

The Fantastic Four of Tuscan Merlot



© Masseto | One of Italy's great wines, Masseto is easily the most recognizable of the four Merlots.
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In Tuscany, Merlot is taking center stage as the following four wines go to show.

It may surprise you, but in Italy, where indigenous varietals such as [Nebbiolo](#), [Sangiovese](#) and [Aglanico](#) are the source of some of the country's greatest red wines, [Merlot](#) carries a reputation that is arguably as impressive as these other selections.

Excellent versions such as the [Brandolini Vistorta](#) in [Friuli](#) or [Pàtrimo](#) from [Feudi di San Gregorio](#) in [Campania](#) display notable complexity and breeding. But the most remarkable examples of [Italian Merlot](#), wines that offer power and impeccable structure, originate from one region, [Tuscany](#), where a handful of producers have fashioned some of the country's most iconic and in-demand wines.

For this article, we will examine four of these wines: Masseto from Ornellaia, Messorio from Le Macchiole, L'Apparita from Castello di Ama and Volta from [Bertinga](#). The first two wines are from vineyards near the sea in Bolgheri, while the latter two are from inland plantings in the [Chianti Classico](#) zone. While each wine displays certain winemaking philosophies, they all have in common a remarkable intensity and complexity along with outstanding cellar potential.
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Volta

While the first three Merlots mentioned in this article have been produced for more than two decades, [Volta](#) (or more formally Volta di Bertinga) is a newcomer; only two vintages have been produced to date – 2015 and 2016 – with only the 2016 being released in the market so far.

Yet given the character of this first offering – *Gambero Rosso*, the unofficial Bible of Italian wines, labeled the 2016 Volta as the Best Italian Merlot they tasted for their 2021 Italian Wine Guide – the wine may indeed be identified as the next great Italian Merlot.

The Bertinga winery, located in Gaiole in Chianti, is owned by two Russian wine importers, who had the opportunity to purchase the Bertinga vineyard from Castello di Ama when it was on the market a few years ago. As they imported wines from this area for many years, and loved the style of the local wines, they jumped at the chance and bought this property, which has an average elevation of 500 meters above sea level.

General Director Luca Vitiello notes that Volta will only be produced in the finest vintages, with 2019 being the next release, while the grapes from the 2017 and 2018 vintages will be used in another estate wine. As for the two vintages produced so far, the decision was made almost immediately that the 2015 would be released after the 2016. For Vitiello, "the 2015 is very tight, it really needs a lot of time." The 2016, however, is a remarkable wine that is quite harmonious, even with its deep concentration. "Vintages like 2016 are more elegant, there's more elegance, there's more complexity at an earlier stage," notes Vitiello.

How does Vitiello describe the style of Volta? "In Italian we would say this is a "Gaiolese" Merlot; it captures the essence of Gaiole in a very strong sense. It has a very strong sense of place, but it is very different from the greatest Merlots of the coast, of course. It is much closer to L'Apparita in terms of style, but even then, the winemaking approach is different, so there are differences between the two wines."

"But the sense of place, that severe elegance, that austerity, those are things I appreciate very much."