

Chianti Classico improves with new grape blends

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Chianti - perhaps the most easily recognized Italian red wine - has come a long way from straw-fiasco-bottled plonk of the 1970s and '80s. Chianti is primarily made of Sangiovese, Italy's most important red grape.

There are seven subzones in Chianti, most of which were added in the 20th century when the Chianti region was expanded.

The original Chianti zone was designated as Classico. Bottles with the black rooster seal of Classico consortium members designate wine from that specific region of Chianti, though not all Classico producers are members.

Through the decades, the vineyard yields and type of grape varieties allowed in Chianti have changed, improving the wine's quality. The most recent change was in 1996, when the allowed percentage of nonnative red grapes like Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon was increased from 10 percent to 15 percent.

Classico also has different designations for barrel aging, including basic, which is aged a minimum of 12 months, and Riserva, which sees a minimum of two years in oak plus three months in bottle.

In addition to the basic Classicos recommended here, most producers also make a Riserva bottling.



The Chronicle Recommends



Il Molino di Grace Chianti Classico 2005

This estate name, which means "the windmill of Grace," is named after the historic 19th century windmill on its property in Panzano. More depth and complexity with saddle leather and slight gamy character on the nose, underscoring the darker fruit profile. Deeper, darker flavors; somewhat drying on finish.