

## **“Brunello is back!” Tom Hyland’s 2004 tasting notes**

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I attended the Benvenuto Brunello tastings last weekend in Montalcino and I am happy to report that Brunello is back! After the rainy 2002 growing season and a torridly hot 2003 which yielded less than satisfying wines, the new examples of Brunello di Montalcino from 2004 are first-rate.

These wines have lovely garnet color, rich cherry fruit, excellent concentration, persistence in the finish and healthy acidity — in other words, everything you want and expect in a classic Brunello. These wines are most similar to those from 1999 and share many of the same characteristics of the 2001 vintage, which was a bit more deeply concentrated. While these wines may not age quite as long as the best from 2001, these will have plenty of staying power, as I marked down “20 years-plus” for my top selections.

While most estates did make a very successful wine in 2004 (if you didn’t, you’ve got problems), the traditionally made wines — those aged in large casks known as botti grandi — performed extremely well. I believe that in a classic year such as 2004 where fruit is dominant, using the big casks to minimize wood is the proper way to go, as this allows the varietal purity of Sangiovese to shine through. Perhaps in lesser years when the fruit isn’t the controlling factor, a bit more wood might be the way to go (maybe), but certainly in 2004, the traditional producers performed brilliantly.

Here are notes on my best 2004 Brunellos, each of which receives a five-star (Outstanding) rating in my book:

### **Sesta di Sopra**

This tiny estate (4200 bottles of Brunello) made its first Brunello from the 1999 vintage, but has quickly become a superstar in Montalcino. Beautiful garnet color; lovely aromas of red cherry, currant, cedar and a hint of cinnamon. Excellent concentration; great complexity and a finish that goes on forever. A complete wine with silky tannins — will drink well for 20-25 years.

### **Talenti**

Talk to people who really know Brunello and watch their eyes light up when you mention this producer. Cedar, dried cherry and strawberry aromas; very good to excellent concentration; generous mid-palate; long finish. A gorgeous wine with great structure and beautiful persistence of fruit in the finish. Best in 15-20 years. This is one of the few traditionally made Brunellos by the famed Tuscan winemaker, **Carlo Ferrini**.

### **Il Palazzone**

This is an estate that has been on quite a roll as of late. Beautiful deep garnet with red currant, cedar and paprika aromas. Excellent concentration; beautifully styled with pinpoint acidity; great fruit persistence and a long, long finish; 15-20 years.

### **Il Poggione**

This has been a personal favorite for many years and their 2004 is another superior wine. Aromas of red cherry, wild strawberry and cedar; excellent concentration; rich mid-palate, lengthy finish with youthful, refined tannins. Elegant through and through; 15-20 years, though considering the track record of this estate, I may be a bit conservative on this estimate!

### **Caprili**

A first-rate traditional estate that is a hidden gem. Deep young garnet with aromas of red cherry, cedar and paprika. Excellent concentration; rich mid-palate and a long, long finish that seems to go on forever. This is the best wine I have ever tried from this estate – simply gorgeous! Great drinkability for 15-20 years.

### **Ciacci Piccolomini d’Aragona**

This is one of the most consistently excellent producers of Brunello. Textbook cedar, red cherry and cinnamon aromas; excellent concentration; beautifully balanced throughout with excellent fruit persistence, lively acidity and a lengthy finish. Beautifully structured for 20 years plus drinkability. Very classy- this is the best Brunello from this producer in some time!

### **Fuligni**

In my opinion, if someone asked you for a textbook example of Brunello, Fuligni would be a great starting point. Gorgeous aromas of cedar, cherry and wild strawberry; excellent concentration; polished tannins and lively acidity. This Brunello is always about elegance over power, though the 2004 is no lightweight; best in 15-20 years.

### **Uccelliera**

Consistent excellence is a trademark at this beautiful estate, located very near the Abbey of Sant’Antimo. Red plum, red cherry, cedar and cumin aromas; deeply concentrated with a generous mid-palate; big fruit persistence, lively acidity, subdued wood notes and a lengthy finish. This does receive aging in both large and small oak, though much of the small oak is second passage; 15-20 years.

### **Poggio Antico “Altero”**

Poggio Antico, one of Montalcino’s greatest estates, makes two styles of Brunello: a traditionally aged one in large casks and this wine, aged in mid-size French barrels known as tonneau. So this wine is in between strict traditional methods and modern practices. Both wines are first-rate this year, but I give the edge to the Altero for its power and varietal purity. Red cherry, red pepper and subtle vanilla aromas; excellent concentration; lively acidity and beautiful balance. Great fruit persistence; best in 15-20 years.

### **Pian dell’Orino**

I sampled this wine in a separate Brunello event at an enoteca in Montalcino apart from the main tasting. This is a tiny estate that practices organic and biodynamic grape growing and winemaking. Fresh red cherry, cedar, marmalade and tobacco aromas; excellent concentration and a generous, lengthy, beautifully defined mid-palate; subtle oak, vibrant acidity and a long finish. What class and breeding! This has great richness on the palate, yet is so subtle and elegant. Great winemaking by **Jan Hendrik Erbach**. In a word — sublime! 20 years plus for this remarkable wine!

Wines that just missed out on my outstanding rating, but ones that I rate as excellent include: Caparzo, Silvio Nardi, Tenimenti Angelini and the more modern bottlings of Casanuova delle Cerbaie and Siro Pacenti.

[—Tom Hyland](#)

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