

## Altesino 2001 Brunello di Montalcino

10 Apr 2007 by JR

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En route to Bordeaux last week I spent a day at Vinitaly, the giant wine fair held every year in Verona (see [travel tips](#) for news on travel opportunities between Italy and Bordeaux). I had a chance to taste a wide range of the recently released **2001 Brunello di Montalcino Riservas**, most of which are quite a way from being ready to drink. I'll be publishing these notes when they have been transcribed.

On the Friday evening I went to the inaugural dinner of the recently formed Comitato Grandi Cru d'Italia, an association of 130 top Italian producers under the presidency of Piero Antinori that has been formed in the image of Bordeaux's Union des Grands Crus. The UGC was formed of course in the early 1970s in response to the oil crisis and difficult times for the Bordeaux trade. The Comitato is designed, as I understand it, to help advance the cause of fine Italian wine, not least to non-Italians. To be a member of the Comitato, the producer has to have a 20-year track record (which must cut out quite a high proportion of *tre bicchiere* winners).

The food, as you might expect, was excellent thanks to such revered Italian restaurants as Enoteca Pinchiorri: seafood sashimi, truffle-infused fonduta, pigeon with lentils and a creamy miracle of amaretti. I was intrigued to see how they would tackle the usual, highly political problem of which wines to serve to the hundreds of producers, media, traders, hoteliers and restaurateurs from around the world (including a particularly large contingent from India). The answer was diplomatic. Each table was served by a wine waiter with a (rather unglamorous) yellow plastic carrier holding six different bottles. We were each free to make our own choice from these.

A bottle of Antinori's Solaia 2003 caused a mild diplomatic incident at my table, shared by Piero Antinori and James Suckling among others, forcing the usually super-polite former to allude to the exceptionally low score the latter had given this vintage of his Supertuscan in the *Wine Spectator*. But the wine we all agreed was absolutely outstanding, drinking beautifully now and epitomised great Italian wine in a way that a Cabernet blend never will was **Altesino 2001 Brunello di Montalcino**.

This classically-styled, all-Sangiovese red has already developed a haunting bouquet, is delicately medium-bodied, shows no trace of obvious oak, but is firmly assertive and could only be a Brunello from one of Montalcino's more senior, more distinctive vineyards. Altesino in the far north of the Montalcino zone has long been a standard-bearer for Montalcino. This wine was unfortunately not shown at the large London tasting of [Brunello di Montalcino 2001](#) I reported on in detail last year, and nor were Altesino's wines available at the Brunello Consorzio's well-run tasting operation at Vinitaly, so it was a delight to catch up with it at the table.

Piero Antinori, incidentally, observed that for 2001 is a great vintage and his favourite for many, many years. (In Tuscany 2004 and 2006 are generally much better than 2005, by the way, contrary to the general Rule of Five.)

I would strongly recommend this wine, displaying Sangiovese's leafy, autumnal notes with prune-like substance on the palate, to anyone who wants to get to grips with true Brunello, rather than the rash of much sweeter, fuller, more oaky examples that have proliferated recently. I reckon it could be drunk with great pleasure – with food – at any time over the next five years or more – although converts might also like to look out for Altesino's more concentrated **Montosoli** bottling for longer-term drinking.

This is one of the most widely distributed wines I have ever recommended in this slot. Winesearcher currently lists well over 100 stockists in a wide array of countries. In the UK Bordeaux Index have the best prices, and quite a bit of stock, but they demand a minimum order value of £500. Italian specialists Ballantynes of Cowbridge are offering the wine by the single bottle at £29.99.

To find a stockist near you, click [here](#).