

A once-in-a-lifetime-tasting: Sassicaia

By Dr Winifred Bowman CWM

Who could resist an invitation to taste the first (and only) 44-year vertical of the iconic Super Tuscan Sassicaia wines from Bolgheri, Italy?

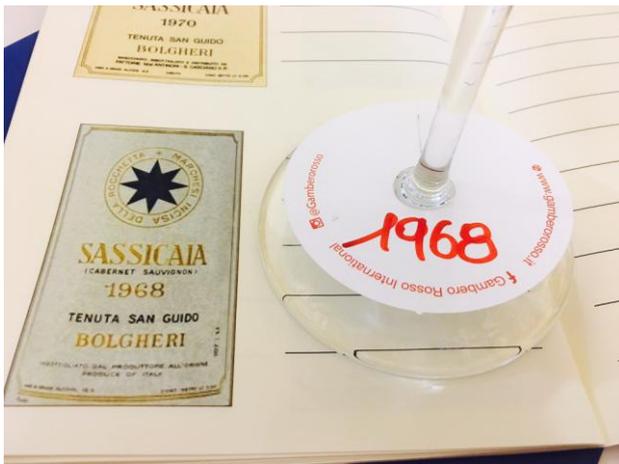
I was fortunate to be invited with 13 other wine personalities to experience this absolute treat in Rome. The Gambero Rosso, Italy's foremost wine publication celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2016 and decided to celebrate in style. Three very special tastings were held in a previous pope's private apartments. They were Sassicaia, a 33-year vertical of Vintage Tunina from Jerman, and a 15-year vertical of Belucchi sparkling wines from Franciacorta.



When Mario Incisa della Rocchetta planted the first Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc vines in Castiglioncello, in 1944, on his beloved Bolgheri estate, he certainly never imagined the impact his wine would have worldwide. The Marchese had been very successful, especially with his greatest love – horses. Nearco, Ribot, and the purebreds of his Dormello-Olgiate stable, for over twenty years, had dominated the most important races in the world, from the Derby to the Arc de Triomphe. Mario Incisa, who was an agronomist and great wine aficionado, also cultivated another passion, the dream of producing a few French-style barriques for his own consumption and that of a few lucky friends. The leap forward came in 1972, when, on the advice of his Antinori cousins, he brought a brilliant oenologist on board: Giacomo Tachis. Tachis was already in charge of production on the Antinori estate. He was the force behind Tignanello, Solaia, and other celebrated Italian wines, first working with Antinori, and later, many others. Awards in Italy and around the world followed the first enthusiastic review of Sassicaia by Luigi Veronelli in Panorama magazine in 1974.



Sassicaia is a modern classic of Italian oenology. The prices for old vintage years – 1985, for example – break records at every international auction. Today son Niccolò, who gave Sassicaia an entrepreneurial makeover, transforming it from a family passion to a cult label, heads the winery. More than once the wine won over more prestigious Bordeaux chateaux and other world classics in international competitions, just as Ribot had done years before. Alongside Niccolò is his daughter Priscilla. Like her father and grandfather, she is in love with this corner of Tuscany’s Maremma, which the Incisa family has decided to preserve intact as a natural reserve, a first in Italy. Year after year, Sassicaia, which has its own denominazione d’origine as a subzone of the Bolgheri DOC, unwaveringly maintains its charm, elegance and delicious drinkability. Its success created a winegrowing zone that had not existed before, but where today grand cru labels are no longer a rarity. Bolgheri is the Mediterranean alternative to the grand crus of the Médoc. To celebrate its own thirtieth anniversary, Gambero Rosso could not have chosen a more iconic label to represent Italian wine in the world.



My favourite was without doubt the iconic 1985 (95/100) and a sentimental favourite - the very first Sassicaia – 1968 (95/100). This was an unforgettable, and unrepeatabe tasting, as Priscilla Incisa della Rocchetta and Carlo Paoli, director of Sassicaia, shared the last bottles with us (for some vintages), of the family reserve.

