

The International Wine Review

Rosso di Montalcino from the 2010 & 2009 Vintages

Rosso di Montalcino is often referred to as Baby Brunello. Made from 100 percent Sangiovese and often from the same vineyards as its famous brother, Brunello di Montalcino, it costs just one-third the price. Of course, with just one year in barrel or tank, it's lighter in body and lacks the earthy complexity of Brunello, but it has a special charm all its own. In this article we review over 60 Rosso di Montalcino wines. We tasted them in Montalcino, at Vinitaly in Verona, at the Italian Wine Masters tasting in New York, and at the offices of the **International Wine Review**. In the text below we look at how Rosso is grown and made; readers interested only in the wines themselves should skip directly to the reviews. See Report #31 Brunello di Montalcino for detailed information on the wineries and vineyards that produce the fruit for Rosso di Montalcino.

In the Vineyards of Montalcino

Like Brunello di Montalcino, Rosso di Montalcino is produced only in 100 percent Sangiovese vineyards. However, while Brunello can only be produced from Brunello-designated vineyards (i.e., vineyards approved for Brunello by the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino), Rosso di Montalcino can be produced from either Rosso or Brunello-designated vineyards. This regulation means Rosso is a type of escape valve. In good vintages, some growers produce Rosso only from their Rosso designated vineyards. In poor vintages, they can use Brunello fruit to make Rosso, thereby raising the quality of both the Brunello and the Rosso for the vintage. Thus, we find Rosso is of a more uniform quality across vintages than is Brunello. In good vintages both Brunello and Rosso are high quality; in poor vintages, the quality of Rosso is raised by the addition of declassified Brunello. This is born out in our tasting notes given below of Rossos from both the superb 2010 vintage and the good but less impressive 2009 vintage.

Making Rosso

While Brunello has a solid reputation going back 150 years, Rosso di Montalcino is a relatively recent invention. At the time of the Consorzio's founding in 1967, members agreed for commercial reasons to create a second wine (i.e., Rosso) that would require no oak aging and could be sold a year after the harvest. Rosso is particularly important as a revenue source for small wineries, as it need not be kept in inventory very long, and it ensures income even in poor vintages. The original Rosso wine was called *Vino Rosso dai vigneti di Brunello*. When in 1983 a DOC was created for Rosso, the name had to be changed to Rosso di Montalcino to comply with European rules.

Producers have different philosophies concerning Rosso, with some seeking to

produce a light colored wine, fruity and fresh, to be consumed young and not requiring aging. Others try to produce a baby Brunello with grapes from older vines,

Tasting Notes and Ratings

In our tastings we found many excellent Rossos from both the 2009 and 2010 vintages that fall into a spectrum of styles, ranging from easily accessible light red fruit to more firmly tannic and earthy Brunello-like wines. In general, these wines are meant to be drunk young, although in our opinion they are best after a year of bottle age. Many of them are elegant, delicious and excellent values at about \$20 per bottle.

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Abbadia Ardenga 2010 Rosso di Montalcino 90+

The 2010 Rosso is a delicious fruit forward wine, rich and flavorful with black cherry fruit and nicely integrated oak. It has good depth of flavor and will be even better after a year of bottle aging. Not currently imported to the US.