

## Producer profile

## Col d'Orcia

The first thing to do was pull up the tobacco and wheat; after that it was years of studying Sangiovese. All that work has paid off, says Kerin O'Keefe, and Col d'Orcia continues to set ever higher standards in Montalcino

COL D'ORCIA BELIEVES in Sangiovese. Unlike most of the other large companies in Brunello (it's the third-largest Brunello house in terms of area under vine), it opposed the consorzio's 2008 and 2011 proposals to allow grapes other than Sangiovese into Brunello and Rosso, and owner Francesco Marone Cinzano spoke his mind publicly. Col d'Orcia has invested in massive research into every aspect of grape-growing, including decades of work on Sangiovese. And even if all producers today like to say that winemaking begins in the vineyard, Col d'Orcia has always based its winemaking philosophy around starting with the healthiest grapes possible. It's now on course to become the largest organic winery in the whole of Tuscany.

Col d'Orcia can trace its Brunello-making roots back to the first decades of the 20th century. At that time it was part of a single estate, Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle, spread out below the hamlet of Sant'Angelo in Colle, 15km south of Montalcino. Until the 1950s this estate also incorporated the historic Il Poggione vineyards. Documents show that the fattoria, owned by the Franceschi family, presented several vintages of its Brunello at Siena's first wine fair in 1933, back when only a handful of estates made Brunello and half a century before outside investors would swoop upon Montalcino to cash in on the Brunello boom.

In 1958, two Franceschi brothers inherited Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle, and in the grand tradition of Tuscan scions, promptly decided they could not work together. They divided their large property into Col d'Orcia (which means Hill above

**Right: Poggio al Vento was one of the region's first single-vineyard Brunellos, heralding a bright future for the estate**

Orcia, the name of the local river) and Il Poggione. Fifteen years later, Count Alberto Marone Cinzano, whose family had been involved in Piedmont's vermouth and sparkling wine industries for centuries, purchased Col d'Orcia.

## A new broom

When Marone Cinzano arrived, Montalcino was a depressed rural area, and, as well as grapes, the property was still growing tobacco, wheat and other crops. He immediately began pulling these out to plant more vineyards and, in 1975, he hired a full-time agronomist, Giuliano Dragoni, to follow the vineyards. Two years later, he hired an estate manager, Edoardo Virano, still there and now the managing director.

Marone Cinzano made a number of innovations that were avant-garde for the time. Perhaps his most significant contribution to Montalcino was underscoring the importance of specific vineyards and choosing the right areas to plant Sangiovese.

Col d'Orcia's most celebrated wine, Poggio al Vento, demonstrates this. First released in 1982, this single-vineyard Brunello riserva comes from vines at 350m above sea level with south-southwest exposures. It's made only in excellent vintages, and only about 20,000-25,000 bottles are produced. Marone Cinzano replanted the vineyard in 1974 with cuttings from existing vines; and although a vine density of 3,000 plants per hectare (ha) is low

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