

Overlooking
the Serego
Alghieri estate in
Valpolicella.

God Bless ITALIA

RECAPPING THE
“ITALY, NORTH
TO SOUTH”
WEBINAR SERIES IN
ASSOCIATION WITH
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



by Jessie Birschbach



San Polo is the Montalcino property of the Veneto-based Allegrini family.

ITALY

is notoriously complicated when it comes to wine. Its north-to-south axis makes for an incredibly wide range of macroclimates in which roughly 2,000 native grape varieties alone are cultivated.

(And don't even get me started on appellation and labeling laws.)

As a longtime friend of Lars Leicht, VP of education for *The SOMM Journal* and moderator for our Geographical Digest webinar series, I expected him to describe attempting to understand the country's wine industry the same way I've heard him do so in the past: "like trying to untangle a bowl of spaghetti." But this time the Italian wine expert did no such thing. "Our theme today is very poignant," Leicht told our audience, "as Italy is just coming out of a political crisis." He was referring to the governmental upheaval that had ended in February, just a few weeks prior to the webinar, and resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. Leicht also solemnly mentioned that the country had imposed yet another lockdown due to the pandemic.

Yet, he noted, Italy's wine industry is still thriving amid the tumult. I might have been missing my friend's reliable pasta metaphor, but I was grateful to hear him frankly address what Italians are currently facing. I suspect that, like me, the truth made the audience all the more willing to not only learn about their wines but support the industry as a whole. "We're representing six different wine regions today," said Leicht—and perhaps in keeping with the Italian spirit of spontaneity, "we'll actually be moving south to north, so let's get on with it! And God bless Italia."

An aerial view of San Polo and its estate vineyards.

SEVENTH-GENERATION STEWARDS

APPELLATION/REGION: BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO DOCG, TOSCANA

WINERY: SAN POLO

PRESENTER: ROBIN SHAY, EXPORT MANAGER, AMERICAS

Any somm worth their salt is well acquainted with Allegrini, but they might not know of the Veneto-based family's Tuscan estate, the San Polo winery in Montalcino. "Sixth-generation winegrower Marilisa Allegrini invested in Montalcino in 2007 with the hope of providing a platform for the next generation of talented Allegrini women to express themselves enologically," said



Robin Shay, export manager, Americas, for San Polo.

Robin Shay, export manager of the Americas for San Polo. And they surely did: Today, Carlotta Allegrini, also an MD, is a member of the board for San Polo, and her sister Caterina is the winery's current CEO.

What's been most important to the current generation of leaders is environmental stewardship. After Marilisa purchased the winery in 2007, it became certified by the energy certification system CasaClima, earning the Quality Seal for Sustainability; by 2017, San Polo had also earned its organic certification from the European Union.

After a topline review of Brunello di Montalcino's DOCG requirements, Shay noted the importance of subzones within the appellation, dividing it into three levels of elevation: the high ground, which offers the most structured and ageworthy wines; the mid-mountain level, which produces a

richer style of wine with a more approachable structure; and the lowlands, which typically offer a softer, riper style of Brunello di Montalcino. For somms currently studying for a certification, it's worth noting that Shay strongly recommended the book *Brunello di Montalcino: Understanding and Appreciating One of Italy's Greatest Wines*, whose author, Kerin O'Keefe, conceptualized these elevation-based delineations.

Within Brunello di Montalcino's highest subzone, which ranges from 1,148 feet to 1,640 feet, is San Polo's 54-acre estate, comprising mostly Galestro soils. Forty acres are planted to vine, half of them classified as Brunello di Montalcino. Shay presented both the estate-grown San Polo 2018 Rubio and 2015 Brunello di Montalcino as a demonstration of the producer's range. The former is an early-release wine that he said "communicates [the winery's] values" through its "bright, fresh quality" and, in the quoted words of San Polo winemaker Riccardo Fratton, "unspoiled nature." The latter expression, meanwhile, exemplifies what Fratton calls "power and elegance," according to Shay. He used that descriptor to draw a fitting parallel to the leadership of Carlotta and Caterina as well as Marilisa, "who's broken a number of glass ceilings in our industry."



San Polo 2018 Rubio, Montalcino, Toscana IGT (\$25)

Composed primarily of hillside-grown Sangiovese, this stainless steel-aged red presents as dense and juicy, with high acidity and notes of concentrated dark plum. Soy sauce and olive tapenade add dimension to its freshness. The mouthfeel is silky,

leaving a touch of salinity on the tongue. **91**



San Polo 2015 Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Tuscany (\$70)

At 1,476 feet above sea level, soils rich in calcium and clay underlie

the two vineyards on the San Polo estate that impart character to this masterpiece, aged in barrel for 30 months and in bottle for six. Aromas of dried blue and red fruits signal the wine's high-powered energy. Fine acidity, tart cherry, and cinnamon lead the way, followed by sweet rose petals and tomato leaf. Sandalwood, balsamic, and earthy tones join in midway to reach the full finish. **95**

TRINCHERO FAMILY ESTATES
HERITAGE COLLECTION



San Polo winemaker Riccardo Fratton.

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