

Wines Of The Week: Rocca Di Montemassi And Tenuta Di Arceno



Brian Freedman Contributor 

Food & Drink

I cover food, wine, drinks, travel; host dinners; and consult on wine

I'll be going back to featuring wines from around the world next Friday, but today, my Wines of the Week are again from Tuscany, where I just returned from spending five weeks with my family exploring the vast range of reds, whites, and *rosati* that are produced there. There is so much more to write about the region and its incredible array of energetic, wildly talented producers, which I'll certainly be doing, but for now, I want to put the spotlight on Rocca di Montemassi and Tenuta di Arceno.

My white Wine of the Week, the Rocca di Montemassi Calasole Vermentino 2018, comes from the Maremma, the vast agricultural area of the Tuscan Coast that in recent years has seen somewhat of an increase in visibility in the United States. It's a well-earned success story: This land of generous plains and gently rolling hills wasn't always so idyllic: At one time malaria-ridden and almost swamp-like, it had to be drained in order for its full agricultural potential to be realized. For a time, it was a center of mining in the region. Even today, small towns in the hills are surrounded by vast swaths of flat farmland, and among the vineyards are also farms that grow cereal grains, livestock, and more.

Rocca di Montemassi, in fact—which was bought by the Zonin family in 1999—still raises Maremmana cattle, a unique breed of white cows, on the gorgeous 49-acre property, including 37 acres of grape vines. There's also a lovely agriturismo on-site, as well as a fascinating Museum of Rural Civilization.

The wines they produce, crafted by Winemaker Alessandro Gallo, are delicious. I tasted through the entire range of current releases, and while I thoroughly enjoyed them all (the Sangiovese-dominant Le Focai 2017 is a serious value, and the eponymous Rocca di Montemassi 2016, with its aromas dense with cassis, meat, flowers, and peppercorns, and its palate bursting with fig paste, sweet

spice, candied violets, orange peels, and star anise, is a blockbuster), the Calasole Vermentino 2018 is my white Wine of the Week.

Like so many of the other standout Vermentino-based wines from the Maremma that I tasted during my time in Tuscany, this one is also marked by a telltale sense of salinity that lends savory mineral notes to the fruit, in this case a banana-like hint to aromas of pineapples and citrus. These follow through to the palate, which maintains serious balance through the energetic, tension-filled finish. And at less than \$15 per bottle, it's a phenomenal value.

My red Wine of the Week, the Tenuta di Arceno Arcanum 2015, is a wine that is deeply tied to its place of origin, a Cabernet Franc-based blend that shows exactly why this land in Castelnuovo Berardenga is so perfectly suited to a grape variety most famously utilized on the Right Bank of Bordeaux. Grown mostly in two specific blocks on the Jackson Family-owned estate, and crafted by Viticulturalist and Winemaker Pierre Seillan and Winemaker Lawrence Cronin, the 2015 is a three-decade wine...if you have the patience once it's released next May. Until then, I strongly recommend the 2013, whose meaty and subtly floral notes are complicated by mixed berries, rosemary, spice, and a deep seam of minerality. (SRP: \$100)

With supporting roles played by Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petit Verdot, this vintage of Arcanum is brilliantly shot through with the inimitable marks of world-class Cab Franc: Aromas of brambly purple fruits and licorice precede a rich, seriously structured palate vibrating with notes of spearmint, dark chocolate, allspice, charred rosemary, and something almost meaty pulsing through it all. It's excellent right now, and promises to continue evolving in fascinating ways for another 30-plus years. (Interestingly, I also tasted the 2002 Arcanum, and despite the fact that it was from a less-than-venerated vintage, I loved it, the notes of leaves sweetly mouldering on the forest floor, currants, and mint both haunting and persistent at the same time. And that's from a not-great year!)

Tenuta di Arceno is currently undergoing a bit of expansion, and their new vineyard sites—currently being planted or re-planted—includes land that, at a significantly higher altitude than the rest of their vineyards, is an average of 3.5-degrees Fahrenheit cooler than land just half a kilometer away. Its impact on the wines will be revealing and delicious to follow.

Both of these wines, then, are yet further evidence that Tuscany is a vast land of amazing breadth and seemingly limitless potential.

Rocca di Montemassi Calasole Vermentino 2018

A delicious sense of salinity lends savory mineral notes to the fruit, in this case a banana-like hint to aromas of pineapples and citrus. These follow through to the palate, which maintains serious balance through the energetic, tension-filled finish. At less than \$15 per bottle, it's a phenomenal value. It would be even at \$10 more.



Rocca di Montemassi is located in the Maremma, an area that excels with the growing of wine grapes in addition to a range of other agricultural products (Credit: Brian Freedman). BRIAN FREEDMAN

Tenuta di Arceno Arcanum 2015

This is brilliantly shot through with the inimitable marks of world-class Cabernet Franc: Aromas of brambly purple fruits and licorice precede a rich, seriously structured palate vibrating with notes of spearmint, dark chocolate, allspice, charred rosemary, and something almost meaty pulsing through it all. It's excellent right now, and promises to continue evolving in fascinating ways for another 30-plus years. SRP to be announced on release in May 2020.



The new vineyards being planted by Tenuta di Arceno are high enough in altitude that they benefit from a significantly cooler temperature (Credit: Brian Freedman). BRIAN FREEDMAN



Brian Freedman

I am a food, wine, drinks, and travel writer, restaurant and beverage consultant, wine educator, and event host and speaker. I was Editor-in-Chief of Drink Me Magazine a...

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