

UNCORKED

Here's to Chianti close cousins Outside Classico district are 7 wine regions to discover

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Everyone knows about the red wine Chianti. The elders of the tribe remember the spaghetti scene at Tony's Restaurant in Disney's "Lady and the Tramp." The tribe's juniors know Chianti as merely one of, and infrequently the best, of Italy's legion of tableside red wines. And those in the middle may yet keep a tchotchke of a raffia-covered Chianti flask, dripped with candle wax, in a corner of the family room.

But fewer folk know about Chianti Classico, a district within the larger Chianti appellation, that may produce *la crema della crema* of Chianti as a whole. And still fewer recognize Chianti's cousins, those small subdistricts that dot or ring the Classico district and that seldom find their way to these shores.

They are seven in number, and you will find only two of them, Chianti Colli Senesi and Chianti Rufina, with any great ease in the States. But they're worth the search if for no other reason than, as Chiantis, any of them offers a felicitous combination of generally high quality for low price.

Regulations advanced and passed into law since the 1990s have upped the percentages of sangiovese, one of Italy's favored red wine grapes, that one finds in all Chiantis: a minimum of 80 percent in the Classico wines, to a minimum of 75 percent in these satellites. Because sangiovese is so well-liked, it's more often than not well above either mark in a blend of grapes in any Chianti.

To dispose of the very hard-to-find cousins: Named after the hills that surround their respective cities, Chianti Colli Fiorentini (the hills of Florence), Chianti Colli Aretini (of Arezzo) and Chianti Colline Pisane (of Pisa) make wines that

are, by and large, lighter, less serious and more accessible plays on sangiovese than Chianti Classico.

The same characterizes the reds of Chianti Montalbano and Chianti Montespertoli, although you might find a bit more heft from anything out of Tenuta di Capezzana's Montalbano. And Tenuta Le Querce puts out a \$12-\$15 Chianti Fiorentini that is a steal for all its weight. If you run into either, snag it.

Chianti Colli Senesi

Named after the hills that cuddle the town of Siena, these Chiantis come from prime real estate; half its northern border abuts the Classico district.

The Sienese have a reputation of being lovers of life, openhearted and generous at table. Their Chianti is like that, too, with plush, juicy fruit, soft tannins and open aromas.

2007 Tenute Niccolai Palagetto, Chianti Colli Senesi Riserva: Fine price for going on seven years' aging, with deep color reflective of the dark-red fruit flavors and aromas; tannins that caress. **\$25**

2010 Sono Montenidoli "Montenidoli," Chianti Colli Senesi: Somewhat rustic, if you like that sort of thing with heartier fare. **\$15-\$19**

2011 Castello di Monsanto Monrosso, Chianti Colli Senesi: This stellar producer of Classico wines also puts out something from its back door vineyards that is as good a buy as they come; chin-dripping juicy. **\$10-\$15**

Chianti Rufina

Pronounced ROO-fee-nah and not to be confused with the Classico producer Ruffino (roo-FEE-noe), this is the smallest of the Chianti satellites, with hills of the highest elevation (up to 1,600 feet), and a personal favorite.

What always strikes me about Rufina wines are their aromas, nay perfumes, wafting scents of both red and black cherry, a panoply of spice (especially brown baking spices) and hints of vanilla and rose petal. It's difficult to pull a Rufina from your nose to steal a sip of it. Perhaps the hilltop vineyards, with their resolutely cooler temperatures, are the secret.

The region also sports some of the finer, more noble and long-lived Chianti producers, such as these two.

2009 Marchesi de' Frescobaldi Nipozzano, Chianti Rufina: What a terrific red for the money, with a pleasurable yin yang of dark depth (dried leaves, dried cherry, dark wood) and bright energy (cherry pie, cinnamon, lifted aroma). **\$15-\$20**

2010 Fattoria Selvapiana, Chianti Rufina: Heady, come-hither aromas (strawberry com-



pote, cherry pie, wet black earth) followed by juicy fruit and deft tannins. **\$15-\$19**

One more to know

Also overlooked within the larger Chianti appellation is the petite region of Carmignano. It isn't a Chianti, make no mistake, because it allows for up to half nonsangiovese grapes, but it's a winner along the price-quality axis.

2010 Capezzana Barco Reale di Carmignano: From younger vines on the estate (for all intents and purposes, the only name to remember from Carmignano), with sour cherry fruit in all aspects of body, finish and aroma; a fine buy. **\$11-\$15**

If your wine store does not carry these wines, ask for one similar in style and price.

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