



TUSCAN OLIVE OILS, 2010

Online Edition
Spring 2011

THE RARE WINE CO. NEWSLETTER



Pictured:** Last November's tasting of just-pressed olive oils at the Grati estate in Rufina is notable for the range of colors. The Grati family allows only The Rare Wine Co. to choose just the pressings we love, and invariably we choose deeply colored oils as they offer the most structure and character. The brown-looking oil to the right of the notebook was a sample sent by another producer ... put off to the side as it deserved. **Page 3.

The Chosen Ones

Gems of the 2010 Harvest

The fruits of our labor—a remarkable seventeen superb 2010 Tuscan extra virgin olive oils—have arrived. And if you sampled any of our *nuovo* bottlings in December, you'll have an idea of how splendid they are.

But what you may not know is just how rare these oils are ... and what it took to bring oil of such remarkable quality to you this year.

Changing Times

As in other recent years, Tuscan olive growers waged an uphill battle against the weather to produce great oil in 2010. Most parts of Tuscany struggled through another summer drought—a huge problem, since olives depend on summer rain for proper ripening.

Things got better in October, with moderate rain and cool nights, both needed for the final stages of flavor development. But because of the earlier drought, many olive groves were not ready to pick by late October, the sweet spot at many estates.

And then heavy rains began in early November, lasting for weeks. Some estates had two or three weeks to bring in optimally ripe fruit, others had just a few days. At our request,



The al fresco "tasting room" at Podere Cugno, overlooking a magnificent olive grove.

Rufina's Colognole made one small, glorious pressing in late October only to lose just about all of their remaining olives to rain.

Farther south in Chianti Classico, Cugno was on cruise control until mid-November when unrelenting rain brought their harvest to an early close. (They left a third of their crop on the trees.) At just about every estate that we typically visit, this was the smallest harvest window we've ever seen.

Such conditions mean that rich, expressive Tuscan oil will be scarce this year. Quality-conscious estates will

have left much of their crop for the birds, while commercial producers will be blending the good with the bad, to produce a sea of oil hardly worthy of the "extra virgin" name.

Caveat emptor.

Our Recipe

Since we started importing olive oil in 1995, we have always had the highest standards in the business, including tasting in the estates' cellars the second week of November, bottling in dark glass to protect the oil from damaging light, and shipment by temperature-controlled container.

But the weather challenges of recent years have compelled us to be even more demanding of our growers and selective in what we buy. At many properties we have moved to single pressings, since olive oil quality and style can now vary so dramatically from day to day. We make our selections on the spot, understanding that if we don't reserve the best pressing we taste, it could go to someone else or, much more likely, go into the blended oil that will be sold to other customers.

All this gives us, once again, the opportunity to offer you oils that arguably will be 2010's most expressive and longest-lived. ►

“ ”

*The Rare Wine Company ... imports some of the best green olive oils from Tuscany. **Daniel Patterson in Aroma***

*A top source of extremely fine Tuscan olive oils. **Matt Kramer***

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOOD & GREAT

Just as subtle differences in grape source and vinification can profoundly influence the quality of a wine, there are factors that separate great olive oils from merely good ones. Here are the most important of them.

MICROCLIMATE — Olive oil is produced throughout the Mediterranean, but many feel that the greatest oils of all are produced in Tuscany's interior hills—from old trees in poor soil and cool microclimates.

While coastal Tuscany produces some of the region's greatest wines, we believe that interior olive groves typically produce better oil. So, long ago we restricted our search for great oils to areas well away from the sea.

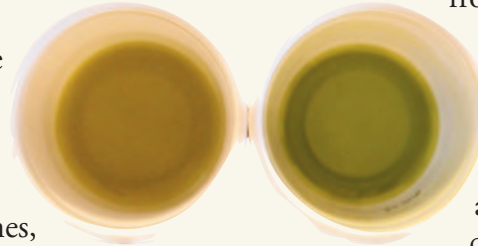
RIPENESS — The time of harvest is crucial, with the best Tuscan oils made from olives that are harvested in late October or early November, while many are still green. Olives at this stage of ripeness produce an oil with a green color and intense flavors of artichoke and freshly cut grass.

These “early-harvest” oils also have extraordinary structure—plus the ability to withstand the four enemies of olive oil: age, heat, light and air. In fact, a good early-harvest oil, if properly stored, can keep for two or more years with ease. In contrast, most commercially available olive oils (including many expensive ones) already show noticeable deterioration six months after the harvest.

The explanation is that early-harvest olives have substantially more antioxidants. Consequently, Tuscan olive oils that have a greenish color hold up much better after opening, maintaining their fresh aromas and flavors.

So, why not harvest all the olives early and produce only great oil? The answer is “time and money.” Most growers prefer to wait until the olives offer little resistance and can either be swept from the trees or fall to the ground on their own. Early picking also produces much less oil from the same weight of olives. Our

growers often obtain only one to two liters of olive oil *per tree*; the big commercial olive oil producers, who harvest later, can produce many times that amount from a single tree.



Such extremes of color demand that we buy only what we taste and see.

SPEED OF PRESSING — It is crucial that the fruit arrive at the *frantoio* (the press house) speedily and unbruised. Otherwise, the olives will oxidize and develop a high level of oleic acid.

The International Olive Oil Council (*IOOC*) has adopted oleic acid as a standard measure of quality; a high percentage indicates overripeness, damage or that olives have sat around too long before pressing. The *IOOC* permits the “Extra Virgin” label only if an oil has less than one gram of free acidity, expressed as oleic acid, per 100 grams of oil (one percent).

In fact, top Tuscan oils have a fraction of the permitted level of oleic acid. This is due to their early harvest and the great care that goes into making them.

METHOD OF EXTRACTION — Olive pressing basics have changed little in recent years: the entire olive (skin, pulp and pit) is crushed, ground and worked into a paste. The oil is extracted from this paste, exposing it to as little heat and oxygen as possible. But while the essentials haven't changed much, many improvements have been made to the processing equipment, to obtain purer, cleaner oil, with a high level of polyphenols and a minimum of oxidation.

AGE — Top Tuscan oils have a window of optimal usability that is far greater than for other oils. During the first year of their lives, they are intensely flavored, with the distinctively peppery finish that Tuscans prize. As time goes on, they mellow, but if well-stored, will continue to offer exceptional flavor and aromatics.

KEEPING OIL FRESH — Great Tuscan oils withstand heat and light better than other oils, but they still deteriorate if abused. Unopened bottles should be stored in a cool, dark place like a wine cellar. Once opened, they are best kept in a cool, dark cupboard away from the stove. Following these rules, your oils will remain fresh and vibrant. □

Monte, Vetrice & Prunatelli

Exhilarating Extra Virgins from Rufina's Providential Hillside

There is no better demonstration of the influence of *terroir* on olive oil than the extra virgins of Rufina's Grati family.

Year in, year out, the Grati's olive groves—Vetrice, Monte and Prunatelli—produce three of Italy's greatest oils, and they do it effortlessly. The secret is some of the finest hillside *terroirs* in what could be Tuscany's greatest olive zone.

Once again, the three oils soar. Because the groves are all at relatively high elevations—250 to 500 meters above sea level—and have old trees, their olives ripened beautifully in 2010.

Yields were also very good. Only Vetrice suffered a drop in production, caused by a freeze that ravaged Rufina's olive trees last December. Countless branches had to be removed, but surviving limbs thrived, producing oil of superb concentration.

These three oils have long been our most popular, not only because of their incredible quality, but their low prices. Let us just say that, for the money, there are no greater olive oils made on the planet.



Rufina's valley from Villa Vetrice.

2010 Monte "Orcio 4"

\$22.95 500 ml

Harvested Nov. 3-5. Always one of the region's most nuanced oils, 2010 Monte offers a smorgasbord of aromas: mint, ripe olives, roasted grains, magnolia, sweet butter and spicy hay. The palate echoes the nose, and is finely balanced with excellent length.

2010 Vetrice "Orcio 1"

\$22.95 500 ml

Harvested October 27-29, the brightly green-colored Vetrice offers more explosiveness, with pungent minty, alfalfa and arugula aromas. The palate is sensational, boasting richly earthy, lemongrass and green bean flavors and a long moderately peppery finish.

2010 Prunatelli "Orcio 3"

\$22.95 500 ml

Harvested Oct. 30-Nov. 1, this year's Prunatelli bottling offers classic Rufina green color, with a compelling nose of sage, mint, toasted nuts, artichokes and a hint of celery. The palate offers superb drive and viscosity, with some pepper appearing in the mid-palate, which continues in the long finish.

IL CARNASCIALE, MERCATALE VALDARNO

Bettina Rogosky's famed Il Carnasciale estate produces Il Caberlot, the legendary Super Tuscan. But this lofty site also produces some of Tuscany's most beautiful olive oils. In fact, before the Caberlot vines were planted in 1986, the site was planted only to olive trees—mostly dating from the 1860s and of the Frantoio variety.

Today, just 500 ancient trees remain, making the oil even more precious. The olives are quickly and gently pressed, and the oil is bottled unfiltered. As always, this wonderful oil comes in its striking ceramic bottle.

2010 Il Carnasciale Extra Virgin Olive Oil

\$29.95 500 ml

Bettina again made just a few dozen bottles of her precious oil in 2010, and we were indeed fortunate to get some. The color is green/gold, with pure, delicate aromas of green almond, ripe olives and freshly cut grass. The palate is elegant, like its maker, with wonderful balance, length and subtle inner-mouth aromas. Another beauty from a providential site.



Podere Cogno, CASTELLINA IN CHIANTI (Organic)



We discovered Podere Cogno in 2007, when Marco and Giovanna Matteini's pressings were among that year's very best. And in each of the last three years, they've soared to the top, surpassing almost anything else made in Chianti Classico.

Their secret: very old trees, a 550-meter elevation, organic farming, a unique microclimate and a passion for perfection. Their true prize is a grove of 450 old Leccino trees, which produces an oil of astonishing perfume and one that is nearly unique in Tuscany.

As we reported on page one, the Matteinis' 2010 harvest went beautifully until November 19th, by which time they'd brought in two-thirds of their crop. But then the rains came, ruining everything left on the trees. In all, they lost over 15,000 pounds of olives. Fortunately, we visited on November 12th, securing enough for both *olio nuovo* and our spring shipment.

To assure the best quality, Marco and Giovanna changed *frantoios* this year: choosing the superlative Frantoio Pruneti in San Polo in Chianti. This season, Marco put 2000 kilometers on his truck driving back and forth to Pruneti, but he was happy to do it because it made his oil better. That's the way he and Giovanna are.

These are quintessential Tuscan oils—and among the year's best. Don't miss them.

2010 Podere Cogno 'Leccino'\$24.95 500 ml

Once again, the brilliance of Cogno's *olio* Leccino makes us regret that there aren't more old Leccino trees in Tuscany. The color is sublime, and the nose features classic scents of grass and artichoke. The palate is classically rich and powerfully structured, with a rush of spice leading to the long, peppery finish.

2010 Podere Cogno 'Classico'\$22.95 500 ml

A brilliant green color leads to leafy, green tea, thyme and floral aromas. On the palate, the flavors are minty, floral and rich, with some pepperiness and eucalyptus on the long finish. A very flavorful oil featuring intriguing arugula notes throughout.

La Porrone, MONTISI (Organic)



Porrone

Embraced by the beautiful Orcia and Chiana valleys, the medieval village of Montisi is dedicated to grapes, wheat and olives. And some say that the white truffles are the best you'll find outside of Alba.

So when Pino Brussonne found a magical 70 acres here, with century-old olive groves, he gave up his career running fashion houses like Armani and Donna Karan for the life of a gentleman farmer.

Pino's trees are hand-harvested, and the oil is hand-bottled. In fact, each year, he only makes about 50 cases, just enough for himself, a few friends and us. We are truly blessed.

**2010 La Porrone
Extra Virgin Olive Oil**

\$24.95 500 ml

Beautiful green/gold color. The nose is rich and minty, with evocative scents of roasted almond and chlorophyll. The palate starts out featuring sweet olives, and then moves into artichoke and butter. The finish is long and fresh, with moderate pepperiness.



**10% discount on any olive oil
purchase of 12 bottles or more**

**Flat-Rate Ground Shipping
\$14/cs. California - \$22/cs. elsewhere**

COLOGNOLE, RUFINA



Colognole

Scion of a noble Tuscan family, Cesare Coda Nunziante carries on an ancient tradition of growing olives on Monte Giovi, the mountain that towers over Rufina.

For years, his oils have been part of the high-end Laudemia line-up, but in 2006 we met with Cesare to discuss the possibility of selecting his

most intensely green and aromatic pressing for an exclusive Rare Wine Co. bottling. As many will remember, our first collaboration, in '06, was a great success.

But we were unable to match that oil the next three years, and so Colognole has been missing from our annual offerings ever since.

Not to be Denied

Cesare was determined that 2010 would mark a return to the success of 2006. Intent on making an explosively rich oil just for us, his pickers fanned out over Monte Giovi for three days (October 24-26), singling out the trees whose olives had arrived at perfect, still-green maturity. The trees were Cesare's highest, 500-600 meters above the sea. And every drop of oil was reserved for The Rare Wine Co.

The timing was propitious, not only because of the quality of the oil—which is spectacular—but because it started to rain hours after the harvesters finished their work. The rain continued for weeks, making it impossible to produce any further oil of such quality in 2010.

2010 Colognole 'Montegiovi' Extra Virgin Olive Oil

\$26.95 750ml

One of the year's deepest colors is followed by a vibrant bouquet of freshly cut grass. The palate has great drive and length, bursting with pepper, grass, mint and jasmine tea. This is what great Rufina oils are all about. Don't miss it.

LE RAGNAIE, MONTALCINO



Ragnai's oliveto beyond the vines.

Guided by the passionate Riccardo Campinoti, Le Ragnai is an emerging Brunello star. In a region where 95% of the region's young winemakers are taking a modernist approach, Riccardo's role models are the likes of Gianfranco Soldera and Cerbaiona's Diego Molinari. Look for Le Ragnai to become a traditional icon in the years ahead.

Like others in Montalcino, Riccardo also takes care of a few hundred olive trees, which he farms organically and presses and bottles with the same tender care as his wines. But Riccardo's trees offer something special: they are planted between 590 and 620 meters above sea level, virtually at the limit where olive trees grow in Tuscany. Such a high elevation produces oil with the brilliant green, peppery and intensely aromatic profile we love.

We also believe that the oil composition— 50% Leccino, 30% Frantoio and 20% Moraiolo—imparts a unique nuance. If you love Cagno's Leccino oil like we do, you'll have an idea of just how special this oil is.



Riccardo's stunning 2010 oil is a blend of pressings from the first two weeks of November—perfectly timed to avoid the heavy rains of late November. You won't want to miss it.

2010 Le Ragnai EVOO (organic)

\$37.50 1-liter

Emerald green color. Intense aromas of grass and mint, with echoes of artichoke torta. The palate offers rich, powerful flavors of artichoke and pepper which builds towards a long, peppery finish. Classic, high-altitude oil. *One bt. limit.*

10% discount on any olive oil purchase of 12 bottles or more

Flat-Rate Ground Shipping
\$14/cs. California - \$22/cs. elsewhere

Frantoio Franci, MONTENERO D'ORCIO

If there's a superstar in Tuscan oil, it is Giorgio Franci. From childhood, Giorgio was groomed to take over his father's *frantoio* south of Montalcino. But unlike other young Tuscans in a similar position, he gravitated to the world of food and wine that existed outside Italy.

He hung out with elite winemakers and chefs and came to understand the concept of *terroir*. He learned that superior technique can make the difference between mediocre and transcendent, and he acquired the skill to blend and taste like a great winemaker. Since his first harvest in 1995, he has won every award imaginable, firmly establishing himself as Italy's most revered oil maker.



Giorgio Franci and his father, Fernando.

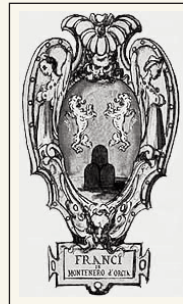
Giorgio enjoyed an outstanding harvest in 2010; in fact, he says he has to go back six years to find such good oils in Montenero. And as in past years, we chose to focus on his two top oils: **Villa Magra** and **Villa Magra Gran Cru**, which are made by isolating the best sites in the family's noble Villa Magra *oliveto*, harvesting them separately and then blending them to create the perfect olive oil.

Giorgio has acquired a cult following that spans the globe, so scarcity is most definitely a factor. But we've been buying his oil since 2005, and once again received a prized allocation in 2010. Quantities are very limited.

2010 Franci "Villa Magra"

\$27.95 500 ml

The hallmark of all Franci oils is their purity and amazing balance. The 2010 Villa Magra offers a beautifully complex nose of toasted pine nuts, artichoke, asparagus and freshly cut grass. Classic Tuscan artichoke repeats on the palate, which is long and lush, with a welcome touch of pepper at the end.



2010 Franci "Villa Magra Gran Cru"

\$39.95 500 ml

An oil worthy of its reputation as Italy's best. It's all about nuance and balance here, the nose featuring vibrant aromas of artichoke and chlorophyll. The palate increases the volume, with cherry blossoms and roasted almonds against a background of viscosity and power. Great persistence on the long, peppery finish.

SANTO STEFANO, GREVE IN CHIANTI



Santo Stefano

Since the Bendinelli family left Florence forty years ago to settle in Greve, they have lovingly tended their ancient olive groves. Today, they continue to do everything by hand: hand pruning and careful cultivation with organic fertilizers. This gives them a beautiful, but tiny, crop of olives each year, which they turn into some of the zone's finest oils.

The last time we offered a Santo Stefano oil was 2006, but we've been yearning for

its return to our annual offer. Fortunately, 2010 was the year. This graceful Greve oil is a seductive blend of 75% Frantoio, 20% Moraiolo and 5% Leccino. Golden green with a rich bouquet of cut grass, there is excellent viscosity and weight and a long, moderately peppery finish. Again, it is one of our most elegant oils. An incredible value in the 750 ml size.

2010 Santo Stefano Extra Virgin Olive Oil (organic)

\$25.95 750 ml

10% discount on any olive oil purchase of 12 bottles or more

Flat-Rate Ground Shipping: \$14/cs. California - \$22/cs. elsewhere



Il Melograno, MERCATALE VAL DI PESA

Like Giorgio Franci, Valeria Ronconi is revered by Italian olive oil aficionados. And she's not resting on her laurels either. Her recent efforts to perfect olive oil extraction technology has won her nearly as much admiration as the quality of her Melograno oils.

A grower for more than 30 years, Signora Ronconi is working closely with agronomists to develop a new system of extraction that promises to revolutionize olive oil making in Tuscany. It is designed to retain structure, antioxidants and vitamins, while virtually eliminating oxygen during pressing and extraction.

Each November, we spend the better part of an afternoon with her, hearing her philosophy and tasting a broad range of oils from which to choose.

With few exceptions, each oil reveals remarkable purity, varietal clarity and balance. She harvests in very small lots, rejecting out of hand anything she doesn't believe will contribute to the final blend.

Incredibly, 2010 was our eleventh harvest working with Signora Ronconi. For this year's selections, we chose two mono-varietal oils, plus one of her magical blends. More than ever, we consider it a privilege to include her extra virgins in our portfolio.

2010 Melograno Frantoio (Nov. 4 & 6)
\$27.95 500 ml

Signora Ronconi's skills always bring out the best in the noble Frantoio variety. And so it is in 2010. The oil's color is bright green, its aromas full of thistle, arugula, pea pods, and bitter greens. The palate is long, bright, earthy, deeply flavored, very elegant and highly focused in the finish.

2010 Melograno Moraiolo (Nov. 11 & 12)
\$27.95 500 ml

The aromatic power of Moraiolo olives asserts itself with a wild nose of jasmine, olives, green almonds and citrus. The palate is delicate for this variety, yet with vivid flavors of artichoke and fresh herbs. The flavors continue to build through to a long, peppery finish.

2010 Melograno Misto (Nov. 5 & 6)
\$27.95 500 ml

Surely an oil where the sum is greater than the parts—the Frantoio and Moraiolo olives merging seamlessly to produce remarkable complexity. The nose features tea and tobacco leaf, with strong notes of arugula. The palate has great volume and a wonderful nuance of white pepper. A compelling oil from a master.

TUSCAN OLIVE OIL & FOOD

One of the many popular misconceptions about olive oil is that it is best used for frying and salad dressings. True, the destiny of cheap oils may be to fry with, and the metier of light oils is to dress a salad. But a rich, aromatic top-rank Tuscan oil has a higher calling.

Great Tuscan olive oils come into their own when drizzled over foods, especially if the foods are warm. While fine Tuscan oils are wonderful for frying or sautéing, pouring a great oil over something warm magnifies its aromas, unleashing all of its power. Perhaps the most classic use for extra virgin olive oil is fettunta—grilled bread, drizzled with oil and served warm. (Before drizzling the oil, it is common to rub the bread with a garlic clove; the bread's warmth melts the garlic.)

Even applying Tuscan oil to cold foods can be a sybaritic experience. Take, for example, something as simple as fresh mozzarella bathed in a rich Tuscan oil, seasoned just with salt and freshly ground pepper. Add some crusty bread to sop up the cheese-infused oil and ... *Mamma mia!*

The Tuscans understand intuitively how to use their oils, and many of their methods are amazingly simple. For example, they drizzle their *olio* over grilled fish or meat; gently-cooked white beans or chick peas; raw vegetables like sliced fennel or baby artichokes; steamed asparagus; bruschetta of fresh tomato, basil and minced garlic; fava beans with pecorino cheese; and any hearty, thick soup.

For more uses of Tuscan extra virgin oil, consult any good Tuscan or Italian cookbook. □

Il Poggione, MONTALCINO

Il Poggione's extra virgin olive oil has been a staple in our kitchen for more than two decades—ever since our first visit in 1988. But this old estate's oil has scaled new heights since a new *frantoio* was built in 2004, to take full advantage of Poggione's wealth of ancient olive trees, rooted in rocky soil near Montalcino.



Oil coming off the press at Il Poggione.

During our visit in November, we chose the estate's first pressing of pure Frantoio olives, harvested between October 22 and 28. At the equivalent of \$15.00 a half liter (\$13.50 with our mixed 12-bottle discount) it is an amazing value.

**2010 Il Poggione
Extra Virgin Olive Oil
\$29.95 1 liter**

Green-gold in color, the nose is an opulent marriage of white flowers, ripe olives and roasted almonds. The palate is rich and buttery, with delicate flavors of mint and tobacco. Long, creamy finish.

Selvapiana, RUFINA

Each year, we eagerly await our visit to Federico Giutini's Selvapiana estate in Rufina. It's an important visit not only because he's one of our favorite producers, but because his oils are often a bellwether of Tuscany's *olio* fortunes.

Fortunately, Mother Nature was kind to Federico this year. There was plenty of rain during the summer to nourish his olives, allowing a slow ripening. In fact, the olives ripened so slowly that it wasn't until his November 11th pressing that we could gauge the year's potential. Early pressings were disappointing: when we visited on Nov. 13th, his Oct. 29th pressing had already lost some color.

His November 11th pressing is a different story: a rich and aromatic Selvapiana oil just made for bruschetta, fettunta and fresh mozzarella!

**2010 Selvapiana Extra Virgin Olive Oil
\$24.95 500 ml**

Emerald green color with hints of gold. The nose is intensely olivey, accented with eucalyptus and fresh herbs. A classic palate follows: the full, powerful flavors building to a long, moderately peppery finish.



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The Great Olive Oils of Tuscany 2010 — ONLINE EDITION

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