



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

MONTEVERTINE



THE STORY OF MONTEVERTINE IS AN EXTRAORDINARY TALE OF ONE MAN'S DETERMINATION AND SINGLE-MINDED CONVICTION.

Sergio Manetti was not from a long line of vigneroni and winemakers. Born to Milanese parents he grew up around Piedmontese and French wines but in 1941, he moved permanently with the family to Poggibonsi in Tuscany where they were making steel. By the 1960s, the business had grown sufficiently to enable him to look for property in the countryside, purely for leisure purposes.

There was land available but to approach its acquisition with the mindset of an artisan was definitely against the flow. But Sergio knew what he was looking for and the property that he eventually alighted upon was purchased from the church for the princely sum of 5m lira (about €50,000). The year was 1967.

The hillsides of Tuscany had seen dramatic depopulation in the post-war era. The people had been drawn away to look for work in the cities and factories and the wineries that remained in production in the Chianti Classico zone had become more focused on industrial practices and high volumes.

There had been evidence of inhabitants in this small hamlet on the outskirts of Radda-in-Chianti as far back as the 11th century. However, the property was not in good condition and required extensive work. Its situation, at the top of a hill at an altitude of 425m, protected by woodland and surrounded by nature was exactly what Sergio had coveted.



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Together with Bruno Bini, who had lived in the house on the property and was to become the estate and (later) vineyard manager, the work began.

Early on, Sergio wanted to plant some vines. The name for the land surrounding the property, 'Sodaccio' in local dialect, was not encouraging: meaning 'tough to work'. Most land with such a name usually ended up for grazing. However with the help of his friend Giulio Gambelli, an oenologist from Poggibonsi, they planted two hectares with a north and north-east exposure, calling the first vineyard 'Le Pergole Torte' after the twisted rows of Sangiovese vines.

Gambelli was to become one of the most important figures in Italian wine over the future decades up until his death in 2009 but he is perhaps linked with the wines of Montevervine more than any of his other projects. The early wines that Sergio, Giulio and Bruno produced were really only intended for the pleasure of friends and family but they received such positive commentary that Sergio decided to enter them at VinItaly in Verona with the 1971 vintage. Their reception there only added to the momentum that Sergio had created and within a few years he had decided to dedicate himself completely to the wine project at his estate, having by then planting his second vineyard, which he called Il Sodaccio, in 1972.



The estate would continue to expand little by little. Today it measures 18ha, 90% to Sangiovese with the remainder split between two other local varieties, Canaiolo and Colorino.

In their attempt to establish order in the appellation of Chianti Classico, the authorities had decreed that any wine that was to carry the name must include between 10% and 30% of white grapes, such as Trebbiano or Malvasia. Given the reception that their Sangiovese had already received both from their friends and from the public, this made no sense at all to either Sergio or Giulio. Matters came to a head when the Consorzio refused to grant them an exemption.

The name Chianti still, rightly or wrongly, carried considerable recognition in both domestic and international markets but Sergio would not compromise and instead elected to leave the Consorzio in 1984, accepting his ranking as a humble 'Vino da Tavola' by default. The 1981 vintage would be the last to carry the words Chianti Classico. Many years later, the Consorzio updated the ruling on the white grapes but Sergio was not minded to help those who had rejected him. To this day, the wine continues to proudly carry the lowest appellation, IGT Toscana while selling for prices many times above the most famous Chianti Classico.

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As a result, the wines of Monteverdine are often described as Super-Tuscans. In that they are outside of the established appellations of their areas, this is correct but categorically they have not followed the path of including international grape varieties, in the way of the famous estates of the Tuscan coast, for example. Indeed, along with the top vineyards of Montalcino, Monteverdine is one of the greatest expressions of Sangiovese and is considered a driving force in re-establishing the reputation and standing of the grape.

Sergio Manetti died in 2000, passing the baton to his son Martino, who had grown up on the estate. His wine was by that time sought-after by *connoscenti* and collectors but it is in the last 20 years that it has reached global superstardom. To underline the point, Robert Parker's 2002 edition of the Wine Buyer's Guide, which stretches to over 1600 pages in two volumes, doesn't even include it. Not that Sergio would have cared in the slightest.

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With Paolo Salvi, a protégé of Giulio Gambelli, working alongside him, Martino Manetti runs the estate with the same focus and conviction of his father. His team includes several of the family with the third generation also now becoming more prominent. In the vineyard, the estate is fully organic but has never been certified. In the cellar, the techniques of Gambelli are fully respected, including his insistence of leaving space in the top of the concrete fermentation vats to avoid the reduction to which Sangiovese is prone.

Today, there are three wines habitually produced at the estate. **Il Pian del Ciampolo** is the entry to the estate, taking its name from a 1.5ha vineyard on the estate but also including wine from younger vines in other estate vineyards and, importantly, the press wine. All three red varieties are used for it and it typically spends a full year in large Slavonian *botte* before release.

With its altitude and mesoclimate, Radda is one of the coolest spots in the Chianti appellation. The long growing season that this brings is used to good effect at Monteverdine, with the Sangiovese gaining full ripeness in a steady and even manner.



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The estate wine, once with the name Chianti Classico Montevervine but now simply called **Montevervine**, includes vines on all sides of the property and will often include all three red grapes too although with Sangiovese never less than 90%. It is vinified in concrete and then spends 24 months in large Slavonian *botte*. It is a beautiful, spicy, soulful and characterful wine with considerable ageing ability.

Le Pergole Torte was first conceived as a selection from within the estate, working only with Sangiovese. It first came into being in 1977 and for the first few vintages only included fruit from the original Pergole Torte vineyards planted in 1967. As the estate has grown, so too has the sourcing for this wine but it remains uniquely Sangiovese. The Manetti's have also chosen not to produce it on six occasions when they felt that the quality didn't meet their expectations.

After vinification in concrete, it spends its first twelve month in French (Allier) *barriques* before being transferred to *botte* for its second twelve months. The aim is certainly not to lace it with a higher degree of oaky flavour but rather to build the structure of a wine that is meant for very long ageing. It is a wine whose potential we are still learning about: well kept bottles will certainly develop into their third decade and likely beyond. It has an energy and precision that accompany its natural power that make it utterly beguiling. By any measure, this is a world class wine.

From virgin vineyard to international icon in the space of two generations is a spectacular achievement, particularly when the obstacles that have been thrown in their path are also considered. The family are rightly proud of their success but also understand how it arrived. To see the younger members now stepping up, learning the ropes and committing their energies to the project is sure to deliver the accolades for many years to come.



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