

## Castello di Ama new reviews

June, 2012

This is a fabulous set of wines from Lorenza and Marco Pallanti. In addition to these wines, I also tasted the full range of 2010 and 2011s, two vintages that are shaping up beautifully at Ama. The single-vineyard Chianti Classicos return to the fray in 2011, the first vintage produced after 2007. The 2011s are full of promise although they naturally reflect the more exuberant quality of the year vis-a-vis the cool, structured 2010s. I also retasted Ama's 2008s, two wines that have improved markedly since I reviewed them last year. Pallanti describes 2008 as a good vintage up until September, when rain became problematic. Castello di Ama fans will want to check out my vertical of the Chianti Classico Bellavista, also in this issue. Lastly, let me add that any readers still holding the 2002 Chianti Classico (a year in which the single-vineyard wines weren't made) are in for a very pleasant surprise.

### CASTELLO DI AMA 2008 RISERVA

Rating: **91+**

The 2008 Chianti Classico Riserva Castello di Ama is going through a very beautiful phase right now. It was quite Burgundian and refined from barrel, then shut down considerably after bottling. Today, it shows lovely inner perfume and sweetness. The cool, restrained personality of the year comes through, but there is also plenty of understated richness in the glass. A kick of Sangiovese acidity and tannin frames the finish. This is a gorgeous wine that could very well surprise on the upside. Anticipated maturity: 2013-2020.

### CASTELLO DI AMA 2009 RISERVA

Rating: **92**

The 2009 Chianti Classico Riserva Castello di Ama is striking. Dark red cherries, flowers, mint, licorice and spices caress the palate in this fleshy, generous Chianti Classico. The radiance of the fruit is suggestive of a warm year, but the tannic profile, medium body and overall structure is more similar to that of a colder vintage. In 2009 Ama did not bottle their single vineyard selections; all of the best fruit went into the Castello di Ama bottling. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2029.



## HAIKU 2009

Rating: **92**

The 2009 Haiku is a new Sangiovese/Cabernet Franc/Merlot blend meant to showcase regional distinctiveness over strict varietal character. Dark red cherries, flowers, mint and spices are some of the notes that flow from the glass, but today the 2009 is quite reticent, especially in the bouquet. Like all of the Ama 2009s, the tannins are quite firm and call for cellaring. The blend is 50% Sangiovese and 50% Cabernet Franc/Merlot. Haiku is a promising wine. The 2009 isn't hugely differentiated from the Castello di Ama bottling, but readers will see a greater difference beginning with the 2010, which I also tasted. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2029.



## IL CHIUSO 2010

Rating: **88**

The 2010 Chiuso is an intriguing blend of Sangiovese and Pinot Noir that works beautifully. Sweet red cherries, flowers, mint and spices, waft from the glass, all supported by silky tannins. The Pinot Noir gives this entry-level red an extra measure of gracefulness that is usually missing from Tuscan wines in this price range. This is a delicious entry-level red from Ama. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2014





## L'APPARITA 2008

Rating: **93+**

The 2008 L'Apparita (Merlot) is very, very beautiful. This is a gorgeous vintage for the Apparita. Sweet dark cherries, chocolate, mint, licorice and spices are some of the many notes that emerge from the glass. The 2008 possesses striking inner perfume and sweetness. The 2008 is a decidedly mid-weight vintage, but it works. Graceful and elegant through to the long finish, the 2008 Apparita is a wine that convinces for its balance and overall sense of harmony. This bottle is far better than the two examples I tasted last year. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2028

## L'APPARITA 2009

Rating: **95**

The 2009 L'Apparita (Merlot) wraps around the palate with layers of fruit. The more seamless side of Apparita is on display, yet at the same time there is plenty of tannin underpinning the fruit. Juicy dark cherries, plums, flowers and tobacco wrap around the finish. As always, L'Apparita is one of the more interesting Merlots in Tuscany. It is first and foremost a wine of Chianti Classico. Anticipated maturity: 2019-2029.



## Vertical of the Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista

June, 2012

This vertical of Castello di Ama's flagship Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista was one of the more remarkable tastings I have ever had the privilege of participating in.

From his very first vintage, 1982, Marco Pallanti was clearly onto something big.

Readers still lucky enough to own that wine are in for a real treat.

The single-vineyard Bellavista is 80% Sangiovese and 20% Malvasia Nera, a combination of indigenous grapes that works beautifully. The early vintages included a dollop of Canaiolo that was planted in the vineyard up until 1988, when it was ripped out in favor of the Merlot that would go on to produce L'Apparita. I also tasted the 2011 Bellavista in barrel, the first since 2007, and a year that it resembles from a stylistic standpoint.

Castello di Ama Chianti Classico Bellavista Key Points:

1. 80% Sangiovese/20% Malvasia Nera aged in French oak barrels
2. Made from Ama's Bellavista vineyard, a high-altitude plot in Castellina
3. A powerful, intense Chianti Classico
4. Aging potential: 20-30 years

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1982 Rating: **96**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1986 Rating: **94**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1988 Rating: **97**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1990 Rating: **98**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1993 Rating: **94+**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1995 Rating: **96**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1999 Rating: **96**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2001 Rating: **95+**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2004 Rating: **96+**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2006 Rating: **95+**

VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2007 Rating: **97**





## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1982

Rating: **96**

The 1982 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista boasts an extraordinary bouquet that is to die for. Sweet dried rose petals, tobacco, anise, flowers, herbs and leather are some of the many notes that emerge from this beautiful, delineated wine. At thirty years of age the wine shows marvelous depth of color and plenty of fruit. Bright, saline notes frame the exotic and extraordinarily beautiful finish. The 1982 is exquisite and also a historical wine for Chianti Classico, Tuscany and all of Italy. Aged the 1982 Bellavista in cask. The blend was Sangiovese, Malvasia Nera and Canaiolo. Beginning in 1985 the estate moved to French oak barrels and grafted over the Canaiolo with Merlot, which would then be used for the Apparita. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022.

## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1986

Rating: **94**

The 1986 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is a big, powerful wine. There is plenty of depth and richness in the dark fruit. Hints of truffle, tar, licorice, game and dried cherries are woven into the finish. The 1986 suffers only by being placed close to the 1982 and 1988. In any other context it would be brilliant with no questions or doubts. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022.

## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1988

Rating: **97**

The 1988 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista comes across as an updated version of the 1982. It is slightly richer and more powerful (also owing to the use of French barrels) than the 1982, but stylistically it is quite similar. Dark red cherries, flowers, licorice and spices flow through to the effortless, gracious finish. This is a striking wine. Wow. As great as the 1988 is today, this is also a slightly linear vintage. The wine is firing on all cylinders today, but I am not sure it will improve meaningfully from here. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2022.

## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1990

Rating: **98**

The 1990 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is one of the greatest wines ever made in Italy. It shows the classicism of the wines of the 1980s, but with a little more depth, power and muscle. Layers of dark fruit build to the effortless, gracious finish. Today the 1990 is still an infant. The tannins have begun to soften, but the aromatics remain quite vibrant. This is an extraordinary wine by any measure. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2032



### VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1993

Rating: **94+**

The 1993 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is a pretty, understated wine. It doesn't have the power, richness or elegance of the best years, but its balance is utterly impeccable. Hints of sweet tobacco, leather, spices and dried flowers wrap around the long finish. These are the types of vintages that often surprise on the upside, and I wouldn't be surprised to see the 1993 show even better in another few years, once the bouquet is fully developed.

Anticipated maturity: 2013-2018.

### VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1995

Rating: **96**

The 1995 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is breathtaking. Today it remains a baby. Pallanti calls the 1995 'jammy' but I don't really see that. Yes, the fruit is voluptuous, but it is also balanced by healthy acidity and veins of underlying minerality that keep the wine vibrant. The 1995 is the product of a year with almost no summer until late September. The harvest took place on October 20, exceedingly late by present-day standards. Today the 1995 boasts dazzling power, richness and opulence, but without any heaviness or excess weight. This is a dazzling showing. Readers who own the 1995 can look forward to another 10-15 years of fabulous drinking.

Anticipated maturity: 2015-2030.

### VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 1999

Rating: **96**

The 1999 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista comes across as big, rich and powerful. It doesn't initially have the freshness of some of the more structured years, but then the fruit opens up and the wine literally explodes on the palate. If opened today the 1999 needs a lot of air. The wine is constantly changing in the glass, making it hard to peg down, but endlessly fascinating. Dried rose petals, mint, licorice and tobacco wrap around a vibrant finish that is at once powerful and seductive. Stylistically the 1999 lies somewhere between the truly opulent years and the more structured vintages, making it relatively accessible for this wine.

Anticipated maturity: 2016-2029.

### VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2001

Rating: **95+**

The 2001 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is huge and beautifully balanced. The Easter snow and very hot temperatures that year produced an opulent, super-ripe Bellavista with a distinct personality that stands apart from the rest of the wines in this tasting. Truffles, blackberry jam and camphor round out the sexy finish. It will be very interesting to see how the 2001 develops over the coming years. There is plenty of structure to support another decade or two of very fine drinking. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2031.



## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2004

Rating: **96+**

The 2004 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista impresses for its length and gorgeous inner perfume. This understated wine shows the finessed side of Bellavista. Sweet red fruit, flowers, mint and spices wrap around the silky, eternal finish. The 2004 is all about class and personality, both of which it has in spades. The only weak spot for the 2004 is the naturally high yields of the vintage. Still, it seems quite clear the 2004 has a bright future ahead of it. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2029.

## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2006

Rating: **95+**

The 2006 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista boasts compelling inner sweetness, great power and huge overall structure. Dark cherries, flowers, licorice, tobacco and incense are some of the many notes that burst from the glass in this explosive, totally seductive Bellavista. The 2006 needs time to fully integrate its French oak, but it is shaping up to be a jewel. It is quite clear from this tasting the 2006 is evolving at a glacial pace. Readers who can be patient will be amply rewarded. It is conceivable that the 2006 could one day eclipse the 2004. Anticipated maturity: 2016-2036.

## VIGNETO BELLAVISTA 2007

Rating: **97**

The 2007 Chianti Classico Vigneto Bellavista is a knock out. Rose petals, flowers, all sorts of red berries and mint are some of the nuances that emerge from the 2007. Striking inner perfume, ripe tannins and phenomenal overall balance are the calling cards. Today the 2007 comes across as a modern-day version of the 1990 or, to use a more contemporary comparison, the 2004, but with more weight and also greater sweetness in the tannin. Either way, it is flat-out stunning and a must-have. Anticipated maturity: 2017-2037.



## A Look at the Best Italian Rosés from 2011

June 4, 2012

This year's crop of rosés from Italy features a number of exciting wines, many from lesser-known regions, such as Campania, Sardinia and Valle d'Aosta. It was a warm vintage across much of Italy that yielded rich, generous rosés with more than enough body to stand up to a wide range of cuisines.

The best wines reflect the unique qualities of Italy's indigenous grapes and the personality of where they are grown.

Even better, all of the wines in this article can be found for under \$25 a bottle, and most will sell for well under that sum.

### CASTELLO DI AMA 2011 ROSATO TUSCANY

(\$22.00) **91** (highest score in the group reviewed)

The 2011 Rosato is striking. Layers of fruit caress the palate in this generous, impeccable and totally beautiful Rosato.

Far from easygoing, the Rosato is a serious wine with impeccable balance and no hard edges. This is a great showing from Ama.

The Rosato is Sangiovese with a dash of Merlot. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2014.

