



The next time someone tells you that Super Tuscans are dead, or just a marketing term, tell them what you know. Tell them that it didn't start out that way, that super Tuscans were *the* wine of non-conformist winemakers who refused to accept government-mandated mediocrity. Tell them that Super Tuscans were the reason Chianti stepped out of the dark ages and into the light of quality, modern day winemaking. Super Tuscans were actually the leaders of a second Italian renaissance.

In 1944 in the Bolgheri district on the Tuscan coast, Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta dared to experiment with a plot of cabernet vines he had taken from Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, to make house wine for his family estate, Tenuta San Guido. His winemaker, Giacomo Tachis, followed the work of the great Bordeaux enologist Emile Peynaud, who encouraged Tachis to use Bordeaux varietals and try French barrique. After 40-some years of private consumption, Marchese released the cabernet-based 1968 Sassicaia (aia = very, sassi = stony) publicly – to immediate acclaim.

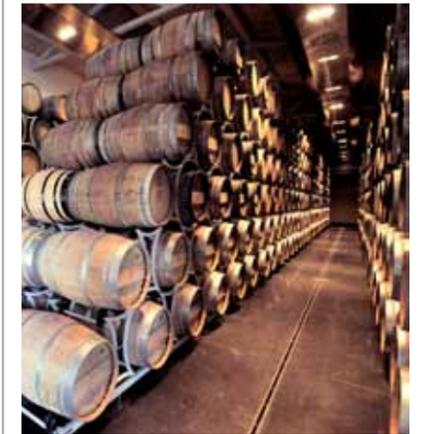
Marchese accepted a lowly vino da tavola (table wine) designation rather



CLASH OF THE TUSCANS

“IF YOU WANT THINGS TO STAY AS THEY ARE, THINGS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE” – GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA

CANTINA NUOVA
Left, Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta experimented with cabernet vines to make house wine for his family estate, Tenuta San Guido



than submit to governmental constraints, which required that all Tuscan red wines include between 10 to 30 per cent white grapes – grapes that would degrade the wine's concentration, structure and ageing potential – in order to attain the “status” of DOC/G (Denominazione di

Origine Controllata). By rejecting that, he was free to follow his vision wherein his wines would be delicious, not diluted.

His admiring nephew, Piero Antinori, then created Tignanello wine, and later Solaia. This begat Ornellaia, and after, Masseto by brother Ludovic Antinori.

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PICTURES: GETTY & SUPPLIED

This begat the Tuscany before us today, with nearly all medium to large wineries having at least one wine of DOC/G status and one of IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) – the 1994 classification created by the Italian government (tail between its legs) to acknowledge the prestige

and honour these elite wines brought to Tuscany. The laws were further improved to allow 100 per cent sangiovese wines for DOC/G status or up to 15 per cent non-traditional grapes blended in. Afterward came the superb 1995 and legendary 1997 vintage, which thrust Super Tuscans

to the fore of the world market.

Subsequently, the film *Sideways*, released in 2004, boosted Pinot Noir atop the market. But, according to Christy Canterbury, Italy wine editor of *Professional Wine Reference*, and former wine acquisitions director for Italian Wine Merchants, NY, “Super Tuscans are as popular as ever, wherever high-end Italian wine is in vogue. They held their value much better than Bordeaux and Burgundy throughout the financial crisis. The 2006 vintage was historic and early trading on Masseto was as high as US\$1,000 per bottle.” They perennially list on the *Wine Spectator* Top 100, and Decanter recently named Giacomo Tachis (also behind Tignanello and Solaia) as its 2010 Man of the Year. Today's Super Tuscan may be 100 per cent sangiovese or some blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc or sangiovese – or it might be 100 per cent merlot like Masseto or Tua Rita's rare and covetable Redigaffi. But, once you taste one, you will taste the light of Tuscany's modern-day renaissance. ■