

Chianti Classico

The Search for Tuscany's Noblest Wine

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GAIOLE IN CHIANTI

BADIA A COLTIBUONO

We drove up a winding road through woods. Badia a Coltibuono, an isolated, walled abbey, rose out of a clearing. The abbey has been here, in the northeastern corner of Gaiole, since 1051. Emanuela Stucchi Prinetti greeted us. She had just arrived from Hong Kong and was excited because the Hong Kong Jockey Club had showcased Badia a Coltibuono wines in an event and put the annata on its wine list. A few minutes later, her brother Roberto arrived. He has studied agronomy in Italy and viticulture and enology at the University of California, Davis. Initially, Emanuela helped her mother, Lorenza de' Medici, to establish the Badia cooking school and to write books. Later, her enthusiasm and marketing skills got Badia on to the world stage. Roberto, whose energy is hidden beneath a quiet demeanor, has been a pioneer in biologic agriculture. Moreover, he has protected the genetic patrimony of the estate's vineyards by overseeing the mass selection of its oldest vines. His search for purity has always been reflected in the wines. They are simply complex. If you ever visit the estate, allow enough time to have lunch or dinner at its restaurant, Coltibuono, where brother Paolo, the creative Stucchi Prinetti, shows how perfectly Badia's wines and famous olive oils, home-grown ingredients, and his kitchen's creations take the word *terroir* to another level.

The badia is at 625 meters (2,051 feet) of altitude, too high for grapes to regularly mature. Its vineyards and winery are at the southern end of Gaiole and a much lower altitude, about 350 meters (1,148 feet). The topsoil there is calcareous clay, not sand like at the nearby San Giusto a Rentennano, an estate that was formerly a nunnery. These factors make Badia a Coltibuono's wines richer and fuller than one would expect.

Its annata wines mature for one year and its Riserva wines for two, all in large oak casks. The use of large casks and the absence of international varieties bring the taster directly into the flavor and sensorial world of Chianti Classico: cherries, refreshing tartness, and a sharp edge of astringency. I tasted the 2012, 2011, 2010, and 2008 annatas. My notes were similar for all of these except the 2008, in which woody and rose-water smells had pushed in front of the cherry ones. This is just a sign of age.

I also tasted the 2010, 2009, and 2008 Riservas. The 2009 had some orange at the rim and smelled of cinders and iron filings. The 2010 and 2008 were fresher and livelier, though the 2010 had riper fruit flavors. It may be that since the 2009 vintage was hotter than both the 2010 and the 2008, it had matured more rapidly, possibly because of lower acidity or any of several other factors. In any case, it showcased the tertiary aromas of aging, cinders and iron filings, rather than the fresher fruit of a "younger" wine.

The Coltus Boni Chianti Classico 2010 is a mix of the zone's historic and most promising native blending varieties—Canaiolo, Cilieggiolo, Foglia Tonda, Malvasia Nera, Mammolo, Pugnitello, and Sanforte—with a balance of 80 percent Sangiovese. It was dark for a Chianti Classico, probably because of the Pugnitello, and had a spicy, floral, minty character from new toasted oak. Though its texture was thick and unfiltered, it was low in astringency.

The wine named Sangiovese is a 100 percent Sangiovese Super Tuscan. I sampled the 2010 and 2009. Both lacked fruit and had celery in the nose, an indication of age, and were soft and round in the mouth. Perhaps macerations of a month or more and two-year maturations in toasted barriques had conquered the fruit.