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## Chianti Classico Tasting in Tuscany



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Chianti, is a wine that is not only symbolic of Italy, but is the soul of wine from the lush valleys and vineyards of Tuscany. Not all wine that comes from the valleys of Tuscany is Chianti, and not all Chianti can be called Chianti Classico. Our instructor and sommelier **Sabastiano Pedani**, from **Wine & Services s.n.c. di Pedani S. & C.** ([www.wineandservice.com](http://www.wineandservice.com)), led us through a captivating and educational wine tasting on Chianti Classico wines, which was part of "The Lessons of Tuscany" Arts and Education classes offered for guests at the **Il Borgo di Villa Bossi-Pucci** (see **Destinations** section Tuscany article as well Hotel & Resorts section for additional information on **Il Borgo**).

Sabastiano, being the consummate sommelier, conducted a very thorough Chianti Classico wine tasting as he discussed the region, the history, the soil, the grapes, what makes a Chianti a Chianti Classico, and he closed with a discussion on several wineries, Riserva vintages and of course a tasting of the nectar of the gods, Chianti Classico wine.



He informed the class (Jim and Gloria Redmond, Debra C. Argen and I) that there are 7 sub-zones of the Chianti wine region, and that the Classico region is considered the historical heart of the Chianti region. The Classico region is bordered to the north by Florence, to the east by the Chianti Mountains, to the south by the city of Siena, and to the west by the valley of Pesa and the Elsa River. The unique climate of the Classico zone is of a continental type, with relatively low temperatures in winter of 4-5 degrees C. (39-41 degrees F.), and dry, hot summers of 35 degrees C. (95 degrees F.); the temperatures do not vary substantially in the course of a day, which is due to the altitudes that range from 250 meters to over 800 meters (820-2600 feet). The terrains are as diverse as the altitudes and are characterized by soil made up of, depending on the altitude, marl, calcareous clay, sandstone, limestone, and tufa, with average rainfall of 700-800 millimeters (27-32 inches). The characteristics of the climate, terrains and altitudes, which are unfavorable for most crops, have made Chianti Classico a region that excels in producing premium wines.

Historically this is a region that has produced exceptional wines, but in the past century there has been a focus on delimiting regions, establishing a decree that Chianti Classico is "the oldest zone of origin", and thereby identifying the term "Classico" as the "the first" or the "the original". Not all wine produced in this designated region is Chianti Classico; a producer must respect all the rules stipulated in DOCG (Denomination Controlled and Guaranteed) production code. In 1996 Chianti Classico obtained the definitive consecration of importance when it was decreed an independent appellation, further establishing its diversity and independence of the other Chianti wines.

The DOCG production codes were modified in 2002 increasing the minimal percentage of Sangiovese grape, the heart and soul of Chianti Classico, to 80%. Other grape varieties like Canailolo, Colorino Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot may be used up to the remaining 20%, but varieties such as Trebbiano and Malvasia, both white grapes, will no longer be used starting with the 2006 vintage. There are many

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other important requirements that producers must adhere to that impact alcohol content, new vineyards, and classifying a vintage as a Riserva; thus production of Chianti Classico is under strict rules.

The grape that is the soul of Chianti Classico is the Sangiovese, which is extremely sensitive to external factors, such as terrain and climate, but it is a variety that faithfully interprets the characteristics of the soil in which it grows, and modifies in odors in accordance with the terrain; in other words, it is a grape worthy of carrying the banner for the Chianti Classico region. Sangiovese makes a wine that can be aged for a medium or extended period yielding outstanding complexity and wines with big bodies. Due to these unique characteristics of the Sangiovese, the best grapes are selected, exposed to wood for aging (24 months), and end up finished in the bottle for 3 months before being labeled as a Chianti Classico Riserva. (Note &ndash; Riserva wines tend to have a longer cork to ensure the wine is preserved throughout the aging process)

Educated on the essentials of Chianti Classico the class was ready, and very eager, to do a tasting of 2 bottles of 2002 vintage Chianti Classico. The first bottle was a **Chianti Classico DOCG Antico Borgo di Sugame 2002** (90% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon), the second bottle was a **Chianti Classico DOCG Montemaggio 2002** (90% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot); both wines should be served at between 16-18 degrees C. (61-64 degrees F.). If the wine is served colder it will be more acidic, and if served warmer it will show a stronger alcohol taste. Sabastiano selected the 2002 vintage, though 2002 was not a great year, to show the class the taste variation in the same distinctions of wine (DOCG). He explained that when there is a weak crop, like the 2002 crops, some vineyards adhere to the rules to meet DOCG level but may not have the taste, while other vineyards are able to obtain both taste and distinction; thus you need to taste every bottle and judge for yourself, don't get caught by the distinction. The visual feedback from the class incorporating both how the bottle looked, and wine color was that the Montemaggio would be the better wine. Upon tasting the wines it was unanimous for the Antico Borgo di Sugame. To provide a pairing for the wine, we were provided an assortment of salami and cheese appetizers. The Antico Borgo di Sugame was a full body bold wine with a long finish and a scent of violets, it went well with the sharp cheese and the spicy salami; the Montemaggio though it had less body, and was much softer on the palate, paired well with the softer cheeses.

The course was as thorough a wine tasting as I have been to, and in addition to the detailed discussions that Sabastiano provided, he handed out a wine tasting worksheet for sight, smell, taste and "touch", an aroma wheel to aid in detecting the nuances of a wine, and lastly a wine and food pairing worksheet.

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