



PHOTO BY DAVID RANSOM

Inside the barrel room at Cantina Vignaioli Morellino di Scansano, the region's impressive cooperative.

*It's said that Sangiovese*, while grown throughout many regions of Italy, has found its home in Tuscany. No other region produces more, and certainly none produces so many different styles.

The dominant factor here is that Sangiovese has shown that it can adapt to almost any place it is planted in the sun-kissed hills south of Florence, the main production area for the varietal, leading to a variety of wine styles being made from the many different terroirs present in the regions that produce it.

That said, it has been a select few production areas that have traditionally dominated the marketplace and wine lists. But thanks to the constantly evolving landscape of wines available to them, retailers and sommeliers, in their never-ending quest to provide their clientele with unique offerings, are increasingly turning to other expressions of Tuscany's most celebrated grape.

Enter Montecucco and Morellino di Scansano, two DOCG-classified Southern Tuscan winemaking regions—quite different from each other, yet both defined by common ideals and the promise that Tuscany can provide exciting wines based on Sangiovese other than the more common Chiantis and Brunellos.

# *Sangiovese's*

# NEXT FRONTIER

*by David Ransom*



Montecucco, with Monte Amiata, its northern boundary, in the distance.

# Montecucco

*Member producers of the Consorzio Tutela Montecucco in the cellar at Collemassari. Claudio Tipa is at the lower right in red fleece.*



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**Umberto Valle of Poggio Trevalle winery, who produces only biodynamic wines from his certified organic vineyards, which uniquely straddle both DOCG regions. While he produces some of the best wines in the area from some of the oldest vineyards, “there is nothing special about my wines,” he says.**

Still in the Maremma, but just North and East of Morellino, lies the landlocked, fairly mountainous region of Montecucco. The two regions actually share a border, so there are definite similarities to the wines, and if a comparison can be made regarding style, then the wines of Montecucco would align more with the Morellino wines from that region’s eastern area. However, Montecucco also shares a border with Montalcino, home to Brunello, so there are some producers on Montecucco’s western edge that make wines that are every bit as good, and age-worthy, as their more famous neighbors across the d’Orcia River.

By comparison to Morellino, most of Montecucco’s producers are making small amounts of wine and maintain small vineyards, of which approximately 70% are organically farmed. All are independent and, interestingly, some, like Campi Nuovi’s Daniele Rosellini, have settled in Montecucco to start their own “dream” wineries after working for someone else in another region of Tuscany. Even the largest, Collemassari, nestled in a 3,000-acre estate owned by Claudio Tipa, and which bottles 80% of the approximately 1.2 mil-



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**Giulio Parentini of Moris Farms. Founded in 1971, it is one of the older wineries of Morellino di Scansano.**

lion DOCG Montecucco wines made, has a small feel to it.

Tipa, who along with his sister Maria also owns wineries in Montalcino and Bolgheri, was instrumental in gaining DOCG status for the region, which it achieved in 2011, and which in his words was “an important step to gaining international recognition for Montecucco and the Sangiovese of Monte Amiata.”

## Production and Labelling

DOCG requirements for Morellino dictate the wines must contain a minimum of 85% Morellino to be labeled as such. For Montecucco, the minimum requirement for DOCG labeling is 90% Sangiovese, though many producers are making 100%. In both regions most producers are using both native grapes such as Alicante, Canniolo, and Cilieggiolo, and international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot as well as Syrah to make up the balance.

Standard releases for each region

include a Normale, main bottling from a producer under the DOCG classification, and a Riserva, usually made in better years or from unique and/or older vineyards. While the Normale are meant to be drunk within a few years, many of the Riservas show aging potential well past that.

Many producers are also bottling Toscana IGT wines from international grape varieties, and there are a growing number of producers making Super Tuscan style wines, as well. However, it’s the approachable and versatile DOCG labeled wines that are driving the growth in popularity and distribution.

This is exactly the appeal of Morellino di Scansano and Montecucco for sommeliers such as Joe Cuvo of Del Posto, the New York temple to Italian cuisine owned by Joe Bastianich and Mario Batali, who also produce a Morellino of their own. “Morellino di Scansano’s ripeness and softer tannins make it immediately accessible, and Montecucco’s precise wines, even with their slightly more full-bodied style, are, as well,” says Cuvo, who while admitting his sales are limited, finds that both sell very well to certain demographics, such as Millennials. “Younger patrons in particular, tend to gravitate towards the softer expression and approachable price-point that the wines from Montecucco and Morellino offer,” he adds.

Good news for these two exciting regions, both of which are worth looking into as they work their well-made wines deeper into the U.S. wine-buying consciousness. S|