

Brunello di Montalcino 2012: Top wines and vintage review

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Richard Baudains takes a look at the 2012 vintage for Brunello di

Montalcino wines...



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Brunello di Montalcino 2012 is hard to generalise about. The vintage won the *consorzio*'s top, five-star rating, but it divides opinion. My own view is that 2012 shows both the positives and the downsides of a hot, dry vintage.

It is a 'choose with care' vintage in which *terroir* differences played a determining role. Wines from cooler sites have much better balance; those from hotter slopes can be tough and alcoholic.

It is certainly a powerful vintage. The wines are not easy to drink now, but the best have the prerequisites for long-term ageing.

The summer of 2012 was hot and very dry, with no rainfall at all from July to mid-September, a situation exacerbated in August by three days of scirocco, the hot, dry wind from the Sahara, which not only raised temperatures by day but kept them high at night.

View all of Decanter's Brunello 2012 tasting notes

At the Baricci estate they resorted to spraying water in the vineyards in the early hours of the morning to try to give some respite to the vines. 'I couldn't say 2012 is a five-star vintage,' says Francesco Baricci; 'there was just too much drought stress.'

On the other hand, Riccardo Fratton, winemaker at San Polo, has no doubts about the five-star quality. 'It is true that 2012 was hot, but we had some rain before we picked and that freshened the vines. The wines are closed now, but they will come out in time.'

This article continues below the list of wines

Richard Baudains' top Brunello 2012 wines:

Click on the wine to see the full tasting note and stockist information for UK and US, where available.



Fuligni, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy, 2012

Pale but fresh look. Open, very expressive nose for the vintage, with wild berries, powder puff and hibiscus. Tight ripe tannins and firm...

POINTS 96



San Polino, Brunello di Montalcino, Helichrysum, 2012

Bright, very youthful looking ruby colour. Delicate floral and wild berry nose. The palate has great power but also superior balance...

POINTS 96



Tenute Silvio Nardi, Brunello di Montalcino, Vigneto Poggio

Still quite closed on the nose, but fresh and precise. It has a firm vertical palate with very fine tannins, a subtle mix of herbs and spices...

POINTS 96



Il Marroneto, Brunello di Montalcino, Madonna delle Grazie,

Big, earthy terroir nose of humus and mushroom with candied fruit in the background. An equally big palate with slightly raw tannins and a...

POINTS 95



Salvioli, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, Italy, 2012

Quite closed on the nose, but intense and concentrated on the palate with confident progression, a subtle but tangy wild berry fruit vein...

POINTS 95



Gianni Brunelli, Brunello di Montalcino, Le Chiuse di Sotto,

Lovely bright and pale ruby shade. Fresh blackberry fruit nose leading into a balanced, tight, tangy and fine palate, with perfectly integrated...

POINTS 94



Donatella Cinelli Colombini, Brunello di Montalcino, Prime

Concentrated ruby shade. An intense, concentrated fruit nose with hints of sloe gin. Big impact on the palate, dense ripe tannins and a...

POINTS 94

Decanter

Tenuta Crocedimezzo, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, 2012

Pressed flowers, incense and a touch of oregano on the nose. Starts low key on the palate, then opens up to become big and powerful with rich...

POINTS 94

Decanter

Poggio di Sotto, Brunello di Montalcino, Tuscany, 2012

Very traditional nose of pressed flowers with gamey notes and hints of chestnut flour and camphor in the background. Concentrated, dry and...

POINTS 94



Le Ragnaie, Brunello di Montalcino, Fornace, Tuscany, 2012

Slightly smoky, toasted barley nose. Massive concentration of fruit and great volume on the palate. The tannins are refined for the vintage, and...

POINTS 94

Defining features of Brunello 2012

Probably both producers are right. The defining features of the vintage are depth of colour, massive extract and high alcohol. When this all comes together without losing fruit aromas, the result is a big, chunky mouthful of Brunello. The variables are the ripeness of the tannins and the acidity levels.

Two factors made the difference to the overall quality and balance of the wines: the date of picking and the site. At Poggio di Sotto they picked early, at the end of August, and made a wine with 13.5% alcohol on the label and an elegance that's rare for the vintage.

Silvio Nardi's Poggio Doria single vineyard selection was picked much later, but benefited from its high, cool location in the far northwest of the DOCG zone to produce a Brunello with tight, ripe tannins and complex aromas.

The downside of 2012 is that many wines lack these qualities. Aromas are often baked and leathery, extract is huge but the tannins are hard and underripe, and the palates have a very peppery quality and a flat finish.

Whether the wines will soften with age is an open question. In many respects they recall the 2006s – another hot and powerful vintage which started life tough, and in my experience remains tough and unyielding today.