

# *The* RARE WINE CO.

## NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO. 326

Spring 2017 Edition: The Great Olive Oils of Tuscany

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## Scarcity & Splendor

### *The Beautiful but Rare 2016 Tuscan Olive Oils*



Call it a hot streak. On the heels of the highly touted 2015 Tuscan olive harvest, the 2016 crop has again produced superlative extra virgin olive oils. Not since our early days of sourcing Tuscan oil in the 1990s—when we were changing the face of fine olive oil importing in America—have we seen back-to-back years of such brilliance.

This year's oils will wow you. In our view—and the view of Tuscany's most revered olive grower, Giorgio Franci—they are at least as fine as the superb 2015s.

But there's a caveat. Unlike 2015, which combined excellent quality with abundance, the 2016s will be painfully scarce. Not only did most of our growers have to reduce our allocation, some growers—like one of our standbys, Selvapiana—had no oil at all to sell us.

But balancing small quantities is the superb quality of the oils, with brilliant color, evocative aromas, and wonderful textures and finishes.

Also on the bright side, we are introducing an important new producer, Pruneti, who, like Franci, is one of the most respected growers in Tuscany. And we reintroduce, after an absence of nearly two decades, Castello di Volpaia. Volpaia is not only an elite wine producer, they were a leader in advancing the cause of estate-grown olive oil back in the 1990s.

### Scoping the Great Stuff

As we do every year, we spent several 14-hour days in early November in Tuscany tasting through scores of oils at numerous estates. This is a ritual we've been loyal to since 1995. It enables us to hand-select the very best pressings, often from single olive groves.

The oils we selected this year promise to be the most exciting available anywhere, and they have now arrived. It is your best chance of the year to stock up on the world's greatest—yet most fairly priced—olive oils.



### Greatness out of Adversity

The 2016 oils may be among the best in years, but that comes at a cost: very small production. Overall, production was down at least 50% at most properties. And at some addresses it was down by 90% or more. The reasons, as always, were difficult conditions during the growing season.

The problems began in the spring, when wet weather seriously affected flowering. Though trees had, on average, half the usual number of buds, the fruit developed well through most of the summer. Lower elevations had their usual problems with olive flies, but in the mountains where our oils originate, fly infestations were either nonexistent or easily controlled.

### Winds of Change

By early October, the olives were for the most part healthy, though sharply reduced in numbers from previous years. In a normal year, the growers would have started harvesting at that point. But very few olives were ready, thanks to a hot August that slowed down their development. So, virtually everyone waited. For some, that was a good call. But others lost their bet, as unexpected October winds blew millions of olives to the ground.

By the time the harvest got into full swing (a good two weeks later than usual), growers were able to bring in olives that were, for the most part, still green. These olives have given us some of the best oils we've seen in recent years, though we're generally getting fewer bottles of each oil.

Perhaps the brightest spot this year was the performance of the Moraiolo olive, which in recent years has lagged behind Frantoio in overall quality. But in 2016, it benefited from the year's slow ripening, and for once produced the very rich, powerful, concentrated oils of which it is capable. You can look forward to some really exciting Moraiolo monocultivar oils this spring.

### Our Guarantee of Quality

Some amazing oils have been made in Tuscany in 2016. Yet, we urge caution. Countless producers hit hard by the year's conditions have had to buy oil from other producers—even from outside their region—so they can have something to sell. Their oil may be perfectly acceptable, but it may not all be theirs. Unless you know and trust your source, you should take claims of greatness with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Even in the most abundant of years very few oils that reach the US are in fact entirely estate-grown. Blending from multiple properties is common, as is the practice of buying outside oil to bolster stocks. But since 1995, The Rare Wine Co. has not only sold only 100% estate-grown oils, but many of our oils are selected from individual groves.

### Locking Up the Best

We learned long ago that there's no substitute for being there and choosing our own oils before the producers make up their blends.

Not only do we get the best; we avoid the homogenizing effect of combining two months' pressings.

With good reason, wine and food writers have consistently praised The Rare Wine Co.'s Tuscan oils as the best, and most fairly-priced, available. And it will never be more true than in the coming months.

On the pages that follow, you will find our selections from this remarkable harvest—each oil capturing the beauty and nobility of Tuscany's ancient olive oil-making tradition. These are very exciting olive oils: buy them with the knowledge that you are buying the year's very best.



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# The Complete Package

Three Tuscan oil assortments to get you through the year.

**A**s our regular olive oil buyers have learned, the best way to assure yourself of phenomenal olive oil throughout the year is to stock up in the spring. You'll want to buy enough to *at least* last you through 2017, making sure that you have a few bottles to spare for gifts to friends.

Most customers can easily go through a case in a year,

since that's just one bottle a month. Others will go through two, three, four or even five dozen bottles over the course of twelve months.

To make your choice easier this year, we're not only offering the oils individually, we've created three packages that allow you to focus on producers and oils you love, while also exploring others you may not know.

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## Set No. 1: 12-bottle Tuscan Explorer Case

1 bt Franci Villa Magra  
1 bt Franci Moraiolo  
3 bts Sagona "Orcaia"  
1 bt Sàgona "Sàgona"  
2 bts Pruneti Moraiolo  
2 bts Vetrice Vasca 36  
2 bts Prunatelli Vasca 39

**\$299.00** *reg. \$343.60* [buy](#)

## Set No. 2: A Feast of Moraiolo

1 bt Franci Moraiolo  
1 bt Pruneti Moraiolo  
1 bt Sàgona Orciaia

**\$89.50** *reg. \$99.85* [buy](#)

*Two sets just* **\$84.50 ea.** [buy](#)

## Set No. 3: Il Poggione

Three 1-liter bottles. Only available as a 3-pack.

**\$98.00** *reg. \$107.85* [buy](#)

To place your order online, click [here](#).



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# The Best of 2016

## Hand-chosen blue chip oils

The following oils, which are available individually, represent the very best of the 2016 Tuscan harvest. Prices are well below what you'll pay for even ordinary oils elsewhere.

- 2016 Franci Villa Magra (Montenero) \$29.95 [read](#) [buy](#)
- 2016 Monte *Vasca* 1 (Rufina) \$25.95 [read](#) [buy](#)
- 2016 Vetrice *Vasca* 36 (Rufina) \$25.95 [read](#) [buy](#)
- 2016 Prunatelli *Vasca* 39 (Rufina) \$25.95 [read](#) [buy](#)
- 2016 Sàgona “Sàgona *Oliveto*” (Pratomagno) \$27.50 [read](#) [buy](#)
- 2016 Carnasciale (Valdarno) \$29.95 [read](#) [buy](#)





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# 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 Tuscany.

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—coincidentally our first year importing Tuscan oil—he's become Italy's most revered oil maker.

Each year, we look forward to our visit with Giorgio, not only to see what wonders have come out of his state-of-the-art Alfa-Laval presses, but we also relish his take on the year's harvest, which is one of the region's best-informed.

As Giorgio's global following continues to grow, consider yourself fortunate to have direct access to some of the finest olive oils on the planet. They are essential purchases.



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### 2016 Franci Villa Magra

**\$29.95 500ml**

Villa Magra is Franci's flagship oil, blended from the best pressings of its best olive groves in the village of Montenero.

When we visit, we taste all of the tanks selected to go into Villa Magra, and on that basis we can anticipate what the final blend will be like. (It's a lot like barrel tasing in a winery; the more barrels you taste, the better the idea you have of the final blend.)

The 2016 Villa Magra is the essence of a great early-harvest Tuscan oil, with excellent color, lots of artichoke and pepper in the nose, a very lively palate, and a reassuringly peppery finish. It also contains a large amount of polyphenols (as measured by milligrams of hydroxytyrosol per kilogram), which is the principal olive oil attribute believed to promote heart health. It is simply glorious.

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### 2016 Franci Villa Magra Grand Cru

**Sold Out**

Villa Magra Grand Cru is arguably Tuscany's most revered olive oil, and the best example of Giorgio Franci's mastery of blending. And in most years, in major oil competitions in Italy and abroad, it is judged the year's finest *olio*.

Villa Magra Grand Cru is the last oil that Giorgio blends. In the weeks following the harvest, he watches about a dozen tanks that he believes have the potential to be part of the year's Grand Cru blend.

This year's final blend is an oil worthy of Villa Magra Grand Cru. It bears Franci's hallmark refinement and balance. Rich in artichoke and menthol, the palate is very concentrated and creamy, building to a long, slightly peppery finish. Tremendous balance. Great oil.

Orders received by noon PST on Friday April 14th  
will ship UPS Ground the week of April 17th.  
(Oil & bean orders ship separately from wine.)

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# Vetrice, Monte & Prunatelli

## *Exhilarating Extra Virgins from a Legendary Rufina Grower*

The Grati Family are the quintessential Tuscan olive growers. They produce wine—in fact, excellent wine—from their Rufina vineyards. But for us, their calling cards are their amazing olive oils, from three different olive groves (*oliveti*): Vetrice, Monte and Prunatelli.

Each site commands a high position overlooking the Rufina valley. This not only promises beneficially cool temperatures, it also provides relative freedom from frost, so that most of their trees are extremely old, having survived the terrible freeze of 1985.

Not only is each Grati oil a fantastic example of extra virgin olive oil at its best. Each also shows why Rufina is considered by many to be the greatest of all Tuscan olive zones, producing oils that are consistently intense, but each with its own highly distinctive character.



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### 2016 Vetrice Vasca 36

**\$25.95 500ml**

The Grati's only began harvesting Vetrice on November 3rd, making it one of the latest starts in years. We chose the oil from Vasca 36, and it was well worth the wait. This is what Tuscan olive oil is all about: a seductively evocative Frantoio-dominated bouquet, a rich but not at all heavy palate, and a long spicy finish.

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### 2016 Monte Vasca 1

**\$25.95 500ml**

A classic Monte: powerfully perfumed with fantastic palate-clinging density and plenty of spice in the finish. Enjoying one of the highest elevations of any *oliveto* in Tuscany, Monte has some of the region's oldest trees. This year's selection was pressed well into November, demonstrating the extent to which many of the best olives came in several weeks later than usual.

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### 2016 Prunatelli Vasca 39

**\$25.95 500ml**

Of all the Grati *oliveti*, Prunatelli enjoys the highest elevation and the oldest trees, having survived the 1985 freeze. And while Monte and Vetrice were picked late this year, Prunatelli was harvested two weeks earlier than normal! This resulted in an oil (from Vasca 39) with Prunatelli's typically sumptuous mouthfeel and classic aromas of artichoke, chive, asparagus and freshly cut grass.



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# Agostina Pieri, Montalcino

Montalcino's reputation as a source of highest-quality olive oil is long-established, particularly among Rare Wine Co. clients who've been buying Il Poggione's wonderful *olio* for more than two decades.

But only occasionally have we added a second Montalcino oil to one of our annual offerings. And we've yet to find another Montalcino producer with whom to establish an ongoing relationship. But with this year's addition of Agostina Pieri to the list, we think we've found one.

Pieri is of course no stranger to Rare Wine Co. clients. We've been importing their fine Brunello since the 2006 vintage. But this past fall was the first time our visit to their cantina coincided with the olive harvest. The planets aligned not only with our being able to taste their freshly pressed oil, but with our also doing so before anyone else did!

We tasted two oils. The first was their general blend, from trees spread around the estate. The oil, which they only began bottling for sale in 2015—rather than in bulk to the local market—was excellent. And we would have put our name on it, had we not tasted what was in Vasca 6.

Vasca 6 was a revelation: from a small stand of 100-year-

old trees on one rocky hillside at about 250 meters above sea level. Eighty percent of the trees are of the rare Olivastra Seggianese variety, the rest Frantoio.

Once we tasted it, we asked for everything they made, because not only was the oil magical, the price was shockingly low for the quality.

If there is a downside to this oil, it's how little they made. You'll want to hurry.

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## 2016 Agostina Pieri Vasca 6

### Sold Out

Every time we've tasted this oil since November, we've been blown away by the quality/price rapport. Tasted head-to-head with virtually any \$40 oil you'll find out in the market, this would take no prisoners. And there's more than just the iridescent color to hypnotize you. The nose is simply evocative, with warm, open scents of freshly cut grass, artichoke, bell pepper, white flowers and grilled almonds. The palate starts out delicately, but then builds to a long, spicy finish. This was one of our staff's favorites in our tastings this year, and a must-buy.



*One of Pieri's ancient trees.*



# A Feast of Moraiolo

## *A Rare Chance to Experience a Noble Olive Variety at its Very Best*

There once was a time when Moraiolo olives were royalty in Tuscany.

It was the 1980s and 1990s. Summer temperatures were cooler than they are today, favoring this early ripening variety. And we were frankly obsessed with this ancient variety, entranced by the power of its oil. And if we ever came across that rarity, a pure Moraiolo oil, there was no holding us back.

But over time, Moraiolo gradually disappeared from our offers. As summer temperatures rose, the Moraiolo olives began turning black in September, before they had a chance to achieve phenolic and aromatic maturity. The days of green, peppery Moraiolo based oils seemed to be a thing of the past.

But then 2016 came along. In a number of areas that year, Moraiolo held off ripening until October, when cooler temperatures allowed the flavors and aromas to develop while the olives were still green. It was something we hadn't seen in perhaps 15 harvests.

In recent years, Frantoio and Leccino based oils have consistently stood out in our tastings as superior to the Moraiolo examples. But not



**\$89.50 3-pack**  
**two sets \$84.50 each**  
*Not available individually.*

in 2016. Time and again, brilliant Moraiolo oils begged to be noticed for the surreal way they combine richness and elegance, with an intense grassy complexity.

We have combined our three favorite Moraiolo-based 2016 oils in a compelling 3-pack. Please be sure to include one or two of these packs among your purchases this year.

**Note:** these three oils are only available as a 3-pack, not individually.

## PRUNETI

*New this year*

Along with Giorgio Franci, the Pruneti brothers are part of the new generation of Tuscan olive specialists who've earned global reputations for their sophisticated techniques and superbly expressive oils. We selected their Moraiolo as our favorite Pruneti oil for 2016. But you can look forward to other outstanding oils from Gionni and Emanuele.

### 2016 Pruneti Moraiolo 500ml

From organically grown Moraiolo at over 300 meters above sea level in San Polo in Chianti. The nose features wheatgrass and chlorophyll, while on the smooth palate, characteristic flavors of radish, complemented by thyme and clarified butter, develop. The softness soon gives way to a classic spicy finish.

### 2016 Sàgona Orciaia 500ml

From an extraordinary hillside *oliveto*, which lost most of its Frantoio in the 1985 freeze. The surviving trees are about 80% Moraiolo, with the rest Leccino and a few Frantoio. The nose features powerfully sweet apple & pear, with hints of wheatgrass and melon. The mouthfeel is soft and silky, with a great balance between fruit and bitterness. Mild-to-moderate heat in the finale.

### 2016 Franci Moraiolo 500ml

This rare oil comes from a single *oliveto* situated near Montalcino on the hillside that they call Poggio all'Oro. Franci has only been working these trees for three years, but they're now excited to have it on a long-term contract. The 2016 oil is extraordinarily complex, with notes of chive, wheatgrass, menthol and bell pepper, while the palate builds a highly aromatic, spicy finish.



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# Frascole, Rufina

**F**rascole was a new addition to last year's Tuscan oil offer. At 350 to 500 meters above sea level, the estate overlooks the town of Dicomano, where the Mugello Valley ends and Rufina's Sieve Valley begins. As a consequence, it lies at the gateway to what is arguably Tuscany's greatest olive *terroir*.

In 1985, the estate's olive trees were all killed to the ground in that year's historic January freeze. But the roots survived, and the trunks regenerated. Yet, it wasn't until the estate was sold to passionate new owners a decade later that the trees received the necessary care to resume serious production.

Now, with more than twenty years having passed, Frascole is again taking its place among the best small oil producers in Rufina.

The downside, however, is just about the smallest oil production of any Tuscan olive estate we know of. In 2015, they produced just 120 liters. In 2016, they made even less, as a result of a severe winter pruning plus a poor flowering and strong October winds.

But the small amount of oil made is excellent. Harvested between November 9th and 11th, each olive yielded less than 13% of its weight in oil, and the blend is classically 60% Frantoio, 20% Moraiolo, and smaller amounts of Leccino and Pendolino.

We bought what we could of Frascole's 2016 oil, and it's not much. Still, we'd suggest you include a bottle in this year's purchases.

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## 2016 Frascole

### Sold Out

This oil features an elegant nose with more subtle hints of grass and celery. The color is a moderate green, with just a hint of yellow at the edge. More intense on the palate than last year, thanks in part to the Moraiolo. The flavors are sumptuous, evoking a *mélange* of Tuscan greens. The finish is long and spicy. Due to scant production, there's a strict one-bottle limit.



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## Tuscan Olive Oil & Food

**O**ne 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 *métier* 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.

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# Il Poggione, Montalcino

**A**mong all of our oil estates, our history with Il Poggione is the longest, dating back to 1988. And since 1995, Il Poggione's fabulous olive oil has been a staple of our annual offerings, offering a price-quality rapport that is nearly unparalleled.

Over the winter of 2016, the estate performed a strict tree pruning, to get more of their very old trees into a classic "vaso" shape, for better air circulation and more even ripening.

This was expected to slash yields, which did happen, with a record low 10% weight of oil to weight of olives.

But the low yields were offset by exceptional quality, particularly in the Cassone, Santo Stefano and Morone groves, where only Frantoio trees can be found.

Il Poggione's extra virgin has always

been a bargain in its one liter bottle, and that continues to be the case. Stock up!

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## 2016 Il Poggione

**\$98.00 3-pack**

*3 one-liter bottles*

Il Poggione's dedication to quality shows up in every oil they release, but we enjoy the special privilege each year of choosing the pressing we believe best expresses their oil-making tradition. In this year's selection, the color is a delicate green with yellow highlights. The nose is enormously complex, with notes of chive, orange blossom, pea pods and freshly cut grass. The palate is quite viscous but with the cut that invigorates Tuscan oils. The finish is long and peppery.



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## All olive oil & bean orders will ship separately from wine orders.

All orders received before Friday April 14th  
will ship the week of April 17th.

Orders received after Friday will ship  
within two business days of receipt.



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# Sàgona, Pratomagno

In 2013, we introduced you to the tiny Sàgona estate. Nestled high in the mountains of Eastern Tuscany—at about 500 meters above sea level—it is roughly the same altitude as the Grati estate in Rufina or Carnasciale.

Sàgona's claim to olive oil fame is its priceless collection of 100-year-old olive trees in the Pratomagno mountains, on the eastern bank of the Arno River. But it is also the site of a project to bring back several varieties of nearly extinct Tuscan beans, including the famed **Fagioli Zolfini**; the rare **Cece Piccino del Pratomagno**, a tiny variety of chick pea; and diminutive black-eyed peas called **Fagioli dall'Ochio Nero**.

## Preserving Ancient Agriculture

For all of this, we have young Daniele Corrotti (pictured below in the center) to thank.

Daniele left behind an academic career in history to preserve the vanishing ancient agriculture that once flourished in the Pratomagno Mountains. Both rugged and eerily picturesque, the Pratomagnos offered the landscapes for many of Leonardo da Vinci's works, including the Mona Lisa. The estate's name, Sàgona, comes from a small river that runs through them.

Daniele has about 2000 olive trees, planted between 450 and 550 meters, from which he makes less than 1000 liters of oil in a year. From the 2016 harvest, we chose two oils.

One is a pure Moraiolo that is featured on page 8. The other is an oil made from old trees surrounding the house at Sàgona. The trees are mostly Moraiolo, with a few Leccino and very few Frantoio.

## A Marriage Made in Heaven

In addition to growing olives, for centuries local farmers have endured the back-breaking work of growing its famed indigenous varieties of beans.

Grown on rocky terraces about 200 meters above the olive trees, the beans were threatened with extinction, but thanks to Daniele and others (working with the University of Florence), they are making a small comeback, with the work still all done by hand.

Reflecting the conditions, each of these beans is far smaller than what we're used to. The Cece are about half the size of our chickpeas. But their small size gives them the incredible texture that makes them perfect in soups and with pasta. The Zolfino beans look like cannellini but, again, they're about half the size. Slow cooked until al dente, and dressed with just olive oil and perhaps rosemary, they are heavenly. And the tiny black-eyed peas could give any Southern U.S. black-eye pea a run for its money.

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### 2016 Sàgona (Sàgona *Oliveto*) Olive Oil \$27.50 500ml

Yellow-green color, with scents of white and black pepper, wheatgrass and asparagus. Real elegance on the palate—smooth with fine density and no hard edges, and mild by Rufina standards. The finish builds subtly but persistently, with just a bit of pepperiness.

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### 2016 Sàgona Fagiolo Zolfino Beans **Sold Out**

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### 2016 Sàgona Cece Piccino del Pratomagno Beans \$18.95 500g bag

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### 2016 Sàgona Fagioli dall'Ochio Nero Beans \$16.95 400g bag

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# Castello di Volpaia

## *An Exciting Return to the Fold*

Situated in the heart of Chianti Classico, and with origins in the 12th century, Castello di Volpaia is among the most ancient of Tuscan estates. It was also one of the very first properties from which we imported estate-grown Tuscan oil, from 1996 to 2000.

At the time, under the famed enologist Maurizio Castelli, Volpaia was pioneering Sinolea, a revolutionary new way to press olives. The results were extraordinary in terms of extraction of pure olive character, but as time passed, it became clear that the remarkable intensity came at a price: the oils lacked staying power, fading within a few months. And so following the 2000 harvest, we chose to stop importing Volpaia's oil.

Since then, Castelli has left (becoming a globe-trotting wine and olive oil maker and consultant), but the estate's passionate owners, Giovannella Stianti and Carlo Mascheroni, remained in place, as they have now for 45 years.

They've achieved renown for Volpaia's wines, and they've returned to more traditional ways of processing their olives. Today, they use a more conventional, yet absolutely state-of-the-art, Alfa-Laval press in Gaiole. And today, the trees are all treated organically (with certification).

The results in 2016 were spectacular. And it's no surprise the math worked out this way. The

estate has some of the highest—and most beautiful—*oliveti* in Chianti Classico, ranging from 400 to 650 meters in altitude. The trees are 40% Frantoio, with the rest Moraiolo, Leccino and Pendolino.

For this year's selection, we chose Vasca 211, which came from two southeast-facing *oliveti* located at about 500 meters above sea level: Camalodi and Coltassala, the latter the source of their great Chianti Classico Riserva. The soils are mainly sand and limestone. The blend is 60% Frantoio, 30% Leccino, 10% Moraiolo.

It is a fabulous Chianti Classico oil, with classic flavor and aromatic definition. And, as far as aging potential, it has the structure to age with the grace of any elite Tuscan oil.

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### 2016 Volpaia **Sold Out**

After a 15-year absence from our list, what a return! This is what great Tuscan olive oil is all about, with an emphatic scent of artichoke, against a tapestry of wheatgrass, asparagus, jasmine and thyme. On the palate, the flavors and texture build relentlessly across the palate, finishing in a second burst of artichoke, with just enough heat to remind you the oil's Chianti Classico origins. Simply brilliant!





# Il Carnasciale, Mercatale Valdarno

**B**ettina Rogosky's Il Carnasciale estate produces Il Caberlot, the legendary Super Tuscan. But this high-altitude 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. And this beautiful oil comes in a striking ceramic bottle, which all by itself separates Carnasciale's extra virgin from every other oil.

And no oil has a more devoted following among our clients. And it requires devotion, since so little is made! In most years,

we can only allocate a bottle or two per client, and the same appears to be the case this year.

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## 2016 Il Carnasciale \$29.95 500ml

One of the most elegant of Tuscan olive oils—as elegant as Bettina—and at the top level of recent Carnasciale releases. The overall impression is luxurious. Scents of dandelion, alfalfa, chive and peppercorns dominate, with a hint of lemon. On the palate a subtle, but cool, mintiness adds to the oil's complexity. The texture is smooth and the finish is long.



To place your order online, [click here](#)

## A Labor of Love

“A top source of extremely fine Tuscan olive oils.” Matt Kramer on The Rare Wine Co.

**O**ur awakening to the glories of great Tuscan oil came in the mid-1980's, when we had dinner one April night at the venerable Montalcino estate, Il Poggione.

They were rightly proud of their extra virgin olive oil, encouraging us to pour it on every dish short of dessert. It was exhilarating. We dipped and drizzled with abandon: over the thick Tuscan soup, on fennel bulbs, over the grilled meat, and on thick slices of toasted bread.

We didn't realize at the time that we were enjoying a precious commodity, as great Tuscan oil can only be made from tiny yields, and by harvesting early. A

tree in the hills near Florence—harvested in November—may yield only a liter of olive oil. Compare this to the commercially farmed trees along Tuscany's coast—harvested much later—which produce 20+ liters of oil per tree.

After our experience at Il Poggione, we were shocked to discover just how difficult it was to find comparable oils in the United States. Even the expensive oils available here didn't come close to matching Il Poggione's. In fact, most of the oils we found were tired, the result of being too old or improperly stored. We were also frustrated by the fact that few labels revealed the olive source or year of

production.

We took matters into our own hands. Beginning in 1995, we began importing our own selections. Each November, we taste on site, before the oils are blended—selecting pressings that offer the most character, structure and balance.

We also have the trade's strictest standards: offering only ruthlessly selected single-estate oils, providing clear and informative labels, shipping under strict temperature control, and offering the new oils as soon as they are pressed and bottled.

If we've become America's best source for Tuscan olive oil, these are the reasons why.

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# Melograno

## Mercatale Val di Pesa

**L**ike Giorgio Franci, Valeria Ronconi is revered by olive oil aficionados. Her efforts to perfect olive oil extraction technology have won her nearly as much admiration as the quality of her Melograno oils.

A grower for more than 30 years, Signora Ronconi has worked closely with agronomists to develop a new system of extraction to retain structure, antioxidants and vitamins, while virtually eliminating oxygen during pressing and extraction. We've been working with Signora Ronconi since 2003. With few exceptions, each of her oils reveals remarkable purity, varietal clarity and balance. But like any olive grower, she is subject to the whims of Mother Nature which, for the second time

in three years have devastated her crop. As in 2014, when she had no oil at all to sell, in 2016 her production was a tiny fraction of usual levels.

Normally when we visit, we are treated to a vast array of brilliant oils, one more interesting than the one before. But this year, she had only two: a blend of Frantoio and a blend of Moraiolo, harvested from October 19th on (her earliest starting date ever).

Make no mistake about it: these classic Ronconi oils have an elegance that sets them apart from nearly everything else made in Italy. We strongly urge you to include a bottle of each in this year's purchases.



**All olive oil & bean orders will ship separately from wine orders.**

**All orders received before Friday April 14th  
will ship the week of April 17th.  
Orders received after Friday will ship  
within two business days of receipt.**

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### 2016 Melograno Frantoio

**Sold Out**

Signora Ronconi's skills always bring out the best in the noble Frantoio variety. The oil's color is bright green/gold, its aromas full of freshly cut grass, artichoke, arugula, alfalfa and bitter greens. The palate unleashes a wave of grass and mint, followed by spicy pepper, finishing on a note of bitter greens on the long finish.

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### 2016 Melograno Moraiolo

**Sold Out**

Signora Ronconi made just a few liters of this superb oil, but it is unquestionably the finest Moraiolo we've tasted from her in many years. Very rich, with remarkable complexity and weight, it recalls for us the great Moraiolo-based oils of the 1990s.



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# 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.

**Microclimates:** 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 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 easily keep for two years, and often even longer. 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.

“Surely the best  
American source for  
fine Tuscan olive oil.”  
Ed Behr, The Art of Eating,  
on The Rare Wine Co.

**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 indi-

cates 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 optimum usability that is greater than for other oils—and they can often age for several years when well stored. In estimating ageability, look to variables such as pepperiness, green color and depth of flavor in the young oil. Generally, the more intense these characteristics, the better the prospects for extended aging.

**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.