



Written by
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Castello di Ama - an exclusive vertical



I owe much to the brilliantly run literacy charity Room to Read, including the chance to taste every vintage of Castello di Ama, one of the most respected Chianti Classico estates.

This year's London wine gala, the major annual fundraiser of the British chapter of Room to Read, takes place tonight and this year has an Italian theme. So 215 guests in Drapers' Hall in the City of London will be served:

Ferrari, Perlé Brut 2008 Trento
Antinori, Cervaro della Sala 2014 Umbria
Planeta 2015 Etna Bianco
Ornellaia 2013 Bolgheri
Castello di Ama, San Lorenzo Gran Selezione 2011 Chianti Classico
Tasca d'Almerita, Regaleali Rosso del Conte 2012 Contea di Sclafani

Allegrini, Giovanni Allegrini 2011 Recioto della Valpolicella Classico

(The producers of these wines so readily volunteered them that there was no room for any wines from the north west; perhaps we should make Piemonte the theme for next year.)

When promising to supply enough of their delicious top 2011 bottling for the thirsty attendees, the owners of Castello di Ama, Lorenza Sebasti and Marco Pallanti (pictured below by Alessandro Moggi, who also took the aerial picture of the estate), suggested sending me a complete vertical of their top wine to taste - the first time such a vertical had ever been shown to a wine writer. As you may imagine, I leapt at the chance.



Marco's first vintage at Castello di Ama was 1982 and between then and 1995 he made a regular Chianti Classico and four single-vineyard selections. Then in 1996 they reduced yields in pursuit of higher quality and more structure and introduced the serious Castello di Ama Riserva. Then in 2010 they introduced a special selection, the flagship wine of the estate, based on their oldest vines, San Lorenzo Chianti Classico Gran Selezione (see [Gran Selezione - emperor's new clothes](#) for Walter's view on this recent classification). A measure of the seriousness of intent is that no San Lorenzo was made in the soggy 2012 vintage. In some vintages they also bottle two of their single-vineyard selections Vigneto Bellavista and Vigneto La Casuccia.

The 65 ha (160 acres) of vineyards are at elevations between 390 and 530 metres (1,280-1,740 ft) on pebbly clay-limestone. Part of the vineyards was planted between 1974 and 1978 on old traditional rootstock, at an average density of 3,000 vines per hectare, while plantings from 1996 are at a density of 5,300 vines per hectare, grafted on low-vigour rootstocks such as 420A, 3306, 3309 and S04.

Sangiovese dominates and is supplemented mainly by Merlot and Malvasia Nera although there was some Canaiolo in the older vintages of the wines below, and the back label of the 2008 mentions Cabernet Franc.

Each variety is hand picked and fermented separately with frequent punch-downs and a total maceration of about three weeks. The new wine is put into barriques, generally in December, with the proportion of new oak having declined over time to around 20% now. Bottling usually takes place in April or May.

I was most impressed by the consistency of this vertical. Although they quite rightly reflected

the different characters of the vintages, the wines were never showy but always appetising and elegant. The finish was always savoury and dry but never drying, with well-managed tannins and never any suggestion of oak.

Sebasti and Pallanti are particularly well known in art circles for the series of art installations they have hosted at the estate, in the atmospheric hamlet of Ama, near Siena, shown above. See more at the estate's rather beautiful [website](#).

- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 1996 Chianti Classico***Picked 7-18 October and aged in barriques, of which 35% were new, for about 12 months.*
Mid ruby with a pale rim. Earthy, almost feral nose with a suggestion of ash and real lift. Very zesty acidity - in fact it seems as though the acidity is beginning to dominate the fruit. Elegant and light to medium bodied. Very clean and fresh but lightweight, I'd drink this relatively cool. Bone-dry finish.12.8% Drink 2002-2014
16
- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 1997 Chianti Classico***Picked 25 September to 9 October and aged in barriques, of which 40% were new, for more than 12 months.*
Deep ruby and much, much more intense than the 1996 on the nose. Really very gorgeous and appealing - even a little gamey. But without any sense of decay. Mouth-filling and sweet with some attractive powderiness of texture. A hint of raw meat and dried herbs. Super-appetising. Wonderfully clean and refreshing but not remotely skinny. Quite persistent. I should imagine this was pretty tannic in youth.13.2% Drink 2004-2019
17.5
- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 1998 Chianti Classico***Picked 13-18 October and aged in 30% new barriques for about 11 months.*
Dark garnet quite far out to the rim. Both bottles seemed to have just a touch of decay on the nose and the cork of the first one crumbled on opening, and the second one was pretty fragile. Underneath this there is delicate fruit but it is drying out. This is a bit of a relic and the tannins are a bit drying on the finish. But perhaps both corks were at fault?12.7% Drink 2004-2012
14.5
- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 1999 Chianti Classico***Picked 11-16 October and aged for 11 months in barriques, of which 30% were new.*
There are surely relatively few serious Tuscan 1999 reds that have only 12.5% on the label? Rich, sweet nose with something almost succulent, waxy and bone-marrow-like about it. Smells as though it is just at peak now. On the palate, the fruit is just fading slightly but with food this could give enormous, appetising pleasure. Lots of bite and tang. This seems like quintessential Sangiovese. Much livelier than many a Tuscan 1999.12.7% Drink 2006-2016
16.5
- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 2000 Chianti Classico***Picked 6-13 October and aged in barriques, of which 27% were new, before bottling in April 2002.*
Fairly pale garnet. Energetic, sinewy, relatively lightweight on the nose. An edge of balsam. Quite edgy and ethereal but with a core of carefully grown fruit. Really admirably pure and perfect Chianti Classico. Not a showy vintage but just beautiful balance with some light, fresh sweetness on the palate and admirable life. Far from a blockbuster but glorious current drinking.12.8% Drink 2006-2020
17.5
- **Castello di Ama, Riserva 2001 Chianti Classico***Picked 9-15 September. Aged in barriques, of which 30% were new, before bottling in April 2003.*
Dark blackish ruby. Minerally, 'charred' nose. A thick, somehow rather blocked, wine - not that expressive at the moment, with very marked tannins. This tastes as though the grapes could

have done with a little more juice, although on palate entry there is some real breadth of ripe fruit. Just a bit dry on the end. I can't see this improving much.12.9% Drink 2008-2015

16

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2002 Chianti Classico* Picked in a notoriously wet vintage between 5 and 11 October. Just 20% new barriques used for ageing, before bottling in March 2004 - earlier than usual.

Much lighter and leaner than most vintages on the nose. By no means disgraceful. (I think this is the first time I have used this word in a tasting note.) Just a bit dry on the very end but the fruit is pure enough. The initial impact is of a relatively sweet Sangiovese but it rather fades away on the end. Very good for the vintage.13% Drink 2007-2017

16

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2003 Chianti Classico* Picked earlier than usual, 17-30 September and aged in barriques, 30% new, before being bottled in May 2005.

At last - a back label on this particular wine! (I have been tasting from old to young.) I think, if my understanding of Italian is correct, this is a wine destined for a special tasting for the owners' friends. This was Europe's heatwave vintage. Note the higher-than-average alcohol. Deep blackish garnet. Very opulent on the nose - quite different from earlier vintages. I sense that there was a real struggle on this estate to retain its signature refreshing quality. But it is not horribly sweet and is certainly not ridiculously alcoholic but the tannins are pretty dry - as though some of the grapes dried on the vines. There's a little bit of sweetness on the palate, which is unusual at Castello di Ama. Dry finish. It's dramatic...! A Chianti Classico to serve with a strongly-flavoured dish?13.7% Drink 2008-2018

16.5

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2004 Chianti Classico* Picked 10-22 October and aged in barriques, 25% new, before being bottled in May 2006.

Colour looks quite evolved. Very neat and well balanced, even tidy, on the palate. All the elements are in the right place - not the drama and excess of the 2003, but pure pleasure. Particularly ripe Sangiovese with an edge of dustiness. Super freshness and great energy. Long and neat. Perfect for drinking now?12.8% Drink 2010-2020

17

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2005 Chianti Classico* Picked 6-12 October with rain at harvest. Aged in 25% new barriques until it was bottled in April 2007.

Dark ruby. Rather an occluded nose. Something a bit awkward about this. Very tough tannins and high acid. Not enough ripe fruit, Very edgy with a slightly minty note. A rare disappointment.13% Drink 2012-2018

15.5

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2006 Chianti Classico* A late harvest in early October and then the wine was aged in 20% new barriques before being bottled in May 2008.

The label is overprinted with a handwritten message from Lorenza thanking Marco for this 25th something. Blackish ruby. Relatively evolved nose on both bottles. Warm brick flavour and very dry on the finish. Good medium thrust and nothing in excess. The aroma seems more mature than the palate. Real refinement on the palate. Appetising but there is something pretty fragile about the nose.13% Drink 2012-2020

16.5

- *Castello di Ama, Riserva 2007 Chianti Classico* Picked 25 September to 4 October and aged in barriques, 20% new, for 12 months.

A famously good vintage. Very bright, dark crimson. Very spicy, confident and complex on the nose. Comes soaring out of the glass. Masses of ripe fruit but no excess alcohol and lovely vigour. Real polish and fragrance. Complete. There is so much ripe fruit that the wine can already be enjoyed but it clearly has many years ahead of it. Long and it delivers waves of

violets and something warm and minerally - a hot road? - as well as the usual vegetal aspect of Sangiovese. Nothing heavy about this.13.5% Drink 2014-2030

17.5

- Castello di Ama, Riserva 2008 Chianti Classico Picked 13-15 October, 12 months in barrel, of which 20% new, before bottling in May 2010.

Medium-intense dark ruby. Complex, well-knit nose that is obviously less ripe than the 2007 but is very pleasing. Elegant, delicate fragrance. Very glorious for current drinking. Dances on the palate with a very dry finish. Racy and ethereal with the savour of Sangiovese. Super-appetising.13.5% Drink 2014-2020

17.5

- Castello di Ama, Riserva 2009 Chianti Classico Picked 29 September to 12 October and aged in 20% new oak barrels for 12 months.

Sweet and fresh. Lots of vigour but less readable and a bit heavier than the two previous vintages. Lots of acidity and tannin but for the moment a slight lack of fruit concentration on the mid palate. Seems a bit jagged and dusty rather than eloquent. Edgy, with a bit of heat and slight bitterness on the end. Difficult to suggest ideal drinking dates.13.5% Drink 2018-2025

16

- Castello di Ama, San Lorenzo Gran Selezione 2010 Chianti Classico 83% Sangiovese, 10% Malvasia Nera, 7% Merlot.

Very dark ruby. Intense and savoury on the nose - really quite compelling. Creamy-rich on the nose and then tightly focused with lots of dry tannin on the finish. Still very youthful. Embryonic. Concentrated fruit but nothing to do with alcohol. Edgy and youthful. Almost like essence of Chianti Classico.13% Drink 2018-2032

17+

- Castello di Ama, San Lorenzo Gran Selezione 2011 Chianti Classico 85% Sangiovese, 11% Merlot, 4% Malvasia Nera.

Very dark crimson. Sweet and ripe on the nose. Then very marked acidity on the palate. A refined essence of Sangiovese. Very youthful but with masses of drive and edge. Transparent and convincing even if still very youthful.13% Drink 2019-2034

17

- Castello di Ama, San Lorenzo Gran Selezione 2013 Chianti Classico No Castello di Ama was produced in 2012. 80% Sangiovese, 13% Merlot, 7% Malvasia Nera.

Extremely intense and ripe on the nose. Very round and glorious initially and then it tightens up. Rich and yet very savoury. Really intense and driven. This should make a great bottle eventually.13% Drink 2021-2035

17+

- Castello di Ama, Vigneto Bellavista Gran Selezione 2013 Chianti Classico A specific 22.82-hectare terraced vineyard with 9.30 ha replanted from 1974 to 1978, and 13.52 replanted in 2007. 82% Sangiovese, 18% Malvasia Nera.

Wild, almost feral nose - not tight and concentrated. Big and quite edgy and powerful. Lots of tannin currently. Marked compost notes and damp leaves.13% Drink 2021-2035

16.5++

- Castello di Ama, Vigneto La Casuccia Gran Selezione 2013 Chianti Classico 12.58 hectares, six planted in 1978 and the rest in 2007. 80% Sangiovese, 20% Merlot.

Blackish crimson. Really dramatic nose with some opulence - like glacé Sangiovese. Oo really rather gorgeous. So glamorous. Rich and chestnutty on the nose. A wonderful expression of Chianti Classico crossed with intensity. Great balance. Much more forward than San Lorenzo and Vigneto Bellavista 2013.13% Drink 2018-2035

17.5

