

Gran Selezione etc – mainly 2016s



There is little doubt that 2016 was a landmark vintage for Tuscan reds. This beautiful image of the Conca d'Oro vineyards below Panzano in Chianti Classico is courtesy of Fontodi. See also Walter's [Italian assortment 2020 – part 2, the centre](#), published last week.

Those who follow Walter's valuably opinionated commentary on Italian wines may well be aware of his distaste for the newish category of Chianti Classico, Gran Selezione. You can read his objections published in [2016](#), in [2017](#), in [2018](#), in [2019](#) and in [2020](#).

Basically, he doesn't think there is a need for a super-category of Chianti Classico and that the best wines should be geographically specific Riservas. His dislike of the Gran Selezione category is amplified by the fact that it was dreamt up by some of the bigger players, and that French varieties may be included as well as Chianti Classico's own grape, Sangiovese.

As usual, Walter's approach is admirably purist. But I must say that, having just tasted a selection of 2016 Gran Seleziones, I found some of them absolutely delicious.

Admittedly, this small selection, chosen by Giovanni Manetti of Fontodi, current president of the Chianti Classico Consorzio, came from some of the zone's most admired addresses. But most of them clearly were dominated by Sangiovese and were a luxurious expression of their provenance, even if some of them were marked by new French wood rather than the traditional, much bigger and more discreetly flavoured Slavonian oak *botti*.

Below I have presented them in descending score order but you will see that I have included another Sangiovese-based wine that is made in a much warmer part of Tuscany, nearer the coast in the environs of Pisa, and is much cheaper. Tenuta di Ghizzano makes several red wines, of which their Merlot-based Nambrot is the most expensive, but, for my money, the Veneroso 2016 based on Sangiovese is much more distinctive and distinguished than the current release [Nambrot 2017](#). As you can see from our tasting notes database, Veneroso has [an admirable record](#). It retails at not much more than £20 a bottle (around €21 in Europe/\$32 in the US) – whereas the Gran Seleziones of the 2016 vintage can easily be £50 or £60.

The Veneroso 2016 seems to be available only in Italy currently but the much more widely available [2015](#) was extremely good too, especially in view of how hot the year was.

These nine wines are presented in descending score order but you can change this.

Fontodi, Vigna del Sorbo Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico

18

The Panzano estate of Giovanni Manetti, president of the Chianti Classico Consorzio. Vines from an old selection of Sangiovese on a carefully chosen site and aged for 18 months in French oak, Allier and Tronçais barriques (50% new), followed by six months in large casks. Certified organic.

Notably healthy crimson. Utterly hedonistic on the nose – essence of Sangiovese. Finishes with the tang of the grape variety so it's unmistakably Chianti Classico, but it starts with opulence, flowers and – somehow in view of the alcohol – finesse. Really glorious. Dangerous, in how appetising it is when the alcohol is so high. Quintessential food wine. 15%

Drink 2020 – 2035

£69 Vin Cognito, £71.20 Hedonism, £75 Valvona & Crolla

Isole e Olena, Gran Selezione 2013 Chianti Classico

17.5 +

Barberino Tavarnelle. The current vintage (whereas most producers are offering 2016). Picked well into October after a fairly cool growing season. Rather an unnecessarily heavy bottle. 90% Sangiovese, 7% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Syrah, 1% Petit Verdot grown at 350–480 m facing south-west mainly. Soil is a combination of clay-shale (galestro) and clay-limestone (alberese). Some vines are 50 years old. Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot are fermented in open-topped oak vats, with three to four weeks of maceration with délestage and punching down. Syrah undergoes a short pre-fermentation cold soak in stainless steel with 10 days' maceration before being pressed into barrels with some residual sugar to ferment to dryness very slowly. Not all grapes are destemmed. Only indigenous yeasts before two years in barriques and six months in larger casks. Released only after two years of bottle ageing. Just 2,500 bottles made.

Transparent garnet. Hugely complex nose with balsam top notes and notable transparency of fruit underneath. This is definitely high-elevation wine. Quite marked acidity and great finesse. You would be hard put to identify anything other than Sangiovese in here. Builds towards a persistent, elegant finish not unlike a fine red burgundy (if Paolo De Marchi will allow a French comparison). The length of the finish is really quite remarkable. No hurry at all to drink this. 14.5%

Drink 2020 – 2032

£145 per bottle ib Lay & Wheeler

Tenuta di Ghizzano, Veneroso 2016 Terre di Pisa

17.5

Mainly Sangiovese with some Cabernet Sauvignon. Certified organic.

Healthy crimson. Sweet, ripe nose – obviously from a warmer terrain than the hills of Chianti Classico. Extremely flattering and velvety with the clear character of ripe Sangiovese. Pretty delicious! Everything in harmony. The texture of a luxurious Napa Cabernet and the tang, flavour and refreshment value of well-grown organic Sangiovese. Very persistent. Well done! GV 13.5%

Drink 2020 – 2030

£20 RRP

Castello di Volpaia, Il Puro Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico 17.5

Radda in Chianti. Certified organic. They grow 25 clones of Sangiovese, which date from 60 years ago, in this small Casanova vineyard at 450 m. Aged for 18 months in new Allier oak.

Mid garnet. Densely savoury, 'agricultural' Sangiovese notes on the nose and just the right amount of fruit concentration (not skinny but not forced). Excellent acidity and very true to the variety. Bone-dry finish. Quintessential food wine. Not flashy. Well named.

Drink 2019 – 2026

Principe Corsini, Zac Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico 17

San Casciano in Val di Pesa. 100% 21-year-old Sangiovese vines at 270 m. 16-day fermentation in tronconic vats. 16–18 months in used barriques and then 12 months' ageing in bottle.

Super-ripe but characteristic. Perhaps like a Chianti Classico essence? But clean, racy and tangy. Despite the alcohol! Not quite ready but if you drink it with food, that hurdle could be overcome. Admirably persistent. Serious wine. 15%

Drink 2021 – 2029

Lilliano, Ruspoli Gran Selezione 2017 Chianti Classico 17

Castellina in Chianti. Lilliano's current owners, members of the Ruspoli family, still live, according to the website, 'in the historical Ruspoli Palace in the centre of Rome'. The last vintage of this wine described on the website was 2013 which contained 5% each of Colorino and Merlot as well as the Sangiovese. It was aged in French oak.

Rather sweet and gorgeous. An interesting blend of Tuscan hillside Sangiovese and some sweetness and polish. I could so imagine drinking this in a Manhattan wine bar or restaurant. It's attractively transparent so very 21st century, just a little sweeter than some, but super-charming. 14.5%

Drink 2020 – 2029

Vecchie Terre di Montefili, Vigna Vecchia Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico 17

Greve in Chianti. From a single 0.5-ha vineyard planted in 1981 at 500 m. Aged for 26 months in 10-bl casks and then for 8 months in bottle before release.

Light to mid garnet. Very high-toned nose with marked acidity on the palate mitigated by some sweetness. Savoury notes and leaner than many. A rather delicate flower. 13%

Drink 2020 – 2028

Frescobaldi, Tenuta Perano, Rialzi Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico 16.5

From the Rialzi vineyard on the Frescobaldi family's estate in Gaiole in Chianti. Fermentation in stainless-steel tanks then aged for 36 months, 24 of which spent in barriques. Then some bottle ageing.

Deep ruby. Very ripe fruit with a little sweetness and light cheesiness. Overall informed by Sangiovese but with more concentration than many. Vibrant, lifted finish and light, fine tannins in evidence. But already a well balanced drink. 14%

Drink 2020 – 2026

Barone Ricasoli, Castello di Brolio Gran Selezione 2016 Chianti Classico 16

Gaiole in Chianti. 97% Sangiovese, 3% Abrusco (a rare, ancient Tuscan grape associated with deep colour, though not red-fleshed) on this historic estate at 400–500 m. Aged for 18 months in tonneaux (30% new).

Bright cherry red. Sweeter than the average Chianti Classico. Almost as though there were some Merlot in here. But it takes to the refrigerator very happily on this sultry night. Just a suggestion of Sangiovese tanginess on the end. Decent balance and certainly ready to drink. But just a bit sweet and non-Tuscan to satisfy Walter(!), however well made. My (French) dinner guests enjoyed it. 14%

Drink 2019 – 2023