

Marchesi Pancrazi

Montemurlo, Province of Florence

Owner: Marchese Vittorio Pancrazi
Winemaker: Niccolò D'Afflitto
Location: Montemurlo
Province: Florence
Website: <http://www.pancrazi.it/>



The story of this stunning Tuscan Pinot Noir from a fifteenth-century estate west of Florence, Villa di Bagnolo (property of Marchese Vittorio Pancrazi) is unusual to say the least. In 1975, 3,300 vines identified as Sangiovese were planted on the estate's clayey/schistous/serpentine soil, on a low hillock (50-150 meters a.s.l.) particularly rich in iron (instrumental for Pinot Noir complexity). The grapes were vinified as Sangiovese, and anonymously blended into the everyday family wine. Then one day in 1989, an oenologist friend of the Marchese pointed out the "Sangiovese" was actually Pinot Noir — in fact, probably Tuscany's oldest Pinot Noir vines! At this point, Vittorio Pancrazi decided to vinify it on its own, and naturally put his Bordeaux-educated friend, Niccolò D'Afflitto, in charge of the experiment. After over a year's maturation in Allier barriques and six months' bottle age, the experiment not only succeeded, it exceeded all expectations.

From 1989 to this day, Pancrazi, in synergy with both his winemaker and brilliant agronomist Paolo Mocali, has carried out in-depth innovations in the vineyard and in the winery.

In the vineyard: Today, the Pinot Noir vines on the estate, southerly exposed and covering 14 out of a total 173 acres, have been almost entirely renewed (albeit maintaining some 5% of the original, unidentified local clone), and planted even more densely than in the past (approx. 1,620 stocks per acre), with different clones that come straight from Burgundy. The present number of new variants is 8 (nos. 113, 114, 115, 521, 666, 667, 777, 943): top selections, some of which are so new there are very few specimens in Burgundy itself! Their painstaking orchestration adds dimension and complexity to the Pinot Noir of Villa di Bagnolo, and makes for an even more graceful, mellow style starting with the 2000 vintage.

Another innovation is the gravitational irrigation system for all vineyards, with natural water (very rich in iron) from a well in the hillside above the property, Monte Ferrato.

Besides the Montemurlo property, the Marchesi Pancrazi also own an even larger estate at San Donato: 1,285 acres, 37 of which are now under vine at 300-400 meters above sea level, on Mount Calvana's alberese soil (a variety of compact, very fine-grained limestone), yielding the SAN DONATO and CASAGLIA reds.

Innovations in the winery: The most important of these regarded the duration of aging sur lie. Aging the wine on the lees for lengths of time

comparable to Burgundy's causes a number of distinctive odors (leather, horse sweat, merde de poule), well loved in France but rather disliked in the rest of the world.

This prompted the team at Villa di Bagnolo to cut back on the duration of aging sur lie and eliminate the coarser lees early on.

Furthermore, the past year has seen the Pancrazi team implement a new, hi-tech method for temperature control during fermentation.