

Boscarelli's Red Wine Romance



© Poderi Boscarelli | The family initially bought the property to ensure a supply of good wine for themselves. Old romantic **W. Blake Gray** meets the family behind the most sought-after wines in Montepulciano. Posted Tuesday, 21-Mar-2017

The first thing I noticed is that the De Ferrari brothers are really attractive: tall, urbane Luca and dark, earnest farmer Nicolo, with their perfect English in a musical northern Italian accent.

A better writer could make a rom-com out of this wine story – one lives with his mother! All it needs is a beautiful sommelier, a harebrained plot with a car-train chase scene, and here comes this year's summer blockbuster, Italian Kiss.

Actually, the first thing I noticed, years before meeting the De Ferraris, is that their winery, [Boscarelli](#), makes (with apologies to Contucci) the best [Vino Nobile di Montepulciano](#). And it's no secret. If you eat dinner with wine journalists in Montepulciano, everybody wants the Boscarelli. It doesn't matter what your editorial take is. Decanter likes it; Wine Spectator likes it. You would think this would make the De Ferraris celebrities.

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However, in [Tuscany](#) making the best Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is like winning the Serie B football title. Montepulciano is in between two better-regarded regions: the Chianti Classico archipelago and the warmer hills of Montalcino, where Brunello comes from. When Tuscan producers really want to charge a lot of money, they make a wine from Merlot and [Sangiovese](#), give it a fancy name and – voila! – IGT Toscana.

Vino Nobile was one of the first five regions in Italy to get DOCG status in 1980, and the red wines of Montepulciano were called "perfect" by Pope Paul III's cellar master in 1549. But nowadays, even terrific \$30 wines like Boscarelli's Vino Nobile are sold by sommeliers as cheaper alternatives to Super Tuscans.

In February, I spent a day in Montepulciano. I tasted 42 wines blind and, not for the first time, Boscarelli's was my favorite (this time the 2012 Riserva). Luca, Nicolo and their mother Paola, who took over the estate in 1983 when her husband died in an auto accident, were downstairs pouring tastes of their wine. I asked if it was possible to visit their estate; not the best day, perhaps, as practically every wine journalist in Italy was at the tasting. Nicolo and Paola conferred and said, sure.

The winery is humble: it was the family's weekday home until 2004, with most of the fermentation tanks outside in the elements. Now Paola and Luca have a small weekday home a few hundred meters away; they return to Genoa on weekends. Nicolo has his own home in the middle of the vineyards. He says the two adult brothers and their mother living together under one roof was too close. Still, they are together a lot.

"It is not easy," Nicolo said. "I studied architecture. I studied other things. We didn't grow up with the feeling of the vines."

This is an irony; in an area in Italy where some winegrowing family lineages stretch back centuries, the De Ferraris don't even think of themselves as a wine family. Paola's father, a Genoese grain merchant, bought the Boscarelli estate in 1961 because he liked good wine and wasn't satisfied with what he could buy. They didn't even make wine commercially for the first several years. Yet, what makes their wines so delicious is that they are among the most traditional in the region.

"We try to make wines like the ones made by my mother and grandmother," Luca De Ferrari said. "Not the same exactly, because we try to do the best we can do in that style, but we don't try to have some new idea of wine."



© W. Blake Gray | The winery is still very much a family affair for brothers Luca (L), Nicolo and mother Paola.

Here's an example. Nicolo, who is in charge of the vineyards, is a fan of [Mammolo](#), a grape variety which "Wine Grapes" author José Vouillamoz writes in Italy is "on the slippery slope to extinction", mainly because it's susceptible to rot. Mammolo has a long history in Tuscany – it was first described in the year 1600 – but it doesn't age as well as Sangiovese. It also ripens at a different time than Sangiovese, complicating harvesting. Its main purpose today seems to be to add pretty floral flavors to wines, and for most growers it's not worth the trouble.

"It adds a lot of flavor," Nicolo said. "But it has not much color. So not many people have it."

Nicolo harvests the Mammolo separately. In many years it's just an additional spice for the entry-level Rosso di Montepulciano, but sometimes it's good enough to make up one or two percent of the Vino Nobile. It's a lot of work for one or two percent.

But the family is also open to newer grapes. There's a low-lying part of their main vineyard outside the weekday house where cold air settles and Sangiovese never ripens. Nicolo tried Gamay there and declared it a disaster. They now have Merlot and [Colorino](#) there, as well as a few Syrah plants to see how that does.

"Here is a good place to look at it because here we live," he says.

Boscarelli's vineyards became certified organic two years ago. Nicolo says: "Now there is nothing in the middle. You are organic or you are a killer. We prefer to be organic than to be a killer."

The family makes about 100,000 bottles a year total of eight wines.

2012 [Boscarelli Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva](#) (14% alcohol)

This is the classic taste profile of this wine, which sadly few local wineries even try to achieve these days: good freshness, ripe enough plum fruit, but with restraint. It has good length and the tannins, which can be ferocious in some Vino Nobiles, are nicely smooth. The lightness of body is striking in comparison to their other wines – that's a selling point, as this would be an easy bottle to finish.

2012 [Boscarelli Nocio Dei Boscarelli Vino Nobile di Montepulciano](#) (14% alcohol)

A single-vineyard wine that the family considers its flagship, this is made from 100-percent Sangiovese. It's dense, with plenty of fresh and dried cherry notes and a hint of tobacco, yet it stays fresh. They don't call it a Riserva because, Luca says, "We are not obliged to do longer aging (as is required for Riservas). We want to get the elegance and sometimes it's better without the longer aging."

2012 [Boscarelli Vino Nobile di Montepulciano](#) (14% alcohol)

Dense dark cherry fruit with chewy tannins, this blend of Sangiovese with Caniaolo and Colorino could be drunk right away, but would also reward a few years in the cellar.

2015 [Boscarelli Prugnolo Rosso di Montepulciano](#) (13.5% alcohol)

An easy-drinking wine that has some depth and very good length for entry level. The aroma has a light note of dried flowers from the 15 percent Mammolo in the blend, with 85 percent Sangiovese. The color is fairly light. Tasting it, I thought: "Light, but with length. Eric Asimov would like this." I know I did.

2012 Boscarelli Sotto Casa Vino Nobile di Montepulciano Riserva (14% alcohol)

From the vineyard beside their weekday home, this includes 15 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 3 percent Merlot (the rest is Sangiovese) and is Super Tuscan in the best way: plenty of freshness, good backbone. You can smell the Cabernet but the Sangiovese fruit flavors (dried and fresh cherry) dominate.

If this were a rom-com, there would be a kiss here. Quick, get yourself some of these wines before the closing credits.

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