

PREMIUM

Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018 and Riserva 2017: vintage report and top wines

Michela Morris reports on the Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018 releases, plus the 2017 Riservas, finding wines with lovely definition of aromas, vibrancy and balanced alcohols.



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The landscape of Montepulciano. Credit: Łukasz Czechowicz / Unsplash

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Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018 and Riserva 2017

Scroll down to see tasting notes and scores for the top Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018 and Riserva 2017 wines

How do the Vino Nobile 2018s taste?

Complications due to the pandemic meant that I tasted far fewer Vino Nobile di Montepulciano wines than in normal years. Several estates had yet to bottle their 2018s at the time of writing, but the handful I did taste were from producers that I believe to be among the best in the zone.

The wines showed lovely definition of aromas, vibrancy and balanced alcohol. A couple of producers described the wines as slender, and they are certainly finer-framed than 2017 and less plush than 2015.

In some examples, the tannins are still a bit austere, but became friendlier after being open for a day.

Give these a few more months in bottle to knit together then drink over the next five to eight years. I look forward to assessing the full potential of this vintage when the 2018 Riservas, vineyard selections and late-releases come onto the market next year.

The dozen Riservas, and others, I did taste this time around allowed me to revisit 2017.

There is no doubt that in this hot, dry year it was a challenge balancing tannin ripeness and alcohol levels. In a few wines, pronounced oak exaggerates the fruit ripeness. Nevertheless, there were some pleasant surprises, and both Boscarelli and Dei even managed to capture Sangiovese's beautiful aromatic intricacies.

Pieve: a new category

My tasting of these new releases coincided with the announcement of a third category of Vino Nobile di Montepulciano (somewhat analogous to Chianti Classico's Gran Selezione).

The new designation, called 'Pieve', divides Montepulciano into 12 subzones. For a wine to qualify, it must be made from an estate's own grapes, contain a minimum of 85% **Sangiovese** complemented by indigenous grapes only, and pass an analytic tasting commission. Among the dozen producers I spoke to, excitement for the project is palpable.

The name, however, will be a mouthful. Already, as of the 2018 vintage, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano must now include the indication 'Toscana' on the label to distinguish the wine from the unrelated Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. The addition of 'Pievi' or a named subzone to that will be a lot to swallow. However, if it truly serves to elevate the region and its wines, then it is a giant step in the right direction.

With a minimum ageing requirement of 36 months, the inaugural Pieve releases from 2020 will not hit the market until 2024. In the meantime, it is clear that a growing number of the region's producers have already made significant efforts to improve quality. If you have yet to venture into Vino Nobile, now is the time to do so.

Stand-out producers

Boscarelli: An impressive set of Riserva and single-vineyard bottlings demonstrate rare finesse in 2007.

Tenuta di Gracciano della Seta: Consistently elegant, and excellent value for money.

Il Molinaccio: An up-and-coming, boutique producer making unique but tasty wines.

Top Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018 and Riserva 2017 wines:



Boscarelli, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Tuscany, 2018

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Produced since 1968 and the mainstay of Boscarelli's portfolio, this Vino Nobile has changed little since its inception. Canaiolo Nero, Colorino and Mammolo round out Sangiovese, and ageing is in various sizes of used Allier and Slavonian oak barrels. This is all leather and tar mixed with...

Points 92

Salcheto, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Tuscany, Italy, 2018

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Salchetto's launching pad Vino Nobile is crafted from the estate's organically farmed 15 hectares and is the choicest selection of grapes. 150,000 bottles produced. Appealing from the get-go, this 100% Sangiovese smells of summer's bounty with cherry, plum, blackberry and strawberry. Hints of flint, iron and garden herbs provide nuance....

Points 91



Tenuta Gracciano della Seta, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018

Juicy and elegant, this offers bright red cherry, dried thyme, wild rose and orange peel. Finessed, clinging tannins are decidedly chalky in texture. Mid-weight and mouth cleansing, it finishes with an almost grapefruit tang. Winemaker Giuseppe Rigoli says that even ripening allowed the...

Points 91



Il Molinaccio, La Spinosa, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018

Despite being a bit discreet, La Spinosa eventually demonstrates its pretty fragrances of wildflowers and herbs, particularly anise. There is a nice pop of red cherry on the palate and some chinotto to lend intrigue. Long grainy tannins stretched out rather than compress in this...

Points 90



Poliziano, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, Tuscany, 2018

Made since 1968, Poliziano's stalwart Vino Nobile is oak-smoothed and chocolatey, with ageing in a combination of French barriques, tonneaux and larger casks. Sweet wood spice and vanilla lead but make room for liquorice and blackberry. It's full and rich with some Merlot plumpness, and...

Points 90



Tenuta Valdipiatta, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2018

Sourced from the estate's five predominantly clay plots with vines ranging in age from 25 to 60 years old, the 2018 was picked mid-to-late September. Quiet notes of sweet spice meld with chestnut and earthy aromas. The palate is mid-weight and starts silky, though lean, linear...

Points 89



Tenuta Trerose, Santa Caterina, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018

Trerose's holding on the Santa Caterina hill essentially forms an amphitheatre, providing a range of diverse expositions. Each plot is vinified separately to preserve its specific characteristics. The result is an attractive mix of ripe brambly berries, tobacco, thyme and a touch of violet. Dusty...

Points 89



Tenuta Valdipiatta, Vigna d'Alfiero, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018

Valdipiatta's 3.3-hectare Alfiero vineyard was planted by former cellarmaster Alfiero Carpini approximately 55 years ago. Almost half of the production is set aside for this bottling, which is four-square in comparison to the estate's regular Vino Nobile. Initial accents of new oak cede t...

Points 88



Fattoria La Braccasca, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2018

Antinori's extensive La Braccasca estate spans across the neighbouring denominations of Cortona and Montepulciano. Vineyards in the latter total 103 hectares in the subzones of Cervignano, Santa Pia and Gracciano. Lifted by volatility, aromas of cherry pie, leather and...

Points 88



Boscarelli, Costa Grande, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2017

One of four single-vineyard bottlings, Costa Grande hails from a 1.5-hectare plot in Boscarelli's north-facing Vigna Grande site. Only 400 metres from the vineyards that surround the estate, it sits 100 metres higher in altitude on predominantly red clay. Extraordinarily focused, it marrie...

Points 94



Maria Caterina Dei, Madonna della Querce, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

Produced since 2015, Madonna della Querce is a sophisticated tribute to Caterina Dei's father Glauco, who started making wine under the Dei label in 1985. It comes from a one-hectare south-facing plot at 370 metres planted in 2005. Aromas are mellow and discreet at first, then open wi...

Points 93



Boscarelli, Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2017

For this Riserva, the De Ferrari brothers select bunches from four or five parcels throughout their historic vineyards in the area of Cervognano. This captivates with fragrances of mint, tobacco, woodland berries and dusty earth, while lush red cherry fills the mouth. There's a...

Points 93



Poliziano, Asinone, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2017

The Asinone vineyard sits on an ancient hill that was once surrounded by sea. The clay soil is rich in fossils and minerals, yielding small bunches with small berries and thick skins that give substantial structure. It is still a bit closed, though aromas of macerated cherry and vanilla...

Points 92



Poliziano, Le Caggiole, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2017

First produced in 1983 but discontinued in the mid-1990s, Le Caggiole was revived again in 2015 after being replanted exclusively to Sangiovese. While Poliziano's Asinone hails from silty clay soil, Le Caggiole is predominantly marine sands and is the lighter, more fragrant wine of the...

Points 92



Avignonesi, Poggetto di Sopra, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

Planted almost 50 years ago, Poggetto di Sopra is Avignonesi's historic vineyard, located in the area of Argiano at approximately 300 metres above sea level. The soil is marine in origin and rich in calcium carbonate. Macerated cherry speaks to the warmth and ripeness of 2017, and the nos...

Points 90



Salcheto, Vecchie Viti del Salco, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

The third vintage of this bottling from 30-plus-year-old vines, Michele Manelli describes the selection in 2017 as 'maniacal' – first in the vineyard by bunch, then berry by berry at the sorting table to remove any sunburnt or dried grapes. A powerful and dense package, this leads with...

Points 89



Il Molinaccio, La Duemiladiciassette Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

This was made with 50% whole clusters as the warmth of the vintage allowed the grape stems to fully lignify, explains owner Marco Malavasi. The nose is quite lifted with florals and fragrant savoury earth. Long, chalky tannins gently envelope the palate, which is replete with dark cher...

Points 91



Tenuta Trerose, Simposio Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

With 57 hectares designated for Vino Nobile, Trerose's vineyards extend throughout Montepulciano's eastern sector of Valiano, near the border of Umbria and Lake Trasimeno. The Riserva is a selection of bunches from primarily southwest-facing parcels. Cherry and bramble...

Points 90



Fattoria La Braccessa, Vigneto Santa Pia Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

Following yields reduced by the late-April frost, the dry, hot summer had a concentrating effect on the grapes which is evident in the wine. It leads with prune, dried cherry and sunbaked herbs as well as oak notes of mocha and charred wood. Sumptuous, rich fruit is hemmed in by...

Points 89



Tenuta Valdipiatta, Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2017

The estate's Riserva hails from its Vigna D'Alfiero and Sanguineto parcels, which boast 55- to 60-year-old vines planted at low densities. Harvest was necessarily early due to the vintage's hot and arid conditions, and this clocks in at a very reasonable 13.5%. Intriguing yet discreet, aroma...

Points 89



Maria Caterina Dei, Bossona Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2016

Dei's Riserva see long ageing in a combination of tonneaux and larger cask, followed by a full year in bottle before release. It comes from the estate's prize vineyard, Bossona - a sunny south-facing amphitheatre on stony, sandy soil rich in marine fossils. A heady mix of violets, tobacco,...

Points 92



Salcheto, Riserva, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, 2016

Winemaker Michele Manelli has retooled Tuscany's traditional governo technique for Salcheto's Riserva. He adds partially dried grapes to his best cask of Vino Nobile, triggering a second fermentation for a softer, rounder and more concentrated Sangiovese. The 2016 is laden with...

Points 91

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