

1998 Ornellaia

Ornellaia, Tuscany, Italy

Product details

Vintage:	1998	Drinking:	Now Now
Producer:	Ornellaia	Alcohol:	
Region:	Tuscany	Variety:	
Country:	Italy		

About the producer

ORNELLAIA WINES

When the Ornellaia winery's founder Marchese Lodovico Antinori planned to start his own wine estate, he had an impressive example to follow within his own family. His brother Piero had helped their cousin Nicolò Incisa della Rocchetta to transform Tenuta San Guido from a limited producer of Bordeaux-style red wine into the winemaker behind the first great Super-Tuscan, Sassicaia. From the start, the plan was based on not deviating too far from a winning formula. The Marchese acquired property adjoining the San Guido estate to the south, in the coastal hills of Bolgheri, west of Siena. Like his familial neighbours, he eschewed Tuscany's favourite grape, Sangiovese, in favour of planting Cabernets Sauvignon and Franc, and Merlot. However, he did stray from the recipe a little by planting Sauvignon Blanc too.

At the turn of the century, the reigns were taken by the combined expertise of the Marchesi de' Frescobaldi and Robert Mondavi Winery (and later Tenute di Toscana under the control of the Frescobaldi, with Giovanni Geddes da Filicaja at the helm), which provided fresh impetus and serious investment to ensure the growing reputation of Ornellaia would meet its full potential. Armit Wines has been proud to be the exclusive UK importer of Ornellaia wine for over 20 years, through the various changes of ownership, and has extended that relationship to the estate's other great wines, including Le Serre Nuove dell'Ornellaia and Le Volte dell'Ornellaia.

The estate's 76 hectares contains dozens of different parcels with individual characteristics. The soil can be volcanic, limestone, alluvial sand or marine clay. As well as the land around Ornellaia itself, there is a separate enclave to the north of Bolgheri called Bellaria, with pebbly clay and sandstone, younger vines and more exposure to sea breezes. As a result it produces lighter styles which are used to balance the more robust wine from the Ornellaia vineyard.

The individual characteristics of the different plots is maintained by painstaking quality control at every point of winemaking, under the guidance of Axel Heinz. As harvest approaches, biochemical analysis and good old-fashioned tasting of grapes establishes acidity and tannin content, among other factors. From that, the timing of hand-picking and method of vinification is decided. Grapes are double-selected, with a first table grading bunches, before a second table removes all vegetation. For Ornellaia's first wine, 60 separately vinified base wines, each aged for 12 months in oak, are married in the final blend before returning to oak barrels for a further six months.

Ornellaia wine is known for its sumptuous, rich personality in comparison to its more subtle and severe local rival. It is a complex blend, with perfume and spice added by Cabernet Franc and the late-ripening Petit Verdot. But it is principally an expression of Merlot, which is in almost equal proportion to Cabernet Sauvignon. Axel Heinz actually believes Coastal Tuscany's conditions suit Merlot better than Cabernet



Sauvignon, and the darker Bordeaux grape takes the lead in the estate's second wine, Le Serre Nuove dell'Ornellaia (with the same four grapes). Le Serre Nuove dell'Ornellaia is vinified predominantly from younger vines, resulting in a softer, fresher expression which reaches its peak earlier. Their third red, Le Volte dell'Ornellaia, can be even more Merlot-dominated, but includes the initially rejected Sangiovese, for a more approachable blend which emphasises that opulent black-fruit Ornellaia personality.

The planting of white wine grapes, for which current winemaker Axel Heinz accepts Tuscany is not well regarded, has paid off. As well as the estate's Poggio alle Gazze dell'Ornellaia ("magpie knoll"), which is usually 100% Sauvignon Blanc, Axel has also produced - since the 2013 vintage (released in 2015) - a white expression of the estate's philosophy: Ornellaia Bianco. It is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier (with a little Petit Manseng in 2014) from three small vineyards, bottled in limited quantities.

Since 2008, Ornellaia has used Petit Manseng in an even more limited-edition release, the dessert wine, Ornus dell'Ornellaia. The roots of the estate's name are found in the Fraxinus Ornus, or flowering ash tree, typical to the Tuscan coast. Its sap was traditionally used as source of sugar in Mediterranean, so it seemed an appropriate name for this sweet wine with dried apricot, tropical fruit, caramel and honey notes. It is produced only in certain vintages from the tiny Palmetta vineyard.

Ornellaia can fill a post-prandial glass too, as some of the pomace from the estate's Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot is refined in copper pot stills to capture the Ornellaia essence from copper stills. This Eligo dell'Ornellaia grappa is then aged for three years - twice as long as necessary for Riserva classification - and blended with older vintages to produce a silky golden spirit with incredible depth.

The Ornellaia wine estate could be a Tuscan theme park - albeit one with a wonderful piece of sympathetic modern architecture as the main winery building. The surrounding land is threaded with chalky white pathways, lined with tall cedars; while the vineyards are sheltered by olive groves, which also provide olive oil. Olio dell'Ornellaia, also distributed exclusively in the UK by Armit Wines, is produced with just as much assiduous attention to detail as the wine, with several cultivars used, hand selection and pressing within two hours of picking.

Browse our full selection of Ornellaia wines, including Le Serre Nuove dell'Ornellaia, Le Volte dell'Ornellaia and more online today.