

Readers will find a large number of wines to consider in Tuscany's 2009 and 2008 vintages. **The 2009s are the result of a warm, sunny year that yielded a number of gorgeous wines at all levels. It is a very consistent vintage that can be purchased pretty much across the board.** The 2008s require a much more selective approach as weather was highly irregular across the region. The best wines are found in Maremma, but shrewd consumers will look for attractive deals on the top 2008s from Chianti Classico and other areas within central Tuscany. On that note, this is the last year reviews from Tuscany will be presented in one large article. Going forward, readers should expect to see an increased regional focus for the wines of Chianti Classico, Maremma, Montalcino and the rest of Tuscany.

Tuscany's 2009s: A Radiant Vintage

I have very clear memories of 2009, as I spent a week on vacation with my family in Chianti Classico during the second half of August, always a critical time for the vines. It was hot. Very hot. All of northern Italy was in the midst of a huge heat wave for about a week in late August, which caused some producers to panic and begin picking. Then temperatures began to moderate at the end of August and growers rediscovered their patience. A well-needed spell of rain in mid-September refreshed the grapes at a critical juncture. **The 2009s across Tuscany are warm, open wines with glorious fruit and expressive aromatics.** The sensual, ripe qualities of a hot year are present, but the wines are also very easy to drink, with less of the fatness and textural opulence of other rich vintages like 2007. It is a fabulous vintage for entry-level wines that are meant to be enjoyed upon release. Most of the higher-end wines are still in barrel, so there is time to see what direction they ultimately take. **Based on what I have tasted from barrel, the top 2009s are soft, seductive wines that impress for the raciness of their fruit and accessible personalities.** Whether they have the stuffing to age or not remains to be seen.

The 2008 Vintage: Inconsistent But With Some Surprises

The 2008 vintage is the most irregular, inconsistent vintage in Tuscany I have tasted in a very long time. Most recent vintages have been easy to describe, at least in general terms, but that is not the case in 2008. Quality is extremely variable even within some of the smaller, regional appellations. The vintage appears to have been most problematic in central Tuscany, which is to say the area around Chianti Classico, where many of the wines are quite a bit lighter than is typically the case. At the other extreme, Maremma, and Bolgheri in particular, stand out for a number of exceptional wines.

The 2008 vintage started pretty much the same everywhere in Tuscany as in the north of Italy. The spring was unusually moist and cool, which led to an irregular flowering, and thereby also lowered potential yields. In central Tuscany, especially Chianti Classico, summertime temperatures were on the cool side, with more rain than normal. There are some isolated spots that stayed drier and warmer, but they are the exceptions. Rain was also an issue during the harvest. For the most part, the 2008s from central Tuscany are relatively medium-bodied wines with less fruit and also lower alcohols than normal. For Sangiovese, which needs heat to ripen fully, 2008 is a highly inconsistent vintage. To be sure, there are some beautiful 2008s, but even the best don't quite reach the heights of 2006 or 2007. It is a year to be particularly selective. Readers who appreciate mid-weight, lithe wines in the style of the 2005s will enjoy the 2008s. The best examples have enough acidity to develop nicely for a number of years. **I have long believed consumers do better buying the producer than the vintage, and 2008 is a perfect example of putting theory into practice.** Given the mixed quality of the 2008s and the state of the global economy, I have little doubt even the best wines will be offered at favorable pricing.

The vintage could not possibly be more different in Maremma. Tuscany's coastal regions are generally warmer and drier through most of the year relative to Chianti Classico and the rest of central Tuscany. In Maremma, the summer was actually quite warm, with average to above average temperatures, depending on the exact area. There was very little rainfall throughout the summer, and few growers reported that their vines went into hydric stress. Temperatures cooled down beginning in mid-September, especially at night, which allowed for the development of color, aromatics and full phenolic ripeness. The 2008s are firm, vibrant, tightly coiled wines loaded with personality. The wines are expressive today, but this is a vintage that will require at least a few years to show its best. **The 2008s appear to have enough freshness to drink well for a number of years and, in some cases, decades.** Right now, the

2008s aren't quite as complete or viscerally thrilling as the 2006s, but winemaking continues to evolve at such a rapid pace that many of the 2008s are close or equal to the level of years such as 2004 or 2006. **The best 2008s are fabulous, viscerally exciting wines readers will not want to miss.**

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano

2007 Boscarelli Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Nocio dei Boscarelli 93 pts

"The 2007 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Nocio dei Boscarelli opens with a blast of tar, smoke, licorice and leather. The Nocio is a big, powerful wine endowed with more than enough textural richness and sheer volume to handle its French and Slavonian oak. **A round, harmonious finish adds to the wine's sheer sexiness and appeal.** The Nocio is 100% Sangiovese. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2027."

Compare:

2007 Avignonesi Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva Grandi Annate 88pts

2008 Boscarelli Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 91 pts

"The 2008 Vino Nobile di Montepulciano shows fabulous intensity in its dark fruit. It is a beautifully balanced Vino Nobile that offers superb depth wedded to a powerful sense of structure that should allow the wine to drink well for a number of years. The Vino Nobile is 90% Sangiovese and 10% Canaiolo aged in a combination of cask and barrel. **This is a fabulous effort.** Anticipated maturity: 2013-2023"

Compare:

2008 Avignonesi Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 90 pts

2008 Poliziano Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 89 pts

2009 Boscarelli De Ferrari 90 pts

"The 2009 De Ferrari (Sangiovese) is a gorgeous, entry-level red laced with dark red cherries, flowers, spices, tobacco and underbrush. A fleshy, supple finish rounds things out nicely. **This is a hugely delicious Sangiovese, and a terrific value.** Anticipated maturity: 2012-2019."

CHIANTI

2008 Canonica A Cerreto Chianti Classico 90 pts

"The 2008 Chianti Classico emerges from the glass with beautifully delineated dark fruit, spices, leather and crushed flowers. **Vibrant mineral notes give the wine its centered, polished personality. This is a very strong effort for the year.** Anticipated maturity: 2012-2018. These releases from Canonica a Cerreto show a property in transition. The wines were vinified by Stefano Chioccioli but finished by Marco Bernabei. It will be interesting to see the direction the estate takes with its newer wines. **There is certainly a lot to like here.**"

Compare:

2008 Castello di Ama Chianti Classico Castello di Ama 90 pts

2009 Agricola Querciabella Chianti Classico Querciabella 90 pts

2009 Fattoria di Felsina Chianti Classico 90 pts

2008 Fontodi Chianti Classico 89 pts

2008 Castellare Chianti Classico 89 pts

2008 Castello dei Rampolla Chianti Classico 89+ pts

2009 Viticcio Chianti Classico 88 pts

2008 Isole e Olena Chianti Classico 88+ pts

2007 Canonica A Cerreto Chianti Classico Riserva 92 pts

"The 2007 Chianti Classico Riserva opens with a warm, **radiant expression of fruit** supported by deceptively firm structural components. Freshly cut flowers add brightness to the red fruit in this rich, polished wine. The Riserva is 85% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Merlot aged predominantly in French oak barrels. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2027."