

Chianti Classico 2010: top levels

Tuscany's winemakers now have the chance to shine with a new category for estate-grown grapes, but where does that the Riserva-level wines? Stephen Brook finds out

IS 2010 A truly great vintage in Chianti? Most producers would say yes, but it's not a view that's uniformly held. The year began inauspiciously, with a cold winter and a cool, soggy spring. Conditions improved greatly by June, and July was hot, but the rest of the summer was cooler than usual, so ripening was slow. Late September brought rain and disease, which continued into early October. There was considerable rot during harvest, and much of the crop had to be discarded. Lower vineyards suffered more than better-ventilated higher sites.

Disease led to a drop in average production by around 20%. Growers had to make choices before harvest: to pick a bit too early and accept the possibility that not all the fruit was optimally ripe, or to wait for perfection, while risking further rot and disease.

Those knife-edge conditions at harvest endowed the wines with fine acidity and freshness. They mostly lack the lushness and high alcohols of many 2009s, although the 2010s are far from underpowered. Giovanni Manetti at Fontodi acclaims the wines' rich fruitiness, allied to admirable concentration and a muscular structure.

Most agree that the wines' fine acidity will contribute to their ageing potential. They also tend to have lower alcohol than the super-ripe 2009s. I am an admirer of the 2010 vintage, though perhaps it is not as consistently fine and enjoyable as the 2009s. There will be some disappointments.

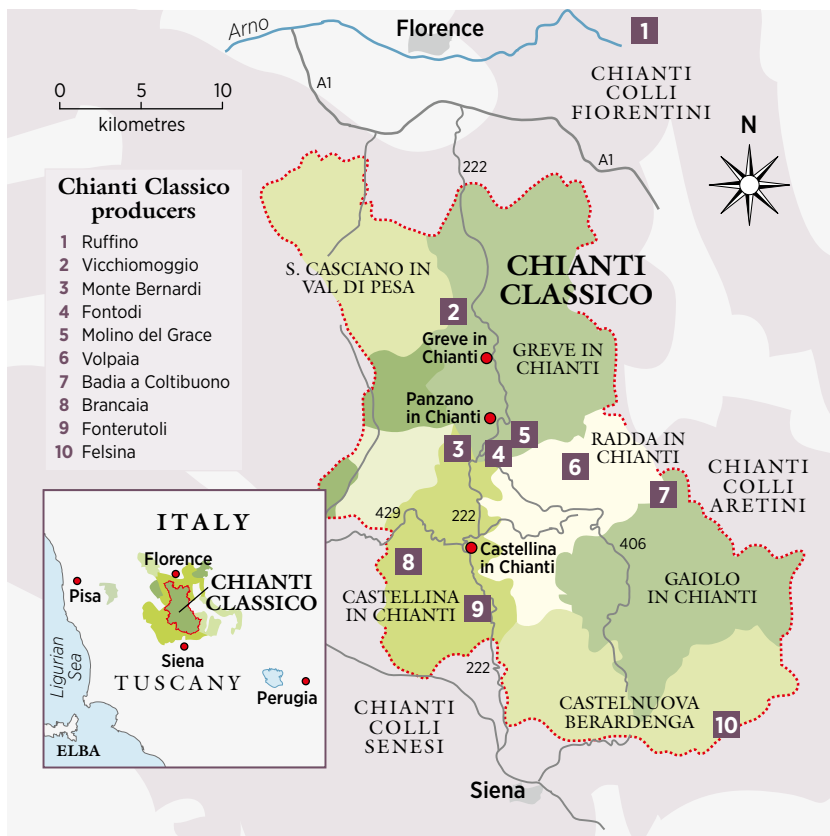
Classification shortcomings

The recent launch of the Gran Selezione tier of wines has cast light on the shortcomings of the Riserva classification in Chianti Classico. 'Riserva' does not necessarily indicate higher quality, since the designation is won by ageing the wine for longer than is required for basic Chianti Classico. Most serious producers set aside wines from single vineyards or exceptional parcels when aiming to produce a Riserva, but they are not obliged to do so. The grapes don't need to come from their own vineyards, either. One of the 'innovations' of Gran Selezione is the requirement that the wines be sourced from the growers' own properties.

Thus Chianti Classico Riserva has become so loosely defined as to become almost meaningless, which is not to say that there are not splendid wines released as Riservas. However, the category's status will not be enhanced by the fact that the introduction of Gran Selezione will demote Riserva from the top tier of production.

There is a widely held view that Gran Selezione has been a missed opportunity. The majority of the wines released as Gran Selezione are very good quality (even if many of them are existing Riserva simply bumped up to a higher category), but the real task in this diverse region is to map and promote individual communes such as Castellina or Greve, thus establishing a more precise typicity for the many sub-zones. Areas close to Florence inevitably have different soils and microclimates to those around Siena. Barolo and Barbaresco growers have moved steadily in this direction over the past decade; the Chianti growers have not.

In the meantime, Chianti Classico will struggle on with its existing difficulties: the continuing existence of DOC Chianti wines that have little in common with the more noble wines from Chianti Classico; the continuation of a Riserva



Chianti: know your vintages

2010 Full ripeness sometimes problematic, but fresh, intense wines.

2009 Rich, ripe wines, hedonistic if sometimes lacking in finesse.

2008 Rain at harvest, so selection is essential. Many dense, structured wines.

2007 Lush, ripe wines but with relatively low acidity, delicious for medium-term drinking.

2006 Heat and cooler spells in summer led to concentrated, long-lived, occasionally tough wines.

2005 Cool summer and mixed autumn led to some disappointing wines. Selection essential.

2004 Excellent year. Finely balanced wines, still going strong.

2003 Extreme heat led to high alcohols and low acidity. Drink up.

2002 Poor summer. A good September helped some vineyards to ripen but many wines tiring.

2001 Fine autumn gave classic wines with ageing potential.

category that is unsatisfactory; the well-intentioned introduction of Gran Selezione, which will struggle to gain recognition when so many of its wines overlap with existing Riservas; and a wide stylistic gap between pure-Sangiovese wines and those with a good dose of French varieties in the blend. Nonetheless Chianti Classico Riserva at its best is a great wine, showing the splendour and structure of top-class Sangiovese in a wide range of interpretations. ➤

Stephen Brook is a contributing editor to Decanter

The results

While there were few exceptional wines, our judges were pleasantly surprised by the precise and elegant Gran Seleziones, which outshone the more rustic Classico Riservas. Georgina Hindle reports

'THE STANDARD IN both categories was very high,' said Michael Garner, to which Andrea Briccarello agreed: 'Most of the wines were very good' but there were few 'really impressive wines'. Emily O'Hare was not surprised by the number of Recommended wines but had hoped to find a 'few more Outstandings': 'I'm not sure if it's because we were being a bit too hard, but I had quite high expectations for the 2010s.' That said, O'Hare admits Tuscany has been 'really moving forward' over the past few years, with 'fewer wines falling by the wayside'.

This, it seems, is what Chianti producers wanted to highlight with the Gran Selezione category that came into force last year. These wines, all of which made a notable first impression on our judges, must be produced solely from estate-grown grapes, can only be sold 30 months after harvest and have a minimum of three months' bottle age.

'The Gran Selezione for me was the revealing tasting of the two days,' said Briccarello. 'They were the most amazing, truly terroir-driven and style-driven wines – the real shining stars.' O'Hare thought they were 'very good' and 'intriguing', while Garner said they were 'very, very impressive'. He praised them as 'showstoppers and medal

'2010 represents really good wines for medium-term drinking' Michael Garner

winners', but pondered how typically Tuscan they were. 'They are more manufactured and more obvious,' he said.

Briccarello summarised the stylistic differences between the two: 'I think producers want to say, "If you want something real, you can go for a Chianti Classico Riserva; if you want something a bit more elegant, you should go for the Gran Selezione". The Gran Selezione are well tailored and precise. It's very much what is happening in the cellar rather than what's happening in the vineyard.' Yet the judges questioned the necessity and validity of the new category, arguing that the Chianti Classico Riservas should 'already be at the peak of the denomination'.

Those debates aside, O'Hare has sympathy for Italian wine drinkers: 'It's difficult for the consumer. You must be quite accepting if you love Chianti, you should love the whole broad spectrum. While there is uniformity in quality,

The scores

90 wines tasted

2

Outstanding

17

Highly recommended

69

Recommended

2

Fair

0

Poor

0

Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

Andrea Briccarello



Briccarello is head sommelier at Galvin La Chapelle. He was previously group sommelier and wine buyer for Corrigan's Mayfair, Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill, and Lindsay House. He has also worked at Michelin-starred Umu. In 2009, he was named Sommelier of the Year by Taste of London, and he was the winner of the Wines of Roussillon Dessert Trophy in 2010.

Briccarello's verdict

'The 2010 vintage in the Chianti Classico

Riserva category includes some good but not outstanding wines. Overall, the quality was solid with lots of classic wines to enjoy. Most were balanced with plenty of typical and rustic Sangiovese notes, but lacked elegance and freshness. I was surprised by the lack of over-extracted and modern styles, leaving plenty of room for more typicity. I was happy to find wines that showed rustic fruit character but also depth of spices and tannins.

'The biggest surprise was the Gran Selezione; a big step up in the glass was recognised almost instantly. Beautifully crafted wines with elegance and poise and plenty of balance and personality. I was surprised by their constant and persistent quality; I could feel the craftsmanship of the winemaker, working together with the wine in perfect harmony.

'While we could argue about this new appellation, some of the Gran Selezione showed huge complexity and incredible purity, offering a new perspective for the consumer who wants to explore a new side of Chianti.

'I was pleased to see more unfamiliar producers do well, alongside the usual suspects. This vintage showed it can deliver solid wines with plenty of rustic character, sweet berry notes and complex leathery aromas.'

Michael Garner



Garner has worked in the wine business for more than 30 years and has specialised in Italian wine for nearly 25 years. He is the co-author of Barolo: Tar and Roses, is a regular contributor to Decanter and has taught for the WSET. He lives in rural Devon with his family and two large Briard dogs.

Garner's verdict

'This was my first chance to assess the Gran Selezione category. The opportunity for comparison with Chianti Classico Riserva

from the same vintage was an added bonus.

'I like the 2010 vintage, and there were few Riserva wines on show that I wouldn't recommend, though conversely few that I found truly exceptional either. The better ones are beginning to show very good aromatic development.

'I must admit to prior doubts about the new "premium tier" but it's what's in the glass that really counts. On the whole, the Gran Selezione wines were surprisingly good, though mostly made in a very international style: deeply coloured, fat, ripe and opulent with lashings of expensive new oak evident. However, a lot of the top examples offer nothing new and seem to be exactly the same wines that used to be marketed as Riserva.

'While you can only admire the overall excellence of the winemaking standards, my doubts about the Gran Selezione category remain: this was a missed opportunity to introduce the importance of terroir to the denomination and I do think the implications for what could now be seen as the "lesser wines" – for example, Classico and Classico Riserva – are potentially very damaging.'

there's not an average style. There are some wines with jubilant cherry fruit, then there are other Sangioveses that are much more muscular and dark – there is such a range.' It also pays to know your producers, as 'the style is so different in terms of what the winemaker is trying to achieve'.

Regarding vintage, Garner likes the 'very forward, attractive and rich 2009s' but these 2010s are 'more distinctive, offering the real character of Sangiovese, which is about aroma, balance and finesse'. But the judges were keen to extol the virtues of the 'young, vibrant and energetic' Chiantis which do not need long periods of ageing. 'I think people are obsessed with wines that are made to age, and with Chianti and Chianti Riserva you should – and can – enjoy them in their primary stage' said Garner. '2010 represents really good wines for medium-term drinking. The Gran Selezione wines are a bit more experimental and people are obviously trying to make wines that are for keeping longer. Whether they've got the sort of depth and concentration of fruit to be able to do that is questionable.'

While Garner believes Gran Selezione is 'perhaps more of an international style' and Chianti Classico Riserva represents 'real Tuscany', consumers will find many examples showcasing the best of this region. But be cautious – as is so often the case, it pays to know your producers, and budget counts.

Entry criteria: Producers and UK agents were invited to submit one wine per producer from each category (Chianti Classico Riserva and Gran Selezione), from the 2010 vintage

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Il Molino di Grace, Il Margone, Gran Selezione

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: Andrea Briccarello 18.5 Michael Garner 18.5

Emily O'Hare 18.5

£19.95–£25 Mondial Wine, Swig

The name of the estate translates as 'the mill of Grace'. It's not quite as romantic as it sounds, as the mill dates from the 19th century and Grace is the name of the American-born owner, Frank Grace. He bought the property, near Panzano, in 1995; until then the grapes had been sold to cooperatives. Grace's first vintage under the new name was in 1999. Since then acclaim has been swift. The 23ha of Chianti Classico are farmed organically. As well as a regular Riserva, the estate produces 'Margone', a selection from pure Sangiovese, which is aged 12 months in 50% new barriques and tonneaux, and then given further ageing in large casks.

Andrea Briccarello Notes of caramelised plums and hints of dark spices and cranberries. Lots of leather and cigar-box aromas. Wild game and meaty flavours on the finish, followed by ripe plums on the back of the palate. Very attractive and rustic.

Michael Garner Coffee, chocolate and spice over ripe and powerful black fruit aromas. Dense and full with persuasively opulent fruit characters. Good intensity and balance; will keep well.

Emily O'Hare Cherry and menthol aromas lead into a savoury and chewy palate with meaty tannins. This is a well-structured wine with great balance.

Drink 2014–2025 Alcohol 13.5%



Melini, Vigneti La Selvanella, Chianti Classico Riserva 18.5 (95) AB 18.5 MG 18.5 EOH 18.5

£12.99 Mondial Wine

Although Melini, an estate that groups five farms in Chianti and Chianti Classico, makes much of the fact that it dates back to the early 18th century, it has long been part of the giant GIV company, which has properties in most areas of Italy. Of the five Chianti properties, La Selvanella, in the commune of Radda, is probably its flagship. First made in 1969, this Riserva is a Chianti Classico of the old school, aged for around two years in large casks. It is the most traditional of its Riservas; Vigna di Fontalle, for instance, is aged in barriques as well as large casks. Despite the industrial scale of the GIV operation, the company has maintained high quality at its top estates.

AB Masculine and generous with forest fruit aromas. Rustic with flavours of leather and wild game and gripping tannins. Plump and intense, this has great texture and spice on the finish. It is textbook Sangiovese – complex yet elegant.

MG Masses of ripe berry fruit and strong spicy notes. Balanced and well-rounded with cleverly judged tannins and a warm, ripe aromatic finish; a stylish wine.

EOH This is wound-up and taut – a respectable classic. Needs time to unwind but the fruit is there, along with some lovely floral notes. It ticks all the boxes.

Drink 2014–2020 Alc 14.5% ➤

Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Castello Vicchiomaggio, Vigna La Prima, Gran Selezione 18.5 (95)
 AB 18.5 MG 19 EOH 17.75
 £36.99 Hallgarten Druiit
 Lifted, fresh and floral aromas over cassis and cherry fruits. Lots of intensity with an over-ripeness that gives identity and personality. The jammy notes open to a deep complex world of spices and summer fruit pudding with a nutty finish. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Casa Sola, Gran Selezione 17.5 (91)
 AB 17.5 MG 17.5 EOH 17.25
 N/A UK www.fattoriacasola.com
 Ethereal and complex nose with hints of cedar and sweet tobacco leaves. Full, fresh palate with damson fruit flavours and coffee notes from the oak. Meaty and smoky with hints of paprika coming through. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 14%



Monte Bernardi, Chianti Classico Riserva 17.5 (91) AB 17.75 MG 17.5 EOH 17.25
 £22 Fields Morris & Verdin
 Seasoned leather over fresh and dried fruit aromas. Cool and lean but with good concentration. The oak is very well integrated and offers complex and intense leathery notes on the finish. **Drink** 2014-2018 **Alc** 13.5%



Castello di Gabbiano, Bellezza, Gran Selezione 17.25 (90+)
 AB 17.5 MG 17.25 EOH 16.75
 £27 Treasury Wine Estate
 Deep and intense with concentrated plums, blueberries and dark spices notes. Chewy and densely textured with ripe, juicy fruit flavours and aromas of mint and sage. Oak needs to integrate but has potential for ageing. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 14%

'On the whole, the Gran Selezione wines were surprisingly good, though mostly made in the international style'

Michael Garner



Fontodi, Vigna del Sorbo, Gran Selezione 17.25 (90+) AB 17.5 MG 16 EOH 18
 £40-£45 Carruthers & Kent, D Byrne & Co, The Fine Wine Co, Liberty Wines, Noel Young, Sheldon's, Swig, Vagabond, Vini Italiani, The Wine Society, Wined Up Here
 Chocolate and cherry brownie nose; quite ethereal and complex. Full and dense palate with fresh acid underpinning dense black fruit flavours and attractive, well-integrated oak. **Drink** 2014-2025 **Alc** 15%



Lornano, Gran Selezione 17.25 (90+) AB 17.5 MG 18 EOH 16
 N/A UK www.lomano.it
 Bright ripe morello cherries with lots of layers of spices and dark forest fruits. Full and luscious ripe fruit flavours supported by finely grained tannins and lovely fresh acidity. Beautifully balanced and very persuasive. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 14%



Machiavelli, Vigna di Fontalle, Chianti Classico Riserva 17.25 (90+)
 AB 17.75 MG 16.5 EOH 17.5
 £14.99 Vinissimo
 Maraschino cherries and intense strawberry coulis notes. Juicy and clean with great lift from the acidity and support from the tannins; very charming. Precise and linear with well-balanced concentration and unobtrusive oak. **Drink** 2014-2020 **Alc** 15%



Monterotondo di Basagni Saverio, Seretina, Chianti Classico Riserva 17.25 (90+) AB 17 MG 17.5 EOH 17
 N/A UK www.agriturismomonterotondo.net
 Expressive cherry and blackberry notes with hints of sandalwood. Quite a tight palate with good, focused berry fruit flavours. Tannins are high, but they have good grip. Traditional and rustic with meaty undertones. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 14%



Tenute di Castelvecchi, Madonnino delle Pieve, Gran Selezione 17.25 (90+) AB 17 MG 17 EOH 17.5
 N/A UK www.castelvecchi.com
 Charming and elegant nose of ripe strawberries and raspberries. Full, ripe and round with very good acidity, polished tannins and controlled oak; an opulent wine. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 14%



Bandini, Villa Pomona, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90)
 AB 16.75 MG 17 EOH 17
 N/A UK www.fattoriapomona.it
 Violets, plums and blackberry notes followed by a mix of dark spices and orange peel. Ripe and intense morello cherries with round tannins and a precise fruit core. A perfumed finish of good length. **Drink** 2014-2018 **Alc** 14.5%



Brancaia, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90) AB 16.5 MG 16.75 EOH 17.5
 £29 Whalley Wine Shop, Olde Worlde Wines; Wine Direct International
 Broad, open and spicy-toned berry fruit aromas with hints of cinnamon and nuts. Savoury mid-palate with notes of camphor and herbs to finish. Clean, lean and elegant. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 14.5%

Highly Recommended (continued) 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Castello D'Albola, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90) AB 16 MG 17 EOH 17.75
 £24.30 Zonin
 Fleishy and spicy with a sour cherry and menthol note. Classic, balanced and fresh; not overworked. Forward, ripe fruit flavours with pretty aromas to finish; honest and drinkable. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 13%



Poggerino, Bugialla, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90)
 AB 17 MG 17 EOH 17
 £26.95 Lea & Sandeman
 Restrained but spicy nose with hints of coffee and seasoned leather. Vibrant fruits, cranberries and plum perfumed. Elegant and well balanced, a true classic in the glass. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Ruffino, Riserva Ducale Oro, Gran Selezione 17 (90) AB 16.5 MG 18 EOH 16.5
 £40 Alivini
 Camphor, clove and aniseed notes with powerful black fruit aromas. Big and dense with juicy fruit flavours and spicy finish. Quite complex with plenty of character and personality. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



San Michele a Torri, Tenuta La Gabbiola, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90) AB 16.5 MG 18 EOH 16.75
 £17.99 (2009) Vinceremos
 Oak and nutmeg up front with golden plum aromas. Intense blackberries and redcurrants on mid-palate followed by a well-knitted acidity and uplifting cherry coulis notes; gripping and firm. **Drink** 2014-2020 **Alc** 14%



Vecchie Terre di Montefili, Chianti Classico Riserva 17 (90)
 AB 16.5 MG 18 EOH 16.75
 £30 Humble Grape
 A full spice rack springs on the nose and adds lots of drama. Typical cherry character with bright and fresh notes of pomegranate juice. Lots of freshness and lifting acidity on the palate. Excellent balance and length with many complex layers. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Volpaia, Il Puro, Gran Selezione 17 (90) AB 17 MG 17.25 EOH 16.5
 N/A UK www.volpaia.com
 Subtle but savoury notes with ripe plums, pomegranate and spice. Balanced, medium-full palate with good ripeness and decent structure; an elegant and perfumed finish with hints of leather and brisk cherry acidity. **Drink** 2014-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	AB	MG	EOH	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Barone Ricasoli, Castello di Brolio, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	17	16.75	16.25	Bourbon oak and dense cherry add to a layer of spicy aromas. The palate is balanced with fair depth of fresh fruit flavours.	14.5%	2015-2022	£40.99-£45.99	Fells, Italian Continental, Roberts & Speight
Bibbiano, Vigna del Capannino, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	17	Full, powerful nose with plum and anise notes. Savoury and leathery with plenty of dry redcurrant and olive flavours. Pure, precise and complex.	14%	2014-2022	POA	Berry Bros & Rudd
Bindi Sergardi, Mocenni 89, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	16.5	17.5	16.5	Gingerbread and cinnamon with hints of coffee and ripe plum on the nose. Dense and chewy with freshness of cherry menthol. Modern and balanced.	14.5%	2014-2025	£35	Decorum Vintners
Casa al Vento, Foho, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17.25	Fresh and vibrant with forest fruit notes and plenty of character. Ripe and juicy with balance and length; toasty aromatics with a hint of nutmeg to finish.	14%	2014-2022	£30	Oddbins
Casalvento, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	16.25	17	16.75	Fresh and aromatic with a good mix of fresh and dried fruit aromas. Ripe and full with understated structure, firm tannins and a ripe berry finish.	13.5%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.livernano.it
Castelli del Grevepesa, Lamole, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	16.5	17.5	16.5	Dark berry and dark chocolate aromas with a slight mineral character. Fat and ripe but balanced with densely textured fruit flavours and fine, ripe tannins.	14%	2014-2025	£25	Roccamora
Castello D'Albola, Il Solatio, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	16	18	16	Vanilla and maple waft up and reveal another layer - intense bramble fruits. Clean and frank. Lacks ripeness but feels balanced overall; quite stylish.	13%	2015-2025	£43.50	Zonin
Castello di Ama, San Lorenzo, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17	Plum clafoutis and pastry on the nose. Fleishy and forward with good ripe fruit flavours and decent balance with just a touch of bitterness on the end.	13%	2014-2022	£36.36	Forty Five 10
Castello di Meleto, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	16	17	17.25	Feminine at first glance with hints of violet and bright plum. Succulent palate with fleshy fruit and well-integrated oak; forward, ripe and flattering.	14%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.castellomeleto.it
Felsina, Colonia, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	17	16	17.25	Cherry, dark plum and raspberry dominate the nose. The palate is meaty and reserved, showing complexity and firm tannins, leading into a leathery finish.	14%	2014-2020	POA	Liberty
I Sodi, Vigna Farsina, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	18	17	15.5	Charming cola-driven nose with coffee and nutmeg notes. Complex and smoky with lots of extraction, poise and elegance; seductive and intense.	15%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.agrisodi.com
Lornano, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	17	17.25	16	Perfumed nose of plum and cherry with a hint of sandalwood. Vibrant on the palate with peppermint tone. Upfront with firm, ripe tannins and good length.	14%	2014-2025	£13.99	Laithwaite's
Monte Maggio, Gran Selezione	16.75 (89)	17	17	16.25	Caramelised fruit and cinnamon lead into a juicy palate with finely grained tannins. A rustic wine with plenty of character and freshness.	13.5%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.montemaggio.com

Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	AB	MG	EOH	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Podere Ciona, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.25	17.25	Forest floor and tobacco introduction which moves into a fruitier welcome. Restrained and firm on the palate with decent balance and depth of flavour.	13%	2015-2022	£22	GIDA
Rocca delle Macie, Famiglia Zingarelli, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17.25	Fresh with floral-toned berry fruit aromas with some spicy oak. Intense juicy mid-palate followed by a spicy finish; needs time.	14%	2014-2022	POA	Continental Wines
San Felice, Il Grigio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	17.5	16	17	Rustic, intense, spicy and meaty aromas. Palate is rich with plenty of acidity and chocolate mocha and morello cherry compote at the end.	14%	2014-2020	£12.29-£14.95 (2009)	All About Wine, Field & Fawcett, Hennings, Rannoch Scott
Stefano Farnia, Le Bocce, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	17.5	17	15.5	Intense summer pudding notes combined with spices and sour plum acidity on the palate. Decent balance with strong oak notes to finish.	13.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.stefanofarinavini.it
Terrabianca, Croce, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Stewed plums and pomegranate freshness on the nose with hints of cigar box and chocolate. Fleshy and attractive with pretty, ripe fruit aromas; well made.	13.5%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.terrabianca.com
Barone Ricasoli, Brolio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	17	15.75	16.75	Smoky and caramelised fruit tones with vanilla pod. Wet leather notes followed by savoury hints on the palate. Fair structure with firm tannins.	14.5%	2014-2020	£27.49	BJR Hanby, Fells, Murrays of Clevedon
Borgo Salcetino, Lucarelllo, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.75	15.25	17.5	Soft and sweet with some animal notes, which add depth. A bit wild; it feels like it needs time to express full potential.	14.5%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.livon.it
Castello San Donato in Perano, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.75	15.25	17.25	Red fruit and thyme open the nose, followed by a palate with lots of structure and intensity. Soft and elegant with game notes and fresh, uplifting acidity.	14%	2014-2018	£20-£24	Iverarity Morton, Forth Wines
Fattoria di Corsignano, L'Imperatrice, Gran Selezione	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16.5	Intense, deep and structured nose with layers of spices and red forest fruits. Big and chewy palate with firm underlying tannins but lacks a little lift.	14.5%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.tenutacorsignano.it
Fattoria di Petroio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.75	17	15.5	Broad, fleshy and aromatic notes of liquorice and aniseed. Round and soft with polished tannins and leather notes; elegant and long.	14%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.fattoriapetroio.com
Geografico, Montegiachi, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16.25	Christmas-spiced nose with berry and sour cherry undertones. Chinese five spice and ground ginger on the palate. Balanced with Sangiovese character.	13.5%	2014-2020	£20-£22	Alfie Fiandaca, Morosini Mills, Tanners, The Merchant Vintner, Colosseum Wines
Poggio al Sole, Casasilia, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.75	16.5	Broad and very spicy and oaky with coffee and chocolate notes. Has a certain savouriness and defined muscle followed by a fresh berry fruit finish.	14%	2014-2020	£40	Philglas & Swiggot
Principe Corsini, Cortevicchia, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.75	16	16.75	Red pepper and spice on the first nose followed by charcoal and meaty notes. Blackberry and cherry on the palate with zesty citrus. Elegant, well balanced.	14%	2014-2020	£25	Astrum
Rocca delle Macie, Sergio Zingarelli, Gran Selezione	16.5 (88)	15	17.5	16.75	Round and ripe with dense and chewy fruit characters, strong vanilla and butterscotch aromas with good length and perfumes to finish.	13.5%	2016-2025	POA	Continental Wines
San Felice, Il Grigio, Gran Selezione	16.5 (88)	16	16.75	16.5	Broad and ripe fruit aromas with a twist of black pepper. Juicy, bright cherry mid-palate followed by round tannins and fresh acidity; has real energy.	14%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.agricolasanfelice.it
Villa Cafaggio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.75	Pure fruits coming through with plenty of cherry and blueberry freshness. Round and fleshy with decent spicy aromas but lacks a bit of grip and focus.	13.5%	2014-2018	£21.99	Waitrose
Volpaia, Coltassala, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.25	16.75	Restrained but ripe nose with spicy and smoky notes. Vanilla, ginger and sour cherry notes followed by well knitted tannins and a rustic finish.	14%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.volpaia.com
Canonica a Cerreto, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16	16.25	16.5	Vanilla plum cake on the first nose followed by cedar and bramble fruits. Firmly structured with intensity of blue and black fruit flavours; will develop.	14%	2015-2022	£14.99	Laithwaite's
Cantalici, Baruffo, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	15.5	Elegant pomegranate and wild plum nose. Round, ripe and plush with decent structure and impressive length of savoury and dark fruit flavours.	14%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.cantalici.it
Carpineto, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16.5	14.75	17.75	Incense and dark cherry with overripe plums. Broad with high tannin, this is a dramatic wine that is dark and concentrated; needs some time to soften.	13.5%	2014-2022	£18.99	Hallgarten Druitt
Castelli del Grevepesa, Panzano, Gran Selezione	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Savoury notes followed by a dense red fruit cocktail. Full and concentrated with juicy berry flavours and muscular tannins. Fresh and rustic on the edges.	14%	2014-2025	£25	Roccamora
Castello di Gabbiano, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17.25	Rather restrained nose of liquorice and blackcurrant with a touch of volatility. Fresh with plum and cranberry and an aftertaste of vanilla crème brûlée.	14%	2014-2020	£27	Treasury Wine Estate
Castello di Verrazzano, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.25	16.25	Restrained savoury character with sour cherry and plum notes. Fleshy and ripe with fair depth and spicy-toned fruit.	14%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.verrazzano.com
I Sodi, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16.75	15	16.75	Evolved and aged nose with notes of balsamic and oriental spices. Flashy and forward berry fruit flavours with oak-dominated finish.	15%	2014-2019	N/A UK	www.agrisodi.com
Le Fonti, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16	Broad with strong cordial fruit aromas. Black fruit and leafy on the palate, though very expressive and savoury with a long and complex finish.	14%	2014-2018	£24	Mille Gusti
Le Miccine, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.75	16.5	Ripe and forward with toasty and dried cherry aromas. Ripe and forward savoury fruit flavours with decent structure. Cherry and fig aromas to finish.	13%	2014-2020	£22	Quaff Wines, The Sampler, Define Food and Wine, Woodwinters Wines and Whiskies
Poggio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	15.75	Dried lavender and spiced cherry on the nose followed by a smoky and savoury palate. Well-structured with good intensity and spice notes to finish.	14%	2015-2024	£23	Lea & Sandeman
San Fabiano Calcinai, Cellole, Gran Selezione	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16.5	Morello cherry, cassis and tobacco take the lead on the nose. The palate is generous with oak with good concentration of black fruit; may need time.	14.5%	2014-2027	N/A UK	www.sanfabianocalcinai.it
Villa Calcinai, Vigna Bastignano, Gran Selezione	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.5	Mixed nuts, black olive and porcini aromas lead into a spreading, full palate with densely textured fruit characters and firm tannins; masculine and intense.	14.5%	2015-2025	£35	Berry Bros & Rudd

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	AB	MG	EOH	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Villa Cerna, Chianti Classico Riserva	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Leathery with notes of cherry and blueberry. Focused palate with good depth of flavour and ripe berry fruits. Polished tannins and greengage freshness.	14%	2014-2018	£13.95-£14.95	Davy's, Vallona & Crolla, Vinum
Bindi Sergardi, Calidonia, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16	15	16.75	Vanilla-driven nose with hints of fruit and custard. The palate is quite toasted, showing generous spice and black fruit though with a rather loose structure.	14.5%	2014-2022	£15	Decorum Vintners
Casa Emma, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16	15.5	16.25	Immediate nose of toasted walnuts and crushed pepper. The palate is round and full with fair intensity of dried fruit flavours and a hint of cassis.	14.5%	2015-2020	£27	Hard to Find Wines
Castello di Querceto, Il Picchio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16.5	15.5	16	Restrained nose with lots of dark cherries and plums. Spices and smoked bacon flavours with ripe blue and black fruit; slightly unfocused.	13.5%	2014-2018	£23.35	Alexander Wines, Barwell & Jones
Cecchi, Riserva di Famiglia, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16.5	16.25	15	Complex with plenty of recurrant and dark plum notes. Smoky, mineral and intense character and concentration. Well-structured and fresh on the finish.	13.5%	2014-2018	£15.79-£21.99	Blanco & Gomez, Enotria, Exel, Invinity, The Fine Wine Co
Il Palagio, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16.25	16	15.5	Broad, ripe, forward and spicy with a hint of nutmeg. The expression of the wine comes through on the palate with firm and complex tannins.	14%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.ilpalagio.it
Nittardi, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	15.5	15	16.25	Spicy and intense with lots of gripping tannins and smoky and savoury notes on the back palate; a green plum finish.	14%	2014-2020	£17.99	Cockburn & Campbell, Palmers Wine Store
Ormanni, Borro del Diavolo, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	17.5	15	15.5	Spicy and oaky nose up front with a perfumed character. Leather and savoury flavours; well balanced with plenty of freshness and ripe wild berry notes.	14%	2014-2018	£30	Wine Traders
Renzo Marinal, Gran Selezione	16 (86)	16.5	16	15.5	Full, broad and spicy with raspberry and plum aromas and a touch of brettanomyces. Juicy with ripe tannins and cigar box finish.	13.5%	2014-2025	N/A UK	www.renzomarinal.it
San Giusto a Rentennano, Le Baroncole, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	16.5	15.25	16	Polished and elegant with notes of vanilla and cinnamon. Meaty undertones followed by a juicy rich and intense mid palate.	14.5%	2014-2018	£14.95	Wine Raks
Solatore, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	15.5	16.5	16.25	A lifted nose verging on lemony citrus, lemon grass and potpourri. Ripe and full with intense berry fruit flavours; a bit hot and rustic.	15%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.solatore.it
Villa Calcinai, Chianti Classico Riserva	16 (86)	15.5	15.5	17	Faint nose at first opens up to nutmeg and seasoned leather-toned berry fruit. Feels very generous but lacks freshness.	14.5%	2014-2020	£25	Berry Bros & Rudd
Felsina Berardenga, Rancia, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.75 (85+)	17	16.5	14	Restrained nose with notes of plum and violet and integrated oak. Soft, round tannins and refreshing acidity; long and structured.	14%	2014-2018	£45.99	AG Wines, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Exel Wines, Liberty Wines, Noel Young, Vini Italiani, Winedirect
Rignana, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15	17	Spicy mineral undertones with plenty of rhubarb. Palate is full and rich; a big, modern wine that you could actually drink on its own.	15%	2014-2020	£11.66-£20	Latimer Vintners, James Eddlestone
Terreno, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.75 (85+)	15	15.5	17	Candied peel, green and red dried fruit on the nose with a full, dense and chewy palate that lacks a bit of lift and freshness.	14%	2014-2020	N/A UK	+39 05 585 4001
Tolaini, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	15.5	Sweet, almost maple, oak nose. Medium-full and very soft with ripe but firm tannins. A little hollow on the mid-palate but has length.	13.5%	2014-2018	£34	Eurowines
Capannelle, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	16.75	16	14	Spicy and floral-toned berry fruit aromas of good freshness. Gutsy and savoury with lots of meaty, earthy flavours and fresh vibrant acidity.	13%	2014-2022	£24.95	Top Selection
Castellare di Castellina, Il Poggiale, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	15	15	16.75	Broad and spicy with lots of oak and overripe bramble aromas. Well knitted fruit flavours with hefty tannins and slightly clumsy.	13.5%	2014-2018	£26.67	Millesima
Castello di Bossi, Berardo, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	16	14.25	16.5	Tight, shy nose with notes of fresh cranberries and pomegranate. Soft ripe fruit flavours with rather firm tannins; has a bit of a swagger.	14%	2014-2018	£29.95 (2009)	Ditton Wine Traders, Uncorked
Cennatoio, O'Leandro, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	15.75	16	14.5	Smoky and ripe with spicy-toned fruit aromas of blackberry and plum. A bit over-extracted and severe but should develop with time.	13.5%	2014-2022	N/A UK	www.cennatoio.it
L'Orcio, Ca' di Pesa, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	16	14.5	16	Round, ripe and generous cherry and ripe plum notes with a hint of floral. Heavily oaked with fairly tight, focused favours; oak notable on the finish.	13.5%	2014-2020	N/A UK	az.cadipesa@libero.it
Setriolo, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.5 (85)	15.75	16	15	Broad and spicy with a hint of nutmeg and sweet fruit. Fruit is concentrated and lacks freshness. Lots of concentrated spices and overripe fruits.	14.5%	2014-2020	£30	The Winemaker's Club
Casa Sola, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.25 (84)	15	14	16.5	Vibrant and intriguing nose of cassis and spiced plums and cherry cola. Really delicious flavours of rich, ripe fruit, though the tannins are slightly overbearing.	14%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.fattoriacasola.com
Fietri, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.25 (84)	15	16	15	A touch of aniseed over berry fruit aromas. Fleshy, ripe and round with good savoury and mineral-toned berry fruit flavours.	13.5%	2014-2022	£22	Grossi
La Porta di Vertine, Chianti Classico Riserva	15.25 (84)	14.5	16	15.25	Aromatic, intense, almost Port-like nose. Full plum and blueberry fruit flavours; soft, plump and broad. Nice freshness and lift on palate.	14.5%	2014-2018	£25	Raeburn Fine Wines
Livernano, Chianti Classico Riserva	15 (83)	15	15.5	15.5	Mocha and leather, with a layer of ripe cherries and plums. Round and medium bodied, though rather aggressively flavoured and lots of oak to finish.	13.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.livernano.it
Losi, Querciavalle, Chianti Classico Riserva	15 (83)	14.75	14.5	15.5	Smoky and spicy with liquorice and blackcurrant aromas, though perhaps some oxidation. Solid but lacks lift and vibrancy.	13.5%	2014-2016	POA	Jascots

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)
■ Tenuta di Arceno, Chianti Classico Riserva 14.25 (80+) **■** Le Macie di M Pellegrini, Terra di Seta, Chianti Classico Riserva 13.75 (79)

For full UK stockist details, see p84 ➤

My top three Andrea Briccarello

■ **Castello Vicchiomaggio, Vigna La Prima, Gran Selezione** Impressive morello cherries and ripe blackberry notes that open generously on the palate to a deep and complex world of spices and summer berry pudding. Extremely balanced and elegant. Finesse in a glass. **18.5/20pts (95/100pts)** Drink 2014-2025

■ **Monte Bernardi, Chianti Classico Riserva** The nose is intense and complex, showing savoury and meaty notes, backed up by a fresh and vibrant wild berry freshness. Oak is very well integrated with plenty of leathery and cigar box notes on the finish. **17.75 (92)** Drink 2014-2018

■ **Fontodi, Vigna del Sorbo, Gran Selezione** The nose is very expressive, with cherry and chocolate brownie notes. Ethereal with some dry red flowers but plenty of juicy, sour cherry aromas on the palate. Incredibly complex and intense. **17.5 (92)** Drink 2014-2025

My top three Michael Garner

■ **Castello Vichiomaggio, Vigna La Prima, Gran Selezione** Really cleverly done and highly persuasive: freshness, lift, brisk acidity and impressive depth of fruit balance the high alcohol well. This used to be the estate's Riserva so it will be interesting to see what happens next! **19/20pts (96/100pts)** Drink 2014-2018

■ **Ruffino, Riserva Ducale Oro, Gran Selezione** Ironically another wine that used to be sold as a Chianti Classico Riserva! Nonetheless, this perennial favourite remains an outstanding example: a truly sensuous wine that is all about perfume and texture. **18 (93)** Drink 2014-2022

■ **San Michele a Torri, Tenuta La Gabbiola, Chianti Classico Riserva** Has performed well before in *Decanter* tastings and is still a delight: the aromas and flavours are pure spicy and savoury-toned Sangiovese and the wine is traditional in style. The estate lies close to the border between Classico and Colli Fiorentini. **18 (93)** Drink 2014-2020

My top three Emily O'Hare

■ **Fontodi, Vigna Del Sorbo, Gran Selezione** Made from Sangiovese with just a drop (5%) of Cabernet Sauvignon, Vigna del Sorbo is a single vineyard in the heart of Panzano. Winemaker and owner Giovanni Manetti believes 2010 to be one of the truly great vintages. This is a dense, dark, ageworthy red. **18/20pts (93/100pts)** Drink 2014-2025

■ **Fèlsina, Colonia, Gran Selezione** I was really excited to see this wine on our crib sheets. I only tasted it for the first time at the Vinality trade fair this year. It really, really smells and tastes like Sangiovese, of Chianti, grippy, and dry and firm. This is, unsurprisingly, 100% Sangiovese from a 20-year-old single vineyard, the highest at Fèlsina, at 420m above sea level. **17.25 (90+)** Drink 2014-2020

■ **Castello d'Albola, Chianti Classico Riserva** This is one of the kinetic Chiantis – it bounces about on the palate, all high acid and vibrant fruit flavours. Drinking now, it is balanced and refreshing, and great value. **17.75 (92)** Drink 2014-2022

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Stephen Brook

There may be a long way to go before the Gran Seleziones are regarded as truly elite wines, but they performed honourably, as did many of the esteemed Classico Riservas



Stephen Brook is a contributing editor to *Decanter* and an award-winning writer

IT SHOULD COME as no surprise that the primary interest of a tasting of 2010 Chiantis is to see how well the Gran Selezione wines, many of which had a previous incarnation as a Riserva, have performed. Overall, they did not disappoint, and a good number were placed among the Outstanding and Highly Recommended wines. However, a majority were merely Recommended, an honourable result, but perhaps not what should be expected from what is supposed to be a band of elite wines. As many have suggested, the Gran Selezione category needs to be more carefully defined if it is to win consumer confidence.

Many of the most esteemed Chiantis showed very well: Vicchiomaggio's La Prima, Fontodi's Vigna del Sorbo, Brancaia, Ruffino's Riserva Ducale Oro and Volpaia's Il Puro were all Highly Recommended. And it was good to see less well-known wines such as Molino del Grace's Margone and Monte Bernardi also in the top ranks. Inevitably, there are some disappointments too. Felsina's Rancia failed to impress, though it frequently fails to excel in blind tastings, only to shine brightly after some years in bottle.

Many Riservas and Gran Selezione wines are aged in barriques, but some of these wines are still aged in the traditional way – in Slavonian oak casks that can hold thousands rather than hundred of litres. Ruffino, whose

Ducale Oro was Highly Recommended, is one of the few wineries that still use American oak. The panel rewarded both methods. Though the barrique-aged wines easily outnumbered the cask-aged wines, a surprising number of the latter made the top ranks.

Decanter, as well as other commentators on Chianti Classico, has often criticised a lack of typicity among wineries that blend in up to 20% of French varieties such as Merlot or Syrah. This is legal and can result in some excellent wines, though they tend to be more opulent and less tangy than a fine, traditional Sangiovese-based Chianti. But it was good to see that most of the wines in the top categories were pure Sangiovese, suggesting a return to complete and justified confidence in the quality and complexity of this great Tuscan variety. Warmer vintages and higher ripeness levels have all but eliminated the herbaceousness or astringency that in the past were sometimes found in pure Sangiovese wines, even at the Riserva level. **D**

'It was good to see that most of the wines in the top categories were pure Sangiovese'