux head to the prom. There is enough time in life for both. And yes, if you enjoy something more traditional, stop now. Let the rest of us enjoy these two wines while you wait for a full moon with your cow horn mug 'o glug. Don't want to shower or shave? I hear ya. Have at it. [IL BLU](#) isn't for you.

The [ILATRAIA](#) isn't either. Maybe. Unless you try it. I had no idea what this wine would taste like, but when I looked at the blend I was skeptical. Yep. Then this wine crept into my being and took over.

This is easily my favorite of the four wines and so odd because it defies my preconceptions about what a red wine from Tuscany in Italy should be. Blah, blah, blah, hey, I liked this wine. I really liked it. I find it seductive and alluring and exciting and generous and mysterious and yes, Italian. Not all Italians are brown eyed and dark haired with olive skin. Even in Sicily. That's a stereotype.



OK, over 1000 words in and where does that leave us? I haven't even talked about the history or the winemaker. Yep, I'm blathering. I'm truly sorry. But these wines, this winery, this family, they took a piece of land when no one wanted it. They worked it; they made the investment in time and money. Willingly. They have the green light, in my mind, because they have made the commitment and have done a lot of heavy lifting over a period of time when now it is fashionable to be once again, from Tuscany. Now we have to wrangle a little with folks who think the wines should all be traditional, whatever that means.

Which is another upcoming post. Soon. Just exactly what traditional is? You will not be expecting what I have recently found out about wine and tradition. Soon. I promise.

In the meantime, get you some wine, traditional or not, and have a glass. Tonight.



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Posted by Alfonso Cevola at [7:00 AM](#)

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ABOUT ME



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Writing about Italian wine and culture. Moving between Italy and America. Passionate about both of my countries. Fed by the energy of Italy, California and Texas. Drawn to the open spaces of America and the small vineyards of Italy. [@italianwineguy](#) ItalianWineTrail@yahoo[dot]com