



Andrea (left) and Cesare Cecchi

SOMETHING OLD something new

While firmly installed in the Tuscan heartland of Chianti Classico, the Cecchi family is also seeking to bring to the Italian wine lover's attention the charms of its newer holdings on the region's coastal plains, writes *Tom Bruce-Gardyne*

THE CECCHI family has been steeped in the wines of Tuscany for over a century. Today its estates stretch from the beautiful hills of Chianti Classico to the coastal plains of the Maremma. While one symbolises the historic heartland of Tuscan wine, the other is its new frontier.

"Our wines and our family belong to the region," says CEO Andrea Cecchi, who co-runs the business with Cesare Cecchi, the chairman.

"When my brother and I took over in 2004 we weren't afraid of modernity. We

wanted to expand, innovate and be very contemporary, and yet always retain our authenticity." This blend of tradition and innovation is for Andrea the very essence of what Tuscany should be.

Now in its fourth generation, the family firm was founded by Luigi Cecchi in 1893. The wines had begun to sell abroad by the 1930s. Today the company exports half its total production of 7.5 million bottles to 60 international markets. The Cecchi family produces wine in four different estates and owns five brands:

Cecchi, Villa Cerna, Castello Montauto, Val delle Rose and Tenuta Alzatura.

Supplied by their own vineyards, each estate boasts a modern, dedicated winery. But for Tenuta Alzatura in Umbria, which the family bought in 2000 to produce Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG, Cecchi remains very much a Tuscan entity.

Cecchi has been transformed by Andrea and Cesare, who have trebled the family's vineyards to around 400 hectares. The four Tuscan properties start with Villa Cerna in Castellina in Chianti where the

company is based surrounded by its vines, and with a superb new restaurant, La Foresteria, for welcoming guests.

The estate is home to Cecchi's flagship Chianti Classicos, including the Villa Cerna Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG 2012 that has just scooped *Tre Bicchieri - Gambero Rosso's* top award. Late last year it was joined by the lovely Villa Rosa estate nearby, adding another 25ha of Chianti Classico. To the west is Castello Montauto within San Gimignano DOCG on a ridge overlooking the famous medieval town, while beyond lies Val delle Rose in the Maremma beside the Mediterranean.

NEW FRONTIERS

The estate was acquired in 1996 and its original vineyards of Morellino di Scansano DOCG have been entirely replanted. The Cecchi family was the first to really invest in this corner of Tuscany, and there are now just over 100ha under vine, making the company the biggest producer of Morellino. With its vineyards,

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new state-of-the-art winery, cooking school, restaurant and wine shop, Val delle Rose aims is to become a beacon of excellence for Maremma wines. In the vineyards there are plantings of carefully selected clones of Sangiovese, interspersed with plots of Petit Verdot, Colorino, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. There are also vines dedicated to the classic, Mediterranean white grape Vermentino, which Andrea Cecchi is a great believer in.

After almost 10 years in the Maremma, he says: "We are finally beginning to understand the region's wines and terroir." The Val delle Rose Litorale



Vermentino is a delightfully crisp, maritime take on the grape, while La Mora, Morellino di Scansano is as fresh and bright an expression of Sangiovese as you could wish for. Both have proved a big success in Italy and have now been launched in the UK.

Meanwhile, Poggio al Leone, a Morellino di Scansano Riserva, takes the DOCG to a new level. A little Cabernet is blended with Sangiovese grown at 150m above sea level and cooled by a steady inshore breeze. After a year in French barriques and a further eight months in bottle, the soft, ripe fruit displays a real freshness and elegance, and the tannins are round and smooth.

"We're very proud of it," says Andrea. "For us, it's what the Maremma is all about." Maybe one day this relatively undiscovered corner of Tuscany will be as famous as Bolgheri up the coast. It won't happen overnight, but the Cecchi family is patiently sowing the seeds.

This broad vision of Tuscany from the vineyards of Castellina in Chianti to the fresh, modern wines from the coast is summed up in Coevo, which was first produced in 2006. The finest parcels of Sangiovese and Cabernet from Villa Cerna and those of Merlot and Petit Verdot from Val delle Rose are picked,

vinified and aged separately in barriques and tonneaux in Cecchi's cellars in Castellina. The final blend varies from vintage to vintage, though Coevo is only produced in particularly good years. For the family it represents the best of both worlds – a marriage between the vineyards of the Maremma and those of Chianti Classico.

PATIENCE IS KEY

For all the dramatic growth, Andrea Cecchi takes a very patient, measured approach to producing wine. "Whatever we've been able to create in the vineyards will see a transformation very far from now. It takes 10 to 15 years to get a result."

For this reason, there has been no rush to produce a Chianti Classico Gran Selezione DOCG, but there will be one from Cecchi when the right single vineyard is chosen. And chances are it will be outstanding. *db*

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