

The RARE WINE CO.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO. 329

Spring 2020 Edition: The Great Olive Oils of Tuscany

PUBLISHED SINCE 1992



The Great 2019 Tuscan Olive Oils

For centuries, the hills of Tuscany have produced arguably the world's most expressive olive oils. And, for the last quarter last century, The Rare Wine Co. has earned a devoted following for the oils we select on the ground in Tuscany during each harvest.

Since our first harvest in 1995, we haven't just guaranteed our clients single-estate oils. We've also focused on oils from individual groves, varieties and pressings. And we were very likely the first American oil importers to ship exclusively in temperature-controlled containers, as we do our wines.

With 26 harvests now under our belt—and our palates guided by our even greater experience with wine—we have a perspective other oil importers don't. Finally, we have exclusive, decades-long relationships with some of the region's elite olive growers, insuring that we secure the very best oils.

Each spring, we're privileged to share the results of our work during the previous fall's harvest. We urge you to join countless RWC clients in stocking your pantry for the coming year.



Particularly Precious in 2019: At left, Melograno's output in a normal year, 2015. At right, their production in 2019.

Beauty from Scarcity

Quintessential Oils from a Year of Climatic Challenges

You may recall that in 2018, the U.S. media were full of stories about Tuscany's disastrous olive harvest. Poor weather had caused supply shortages unprecedented in decades.

If you didn't see such headlines in 2019, it was only because Tuscan oil shortages were no longer news. In fact, the shortages in 2019 were nearly as bad.

For one thing, many trees of the predominant Frantoio variety still hadn't recovered from the 2018 spring freeze. They produced no fruit. And for another, the 2019 season began with a cold and rainy spring, which resulted in poor fruit set of the remaining varieties.

In June, the weather quickly heated up, with temperature spikes well above 100 degrees Fahrenheit and strong winds that caused olives to be stripped from the trees. This alone resulted in the loss of up to half the crop at many estates.

Then, a warm, humid August encouraged an explosion of olive fly (*mosca*) populations in some areas. Flies that used to stay in the lower elevations were now seen in some higher-elevation olive groves, especially in the Montalcino area.

Finally, the fall was unseasonably warm and heavy rains began the first week of November. Growers who waited until November were washed out. Those who picked before these rains were able to make more vibrant, intense and focused oils with greater clarity and cut.

Greatness at Your Fingertips

Once again, we can offer our own special selections from iconic producers like Rufina's Grati family, Valeria Ronconi at Melograno, Federico Giuntini at Selvapiana, Gianni and Paolo Pruneti and, of course, the revered Giorgio Franci. Our lineup is literally a "who's who" of top Tuscan oil producers.

We've brought 2019's high spots together in two power-packed 6-bottle assortments. The first set focuses on Rufina, just to the east of Florence, whose oils are deservedly famed for the way they combine elegance with intensity. The other assortment brings together iconic oils from other parts of Tuscany, including Chianti Classico, Montenero and Pratomagno.

Each 6-bottle assortment has been discounted by more than 10% from our already low prices. Consequently, with these two assortments, you'll end up paying considerably less per bottle than you would for lesser-quality oil from other sources. We're able to do this because we buy directly from the growers and in substantial volumes.

Our ever-popular **Mother Lode** will save you even more: a whopping 23% off our already low individual bottle prices.

As always, each oil was shipped by temperature-controlled container, having been personally selected by us on the ground in Tuscany in November, during a series of 14-hour days of tasting. This is a ritual we've been loyal to since 1995.

Summary of this Year's Offers



6-bottle Rufina Assortment

See Page 4 for details.

\$149.95

reg. \$170.70 [buy](#)



6-bottle Chianti & Beyond Assortment

See Page 5 for details.

\$157.50

reg. \$178.70 [buy](#)

Producers & Oils Offered Individually



Grati 3-Pack

One bottle each of Monte, Prunatielli & Vetrice. See individual oil descriptions on Page 4.

\$79.95 3-pack [buy](#)



Franci Grand Cru

See Page 7 for details.

\$39.95 bt. [buy](#)



Agostina Pieri 3-Pack

Three one-liter bottles
See Page 8 for details.

\$99.00 3-pack [buy](#)

Carnasciale

See Page 6 for details.

\$39.95 bt. [buy](#)



And for passionate olive oil lovers ...

The Mother Lode

Save **23%** off our low individual bottle prices.

[buy](#)



**One x 6-btl Rufina Assortment • One x 6-btl Chianti Classico & Beyond Assortment
Three btls each of Franci Grand Cru & Carnasciale • One Agostina Pieri 3-pack
Two bonus btls each of Pruneti Moraiolo, Pruneti Frantoio & Melograno
Two Grati 3-packs • Three bonus btls of Franci Villa Magra • A grand total of **36** btls.**

Mother Lode Price: \$879.00 • If bought individually: \$1,142.20

The Rufina Assortment

Terroir says it all in this 6-bottle set of Rufina gems:



1. Selvapiana Vasca #2

A frigid May forced this legendary property to set fires for two nights to prevent frost. This delayed flowering, contributing to 40-50% less oil. Despite a tiny 12% yield, we were able to create a blend of the two best lots in the cellar, harvested the last week of October. The oil has a vibrant nose of freshly cut grass with hints of menthol and black pepper. Soft, round and expansive on the palate, where tastes of oregano, olives and leafy greens resonate. A moderately spicy finish.



4. Frascole “Ventaio”

At Frascole, a cold May was followed by a warm June, resulting in flowering so uneven that only one of the estate’s olive groves (Ventaio) could be harvested. Our oil was picked on October 25th, consisting of 60% Frantoio, 20% Moraiolo and the rest Leccino and Pendolino. Fresh hay, dried lavender and carnation in the nose. The palate follows suit, with notes of spring flowers, parsley and turnips. The texture is full and soft with the delicate flavors of a fruit-driven oil. The finish exudes minerality, with hints of black pepper.



2. Vetrice Vasca #3A

Thanks to its high altitude, Vetrice’s Frantoio trees thrived in 2019—having escaped serious damage from the 2018 freeze. This year’s Vetrice oil (Vasca 3A) was harvested on October 30th, from a typically large percentage of Frantoio olives. The oil’s nose is delicate and mineral, with lemongrass and citrus zest developing with time. The palate has hints of chlorophyll and meyer lemon, with delicate olive and saline notes. There’s moderate white-pepper heat on the finish.



5. Prunatelli

Perhaps our most venerable Extra Virgin, Prunatelli bears a striking new label this year. The Prunatelli oil was born in 1995 when we asked Gianfranco Grati to bottle it separately from his other crus. Of all the Grati *oliveti*, Prunatelli enjoys the highest elevation and the oldest trees, having survived the great 1985 freeze. The 2019 edition was harvested on October 28th and boasts ripe olive flavors, with complex aromas of wild herbs. On the palate, the flavors are bold and saline, with the classic Tuscan bitterness of arugala in the long, spicy finish.



3. Colognole “Mons Iovis” Vasca #2

Colognole dates from the late 1800s, when it was a hunting retreat for wealthy Florentines. At the property’s extraordinary altitude—700 meters above sea level—there were no problems with olive flies. And the Frantoio trees survived the 2018 frost. Yet, 2019’s cold spring, warm summer and strong winds reduced production by 75%. Despite the difficult year, we were able to lay claim to a delicately floral Colognole oil harvested on October 30th, less than 48 hours before the rains arrived.



6. Monte Vasca #3

The Monte *oliveto* is perched high on the hill-sides overlooking the town of Pontassieve. Our 2019 Monte oil was chosen from Vasca 3, which was harvested on October 31st, just in time to beat the disastrous rains. This oil is green-gold in color with a chartreuse edge. The nose offers herbal notes and grassy, floral overtones. The palate has subtle artichoke and green notes, and good density. It ends with a classically spicy Rufina finish.

The Chianti & Beyond Assortment

What you'll find in this 6-bottle set:

1. Melograno



The Grande Dame of Tuscan Olive Oil, Signora Ronconi has been growing olives in Castellina in Chianti for over 50 years. She's seen it all, and so was able to adapt easily when her Frantoio trees didn't produce. And so she created an oil based on Leccio del Corno, a rare variety developed in the 1920's. The oil yield was tiny (less than 10% of the olive weight!), yet it offers a beautiful nose of lemon oil, leather, verbena and Asian spice. On the palate the oil is delicate, with subtle herb flavors and bitterness that build. The finish is refined, balanced and elegant.

2. Pruneti Frantoio



From their estate in San Polo in Chianti, the Pruneti brothers make exceptional, mono-cultivar oils from their organically farmed olives. They are careful to harvest at the onset of ripening, to maintain vibrancy in the bouquet and freshness on the palate. This pure Frantoio oil was harvested on October 22nd. It has a beautiful green color with a nose of artichoke, black pepper and spearmint. More flavors emerge on the palate, including chopped mint, chive, watercress and white pepper. The long finish is classically spicy.

3. Pruneti Moraiolo



Like their single-varietal Frantoio oil, Pruneti's pure Moraiolo comes from high-elevation trees (400m above sea level). The Moraiolo was harvested slightly earlier, on October 20th. The color is chartreuse with gold highlights, and the bouquet is a mix of wheatgrass, artichoke and green apple, with sage, radish and floral overtones. On the palate, this oil is round and saline, with plenty of spice in the long finish.

4. Sàgona Leccino



Early in the growing season, Daniele Corrotti knew his Frantoio trees wouldn't yield fruit. So, he shifted his attention to the Leccino trees in his Casamono *oliveto*. The result is a gorgeous oil, harvested on October 25th, whose dark green color hints at its intensity. The nose is dark and spicy with aromas of finely chopped herbs. On the cool, viscous palate, there are chervil, tarragon and a hint of cinnamon. The underlying complexity builds on the long finish.

5. Sàgona



Daniele's Sàgona *oliveto* is very rocky and terraced, endowing its oil with higher acidity and polyphenols. In 2019, Daniele harvested the olives at just the right time, between October 25th and 27th. The oil is a low-yield blend of 70% Moraiolo and 30% Leccino. Green with a golden hue, its bouquet is intense, with notes of artichoke and lime zest, with a floral edge. This oil is bold and vibrant, yet more delicate than the Leccino. Pungent arugula and spice come through on the finish.

6. Franci Villa Magra "Riserva di Famiglia"



In Montenero, on the road south towards Montalcino, Franci avoided the flowering problems seen farther north in Chianti Classico and Rufina. Yet, its yields were still down due to the June winds and residual damage to its Frantoio trees. As always, we are able to taste a wide range of Villa Magra *vascas*, settling on #11/13, harvested between October 15th and 25th. A blend of 60% Frantoio with some Moraiolo and Leccino, it offers lime zest and artichoke scents on the nose. On the palate, this elegant oil has broad, grassy flavors, with a classic bitter accent. The flavors continue to unfold on the long spicy finish.

Great Oils Available Individually

Carnasciale

Carnasciale's proprietors, Bettina and Moritz Rogosky, not only produce Il Caberlot, the legendary Super Tuscan. They also make one of the region's iconic extra virgin olive oils, which is instantly recognizable by its ceramic bottle.

The tiny amount of beautifully crafted oil comes from the 500 trees that have survived on the property since the 1860s. This was more than a century before the first Caberlot vines were planted here!

Most of the surviving trees are of the Frantoio variety. Unfortunately, those trees produced very little fruit in 2019. Also this high-altitude site overlooking the Arno River suffered poor weather at flowering.

As a result the estate made only half as much

oil as usual. So, please understand if we must limit quantities.

Il Carnasciale

\$39.95 500ml [buy](#)

Our 2019 Carnasciale oil was harvested on October 29th, just before the rains. The oil yield was low—a ratio of only 12% oil to weight of the olives—and the varietal makeup was more Moraiolo than usual. The color is gold with green highlights, and the nose exudes alfalfa, hay and dried thyme. With distinctive flavors of root vegetables, this is a rich, earthy oil that can stand up to flavorful foods. The finish is quite peppery and persistent.



Olive oil orders ship separately from wine orders.

If we receive your order by noon PDT, Friday March 27th, we will do our best to ship it the week of March 30th.

Franci Grand Cru

Montenero d'Orcio

Villa Magra Grand Cru is the crowning achievement of Tuscany's most revered olive grower, Giorgio Franci.

Year after year, in major oil competitions in Italy and abroad, this majestic Extra Virgin sweeps the field.

This is also the last oil Giorgio blends. In the weeks following the harvest, he watches about a dozen tanks he believes have the potential to become a component.

Grand Cru is the pinnacle of this year's offer, just as it has been in the previous 15+ years. As always, it is rich and full-flavored, but with incredible purity and balance. It has the green artichoke and pepper that is typical of Franci's oils, and it has the depth and concentration that can only come from old Frantoio trees. The palate wows with its size and complexity.

We suspect that this year's oil judgments will again choose the 2019 Grand Cru as Italy's top oil—just as they always have in the past.

Giorgio Franci

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 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 grows, consider yourself fortunate to have direct access to his greatest oil.

**Franci Villa Magra
Grand Cru**
\$39.95 500ml

Two Bottle Limit.

[buy](#)

The 2019 Grand Cru bears the hallmark grace we associate with Giorgio's oils. Harvested between October 22 and 25, this 100% Frantoio oil stands out with its beautiful texture and depth of flavor. The nose is classic Frantoio, with chlorophyll, artichoke and freshly cut grass. Dense and mouth filling, the complexity of flavors grows on the long, peppery finish. A deservedly sought-after Extra Virgin olive oil.



Our Montalcino Pick of the Year

Three Liters of Agostina Pieri for just \$99!

For more than two decades, Il Poggione's Extra Virgin in 1-liter bottles has been one of our signature oils. And year in, year out, this Montalcino oil has ranked among the great values in Tuscan olive oil.

But growing conditions were particularly difficult at this venerable estate in 2019, and none of the year's oils were up to the property's usual lofty standards.

Fortunately, another Montalcino estate came through for us big-time. That estate is Agostina Pieri, whose Brunellos have graced our lists since 2006.

Despite owning trees more than a century old, Pieri is a relatively new olive oil producer, having harvested their first olives in 2015. We happened to visit the estate during the 2017 olive harvest and fell in love with a small tank of oil they had just pressed. We had the oil put into half-liter bottles, and it proved to be one of the year's big surprises for RWC clients.

We visited Pieri again early this past November and found an even more exciting oil. Fortunately, Pieri agreed to put it in liter bottles, which we're pleased to offer for just

\$99 for three 1-liter bottles.

In spite of their relative newness as an *olivicoltore*, Pieri is already showing remarkable mastery of their craft. This year's pressing is a seamless marriage of olives from two zones—half from their *oliveti* in La Grossola and the other half from the olive trees adjacent to their Brunello vineyards.

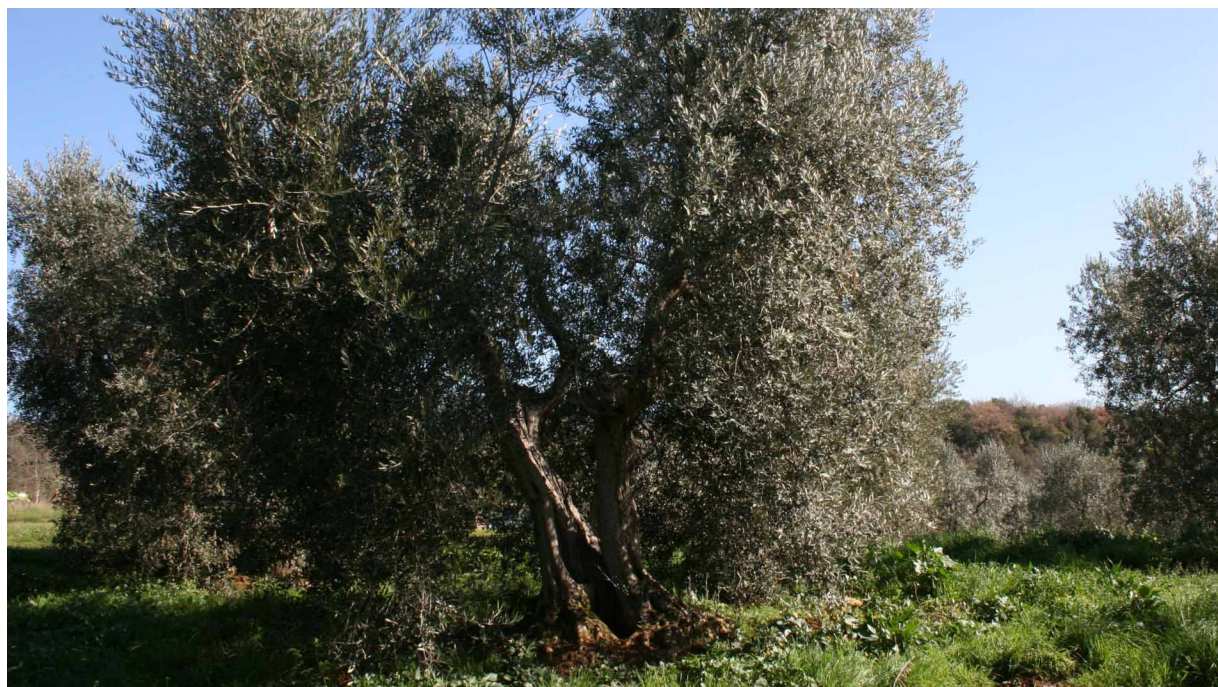
Make no mistake about it: despite the bargain price, this oil is one of the standouts for 2019.

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

2019 Agostina Pieri

\$99.00 3 one-liter bottles [buy](#)

We're blown away by the quality/price rapport of this oil! It would hold its own with just about any other Tuscan oil on the market. The nose offers scents of arugula, black pepper, warm earth and freshly cut grass. The palate is impressively well-balanced, with a creamy, but dense, texture that builds to a long, spicy finish. An outstanding example of a Montalcino oil.



One of Pieri's ancient trees.



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 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.



Olive oil orders ship separately from wine orders.

**If we receive your order by noon PDT, Friday March 27th,
we will do our best to ship it the week of March 30th.**

We are not responsible for typographical errors. All items and prices subject to availability. Request a copy of our terms of sale or read them at www.rarewineco.com. © 2020 The Rare Wine Co.

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 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 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.