



Can't go wrong with a 2015 Chianti

It's hard to fathom a wine lover who does not have at least a passing affection or fancy for Italian wine.

With the many different regions, grapes and styles that come out of Italy, some have become household names without the public even realizing it.

Prosecco, the simple sparkler, is the first that comes to mind. Then there's Pinot Grigio, the white grape du jour that has been "having a moment" for longer than anyone ever expected.

For me, Primitivo immediately leaps into my mind because of my affection for barbecue and pairing it with the Californian-based wine Zinfandel; Primitivo and Zinfandel have been genetically proven to be the same grape living on two different continents. And, of course, wines like Barolo (from Piedmont), Brunello (from Tuscany) and Amarone (from Veneto) are all styles that have either graced your table, been sipped at friends' houses or been seen while perusing the local Italian restaurant's wine list.



Michael Pinkus

But Italy's most famous wine is probably Chianti. A red from the region of Tuscany, it is made primarily from the Sangiovese grape, one of Italy's most famed varieties.

When most people think of Chianti, they think of straw-basket-covered bulbous bottles – called a "fiasco" or flask – that when emptied made great candle holders. Chianti wine has come a long way from those days, but if you visit the area, the bottles still adorn the walls and shelves of some restaurants. It's a part of their history and, whether you consider it cheesy or not, it is a history they embrace, even though they might wish you would forget about the wine that was in those bottles.

Chianti is broken into two defined

regions – and a number of "areas." The Chianti Classico area sits at the heart of the regions. The Chianti area that lies around its outskirts can still put Chianti on a wine label but drop the "Classico" moniker for other sub-regional designations, such as Rufina, Colli Senesi, Colli Fiorentini, Montalbano and others.

The history of Chianti goes back to 1716 when the production zone was delimited and mapped out, but there is a definite distinction between "Chianti" and "Chianti Classico" besides just the two designations you'll find on the label.

From 1716, when the area was drawn, other areas adjoined to Chianti were allowed into the fold and were given permission to use the word Chianti on their labels, but with this expansion came a loss of identity of the wine and the historical area where it got its start.

So, in 1932, the term "Classico" was added to distinguish between the original 1716 area versus what had popped up around it. Finally, in 1996, the original

1716 area officially became its own distinctly recognized part of Chianti by law. Today there are 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) within this demarcated zone, making an annual output of 35 million to 38 million bottles of wine that are exported to 130 countries. Canada sits fourth on the list behind United States, Italy and Germany.

Having recently travelled to the area of Tuscany and sitting through many days of tasting while visiting the regions of Vino Nobile (Montepulciano), Brunello (Montalcino) and, of course, Chianti – all Sangiovese-based wines – I believe the 2015 Chiantis are going to be wines you'll want to get and store, if you have a wine cellar. Especially those from the "Classico" area.

If you're a fan of old-school Chianti, meaning a little rustic with high acidity and low fruit, then stay away. The 2015 Chianti Classico is made in a more modern

fruit-forward style, yet still retains balancing acidity and leaves a little wood in the background for depth and backbone. This vintage shows how winemakers took full advantage of the great growing season Chianti had.

These wines, for the most part, were in their infancy when I tasted them, but should round out nicely and be perfect for dinners and barbecues over the next five-plus years, depending on producer and wine.

We'll start to see these wines in Ontario this summer and into the fall. I'm guessing what the LCBO might stock but anything that bares the 2015 vintage can be picked up without worry. If the label reads 2014, it won't stack up. [G](#)

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.

2015 VINTAGE WATCH LIST

- Antinori Pèppoli *Chianti Classico*
- Barone Ricasoli *Chianti Classico*
- "Brolio" Bibbiano *Chianti Classico*
- Borgo Scopeto *Chianti Classico*
- Carpineto *Chianti Classico*
- Castello di Gabbiano *Chianti Classico*
- Cigliano *Chianti Classico*
- Fontodi *Chianti Classico*
- Isole e Olena *Chianti Classico*
- Montesecondo *Chianti Classico*
- Querciabella *Chianti Classico*
- Ricasoli Brolio *Chianti Classico*
- Rocca delle Macie *Chianti Classico*
- Rocca di Castagnoli *Chianti Classico*
- Rubiolo *Chianti Classico DOCG*
- Tenuta di Capraia *Chianti Classico*
- Vignamaggio *Chianti Classico*
- "Monna Lisa" Villa Calcinaia *Chianti Classico*

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