

Grace Notes

Il Molino di Grace emphasizes quality over quantity.

By Eunice Fried



CHIANTI COUNTRY: *Tuscany is home to Il Molino di Grace.*

IN A REGION WHERE MOST WINERIES count their ages in decades — and some count them in centuries — Il Molino di Grace is the new kid in the vineyards. A Tuscan winery, Il Molino di Grace produced its first vintage three years after Frank Grace, an American, bought a 10th century villa in the Chianti Classico village of Panzano in 1996. It came with acres of vineyards to which he soon added more by buying an adjacent property.

Gerhard Hirmer, a friend and wine enthusiast, joined him in the new venture. Right from the start, Grace and Hirmer put quality over quantity, pruning bunches of grapes from their vines to assure a low production and thus, more concentration, flavor and focus from the remaining grapes. And right from the

start, that philosophy paid off when Il Molino won coveted awards with its first wines.

Today, it is producing such exceptional and well-crafted wines as its Chianti Classico Riserva 2001. Ninety percent Sangiovese, the basic grape of all Chianti, its other 10 percent mingles Cabernet Sauvignon, Cannaiolo Nero, Merlot and various ancient Tuscan grapes. Deep colored, deep flavored, it is a well-made, balanced, fragrant wine, priced at \$30.

Chianti Classico Riserva Il Margone 2000 is everything Riserva 2001 is, only more so. With its blend of 70 percent Sangiovese and 30 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, it is rich, luscious, tightly structured and brimming with both spicy notes and the scent of ripe cherries. It retails for

about \$45 a bottle.

At the top of Il Molino di Grace's line is Gratus, a wine made totally from the 55-year-old Sangiovese vines of a single vineyard. It is a powerful, complex and at the same time, elegant wine with the concentrated aromas of leather, tobacco and coffee. Like all old vines, Gratus' have an extremely low yield — less than a ton per acre. This, Il Molino's greatest expression, can be found for \$53.

Frank Grace had his early success in logistics and relocation businesses. Gerhard Hirmer had his early success as an international banker. Today, with Hirmer as the general manager of the winery, both men have found not merely another success, but the most eminently satisfying one of all. ■