



CLUB MAGNUM

VINS ET EXPÉRIENCES

## LE CHIUSE



**THE SLOPES ON THE NORTHEASTERN SIDE OF THE MONTALCINO HILL FORM A SUB-ZONE OF MANY SMALL ESTATES. HERE WE FIND NAMES THAT ARE INCREASINGLY IN FAVOUR WITH THE COGNOSCENTI OF THE ITALIAN WINE WORLD.**



The changes in taste away from richness and opulence towards something more refined has also come at a time when climate change is the hot topic of the day. This sector is particularly well-suited to tackling these two tasks.

As one descends the hill, the land begins to flatten and open out, eventually merging into a large plain. As vineyards and olive groves give way to wheat fields, there are often small canals and irrigation channels carrying the water required for the cereals. These channels are controlled by wooden blocks known as 'chiuso', in place to dam the flow.

It is on the gentle mid-slopes of the hill, at about 330m altitude, that one finds the estate of Le Chiuse. The soils here are a complex mixture of limestone, schist, marine sediments and fossils over a water-retentive clay sub-soil, originating from historical landslides on the Montalcino hill mixing with the alluvial marine deposits from the ancient sea bed. Totalling 18ha, of which 8ha are planted to vines, Le Chiuse is the property of Simonetta Valiani, her husband Nicolò Magnelli and their family. It is a little jewel of an estate, the absolute pride and joy of this charming family.



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Simonetta inherited Le Chiuse from her mother, Fiorella, daughter of Tancredi Biondi-Santi. It was Tancredi, son of the legendary Ferruccio Biondi-Santi, considered as the father of Brunello, who made Fiorella promise to never sell Le Chiuse. The reason was simple: Tancredi habitually used the grapes from Le Chiuse to make the family's legendary, long-lived Riservas, no doubt as a result of the cool, northeasterly location of the vineyards that was ideal for producing a structured, long-living wine. Fiorella was happy to oblige, leasing the vineyards to her brother Franco who continued to tend the vines and harvest their fruit for the Biondi-Santi wines until his death in 1990.

Fiorella had passed away in 1986 and upon her uncle's death, and inspired by her grandfather's passion for the property, Simonetta decided that the time was right to begin to make her own wine at Le Chiuse. Thus began an extensive renovation of the buildings on the estate as well as the construction of new, gravity-fed cellars. In the vineyards, new vines were planted, all using the famous massal selections from Il Greppo, the Biondi-Santi estate. There was also extensive reorganisation, with the practice of vines being co-planted with olives coming to an end and a more regular vine density of 4500 vines/ha put in place.



Simonetta's first vintage was 1992, vinified at Il Greppo: it wouldn't be until 2000 that the cellars at Le Chiuse were completed. By the end of the 1990s, the estate had become fully organic, receiving official certification in 2005. In 2010, a further step was made with conversion to biodynamics, something that the family believe has been a crucial decision to adapt to a world of changing climate.

Simonetta and Nicolò's son, Lorenzo Magnelli, is running the estate today. With such an extraordinary heritage, Lorenzo is hugely respectful of his good fortune to be working at such a special location.





AT HARVEST, THE FAMILY ARE JOINED BY EIGHT PICKERS, WITH THE AIM ALWAYS TO PICK AT THE OPTIMUM MOMENT. LORENZO FAVOURS A LONG, SLOW FERMENTATION IN STAINLESS STEEL OR CONCRETE VATS AND ELECTS TO PRESS THE SKINS TO MAKE A PRESS WINE.

To the delight of his parents, he chose to study agronomy and oenology and to gain practical experience outside of Montalcino before returning to the estate. Between Lorenzo's two daughters and the children of his two sisters, the next generation is already seven strong and the family are confident that the legacy will continue.

At harvest, the family are joined by eight pickers, with the aim always to pick at the optimum moment. Lorenzo favours a long, slow fermentation in stainless steel or concrete vats and elects to press the skins to make a press wine.

After fermentation is complete, he keeps the wine in tank for a further four to five months, ideally to undergo its malolactic fermentation. From there, he barrels down into large old Slavonian oak barrels. Brunello cannot, of course be put onto market until the fifth year after vintage and must remain in barrel for a minimum of two years, while the Rosso must complete at least a year in barrel and two since vintage before being sold.

The family produce a fantastic **Rosso di Montalcino** from young vines, believing that the larger bunches that grow on less mature plants promote a juicier, less tannic style.

The vines are planted in exactly the same vineyards as for the grander wines, ensuring that the family make the maximum effort to make a Rosso worthy of Le Chiusse. It is aged for a year in large old oak botte and its purity, refreshing style and lovely natural feel make it hard to resist in its youth.

The family also have the right to produce a small amount of an IGT Toscana wine that they call **Arpaia**. They do not make it every year but the idea is for a simple wine that doesn't see any time in barrel. It is 100% Sangiovese Grosso, destemmed and fermented in stainless steel at no more than 29°C.

After a couple of weeks, it is decanted into a new steel tank for malolactic fermentation and will then sit quietly over the winter, awaiting bottling in the Spring.

The flagship **Brunello di Montalcino** is produced to reflect the essence of Le Chiusse. Care is taken to only use smaller and mid-sized bunches, which are quickly destemmed and dropped into the fermenters by gravity. Only wild yeasts are used and the maceration will take around three weeks with both pump overs and punchdowns being used as required to get the extraction right.





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Élevage is in large old oak botte for three years or so before being racked into tanks for blending and bottling. It will then spend a further year or two in bottle before release. The sensitivity of this process enables the unique character of the estate to be captured through the varying lens of each vintage. These are wines destined for the long-haul that stand up to the most famous examples in the appellation.

Tancredi Biondi-Santi's wines were famous for their longevity and the line to the past is clear with the **Brunello di Montalcino Riserva Diecianni**. This tiny production wine is not made every year and is only put on the market a full decade after harvest to ensure against vinous infanticide. Lorenzo explains that in their case, using a specific plot or specific vines for a Riserva would not make any sense given that the whole estate effectively has Riserva quality in its DNA.

Instead, the family have chosen to present their Riserva through the expression of extended time, both the obligatory extra year in barrel and then the entirely voluntary extra time that they give it in bottle. It is a serious, grown-up savoury style, grand and demanding but without any sense of heaviness or clumsiness.

To complete the full line-up, there is Grappa, Extra Virgin Olive Oil and, most unusually, a small cuvée of sparkling Sangiovese named 'Stellare' after Lorenzo's wife, Stella. By ensuring that there is room at Le Chiusse for innovation alongside the desire to preserve tradition, the family will continue to move forward rather than stagnate. To see Le Chiusse now regularly identified among the leading performers of the appellation and in high demand in the key international markets is proof of their success.

