

## Pèppoli 2004 Chianti Classico

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We really must take advantage of Italy's exceptionally delicious 2004 reds while we may. The true glory of the 2004 vintage in Piemonte is steadily being revealed. So far in the UK only Italian specialists Winetraders of Oxford and traders Fine & Rare Wines of London have made specific offers of the 2004 Barolos, but who knows who else may jump on that particular bandwagon if and when it becomes apparent that there will be less income than usual from the Bordeaux primeurs this year?

But 2004 was an excellent vintage for Tuscany too, as was evident in these tasting notes on [Chianti Classico, mainly 2003s and 2004 Riservas](#). Many of the wines I wrote about so enthusiastically last July are both relatively expensive, destined to age slowly, and made in pretty small quantity but Antinori's **Pèppoli 2004 Chianti Classico** is widely available (winesearcher.com lists no fewer than 117 stockists around the world but especially throughout the US), already extremely appealing and is a great price.

We enjoyed it by the glass at the Festival Hall's Skylon restaurant immediately after one of Daniel Barenboim's quite staggering Beethoven sonata recitals last week and I swear it was not the natural high that resulted from such virtuosity that made me so impressed by the wine too. It was the lushness combined with both density and the fact that it is so blissfully true to its origins, the 100-hectare estate pictured above just north of the Tignanello estate north of Greve. Most of this stony terrain is planted with Sangiovese vines although there is a little Merlot, Syrah and Malvasia – and nearly 30 hectares are planted with olive trees such as those pictured below, which produce Pèppoli olive oil. The wine has that bite that defines good Chianti but also manages a certain velvetiness of texture. I honestly think it is underpriced, and I don't say that very often about Italian reds from regions as smart as Piemonte and Tuscany. (Why not Piedmont or Toscana? the copy editors among you may ask, Julia. Well, it just sounds right this way. Sorry to be inconsistent.)

This vintage is 13% alcohol and made up of 90% Sangiovese (superior clones) with some Merlot and Syrah and here for wine students are the technical details as provided by Antinori:

*The grapes were harvested on the Pèppoli estate and carefully selected to ensure only the finest grape bunches were used. After de-stemming and light crushing, they were macerated in stainless steel tanks for about 10 days, during which time the wine completed its alcoholic fermentation, at a temperature kept below 28°C. By the end of the year, the malolactic fermentation was also completed, and the wine was then racked to traditional 55-hectolitre Slavonian oak casks where it aged for a maximum of nine months. 10% went into American oak barrels which made the wine aromas more complex while keeping the original flavours. After bottling, the wine remained in the bottle for a further period before being released on the market.*

*Introduced in 1988 with the 1985 vintage, Pèppoli Chianti Classico DOCG is the archetypal modern Chianti Classico. In a departure from traditional Chiantis, Pèppoli combines the complexity and structure of a well-aged Riserva with the fruity fragrance of a young wine. This style is made possible by a unique microclimate where east-northeast facing vineyards are planted in a small heat-retaining valley on mineral-rich rocky soils that are perfect for growing very fruity, lively Sangiovese. The wine further benefits from the use of better Sangiovese clones, severe grape bunch selection, delayed and cluster harvest when necessary.*

Many stockists have already moved on to the 2005 so go and grab this wine (Croque-en-Bouche still list the 2004, Hailsham Cellars list 2003) designed to turn a meal into a wallow in pleasure and enjoy it with a wide range of savoury dishes. It went well with my guinea fowl and roughly mashed potatoes, even if they paled into insignificance in quality terms next to the Pèppoli. I remember well the first vintage of this made by Antinori in 1985, the year they celebrated their 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary by buying this ancient estate. If I live to be 600 I might buy myself a Tuscan estate too.

And speaking of anniversaries, if you want to give a 2004 baby a present, I strongly suggest you head for Italy rather than France.

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