



AURIC PACIFIC

“selling wine with passion!”

Auric Pacific Fine Wines

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Hi winos,

Cieli di Toscana

Dionysus has particularly been kind to Tuscany over the past years. After the great success in **1997** for both **Chianti** regions in *Firenze* (Florence) and **Brunello di Montalcino** in *Siena*. The following vintage of **1999** has nothing shortcoming. Perhaps not as obvious ripeness and charm like 97s, however, 1999 was supplemented with better acid/sugar ratio and fresher aromas in comparison to some 97s, which often has the influence of (sopramaturita) surmaturite and more obvious alcohol. To many growers, 1999 is a more classical vintage, featuring both the richness and finesse. However, one should notice that, Tuscan, which stretch from Pisa to Florence, Siena to coastal Gosseto, is a vast region with different micro-climate, terraces. One cannot simply generalize the vintage, like the case in **1998**, which was a difficult vintage for most of the high altitude, northern Chianti hills (altitudes ranging from 150 to 170 meters), where the long stretching heat has caused some serious drought. It was however spare for those western, southern lower altitudes Chianti regions such as **Castelnuovo Berardenga** (like **Fattoria di Felsina, San Felice**), **Barberino Val d'Elsa (Isole e Olena)**. The early harvest on those properties also prevents them from being caught by the damaging harvest rain. In addition, 1998 also saw some world-class Merlot being made from Bolgheri (in the case of Redigaffi & Masseto). **2001** is another great vintage not to be miss by oenophne of Italian Wine. This vintage to me, combined the ripe, profoundness of 1997 and backbone, coolness of 1999. It reminded me a lot like the great 1990 vintage, seductively ripe yet with crisp acidity. 2001 start off with late spring frost, where yields were reduced. A hot summer and followed by cool September, which prolongs vegetative cycle and better accumulation of natural acidity. This is the vintage that offers both early appeal personality and at the same time posed the underlying material for future development. **2003** look to be a return to 1997, where the vintage featured extreme heat and drought-threat growing condition. Despite the impressive color, dark fruit aromas and wonderful textured, it somehow fall into that "international appeal" style. It is more blurry when *terroir* is concern. However, the sexy-appeal personality, will please many less patience drinker and for those that are new to Italian wine. Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah fetch better in this vintage than say, Merlot and Sangiovese. What can I say about **2004** vintage? quoted from **Tua Rita's Stefano Frascolla** comment, "almost perfect, with plenty of sunshine and the right amount of rain". According to a friend who visited the estate recently told me, Tua Rita's superb Merlot - **Redigaffi** has achieved such a quality height that the estate was tempted to do a separate, luxury-cuvée Merlot bottling. However, in order not to further confuse the market and to push the quality envelope further for **Redigaffi**. Only one bottling was made. Don't miss! The following, are some brief introduction on Tuscan that one should take note when buying wine from this area.

Sangiovese is the true heart (*il vero cuore*) of Tuscan, which is responsible for majority of wine coming from this beautiful countryside. **Chianti Classico**, as we commonly known, was in fact part of the seven subzone of "Chianti". **Chianti Rufina** is from the hill nearer to Florence, follow by **Colli Fiorentini** (near San Gimignano, which produced an unique white call Vernaccia), **Colli Senesi** (near Siena), **Colli Pisane** (near Pisa), **Colli Arentini** (near Arezzo, which is famous for their syrah) and **Montalbano**. However, the finest Chianti came from Classico and Rufina. Many connoisseur considers Sangiovese to be quite similar in character with pinot noir from Burgundy, which both are very sensitive to travel and oak treatment, prefer to feature finesse as opposed to power; purity than vanillalization. I also happen to think that, by blending them with Syrah, Cabernets or Merlot. The unique tobacco-smokiness, earthiness, meaty, spicy character can easily be dominated by those "loud" varieties. However, unlike Burgundy, which was a mono-cepage (singular variety) region, Sangiovese has been traditionally blended with Canaiolo Nero, Mammolo, and some white variety like Trebbiano and Malvasia. This mixture, which was invented by

Baron Bettino Ricasoli in 1850s has gradually been evolved over the years. Today, almost no one added the white variety into Chianti blend.

I have been in the past visited this region several times starting from early 90s. I have witnessed the quality renaissance in this area. How the whole modernization begins to corrupt this traditional wine growing region. I saw winery switching old chestnut wood fermenters to temperature-controlled, stainless steel vat. Thousand of barrels squeezing into the small and mouldy Tuscan's cellars, which was of course, supplied by the French. In my early visit, growers were more interested to show me their newly concocted Sangiovese blend, which was not a surprise, blended with those familiar international grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah; They also proudly tell me how many month those wines were charged in New French oak cask (228 litre barrique), which cooperage, oak forest, degree of toastiness...blah, blah, blah. Honestly, those new found taste clearly fresher, more inviting than those occasionally oxidized, coarse, obviously sulphide, fruitless Chianti. However, I was concerned that, those new breeds seem hammer with too much of oak, lack personality and what **Matt Kramer** would say, "there were "international" in the same boring way that all airport, however well designed, look alike".



I must credit, Dr. NK Yong for being the person who first introduced me Isole e Olena, during then (1992 or 93?), he wrote an article on two Sangiovese based wine in the daily news paper featuring both **Isole e Olena's Cepparello** and **Fontodi's Flaccianello della Pieve**. I later persuaded an importer, Latin Asia to bring in the wine (I believe is 1990 vintage). Little did I realized, the Latino importer eventually ceased his business and ran away without paying Paolo's wine money.

I visited **Paolo de Marchi** in the early 90s. His property is just behind his two main plot of vineyards - Isole & Olena. As I do not drive and I am completely hopeless when I am in Tuscan. Paolo's wife, Martha was so gracious to pick me up ([Isole e Olena Estate](#)) in Florence and drive me to the estate. The early De Marchi

office/warehouse/laboratory were all in one crammed facility. However, the Piedmontest Paolo (he was originated from Piedmont) was filled with passion. We spend brief time in his garage's barrel room, which he claims to be nothing, but just bunch woods. We quickly hopped into his truck and head straight to his vineyards. Paolo was among the few I visited that did not display me with his modern gadgets, instead, he is very keen to show me his vineyards, his experiment with various trellising, his clonal select for his beloved Sangiovese. During then, he was already working with University of Agriculture to develop better clonal to replace the existing, more vigorous R-10 clone for Sangiovese. Obviously, smaller berries with higher skin to juice ratio, low yield were his aim. Interestingly, when everyone one else is chasing to produce a short-path IGT super-Tuscan, masking their indigenoussness variety with universal grape and charcoal (toasted oak). Over the year, I witness no change on Paolo's approach in his winemaking. His wine has always been meant for long-haul. They can be austere and formidable when young, much like those young Médoc. However, it will continue to evolved and improved in the glass. Paolo's humblest **Chianti Classico** is consistently among the very best Chianti in the region that is marked by unusual intensity, power and longevity. His **Cepparello** (cheh-pah-rel-Loh), is without doubt, one of the greatest Sangiovese in Tuscan. Profoundly rich and powerful, yet the hallmark of Sangiovese; wild berries, violet, tobacco, earthy with occasionally underbrush and game are so unmistakable. In the modern world, when wines are made to suit their reviewers. In the case of Isole e Olena, it was the wine that thought the critics how to appreciate the true potential.

**** Do join me this Saturday, from 3-6.00 pm at Wine Gallery by Magnum at 2 Chang Charn Road (enter by Hoy Fatt road (Audi Car showroom)). We will be sampling all the Argiano new releases. Admission is free.**

2004 **Isole e Olena** Collezione de Marchi Chardonnay at 69.50 nett - Wine Spectator's 91 points

2004 **Isole e Olena** Chianti Classico at 58.00 nett

2003 **Isole e Olena** Cepparello (Sangiovese) at 115.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 88 points

2001 **Isole e Olena** Collezione de Marchi Cabernet Sauvignon at 115.00 nett - Parker's 93 points

2003 **Isole e Olena** Collezione de Marchi "L'Eremo" Syrah at 105.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 89 points

2004 **Argiano** Non Confunditur (Cabernet/Merlot/Syrah) at 39.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 88 points

2001 **Argiano** Brunello di Montalcino at 72.50 nett - Tanzer's 93 points

2003 **Argiano** Solengo (Cabernet/Merlot/Syrah) at 108.00 nett

2001 **Fanti** (San Filippo) Brunello di Montalcino at 88.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 96 points

6 x 2003 **Ornellaia** Bolgheri Rosso Superiore (67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 13% Cabernet Franc & 5% Petit Verdot) at 210.00* each - Wine Spectator's 92 points

36 x 2003 **Ornellaia** Masseto (100% Merlot) at 365.00 nett* each - Tanzer's 91 points

12 x 2003 **Antinori** Solaia at 190.00 nett* each - Wine Spectator's 95 points

12 x 2003 **Antinori** Tignanello at 135.00 nett* each - Wine Spectator's 91 points

2004 **Tua Rita** Perlato del Bosco Rosso (Sangiovese & Syrah) at 65.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 90 points

2004 **Tua Rita** Giusto di Notri Rosso (60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc & 5% Petit Verdot) at 130.00 nett - Wine Spectator's 94 points

48 x 2004 **Tua Rita** Redigaffi Rosso (100% Merlot) at 285.00 nett each - Wine Spectator's 98 points

12 x 2004 **Tua Rita** Syrah at 189.00 nett each - previously rated 95 points by Wine Spectator

Little Brown One

The weather in the past week has been nothing but depressing. I am equally upset as fewer of my golf games were forced to cancel due to wet weather.

Much as everyone was chasing for all the super-Tuscan, where any wines that ended with the "aia" will be both ultimately expensive and quality assured. In a remote, quiet hillside of Montalcino, south-western of Siena, a wine called "Brunello" (literary mean, little brown one) was quietly making some of the best wine in the region known for their quality and aging ability. Long before the arrival of the highly fashionable super-Tuscan, before so called the quality revolution in Tuscany, before Chianti used to drink like a diluted ribena (blackcurrant syrup), **Ferruccio Biondi-Santi** already successfully created a super-Sangiovese clone, that had smaller, more rot-resistant berries, which he later called it, Brunello. The big bang of this "little brown one" began in 1888 vintage. Since then, it was regarded by the local as their finest product, their pride that not least than the Barolo for piedmontese.

The Italian wine authority, **Daniel Thomases of Veronelli** once mentioned in his article, "Sardinian kidnapping gangs once hide their victims in the forests of Montalcino and remain under cover for months". Montalcino is a isolated place with wild land and thick woods that's completely cut off from the rest of Tuscan. In the late 1960s, there were fewer than 150 acres of vineyards and no more than six or seven labels on the market. It has rose to 4,893 acres of vines with 135 different producers today. Despite much report has credited the 1990 vintage to be the vintage that draws the world wine audience into Montalcino, however, it was the **1997 vintage**, when Wine Spectator declared (or assumed?) this year to be the "vintage of the century" that Brunello became the overnight hot commodity. My memory of that year remained fresh, it was 2001, and out of sudden, all my 1997 Brunello in my shop at Orchard Tower (I know, a place otherwise known for something else!) were snapped off! What a phenomenon from the influence of the press! (history has otherwise thought us - never sue a press!)

With all the new producers emerging, many less favorable vineyards were cultivated, and mostly, with younger vines. Making buying Brunello a difficult task. These days, there are many Brunello in the market place, with their raw materials being less sounding and are consistently being cosmetically enhanced, or should I say, masked with new French oak barrels. One can be easily fooled by those highly attractive sweetness that derive from the new oak and lushness from their early "baby-fat". Much like those beautiful Hollywood actresses before and after their makeup! However, overtime, the weakness will unveil. I also happen to disagree with those who try to make, bigger-the-better, California-and Australia-big-fruit-style. Those wines despite well loved by the American press, it was however lacking in finesse and distinction. Let's hope the situation will improve, as previously, this region was dominated by one wine consultant, but recently saw **Luca D'Attoma** (Poggio San Polo), **Alberto Antonini** (Col d'Orcia), **Franco Bernabei** (Lisini), **Carlo Ferrini** (Casanova di Neri), **Stefano Chioccioli** (Fanti) all taken on the consulting role in this area. Hopefully, that in turn, will translate better diversity.

Montalcino area, due to it's dry and hot climate, generally harvest their grape much earlier than in Chianti. The stylistic of Montalcino largely influenced by two very distinct zones - the north zone, which surrounds the town of Montalcino. The soil here tends to be rich in galestro (marl-like, similar to those best vineyard sites in Chianti Classico) than clay. Combined with the high altitude here, resulting wine with natural high acidity and leaner more austere style that required long aging to bring out their fullness. In the southern, Sant'Angelo area, the warmer weather combined soil that is dominated with clay and limestone, produces fuller, richer, more accessible wine in their youth. One of the finest vineyard in this area is, Argiano, which enjoy the higher plateau of 350 metres above sea level that benefit from the idea cool night, warm day.



The historical estate of **Argiano** (historically date back to 1570) is currently owned by **Comtessa Noemi Marone Cinzano**, the same family that previously owned the famous Italian aperitif - Cinzano. The early director of this estate, **Sebastiano Rosa**, stepson of Nicolo Incisa delle Rocchetta of Tenuta San Guido's **Sassicaia**, introduces the "The Father of Modern-Day Italian" - **Giacomo Tachis** as the estate consultant (also the created of **Sassicaia**, **Tignanello**, **Solaia**, **D'Alceo**). Tachis has help to create the flagship wine of Argiano - **Solengo** (Syrah/Merlot/Cabernet blend), which credits the early popularity of this estate since the Cinzano regime. The recent move of bringing in, **Hans Vinding-Diers** (son of Peter Vinding-Diers of **Chateau Rahoul** in Graves and cousin of Peter Sisseck of **Dominio de Pingus**) as the new winemaker for Argiano has once again created headlines in this conservative, close community town (in the town of Montalcino, everyone seem to know everyone!). Obviously, the stylistic of Argiano's wine has changed over the years.

One is not difficult to notice that, the amount of new wood treatment has increased over the year, the fruits are tasted much richer and riper. According to Argiano former director of sale, **Dr. Pepe Schib Graciani**, they are moving to further improve the quality for the estate most important wine - Brunello di Montalcino. The crop size will be further reduce to some 20-30% in order to make stricter, more rigor selection, and only the finest fruit, will go into the Brunello. Two weeks ago, I have tasted their **2001 Brunello di Montalcino** over a course of 5-6 hours. Obviously, the current bottling shown more evident of new wood aspect (mocha, sweet-oak) and the palate also displays more modern-Brunello liquorous texture (more lush and seamless). However, after some 2-3 hours aeration, more typical Sangiovese's dusty, smoky elements have emerged, and the wine density to last for such a long period of aeration is clearly contributed by the prime vineyard site and old vine, low yield.

On **February 1 (Thursday) 2007**, at il Lido in Sentosa Golf Club. We will be co-host a dinner with il Lido, featuring a small vertical of Argiano Brunello di Montalcino, Solengo & Suolo (estate new 100%

Sangiovese wine). The dinner is reasonably price at S\$120+++ . In the evening, you will have the opportunity to meet the new director of sale of Argiano, **Mr. Stephane Schaffer**, in which, you can take this opportunity to ask him about anything concerning Argiano and it's wines. For reservation or any enquiry about this dinner, you can contact me or make reservation direct to il Lido at **6866 1977** (ask for Max). This special occasion is limit to 30 people only. Don't miss!

Saluté

All prices quoted for per bottle in Singapore dollar. Prices indicated "in red" are inclusive of 5% GST.
Free delivery for purchases of S\$350 and above, otherwise S\$15 per delivery will apply.

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