

The RARE WINE Co.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO. 330

Spring 2021 Edition: The Great Olive Oils of Tuscany

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The Great 2020 Tuscan Olive Oils

For the past quarter century, The Rare Wine Co. has earned a devoted following for the Tuscan olive oils bottled for us each fall. 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 (*oliveti*), 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, ensuring 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. 🍷

A Glimpse of the Past

The best 2020 oils remind us of the glory years of the 1990s.

As we wrote in our December Olio Nuovo offer, last fall's Tuscan olive oil harvest may have been, overall, the finest since the late 1990s. Only two years out of the past twenty (2008 and 2015) belong in the same conversation.

Having spent the last four months tasting and re-tasting the oils, our original judgment stands: these oils have few rivals in the past two decades. And as we promised in December, we've done our usual thorough work in tasting through dozens of oils in search of the year's best. And that's what this offer represents.

As usual, you will have the chance to acquire a number of iconic oils on their own. But since most clients like to buy a range of oils, representing different producers, styles and olive varieties, we've again created some compelling assortments, each at a discounted price.

A Stellar Lineup

First up is our **Rufina Assortment**, which gathers together the finest pressings of Rufina's leading olive estates. Sourced from steep mountainside *oliveti* in Rufina's Pontassieve Valley east of Florence, Rufina oils are typified by their intense colors, spiciness and flavors.

Then there's the wonderful **Chianti and Beyond Assortment**. Through six sensational oils, it affords the opportunity to explore the four corners of Tuscan olive-growing, from Bolgheri in the west to the Pratomagno Mountains in the east—and from Chianti Classico in the north to Montalcino and Montenero d'Orcia in the south.

Drilling Down

These broader assortments are followed by a series of smaller sets, each with a different mission.

Two assortments offer compelling introductions to the major olive varieties. In the first set, the **Melograno 2-Pack**, you can see how two classic varieties—Frantoio and Moraiolo—can influence oil character, even on the same estate.

In the second set, you can get to know the wonderful **Leccino** olive, as grown and pressed by two superb growers

with very different *terroirs*. Though Leccino is one of the great olive varieties of Tuscany, it is grown in such small quantities that it is rarely pressed on its own.

Finally, two sets are all about *terroir*. The first is the classic **Grati 3-Pack**, which features oils from three different *oliveti* owned by the Grati family on the same Pontassieve mountainside in the Rufina zone.

Also from Rufina, the two oils in the **Frascole Terroir Set** come from different elevations on the Frascole property, each with its own distinctive character. These are available as a 4-pack.

Finally, there is the **Motherlode**, for the truly passionate olive oil lover—36 bottles representing every oil in the offer at a very special price.

Our Guarantee of Quality & Authenticity

Every oil in this year's offer has been vetted to represent the best of the 2020 Tuscan harvest. We chose carefully, and we think we chose well.

Few American oil merchants can honestly make the claim that their oils are not only 100% estate-grown, they have been personally selected by us, often from individual olive groves.

In contrast, many other merchants and importers don't actually have the chance to taste their oils before buying—often despite claims to the contrary. Instead they accept whatever the producers send them.

At best, these are often a blend of *all* the lots harvested over a two- to three-month period, whether they be good or bad. And at worst, the blend will include oil bought from non-estate sources. Such oils will lack both personality and longevity, and they may even be flawed.

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.

On the pages that follow, you will find our selections. Each oil captures the beauty and nobility of Tuscany's ancient olive oil-making tradition in a unique year. These are very exciting olive oils: buy them with the knowledge that you are buying the year's very best.

All bottles are 500ml unless otherwise noted. 🍷



A Providential Harvest

Why the 2020 oils rise above most other oils of recent years.

When we launched the Tuscan olive oil part of our business in 1995, the timing couldn't have been better. The cool Tuscan summers of the mid-'90s were perfect for intensely green, awesomely aromatic oil. It was easy, year after year, to deliver that style of oil to our customers.

But as the weather has changed, and the Tuscan summers have gotten hotter and drier, it's been a much greater challenge for us to find oils of such quality. Thanks to our relationships in the region, we have continued to bring our customers the finest—and the most fairly priced—range of Tuscan oils in America.

But still, we've been waiting for a special year like 2020 when the oils start to remind us of those great oils of the 1990s. But while the 2020 oils have many of the same characteristics, the growing conditions were quite different and perhaps unprecedented in *any* decade.

The summer in 2020 reminded many olive farmers of 2016. It was hot and dry with very little rain in July and August. As a result, the olives did not develop much pulp, and the pits made up a larger percentage of the olive than in an average year. This condition naturally protected the olives from the flies, since they were less succulent and juicy.

In 2020, the trees also produced abundant fruit, and with so many olives per tree, more time was needed to ripen, extending the growing season and giving the olives extra time to develop aromatics.

A Providential Fall

But missing in other years were conditions in the fall that made it possible to harvest green olives for most of October and a good part of November.

Well-timed September rains helped rejuvenate the trees, and the relatively humid fall allowed the olive trees to ripen their fruit while the olives remained green. Additionally, October temperatures were cooler than in recent years, which further helped the olives develop their phenols slowly, without degradation or premature ripening of the pulp.

The weather was perfect during the harvest period from mid-October through the first half of November, with cool temperatures and only limited rain. The harvest continued without problems, and the olives remained green until almost the end of the season. These were perfect conditions for ripe olives with fully developed aromatics, bright acidity, and serious weight—all the hallmarks of an extraordinary olive oil harvest.

The result was a large number of olives, but each containing very little oil. Most oils came in at about 10% of the weight of the olives, which is the lowest we've seen in 26 years of buying and selecting Tuscan oil. But to compensate for the small production, the oils are generally very concentrated in extract and flavor. 🍷

Summary of this Year's Offers



6-bottle Rufina Assortment

See Page 5 for details.

\$159.95

reg. \$177.25 [buy](#)



6-bottle Chianti & Beyond Assortment

See Page 6 for details.

\$157.50

reg. \$174.80 [buy](#)

Individual Oils

2020 Selvapiana \$29.95 500ml btl [buy](#)

See Page 11 for details.

2020 Carnasciale \$39.95 500ml btl [buy](#)

See Page 11 for details.

2020 Franci Grand Cru \$39.95 500ml btl [buy](#)

See Page 7 for details.

2020 Il Poggione \$105 3-Pack [buy](#)

Three full liter bottles. See Page 12 for details.

More Special Sets

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

500ml btl of Monte, Prunatelli & Vetrice. Reg. \$89.85.

See Page 5 for individual oil descriptions.

Frascole Terroirs \$99.95 4-pack [buy](#)

Passatoio & Ventaio. Reg. \$119.80. See Page 8 for

Melograno Mono-Varietal \$59.95 2-pack [buy](#)

Frantoio & Moraiolo. Reg. \$70. See Page 10 for details.

Mono-Varietal Leccino \$59.95 2-pack [buy](#)

Pruneti & Sàgona. Reg. \$65. See Page 9 for details.

And for passionate olive oil lovers ...

The Mother Lode

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

[buy](#)



One x 6-btl Rufina Assortment • One x 6-btl Chianti Classico & Beyond Assortment

Two btl each of Franci Grand Cru & Carnasciale • One Il Poggione 3-pack

One Leccino set • Two bonus btl each of Pruneti Leccino, Selvapiana & Colognole

One Grati 3-pack • One Frascole set • One Melograno set • A grand total of **36 bts.**

Mother Lode Price: \$895.00 • If bought individually: \$1,156.35

The Rufina Assortment

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

\$159.95 six-btl assortment (500ml) [buy](#)



1. Prunatelli Vasca #5B

Prunatelli's olives were first pressed and bottled on their own in 1995, when we asked Gianfranco Grati to do that for us. Of all the Grati *oliveti*, Prunatelli enjoys the highest elevation and the oldest trees, having survived the great 1985 freeze. And in 2020, we chose a relatively late harvest, between 11/6 and 11/14. The result is an unusually concentrated and deeply colored oil. The bouquet has exotic aromas of tobacco, fresh olives and anise. The powerful palate ends with a long and spicy finish. *Also available in the Grati Terroirs pack on page 4.*



4. Frascaio

"Passatoio" Orcio 5

Passatoio takes its name from the path that joins two small hillside *oliveti* at a 500-meter elevation. The oil in vasca 5 was harvested between 11/8 and 11/11 and is a delicate green with sweet mint and almond blossom on the nose. The attack is sweet with citrus and grassy notes. Its pretty, elegant flavors and pepperiness build with time.



5. Monte Vasca #6/A

The Monte *oliveto* is perched high on the hillsides overlooking the town of Pontassieve. Our 2020 Monte oil was chosen from Vasca 6/A, which was harvested between 10/24 and 11/4. Medium green with an olive hue. Fresh alfalfa, black pepper and a hint of menthol on the nose. Bitter arugula and more pepper on the palate. The finish builds with a hot, chili pepper intensity. *Also available in the Grati Terroirs pack on page 4.*



2. Vetrice Vasca #5A

This legendary olive grove, planted primarily to Frantoio trees, produced a predictably beautiful oil in 2020, harvested between 10/28 and 11/4. The color is a medium green with yellow hues. The nose is expressive of lemon oil, white pepper and thyme. The full-bodied features of sweet, green olive notes are followed by a classically spicy, slow-building finish. *Also available in the Grati Terroirs pack on page 4.*



3. Selvapiana

The harvest at this venerable Rufina estate stretched out nearly two months. The last olives to go into our oil were picked in mid-November, and the result is one of the most impressive Selvapiana oils in years. The color is a luminescent pale green, and the aromas are classically of menthol, black pepper and artichoke. The palate is quite concentrated and spicy, with plenty of pepper in the long finish.



6. Colognole "Mons Iovis"

Colognole dates from the late 1800s, when it was a hunting retreat for wealthy Florentines. Owner Cesare Nunziante recounts the amazing uniformity of this year's olives, perched on the Ancona hillsides overlooking the town of Pontassieve. Our 2020 selection has a lovely light green color with lime zest, thyme and black licorice notes in the bouquet. On the palate, it is full-bodied and warm with sweet mint and balanced bitterness. The warm finish reflects the herbal/pepper notes on the palate.

The Chianti & Beyond Assortment

Explore the Great Olive-Growing Areas of Tuscany

\$157.50 *six-btl assortment (500ml)* [buy](#)



1. Fonte di Foiano “1979” BOLGHERI

New this year! Thanks to its mild coastal climate, Fonte di Foiano boasts a large number of 100-year-old trees, which are harvested by hand and variety. This oil was a wonderful new discovery this year—harvested and pressed very early, between 10/5 and 10/10. It’s a special bottling named for the year of the estate’s founding. Mostly Frantoio, “1979” has intense color. In the nose, you’ll find classic Frantoio aromas of menthol, but also subtle notes of tobacco, truffle and sous bois. On the palate, the oil has a strong attack, with green artichoke flavors, and a persistent finish.



2. Agostina Pieri MONTALCINO

This fine Brunello producer also makes outstanding olive oil. This year’s RWC bottling was harvested between 10/29 and 11/4 and is a blend of Frantoio, Moraiolo & Olivastra Seggionese from the Piancornello subzone. Its bouquet is fresh and elegant with orange blossom, white truffle and rose notes. On the palate, green olive fruit flavors balance the warm, spicy bitterness in the finish.

3. Pruneti Moraiolo CHIANTI CLASSICO

Pruneti is a noted specialist in single-varietal oils, and their Moraiolo comes from trees a lofty 400 meters above sea level. An early-ripening variety, this year’s Moraiolo was picked between 10/19 and 10/25. It is medium green in color, with spicebox notes of anise and coriander accented by bitter chicory. On the palate, it is full and round with flavor intensity that balances its bold personality.



4. Sàgona “Casellina” PRATOMAGNO

This year’s special blend from Sàgona is 70% Moraiolo, 15% Frantoio & 15% Leccino, largely from the Sàgona *oliveto*. Proprietor Daniele Corrotti says he’s never seen a harvest where the olives remained so green. The result is an oil with very green color and a fresh and minty bouquet accented by citrus zest. On the palate, the oil is lithe and buoyant but with plenty of structure, and a very long finish punctuated by a note of spicy red pepper.



5. Franci Villa Magra MONTENERO D’ORCIA

Naturally, the great Giorgio Franci made outstanding oils in 2020. We could have chosen from a number of Villa Magra pressings and ultimately settled on Vasca 13, harvested early, between 10/10 and 10/26. Brilliantly green, with chartreuse hues, this oil features an elegantly floral bouquet, followed by flavors of green artichoke and sea salt on the palate. The intensity builds across the mouth, and the finish showcases classically spicy-bitter flavors of arugula.



6. Volpaia CHIANTI CLASSICO

Radda’s noble Castello di Volpaia has produced some of our favorite oils over the years, and they’ve done it again in 2020. This year, the estate produced tiny amounts of a stunning, intensely green oil from a blend of 50% Frantoio, 25% Leccino, 20% Pendolino and 5% Correggiola. The beguiling bouquet of sage, mint and thyme leads into flavors of bitter artichoke, chicory and arugula with hot pepper in the finish. Classic in every respect.

Franci Grand Cru

The King of Tuscan Oils

If there's a superstar in Tuscan oil, it is Giorgio Franci. And his greatest oil, year in and year out, is the iconic **Villa Magra Grand Cru**.

It 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 worthy of being part of the Villa Magra Grand Cru legacy. It bears Franci's hallmark refinement and balance. With classic scents of artichoke and menthol, the nose leads to a creamy, concentrated

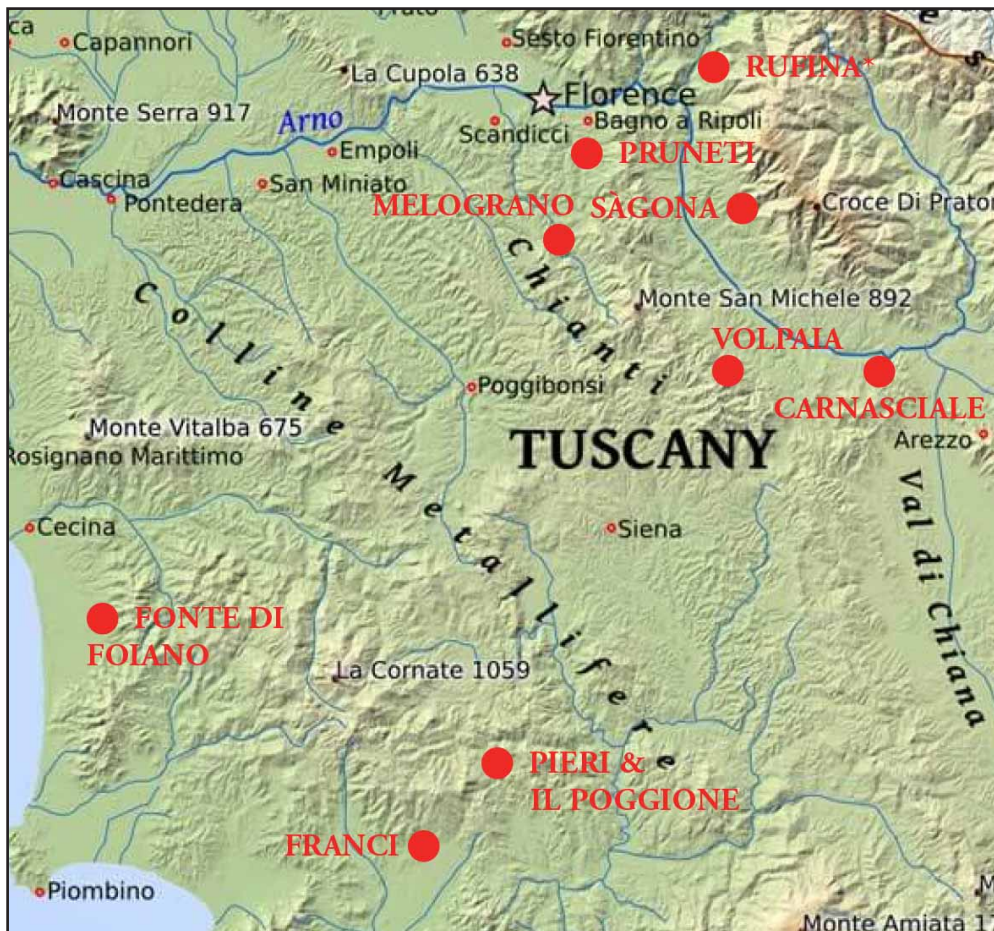
palate and a long finish. One of the great oils of the world.

2020 Villa Magra Grand Cru

\$39.95 500ml [buy](#)

Harvested 10/29 to 11/3

As always, an oil of great elegance in a hand-numbered bottle. This year's Grand Cru is 100% Frantoio from the estate's oldest trees. It boasts an expressive bouquet bursting with mint and floral notes. The smooth, seamless, herbal-nuanced palate finishes impressively long, and subtle mint echoes in the aftertaste.



Sources of the 2020 Oils

**Rufina Estates: Selvapiana, Vetrice, Monte, Prunatelli, Frascole, Colognole*

The Frascale Terroir Set

Highly Individual Oils from Two Superb Oliveti

Frascole joined our oil portfolio with the 2015 harvest. On our first visit to the estate that year, we were impressed not only by Frascale's oil, but by the Lippi family who owns this historic estate.

When we tasted the 2020 Frascale oils, we were seduced by three different pressings, two from their Passatoio *oliveto* and one from Ventaio. Each pressing was tiny—between 250 and 300 liters.

Rather than blend them into a single oil, we asked the family to bottle the three oils separately for us. Two are in this *terroir* set: **Passatoio Orcio #6** and **Ventaio**.

The third pressing, **Passatoio Orcio #5**, is available in the Rufina set on page 5.

The Frascale Terroirs presents a wonderful opportunity to experience the difference that *terroir* can make in the context of a fabulous year.

The Setting

Frascole is tucked away in the hills above the town of Dicomano, nearly 15 kilometers north of the other Rufina oil estates. These hills have been farmed for millennia. The ancient Etruscans valued them for both strategic and agricultural purposes. The Romans then arrived 300 years later, building large, mixed-agriculture estates with grapes, olives and field crops. As for the Frascale estate, some buildings have survived from at least the Middle Ages.

Frascole has been in the Lippi family for three generations, and they continue to nurture the property's history of mixed agriculture, still farming crops like fava beans, barley and oats, whose pollination is believed to be crucial to making great organic olive oil. Wildlife abounds in this idyllic spot, and wild boar are routinely seen grazing on grapes and olives left after the harvest. Their olive trees are a classic mix of 65% Frantoio, 20% Moraiolo, 10% Leccino and 5% Pendolino.

The Oliveti & Their Oils

Passatoio takes its name from the path that joins two small hillside *oliveti* at a 500-meter elevation. The poor, cobble soil of this area slows the natural olive production of the trees, but the resulting oil has a tension that is truly remarkable. This particular Passatoio pressing—bottled from Vasca 6 in Frascale's cellar—was harvested in early November. The oil's brilliant color and aromatics can be attributed to the cold snap that had just occurred. The flavors on the palate remind us of peppery arugula and menthol with a saline edge. The finish is long, spicy and complex.

Ventaio is the hillside grove that surrounds the winery, named for the steady wind that blows on this southwest facing slope. The soil here is deep and, given the exposure, the trees tend to ripen evenly. The Ventaio pressing from Vasca 2 was harvested early, between 10/20 and 10/23. The oil yield was miniscule: for every 100 pounds of olives pressed, it only produced 5 liters of oil. The color is slightly lighter than the Passatoio, with freshly cut grass, tobacco leaf and *sous bois* notes featured in the nose. These flavors carry through on the palate, underlined by salinity and tastes of tellicherry pepper on the finish.



The Frascale Terroirs

Two 500ml bottles each of
2020 Passatoio Orcio #6
& 2020 Ventaio

\$99.95 4-pack

Reg. \$119.80

[buy](#)

All olive oil orders will ship separately from wine orders.

**All orders received by noon PDT, Friday April 9th
will ship the week of April 12th.**

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

Leccino

A Rare Variety Shines in Two Great Mono-Varietal Oils

Leccino is the most elegant of Tuscany's noble cultivars for olive oil production, with captivating aromas and flavors of freshly cut grass and almond, and a long white pepper finish. Pure Leccino oils are simply magical in their perfumed harmony and refined, yet intense, character.

While this ancient variety's first appearance is unknown, Leccino is believed to have originated in Tuscany, and its importance in the region's olive oil production has been documented there as early as the middle ages.

It excels in the cool climate and higher elevations of central and eastern Tuscany. The sweet spot tends to be between 400 and 500 meters, where the olives can slowly mature to perfect, still-green ripeness in mid- to late-October. The old Leccino groves of the Pruneti and Sagona estates fit this description to a "T."

From old trees in such sites, Leccino can produce stunningly complete oil that demands to be bottled on its own: vibrantly green in its aromatics and flavors, very long on the palate, and seductively textured. But its vital role as the balancing element to the more robust, spicier Frantoio and Moraiolo in blended Tuscan oils makes pure Leccino bottlings a rarity.

The Leccino Set

One 500ml bottle each of

Pruneti Leccino

& Sàgona Leccino

\$59.95 2-pack

Reg. \$65.00 [buy](#)



Includes these oils:

2020 Sàgona Leccino

Harvested 10/20

Made from 100% green Leccino olives grown in the Pratomagno mountains, the color is simply stunning. The nose is earthy with notes of leather, black pepper and fennel. On the palate, the oil's flavors are direct with fiery menthol and bitter cardoon. With great intensity, this oil finishes hot and strong with a deep, bitter edge. A truly impressive oil!

2020 Pruneti Leccino

Harvested 10/15 to 10/22

This great Chianti Classico grower has long been a champion of Leccino, and this is a superb example. The delicate green color offers glimmers of chartreuse. Its bouquet is highly perfumed, with floral notes of fresh carnations, orange blossom and jasmine. On the palate, it is long and concentrated, bursting with green citrus and wheatgrass flavors, with a touch of classic Leccino bitterness in the finish.



Melograno

A Tale of Two Olive Varieties

Like Giorgio Franci and the Pruneti brothers, Valeria Ronconi is revered by olive oil aficionados. Her efforts to perfect olive oil extraction technology have won her nearly as much admiration as have 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. They are also incredibly rare, with tiny quantities made.

Fortunately, she was able to eek out enough production in this important year for two signature bottlings dedicated to The Rare Wine Co.

The first is **pure Frantoio** harvested in a single day, November 12th. Normally, Signora

Ronconi harvests her Frantoio olives earlier; but in 2020, the olives' extended evolution let her wait for a cold snap, which finally arrived around the first of November. That allowed her olives to reach their full aromatic potential. This pure Frantoio is a reflection of her patience and wisdom.

Her pure **Moraiolo** was harvested just two days earlier, on November 10th. Again, such a late harvest was possible only because the olives remained largely green. And the cold snap brought out the oil's classic aromatics.

These two Melograno oils are available only as a 2-bottle set—discounted by more than 14%—and in the Motherlode. In either case, very limited in availability.



Melograno Varietal Set

1 500ml btl each of 2020 Frantoio & Moraiolo

\$59.95 2-pack [buy](#)

Reg. \$70

Includes these oils:

2020 Melograno Frantoio

Harvested 11/12

Signora Ronconi's skills always bring out the best in the noble Frantoio variety. This oil is a blend of two miniscule Frantoio lots, and it boasts an delicate bouquet of lavender and mint. On the palate, the flavors are darker, with asian spice and spicy arugula notes. The oil is subtle but with a depth of flavor that builds in volume.

2020 Melograno Moraiolo

Harvested 11/10

This rich oil has a medium green color with hints of yellow. Freshly-cut chicory, thyme, orange blossom and lemon oil are notable in the bouquet. The palate is round, complex and a pure expression of the Moraiolo olive. Signora Ronconi believes that harvesting after 2020's late-season cold snap was the key to her obtaining profound aromatics and such great balance.

All olive oil orders will ship separately from wine orders.

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Two 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.

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. Most of the surviving trees are of the Frantoio variety.

In its distinctive ceramic bottle, the 2020 edition has all the elegance and character we associate with this perennial favorite.

2020 Il Carnasciale

Harvested 11/15

\$39.95 500ml [buy](#)

The medium-green olive color has a dark cast and viscosity, which indicate the oil's intensity. It is floral with sweet tobacco and thyme flower notes in the nose. On the palate, flavors of Jerusalem artichoke and black pepper come through. This is an intense oil with a lot of personality and pepper in the finish.



Selvapiana

Also available in the Rufina Set & Motherlode

Selvapiana olive oil is often a high-wire act for us. When conditions are right, the estate can make one of the world's most exciting extra virgins. But that doesn't always happen; on average two or three years a decade, Selvapiana has no oil at all to sell us, because of poor harvest conditions. That happened twice over the past 10 years.

It's a measure of proprietor Federico Masseti's high standards that, if the oil doesn't please him, he won't sell it. He'll leave the olives on the ground for the *cinghiali*.

The 2020 oil Federico bottled for us was harvested and

pressed over more than two weeks, from late-October into mid-November, resulting in an oil that's one of their best in years.

Buy it on its own, as part of our incredibly well-priced 2020 Rufina Assortment, or in the Motherlode.

2020 Selvapiana

Harvested 10/19 to 11/4

\$29.95 500ml [buy](#)

The harvest at this venerable Rufina estate stretched out nearly two months. The last olives to go into our oil were picked in mid-November, and the result is one of the most impressive Selvapiana oils in years. The color is a luminescent pale green, and the aromas are classically of menthol, black pepper and artichoke. The palate is quite concentrated and spicy, with plenty of peppery in the long finish.



The Il Poggione 3-Pack

Among all of our oil estates, our history with Il Poggione is the longest, dating back 30 years, 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.

Five years ago, 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 pruning has paid dividends ever since with an uptick in quality and consistency. And it made it possible in 2020 to bottle a **pure Moraiolo** oil for us.

Moraiolo olives typically turn black earlier than other Tuscan varieties like Frantoio. But, extraordinarily, in 2020, most of the Moraiolo olives grown on the hillsides surrounding the Il Poggione *cantina* kept their brilliant green color all the way through October.

Il Poggione's extra virgin oils have always been a bargain in their one-liter bottle, and it is never more true than in 2020. Stock up!

2020 Il Poggione

\$105 3 one-liter bottles [buy](#)

Reg. \$119.85

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. This year's selection is 100% Moraiolo from the hillside olive groves directly surrounding the cantina. Harvested early, between 10/20 and 10/28 with a very low yield, its olive green color and bouquet of newly-cut hay and green almond are evidence of the amazing year. On the palate, the classically bold, bitter artichoke and cardoon flavors are long and compelling.



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

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. 🌿

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 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. 🍷

Orders received by noon PDT on Friday April 9th
will ship the week of April 12th.

A Labor of Love

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

Our awakening to the glories of great Tuscan oil came in the mid-1980s, 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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