

20TH ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE

100
BEST
WINES

100
BEST
BUYS

100
WINERIES
OF THE
YEAR

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INTERNATIONAL wineries of the year

Producers that made the cut for our *International Wineries of the Year* consistently make great wines expressive of their particular regions. To find them, W&S panels tasted more than 5,300 newly released imported wines over the past 12 months, selecting wines that stood out for varietal and regional character.

Our final selection is based on each winery's high-scoring wines, the average score of the total recommended wines and the percentage of wines recommended among those tasted. We limit our selection to wineries with three or more recommendations; you'll find other great producers, those who release only one or two proprietary wines in a vintage, among our *100 Best Wines of the Year*, starting on page 117.

In the profiles that follow, W&S editors Nicole Drummer, Joshua Greene, Peter Liem, Patricio Tapia, Tara Q. Thomas and Wolfgang M. Weber provide their personal insight into what makes these wineries great. We've provided a list of each producer's top three recommended wines, as well as background information on their business. For a complete list of recommended wines from our *International Wineries of the Year*, turn to the *Top 100 Shopper's Guide*, starting on page 112. And for our tasting notes on any of these wines, log on to our wine search at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.



Italy wineries of the year Tuscany



IL MOLINO DI GRACE

Frank Grace didn't set out to own a winery; he was just looking for someplace to retire to when he stumbled on Villa Castagnoli, an old, ivy-covered property in Panzano, the heart of Chianti Classico. The estate had a windmill—the *molino* of the name—and a few acres of vineyards, which he was quickly able to expand when the 66-acre estate next door came up for sale.

That was in 1997; soon after he met Gerhard Hirmer, a German who'd given up the banking business to move to Chianti and open an art gallery—something he hoped would give him time to study his passion, wine. Impressed by his business acumen and interest in wine, Grace hired Hirmer to manage the estate, and they brought on enologist Franco Bernabei as a consultant. We tasted Il Molino's wines for the first time this past April, and they were impressive. The wines from 2000 combine power with unusual grace for the vintage, while the 2001s feel more florid and dense.

All of Il Molino's Chianti Classicos include a small percentage of cabernet and merlot, and the winemaking skews to the modern, with microoxygenation in stainless steel and hefty doses of oak from time spent in Bordeaux barrels. Yet sangiovese's power is what stands out in the wines. The 2000 Chianti Classico Riserva, for example, may feel more like a super Tuscan, but the image it offers is of sangiovese built into a monument and buffed to a sheen, a paen to modern-day Tuscany. Il Margone, a vineyard selection of the best sangiovese and the oldest cabernet, puts up an impressive shield of oak, but it doesn't take long for the sangiovese to dominate, its rich red and black cherry fruit balanced with an earthy, tannic grip that promises a long evolution ahead. While it's too early to predict the future for Il Molino, these early releases are a great start. —T.Q.T.

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '00 Chianti Classico Riserva Il Margone \$48 (4/06)
- 91 '00 Chianti Classico Riserva \$36 (4/06)
- 86 '01 Toscana Gratus \$56 (4/06)

Founded: 1998 **Winemaker:** Gerhard Hirmer **Acres owned:** 66.7 **Annual production:** 13,333 cases **Estate grown:** 100% **Owners:** Frank Grace **Known for:** Contemporary wines from a new player in Chianti Classico **Importer:** Domaine Select Wine Estates, NY **Website:** ilmolinodegrace.it