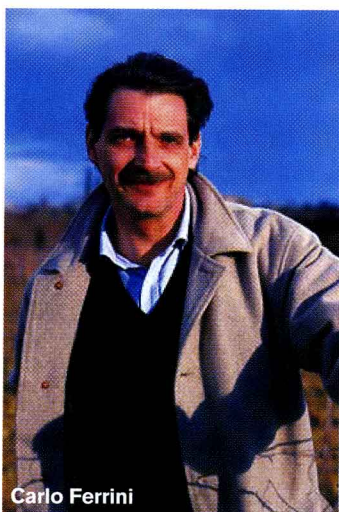


Italy wineries of the year Tuscany



Carlo Ferrini



MAZZEI

With 24 generations of winemakers, the Mazzei family is a well-known one in Tuscany. Located in the heart of Chianti Classico, the family can document its history back to 1435 at Castello di Fonterutoli.

While their Chianti bottlings offer consistently high quality, it's the wines from a new property called Belguardo that caught our attention this year. In 1997, the family bought 173 acres in the Maremma, a hot, dry coastal stretch of Tuscany that was once a winemaking backwater but is now seeing serious investment. Belguardo has an optimal south/southwest exposure and is made up of limestone and sandstone soils. After researching varieties and clones, the Mazzei replanted much of the property to sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and alicante.

The estate's flagship wine, called simply Tenuta Belguardo, is made from a blend of cabernet sauvignon (70 percent) and sangiovese (30 percent) and aged in 100 percent new French oak barriques. Its latest release, from the hot 2003 vintage, has the tannic structure typical of the year. The fruit is redolent of black plums and currants, the texture generous and supple. Going forward, the wine will be a blend of cabernets sauvignon and franc only. Serrata, the estate's second wine, is a younger, early-drinking version with a vibrant taste of fresh berries, a bargain at \$20. The estate also has vineyards in Morellino di Scansano, where it crafts a rich, polished wine called Bronzone.

The Mazzei's most recent project is a new winery in Sicily called Zisola. Here, they produce a nero d'avola with a splash of syrah, first released in 2004. Their plan is to increase the proportion of syrah, as they believe it can create an elegant wine in their Sicilian terroir. —N.D.

TOP-SCORING WINES

93 '03 Maremma Toscana Tenuta Belguardo \$60 (4/07)

90 '01 Chianti Classico Castello di Fonterutoli \$50 (4/07)

87 '04 Maremma Toscana Belguardo Serrata \$22 (4/07)

Founded: 1435 **Winemaker:** Carlo Ferrini **Viticulturist:** Gionata Pulignani
Acres owned: 317 planted **Annual production:** 70,831 cases **Estate grown:** 100% **Owners:** Filippo and Francesco Mazzei **Known for:** Punchy, fruit-forward wines from the Maremma **Importer:** Palm Bay Imports, Boca Raton, FL **Website:** mazzei.com