

# A Tuscan Vertical

[Tweet](#)[Like](#)

Ten years of Fattoria Montellori's flagship Salamartano, a red blend, reveal a wine in transition.

By **Rosemary George** | Thursday, 01 March 2012 | 02:19



I'll leap at any excuse for a trip to **Tuscany**. This time it was an invitation to a vertical tasting. As you may have realised from previous articles, I do enjoy vertical tastings because there's something so satisfying about tasting the history of a wine and seeing its development over the years. This time the theme was Salamartano, a wine that has been made at Fattoria Montellori, the family estate of Alessandro Nieri, for the last 20 years. The very first vintage was 1992.

Montellori does not really fit into the mainstream of **Tuscan** viticulture. It stands outside the somewhat unprepossessing town of Fucecchio in the Arno valley -- an elegant 18th-century villa with formal gardens that are the passion of Eva, Alessandro's wife. The picturesque hill town of San Miniato dominates the skyline in one direction, and in the other is the Monte Albano, which gives its name to a sub-zone of Chianti. The vineyards in the hills outside Fucecchio do not fit into any of the Chianti subzones -- there was talk of the creation of Cerreto Guidi but that never came to anything -- and so, in true Tuscan tradition, Nieri's flagship wine has nothing at all to do with Chianti, or indeed Sangiovese.

The blend for Salamartano, which means Champs de Mars, or Field of Mars, is essentially Bordelais, with **Cabernet Sauvignon** and Merlot, and later some Cabernet Franc was added. Essentially the differences stems from vintage variations. There has also been some replanting of vineyards with an improvement in viticultural techniques, and the oenologist, an all-important figure in Tuscan viticulture, has changed. From 1992 to 2000, it was Niccolò d'Afflitto, and then Andrea Paoletti and Danny Schuster from New Zealand worked together until 2006. Luca D'Attoma had a say in 2007, and in 2008 Alessandro felt confident enough not to need an oenologist.

**2010:** A blend of 65 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 27 percent Cabernet Franc and 8 percent Merlot. The wine is aged in barriques for 14 months and blended after the malo-lactic fermentation. Sixty percent of the barrels are new. This was a barrel sample that will be bottled in 2012. Deep young color. Quite a firm, oaky nose; quite tight with some dry cassis. And on the palate, quite oaky with firm acidity as well as tannins, and a touch of cherry spice. Still very youthful and adolescent, but with potential. 2010 was quite tricky year in Tuscany, with wetter than average weather.

**2009:** Deep young color. Riper sweeter nose, with some cassis fruit, and on the palate more rounded fleshier fruit. Medium weight with a youthful tannic streak. It was bottled in April 2011. 2009 was a hot year, with an early spring.

**2008:** This vintage was described as a classic, normal year. Young color. Quite an elegant cedary nose. And on the palate some cedary fruit was just beginning to develop. Medium weight. Quite a long elegant finish, but maybe just a hint hollow in the middle.

**2007:** The blend changed for this vintage, with the introduction of the first Cabernet Franc, 25 percent, with 70 percent Cabernet sauvignon and 5 percent Merlot. Deep young color. Quite a firm, youthful sturdy nose, developing some cedary notes. Quite a refreshing palate, with some cassis fruit. Medium weight. Good balance of tannins and cedary fruit. Alessandro considers that the Cabernet Franc adds some freshness to the blend, which certainly seemed the case with this vintage.

No Salamartano was made in 2006, nor for that matter in 2002 or 2000.

**2004:** A blend of 60 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 40 percent Merlot. Deep color. Quite rich concentrated cassis nose. Again quite ripe cassis and cedary notes on the palate. Some solid tannins and a substantial mouthful of wine. Still very youthful.

**2001:** A normal year. This is half-and-half Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The color is beginning to develop a little. A rounded nose, with some cedary notes, but quite restrained on the palate. Initially quite a fleshy palate with quite firm tannins, that develops in the glass. Nicely balanced with a long cedary finish, and a touch of cassis. One of my favorites in the lineup.

**1998:** Another cooler year, with more rain than usual. The color was beginning to develop a brick rim. Some elegant cedary notes on the nose, and also on the palate, with a hint of sweet cassis. Medium weight. Nicely harmonious with a streak of tannin and a long finish.

**1997:** In contrast, a hot year. And it shows. The nose is quite solid and dense, still with a touch of oak. The palate is ripe, with firm tannins and some cassis fruit. It is all quite sturdy and dense, and a touch raising on the finish, and fuller bodied than the 1998.

**1996:** Back to a cooler vintage. Some color development. A light cedary nose. And quite an elegant palate, again with notes of cedar wood, some quite firm tannins and a certain concentration of flavour. Quite an elegant finish.

**1994:** Described as a classic year. Hints of brick on the rim. A discreet cedarwood nose. Quite an elegantly smoky cedary palate. A lovely balance of fruit and tannins. Elegantly harmonious with a satisfying depth of flavor. Another favorite in the lineup.

**1992:** We tasted the very last remaining bottle. A cold year, with more rain than usual. Quite a deep

color so that it looked younger than the '94. Maturing cedary fruit on the nose. Quite discreet and elegant. And on the palate rounded mature fruit, and elegant tannins balancing a sweet cedary hint of fruit. Nicely complete and satisfying. And a grand finale to a historic tasting.

---

*Zester Daily* contributor **Rosemary George** was one of the first women to become a Master of Wine in 1979. She has been a freelance wine writer since 1981 and is the author of 11 books. She contributes to various magazines and also writes a **blog** on the Languedoc region.

*Photo: San Miniato, Italy. Credit: Rosemary George*

---

Last Updated on Thursday, 01 March 2012 03:41