

Chianti Classico sales blocked

2 Aug 2009 by Walter Speller

More signs of a stagnant or even declining international wine market come from the Consorzio of Chianti Classico. In a letter last week addressed to its members and signed by its current president, Marco Pallanti of Castello di Ama, the Consorzio expresses great concern about what it calls a 'contraction' of sales, especially in its main market, the United States. (Castello di Ama pictured here.)

Although the Consorzio states that it foresaw a slowing down of sales at the beginning of this year, it is alarmed by the fact that the price of bulk Chianti Classico in particular fell by a considerable 12% during 2008, and a further 10% during the first three months of 2009 alone. To reverse the trend, the Consorzio has convinced its members to accept the very unusual measure of *blocco delle vendite*, which forces producers to hold on to 20% of their total production of 2009 wine for an additional 24 months before putting it on the market.

Although extreme at first sight, this measure may have a much less direct impact on producers who focus on quality and who produce Riserva wines, a category which requires a mandatory 24 months of ageing anyway. This Riserva category currently accounts for roughly 20% of the total production of Chianti Classico. With this measure the Consorzio's principal goal is to reduce the volume of bulk wine available on the market, creating an artificial scarcity and bolstering prices, it is hoped.

This unusual measure may not have a direct effect on better quality producers, but a further erosion of prices on bulk Chianti Classico could have harmful consequences for Chianti Classico's image in general. At the same time, the block on sales may help the Consorzio in its continuing campaign to convince its members to reduce the total volume of bulk wine produced. It has to be said, however, that better quality producers have tended to replenish the bulk market each year by routinely declassifying wines they do not wish to sell under their own name, while at the same time lamenting the effect of this mediocre category of Chianti Classico on the zone's reputation.