

Campinuovi Sangiovese 2009/10 Montecucco

27 Dec 2012 by Walter Speller

About €15, rather more in Swiss francs

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Walter is clearly hugely impressed by this relatively obscure Tuscan red, and as someone who has tasted a few 2009 Supertuscans recently (you can find my tasting notes on Masseto, Poggio al Tesoro, Trinoro and Enrico Santini's Poggio al Moro in our [collection of 75,000+ tasting notes](#)), I am also intrigued by the idea of a 2009 Sangiovese that manages such fruit and freshness.

The only problem is how difficult it is to find it. At the time of writing our dear friend wine-searcher.com could find only one stockist, in Trentino. Our apologies. But this is clearly a wine to watch, and is not ridiculously expensive. The Find this wine link leads to the Trentino stockist of the 2010 regular bottling and the 2009 Riserva as well as a Swiss stockist of one of the 2009s. The 2009 regular bottling that so beguiled Walter is imported into the US by Integrity Wines, 47 The

Prado NE, Atlanta, GA. Importers elsewhere, get going, please! JR

One of the Consorzio of Chianti Classico's last marketing efforts in the UK market, before they gave up on us completely ('such a hard market, let's conquer China instead!'), was in 2008. The event consisted of an overview of the latest vintage, and a seminar that immediately grabbed my attention: a tasting investigating the effects of altitude on individual wine styles. It was one of the first unsteady steps of the Consorzio trying desperately to classify the huge area that is Chianti Classico without offending any of their many members. It was led by the Consorzio's chief enologist, the charismatic and very knowledgeable Daniele Rosellini.

At the time no one could have realised how prophetic the seminar would be (talk about greenhouse effects were just about to get into full swing), as at the time the prevalent opinion on Sangiovese was that it wouldn't really ripen properly above 350 m. This was perhaps true for vineyards planted without any consideration regarding the right exposition needed to ripen Sangiovese properly to prove its class. Why would anyone look for higher altitudes resulting in even higher levels of acidity?

I recall that the samples did not really prove anything, but it has since become clear to me that one of Sangiovese's most valuable and most appetising characteristics would be its refreshing acidity captured in a layer of ripe cherry fruit. Altitude and climate change started to play a greater and greater role in this. And Daniele Rosellini unexpectedly popped up again.

Earlier this year during the first edition of the [RAW wine fair](#) in London I came across Campinuovi's Sangiovese 2009 Montecucco. I had just arrived from Italy and rushed from the airport to London's East End to find only the dregs of the 2009 bottle at the deserted Campinuovi stand. I poured the last of the bottle into my glass and the recognition was immediate: this was fresh, succulent Sangiovese with the kind of purity and depth you would expect in un-tarted up Brunello.

While walking back to the tube I bumped into Rosellini, whom at first I didn't recognise, until we started talking. I found out that Campinuovi was his and his wife's estate. 'How did you manage to get such energy and freshness in your Sangiovese?' I wanted to know. 'Because I am at the right altitude', he fired back.

Montecucco is a relatively obscure Tuscan DOC squeezed in between the coastal province of Grosseto in the west and Montalcino in the east (see our World Atlas of Wine map of [Central Italy](#)). It is separated from the latter by the Monte Amiata (pictured), an extinct volcano. The vineyards of Montecucco roll from Monte Amiata's western slopes down to the plain, where it meets olive groves and grain. It is a beautiful region and much less manicured than some parts of Central Tuscany. But the Montecucco DOC varies wildly in quality - the much hotter plains resulting in full bodied and rather rustic wines compared with the produce of its higher-altitude vineyards.

Weirdly, there is also a DOCG Montecucco, reserved solely for wines consisting of a minimum of 90% Sangiovese, while the straight Montecucco DOC demands only 60% of Tuscany's signature grape variety. The sense in the parallel existence of DOC and DOCG is anyone's guess. Not that Rosellini would care. He found in Montecucco an exceptional terroir in the hamlet of Campinuovi, a fact he recognised by baptising his estate with the same name.

Campinuovi's 7 ha of vineyards situated between 350 and 465 m elevation are almost completely devoted to Sangiovese. The estate has been managed according to organic and biodynamic rules from the very beginning. Sangiovese is considered Campinuovi's prime asset, as no other grape variety is so finely tuned to express Tuscany's diverse soils and altitudes. This it is not just gratuitous marketing speak. In 1994 Rosellini was privileged enough to work at Giulio Gambelli's side. Until his death last year, Gambelli, with an unparalleled knowledge of the best Sangiovese sites throughout Tuscany, was the undisputed expert on Tuscany's signature grape variety. He consulted at estates such as Biondi Sandi and Case Basse in Montalcino that had made Sangiovese their prime concern, long before domestic or international markets seemed to promise any reasonable return on their investments in a variety that until then was widely unpopular.

Rosellini ferments his Sangiovese in tronconic oak casks (no stainless steel or barriques in sight here), using remontage and pigeage as the main extraction methods. Ambient yeast triggers the fermentation and the wine remains in the same tronconic oak cask for 10 months, followed by a year in large 20-hl oak casks.

My tasting note reads:

Campinuovi Sangiovese 2009 Montecucco 17.5 Drink 2012-18

100% Sangiovese fermented in oak cask with natural yeast. Aged in oak cask for 12 months and bottled by hand without filtration. Mid ruby with orange tinge. Real Sangiovese zest and spice. Lifted cherry and a hint of tar and orange peel. Elegance and acidity. Very fine, grainy tannin. Earthy and original. Beautiful expression of a rather unknown and uneven terroir. And great for the 2009 vintage. Looks like Campinuovi is set to become the DOC's leader. (WS) 14%

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