

# Tignanello, A Tuscan Story



San Casciano Val di Pesa

In the words of Marchese Piero Antinori,

*We have been drinking for centuries to quench our thirst, for nourishment, to overcome heat and fatigue, to cure ailments and to 'disinfect' unhealthy water. At most, to get a little tipsy. With a flask of wine, a piece of bread and a chunk of cheese, the farmer would set out for fields in the morning, or the soldier would go to war. This is how it went, in most cases, from antiquity to the early 20th century. For that matter, even in the 1940s and 1950s; as the principal consumers across the border, this is what Italian workers who emigrated to Belgium or Germany asked for: strong Italian wine to battle the cold and homesickness, but above all, a large quantity at a good price as to not affect their meagre salaries.*



Chiara Calabrese in the wine shop

stairway at the winery





**T**ignanello 1971 – *A Tuscan Story* (in its Italian version *Tignanello – 1971 – Una storia toscana*), written by Marchese Piero Antinori and published by Cinquesensi in 2015, is not simply dedicated to the making of a very special wine and to the places where it is produced (the Chianti Classico area, more precisely San Casciano in Val di Pesa), but also gives a background history of the Antinori family who have produced it since 1971. The book provides a very interesting insight into Tuscan social history testifying, if ever it should be necessary, how wine and local culture are always inextricably mixed. The hardcover 200-page volume, printed in an elegant Quarto edition (9.5x12 inch format), is enriched by beautiful photographs, some by Marco del Comune, but many taken from the historical archive of the prestigious Studio Alinari, Florence, and from the archive of the Antinori family.

It seems that in the past people used to drink wine more for need than for pleasure. For the producers this meant *full production with minimum means*, a wine concept completely different from the present one. In the late 1960s the Antinori decided to change their wine, and 'quality' became the keyword. Though Italy had virtually invented wine during Etruscan and Roman times, elite production, taking the time and effort to ensure the highest quality, had remained far behind. The great French wines dominated the market because they were made in a virtuous context that started in the vineyard and included the winery, the laboratory, library research, and finally communication and promotion. The concept of Italian viticulture had to be re-evaluated and reformulated. Piero Antinori started dreaming of a *perfect and agreeable wine that would only and exclusively be the offspring of a grape juice*. Finding a true enologist, at a time when enologist meant chemist more than agronomist, *a bit of a sorcerer's apprentice and a bit, it was said, 'mescolavini' or wine blender, whose task was to make a company's wines drinkable, transportable, and storable at any cost*, was the first difficult step towards the creation of a new wine. Giacomo Tachis was chosen to create Tignanello, a strong and ambitious wine that represented a true challenge to the market, starting from a name that was



virtually unpronounceable for foreigners. Piero Antinori explains that the name comes from a place-name, probably derived from the surname of a family of sharecroppers called Tignani who had resided in the area for generations. However, some associate it to Tinia, the Etruscan Jupiter. Interestingly enough, Pliny the Elder wrote that in the squares of the Etruscan cities, statues of the god Tinia

were carved in grapevine wood.

Much appreciated in Italy since 1971, though Italy is generally reluctant to embracing the new, Tignanello was presented to and welcomed by the rest of the world in 1974, and has now become one of the most renowned Italian wines in the USA. Remembering those days, which marked a fundamental turning point in the Antinori production, Marchese Antinori also recalls the tragic time when the river Arno, on 4 November 1966, burst its banks and flooded the city, destroying the homes, workshops and lives of so many people.

For the benefit of *Grapevine's* Lucchese readers and opera lovers, we can mention just one of the many anecdotes to be found in the book: Marchese Antinori remembers that his father kept in one of his desk drawers a letter of congratulations for their *spumante*, addressed to his grandfather and signed by Giacomo Puccini himself, who undoubtedly appreciated good wine.

Piero Antinori, now 76, belongs to a family that has existed for seven centuries and has more or less always been associated with wine. As we learn from the book, today the Antinori business is primarily a female matter. Marchese Antinori has in fact three daughters who are in charge of a great portion of it: Albiera is vice-president of the Marchesi Antinori Company, Allegra is public relations manager and Alessia is enologist and viticulture expert. The main operational base of the Antinori, administrative headquarters, archive and small museum housing the family documents are in San Casciano, in a modern winery hidden in the Chianti Classico hills. It is possible to visit the impressive new winery designed by the studio of Florentine architect Marco Casamonti. This is an outstanding building in perfect symbiosis with the rural landscape. If you plan a trip remember that, attached to the winery, there is also a lovely restaurant open Monday to Friday at lunchtime.

I have really enjoyed both visiting the winery and reading Marchese Piero Antinori's book. Dealing with wine through its social history, territory, heritage and tradition, the volume is an instrument of culture and in-depth territorial analysis.

– by Chiara Calabrese



Tignanello vineyards

*Visits daily from November to March  
(10 am to 5 pm with last entry at 3 pm)  
& from April to October  
(10 am to 6 pm with last entry at 4 pm).  
Guided tours in English. To book, see the  
website [www.antinorichianticlassico.it](http://www.antinorichianticlassico.it)  
For information: +39 055 2359700 or  
[visite@antinorichianticlassico.it](mailto:visite@antinorichianticlassico.it)*

*To buy the book (in English or in Italian)  
at a reduced price of €38.25 instead of €45,  
see the website [www.cinquesensi.it](http://www.cinquesensi.it)*