

2006 Brunello di Montalcino: Part II

October 1, 2012

As you are probably aware, no vintage in the esteemed history of Brunello di Montalcino has ever received the mountain of praise equal to what has been bestowed upon the 2006s. Virtually every wine critic loves this vintage, a fact that can be supported by the astronomical scores given to these wines.

In fact, the 2006 Brunello vintage was so “hot,” we needed two tastings to cover all of the major wines.

On March 5, 2012, EWS hosted our first blind tasting of the much heralded 2006 Brunello di Montalcino. Turned out that our set of 13 wines lived up to the stellar reviews from the wine critics, as any of the attendees can attest. A full report on this tasting can be found right here at eRobertParker.com.

Since that tasting, we eagerly anticipated Part II. As promised, on October 1st we provided another set of 2006 Brunello di Montalcinos that came with rave reviews. For Part II, we were top-heavy with late release Riservas and other highly rated wines that we somehow missed in Part I.

Turned out that we enjoyed Part II just as much as Part I. Once again, the wines as a group showed why 2006 Brunellos are so special. But unlike Part I where the voting was widely dispersed, Part II had a runaway winner which left attendees riveted in their seats in awe. That wine was the 2006 Brunello “Rennina” from Pieve Santa Restituta. The Gaja influence was quite apparent, as this is a brilliant, near perfect wine. The other wines were not too shabby either, but none could come close to Rennina.

In sum, the vintage accounted for itself very well indeed. With all the hype and accolades bestowed upon 2006 Brunellos, our two tastings seemed to confirm that this vintage is the real deal!

Wines were poured in three flights from numbered bags (1 - 13) and are listed below in the order they were poured, with approximate retail price. Participants were asked to vote (by number) for their three favorite wines. We award three points for every first place vote, two for every second place vote, and one point for every third, allowing for ties. Rating is more reflective of the “here and now” more than future development. Data is based on 20 voters. Voting tallies: 1st/2nd/3rd

#	Wine (20 voters)	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place	Total Points
7	Pieve Santa Restituta (Gaja) “Rennina”	15	0	1	46
1	Casanova di Neri “Tenuta Nuova”	1	5	2	15
3	Ciacci Piccolomini d’Aragona “Pianrosso”	2	3	3	15
4	La Serena Riserva “Gemini”	1	4	3	14
12	Salicutti “Piaggione”	1	3	1	10

6	Valdicava Riserva “Madonna del Piano”	0	3	3	9
8	Pian dell’Orino	0	0	5	5
2	Altesino Riserva	0	1	0	2
10	Mastrojanni “Vigna Schiena d’Asino”	0	0	2	2
11	Lisini “Ugolaia”	0	1	0	2
9	Il Poggione Riserva “Vigna Paganelli”	0	0	1	1
5	Conti Costanti Riserva	0	0	0	0
13	Fuligni Riserva	0	0	0	0

1) Casanova di Neri “Tenuta Nuova” - \$110 - 15 points (1/5/2) - 94 rating

Fairly dark color. Rich, deep, dark berry, smoky oak, earthy, violet nose is first-rate. Follows through nicely on the palate with particularly impressive texture and mouth feel. This is a youthful, concentrated, penetrating, slow to develop Brunello that changes in the glass, getting better with each sip. We like the rich and ripe blackberry flavor. The tannins are obvious but not harsh. This wine seems to straddle the fence between traditional and modern. The acidity is very good, carrying the wine to a long, satisfying finish. Impressive!

2) Altesino Riserva - \$75 - 2 points (0/1/0) - 91 rating

Medium-light color. Pleasant aromas suggest sweet cherry, raspberry, leather, green pepper, coffee grounds, mushrooms, spice, and smoke. On the palate, Brunello #2 is young, a little funky (not in a bad way), and a little raw. It’s nicely balanced with acidity, minerals, and softer tannins. We find this wine somewhat more approachable than #1, but not quite as good. The finish is long and consistent. Overall very good, but not great.

3) Ciacci Piccolomini d’Aragona “Pianrosso” - \$65 - 15 points (2/3/3) - 95 rating

Medium saturated color. Although the bouquet is somewhat restrained, we are nevertheless impressed with the rich cherry fruit, earthiness, smoke, and best possible Sangiovese character. Even better in the mouth in a modern, juicy, elegant style. This wine is focused, well structured, has excellent acidity, and really digs into the palate. The tannins are obvious, yet soft and well integrated into the whole package. Consistent from start to finish, Brunello #3 offers length and wonderful mouth feel. “Pianrosso” was superb and easily the great value of this tasting.

4) La Serena Riserva “Gemini” - \$100 - 14 points (1/4/3) - 94 rating

Fairly deep color. Very attractive “New World” aromas suggest lots of new oak. Additional notes include cherry, strawberry, coffee, tobacco, spice, leather, and chocolate. Sweet and lively on entry; very sexy juice. This wine is clearly made in a modern, fruit-forward style, or as one person put it, “Brunello meets California.” It’s chewy, dense, and modestly tannic, with ripe Sangiovese flavors. The acidity is excellent, leading to a particularly lengthy and tannic finish. Consistent all the way through. If you like new oak, this is your 2006 Brunello!

5) Conti Costanti Riserva - \$105 - 0 points - 89 rating

Medium saturated color. Elegant, though restrained nose makes it hard to identify specific scents beyond hints of licorice and mint. On the palate, the wine appears to be acid-based and quite lively. That said, Brunello #5 is really holding back and seems to be the lightest and most delicate wine in the first flight of five. In fact, we noted that it reminded us of Chianti more than Brunello. Where is the power? This wine was hard to read tonight, although it was pleasant and enjoyable – just not great.

6) Valdicava Riserva “Madonna del Piano” - \$275 - 9 points (0/3/3) - 92+ rating

Dark color. Big, brooding nose reminds us of old style Brunello! It's ripe, smoky, and leathery but seems to be holding something back. Very big in the mouth with excellent concentration, intensity, and complexity. It's well knit and clearly a wine of great structure with jammy dark berry fruit, but comes across as rather blunt right now. Those people looking for elegance and finesse must look elsewhere. The wine has a boatload of tannin and is well balanced for a wine of this size. Long, penetrating finish. Needs many years to round out.

7) Pieve Santa Restituta (Gaja) “Rennina” - \$150 - 46 points (15/0/1) - 97 rating

Deep color. Extremely attractive ripe black cherry nose gets us excited. Even better on the palate, with sweeter fruit than other wines without going into excess or exaggeration. One person described it as “exemplary Brunello,” featuring a harmonious balance between acidity, tannin, and fruit. This is not a blockbuster, yet offers an abundance of flavor, compelling texture, complexity, and concentration. Above all, it is elegant and perfectly balanced, with a finish that really goes the distance. Almost everyone in the room fell in love with this truly great wine, underscored by the runaway first place finish.

8) Pian dell’Orino - \$90 - 5 points (0/0/5) - 93 rating

Fairly deep color. Lovely ripe, smoky notes are found in the bouquet, with leather and mint in the background. In the mouth, we encounter a big, chewy, tannic Brunello with fine underlying acidity. This is a complex, “very Italian” Brunello that noticeably improves in the glass. There is a complaint that wine #8 is somewhat lacking in grip, especially compared to the competition. However, we are impressed with the wine's length and precision.

9) Il Poggione Riserva “Vigna Paganelli” - \$90 - 1 point (0/0/1) - 91 rating

Fairly deep color. Very interesting, sweet, somewhat high-toned nose. This is the first wine in the tasting that made us conscious of alcohol. On the palate, Brunello #9 is one of the more controversial wines in the tasting. Supporters admire the delicious, up-front, ripe black cherry fruit flavor, as well as the overall structure and integration of tannins. But other attendees call it “blunt,” and too soft through the mid-palate. Overall, we found it to be a solid wine, but not outstanding.

10) Mastrojanni “Vigna Schiena d’Asino” - 2 points (0/0/2) - 91 rating

Medium saturated color. Open, sweet, with cherry and raspberry dominating fruit aromas that we find pleasing. Additional notes of earth, leather, and spice are in the background. On the palate, the wine offers lush fruit. It's jammy, earthy, spicy, and velvety in a modern style with well-rounded tannins. Relatively speaking, it's approachable now, with a pleasing, long finish. It's not overly complex and not in a league with the best wines of the tasting, yet enjoyable nevertheless.

11) Lisini “Ugolaia” - \$125 - 2 points (0/1/0) - 90 rating

Medium saturated color. Soft, subtle, pleasant floral nose offers scents that recall

cherries, spice, and leaf mold. On entry, we are immediately struck by lively acidity. One person described it as “electric.” This wine appears to have been vinified in a traditional manner. It’s likeable enough, but didn’t seem to have the depth and definition of most of the other wines. Still modestly tannic, Brunello #11 had a very nice, long finish.

12) Salicutti “Piaggione” - \$90 – 10 points (1/3/1) – 93 rating

Deep color. Rich, unusual, smoky, licorice, almost barnyard nose features dark berry fruit. In the mouth, we are immediately impressed with Brunello #12’s structure. It’s concentrated, chunky, dense, and tannic. The style seems Old World. The fruit lurks just below the surface. A long, enjoyable finish is a nice way to end. This “Brunello that wanted to be Burgundy” grew on us, as it opened in the glass.

13) Fuligni Riserva - \$100 - 0 points - 88 rating

Medium-light color. Soft, fresh, pleasant, easy-going nose is without fault but also without excitement. Subtle notes of cherry, violet, licorice, and spice. Follows through in a similar fashion on the palate, noticeably lacking in depth and concentration when compared to other wines. The lively acidity is this Brunello’s best feature. It’s a balanced wine, pleasant enough, but simply can’t compete for strong showing at this level of competition. Furthermore, the finish is a little short. For most of us, this was the most disappointing wine in the tasting as Fuligni usually does very well at EWS Brunello tastings.

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