

TASTING TRADITION

A Chef's Introduction to Chianti Classico

by Gary Podesto

NESTLED IN THE HILLS OF TUSCANY, the small hamlet of Greve is in the heart of Sangiovese country. Late last year, on a western-facing slope of the valley, I found myself in the courtyard of Podere Campriano, greeted by a pair of massive Bernese mountain dogs and the beaming smile of Elena Lapini, the third-generation *vignaiola* in charge of this tiny family farm.

After showing me to my room in the beautifully restored farmhouse, Elena led me through the cellar, where she recounted her family's history on the land. As with many artisanal producers, the winery is a family-run affair. Her grandfather hand-built the stone arches of the cellar, her husband Luca replanted the vineyards and converted to organic farming in 1999, and her son Pietro currently works in all areas of the property. Their evolution to a more ecologically sustainable system fascinated me. Elena recounted how using organic and biodynamic farming methods helped her develop a deeper respect for the land and the vines. As a chef who seeks to know the provenance of all my ingredients, I deeply respect their hands-on agrarian lifestyle.

After a tour of the cellar, Elena opened a few bottles to serve alongside generous slices of homemade *salumi* and aged pecorino. A traditional *salame toscano* was seasoned with red wine and black pepper. The *capocollo*, with its characteristic streaky fat and dry-cured perfume, tasted delicious. But the star was her *finocchiona*—a regional specialty of Tuscany that my grandmother fed to me when I was a child. Biting into it sent me right back to her table. The flavor of wild fennel vividly evoked not only the Tuscan countryside but also my home in Northern California. It was like tasting a century of tradition, connecting these famous culinary regions thousands of miles apart.

As I reflect on my journey, I'm struck by the importance of preserving the legacy of traditional winemaking. Podere Campriano's blend of old-world charm with sustainable practices is a testament to the enduring vitality of Chianti Classico. It's a reminder that by understanding and incorporating modern techniques while honoring our heritage, we can ensure this remarkable winemaking region's continued success and relevance. Leaving Podere Campriano, I carry not only bottles of quality organic wine but also a profound appreciation for the legacy, as well as the hopeful future, of family-run farms and wineries on both sides of the Atlantic.



Gary Podesto is a cook at Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, and is the chief culinary collaborator for the Climate Farm School. His work aims to revitalize the ritual of gathering around the hearth and table while promoting the values of edible education and regenerative agriculture. Learn more at www.garypodesto.net.

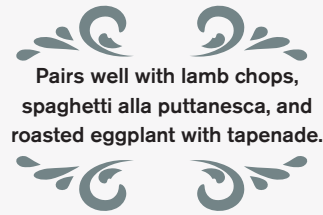


APRIL 2024

ROUGE

2020 ELORO NERO D'AVOLA "SPACCAFORNO" RIOFAVARA

While the high-altitude volcanic slopes of Mount Etna may be the hippest of Sicily's wine regions today, some of its other terroirs are equally capable of yielding refreshing, nuanced wines that transparently reflect the local conditions. The indigenous Nero d'Avola has a natural affinity for the limestone soils that dominate the Eloro zone in the island's southeast. The chalk here retains moisture to nurture the vines, allowing for elegant, balanced wines in an otherwise inhospitably hot, dry environment. When Massimo Padova took over his family's winery in the 1990s, he sought to realize the full potential of the land through organic farming and



Pairs well with lamb chops, spaghetti alla puttanesca, and roasted eggplant with tapenade.

and natural winemaking. Riofava became the first local producer to adopt this philosophy, fermenting exclusively with native yeasts and bottling unfiltered. This delicious entry-level Nero d'Avola is a testament to these methods: dark and smooth, the Spaccaforno is generous but not heavy, with suggestions of blackberry, licorice, and spice leading to a lively, chalky finish.

—Anthony Lynch

\$27.00 PER BOTTLE

\$291.60 PER CASE









ABOVE Massimo and Clementina Padova. © Gail Skoff

COVER Luca Polga and Elena Lapini's Bernese mountain dogs. © Joanie Bonfiglio

2019 CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA PODERE CAMPRIANO

Half an hour south of Florence lies Greve in Chianti, one of the small and sleepy villages that make up the scattered Chianti Classico constellation between Florence and Siena. Perched high on the hill that rises up from Greve, Podere Campriano is a tiny *agriturismo* featuring four hectares of vines, a small cellar, a guest house, and a kitchen for the cooking classes hosted by *vignaiola* Elena Lapini. Wine is the main focus here, but Elena, her husband Luca, and their son Pietro take hospitality as seriously as they take their Sangiovese, welcoming guests with warm embraces and generous slices of homemade *salumi* and cheese. This convivial spirit courses through the family's reds, which embrace the pure, rustic, and joyous side of Chianti Classico. Brambly and dark-fruited, this Riserva is open and charming enough to enjoy now with roast lamb or pork chops, but also has the structure and class to evolve beautifully over the next ten years. If you are planning a trip to Tuscany, don't hesitate to reach out to Elena, Luca, and Pietro! —Tom Wolf

\$45.00 PER BOTTLE \$486.00 PER CASE

					
2020 Eloro Nero d'Avola "Spaccaforno" <i>Riofava</i>	Nero d'Avola	30-year-old vines Limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 60–64° F Decant recommended	Licorice, blackberry, blood orange Generous, supple, lively	Drink now through 2030
2019 Chianti Classico Riserva <i>Podere Campriano</i>	Sangiovese	Vines planted in 1998 Limestone	Serve <i>slightly cool</i> 58–62° F Decant optional	Cherries, earth, undergrowth Pure, rustic, joyous	Drink now through 2035

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