

# COASTAL PATH

Bolgheri boasts two of Italy's most famous estates, but the neighbours are catching up fast – witness the fine 2006s, says **RICHARD BAUDAINS**

**B**olgheri – isn't that where Sassicaia and Ornellaia come from? This reaction to mention of the name of the picturesque village at the northern end of the Tuscan coast was far from uncommon until even a couple of years ago. But things are changing. Over the past decade, wine production in Bolgheri has grown exponentially in terms of both size and reputation. In 1998, the area under vine in the DOC zone amounted to a mere 180ha (hectares), the majority of which was accounted for by the Sassicaia estate of San Guido,

Ornellaia and Antinori's Belvedere. Today the total has zoomed up to nearly 1,150ha, within which around 40 estates make wine. As for prestige, the arrival of international investors like Knauf at Campo alla Sughera and high-profile producers from outside the region such as Angelo Gaja (Ca' Marcanda), Allegrini (Poggio al Tesoro), Guido Folonari (Donna Olimpia 1898), Ambrogio and Giovanni Folonari (Campo al Mare) and Guido Berlucchi (Caccia al Piano) have given the DOC triple-A economic status along with some of the highest real-estate values in

Italy. Bolgheri used to be simply the postal address of Sassicaia and Ornellaia. Today it is becoming recognised as a fully fledged production zone in its own right, with a distinctive terroir character, strong collective identity and by far the greatest concentration of quality producers anywhere on the Tuscan coast.

The key terroir factor is the coastal climate – significantly milder and drier than that of the central hills. What gives the sense of identity, on the other hand, are the grape varieties. Bolgheri is the only top Tuscan production area which does not yield a Sangiovese-based DOC

**Below: the Masseto vineyard at Ornellaia, one of Bolgheri's star names. While Masseto is the estate's IGT wine, it is the DOC as a whole that is making waves**



wine. Cabernet Sauvignon fills nearly half the vineyard space, Merlot accounts for another 25%, and Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Syrah complete the quintet of international varieties.

Cohesion comes from the strength of the DOC. Unlike other emerging areas of the Tuscan coast where the proliferation of IGT wines works against the creation of a terroir-focused identity, at Bolgheri more than 90% of the vineyards are registered for DOC production. Current legislation imposes a blend, either Cabernet- or Merlot-based, but allows ample flexibility in the choice of other grapes. Changes, however, are imminent. In response to an increasingly popular trend, revised production norms due to come into force next year will open the DOC to monovarietals.

Cinzia Merli at Le Macchiole started this controversial ball rolling by converting her top wine, Paleo, from a DOC blend to an IGT monovarietal based on Cabernet Franc. A Syrah (Scrio) and Merlot (Messorio) followed, creating the prototypes for a new breed of coastal 'Supertuscan' which has rapidly gained a following over the past couple of years.

Of the candidates for the new single-grape style of Bolgheri, Cabernet Franc is generating the most excitement. Axel Heinz, winemaker at Ornellaia, is convinced that 'Bolgheri is one of the world's great terroirs for Cabernet Franc'. Ornellaia has no plans to bring out a monovarietal wine (although since his arrival at the estate, Heinz has progressively increased the proportion of Franc in the house blend), but Allegrini immediately opted for Cabernet Franc for the flagship wine *Dedicato a Walter* at its Poggio al Tesoro estate. Giovanni Chiappini and Terre di Marchesato also now produce noteworthy single varietals.

The climate of the coast is very sympathetic to Syrah, used in tight, firmly structured monovarietals with intense aroma. It also lends a marked Mediterranean character to DOC blends like Gaja's Promis, Michele Satta's outstanding *Piastraia* or Poggio al Tesoro's *Mediterra*. Merlot on the other hand, has been the

**'Producers have realised it is time to stop making black wines and return to making red ones'**

Renzo Cotarella, Antinori



**Above: Ornellaia, one of the top estates in Bolgheri – and Italy. Right: Le Macchiole owner Cinzia Merli declassified her top wine to make a Cabernet Franc-based IGT**

subject of much recent debate, with some high-profile winemakers questioning its suitability. Bearing in mind that it is picky about soils and performs less well in excessively hot vintages, there is, however, much evidence in its favour. Ornellaia's Masseto continues to set a standard which few if any in Italy can approach and the increasing number of other complex, ageworthy Merlots confirms Bolgheri's potential with the variety.

## Exuberant vintage

The currently available vintage, 2006, saw an exceptional combination of weather events. The winter was long, cold and wet and the spring late, but when the warm weather came, it stayed. No rain fell on the coast between April and the end of August and showers only arrived at the end of September. What could have been a vintage marred by drought was saved by two things: the reserves of moisture stored in the soil after the wet winter, and the fact that temperatures through the summer, unlike in 2003, were never excessive. The result was uniform ripeness, small bunches and fruit of exceptional concentration. The wines are super-sized, in terms of colour, fruit and aroma, and they have beautifully ripe tannins. Alcohol levels are up but are balanced by juicy acidity. The two Cabernets were the main beneficiaries of the vintage, closely followed by Syrah. Merlot is less consistent and gives the impression that sugar levels raced ahead of the tannins, which can be a little coarse.



The top estates of San Guido and Ornellaia made wines which are destined to become collectors' items. They are not as representative of the terroir as the very classic 2004s, but still stand out for their huge personalities. Quality is high across the board, indicating that the gap between the historic leaders of Bolgheri and the rest of the field is closing fast. At the highest level there is now an ample selection of producers from the longer-established estates like Michele Satta, Le Macchiole and Grattamacco to a whole string of much newer names.

Another of the positives of the 2006 vintage is the outstanding performance of the basic-label wines. The DOC distinguishes between the starting-level Bolgheri Rosso and Bolgheri Rosso Superiore, which is aged for a minimum of two years and constitutes the top of the range in the official scheme of things. The Bolgheri Rossos and the second-label ➤

wines of the leading estates offer a more immediate style of drinking, but in terms of quality they come very close to the level of the senior wines. The Superiore wines, on the other hand, are not for early drinking, but will repay keeping over the next 10–20 years and probably beyond.

Given the elitist aura surrounding San Guido and the massive levels of investment of recent years, expectations of Bolgheri as a whole are high. It has to be said that they have not always been met. Two main criticisms have been levelled: firstly, that the wines are technically faultless but lacking in character; and secondly, that they are clumsily over-concentrated and over-oaked. The very high percentage of new plantings at Bolgheri gives producers the right of appeal on the first charge, but despite the young vines, a local character is emerging. Even in an exuberant vintage like 2006, the hallmark is elegance and not raw power; pure berry fruit with herby nuances, super-fine tannins and fresh acidity are the key features. As for oak, there are some who retain a chewy, highly extracted style, but they are in a minority. Since 2004, there has been a shift away from the excessively oaked wines of the late 1990s and early 2000s. As Renzo Cotarella, winemaker at Antinori's Guado al Tasso says, 'producers have realised it is time to stop making black wines and return to making red ones'. The results are clear to see. **D**

## 2006: Baudains' best Bolgheri Rosso

FIVE STARS



### Michele Satta, Piastraia, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (19/20)

Fresh fruit, herbs and minerals on the nose. Super-soft tannins and long, smooth palate with bags of personality. 2010–2015. **£29.99 (2003); TWL**

### Guado al Tasso, Il Bruciato, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (18.5)

Plum-pudding nose at the beginning, then refined wild berries with hints of herbs and a touch of dark chocolate. Great freshness and length. 2010–2012. **£11.48 (2005); AGW**

### Le Macchiole, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (18.5)

Spicy oak and incense with pure berry fruit and hints of eucalyptus and tar.

Intense, dry and elegant palate with very fine tight tannins. 2010–2015. **£11.91; AGW**



### Ornellaia, Le Serre Nuove, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (18.5)

Big, sweet, complex nose of plums and cherries. Still a little dry and rigid in mid-palate, but very long and intense. 2010–2015. **£35.61–£43; F&R, Imb**

### FOUR STARS

#### Ca'Marcanda, Ca'Marcanda, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (18)

Complex nose of violets, spice and wild thyme. Big palate with lots of substance. Still raw and unknit but full of potential. 2012–2020. **£51.06; AGW**

#### Poggio al Tesoro, Sondaia, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (18)

Big, open nose of plums and cherry brandy with spicy oak. Huge mouthful of wine, with luscious tannins. 2012–2020. **£19.12–£22.50; Hed, Rsv, SLp, WGV, You**

#### Le Grascete, Grale, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (17.5)

Earth and herbs on the nose with a baked-plum character. Good balance. 2010–2015. **N/A UK; www.legrascete.com**

#### Argentiera, Villa Donoratico, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (17)

Plummy nose with leather and eucalyptus. Supple on the palate with long, ripe finish. 2010–2014. **£16.45 (2005); Goo**

#### Batzella, Pèan, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (17) Intense, youthful nose. Fine tannins, zippy freshness, delicately handled minty oak in the background. 2010–2015.

**N/A UK; www.batzella.com**

#### Castello di Bolgheri, Varvora, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (17)

Intriguing red-fruit nose with hints of liquorice. Soft tannins and fruit entry, and a dry, savoury finish. 2010–2012.

**N/A UK; www.castellodibolgheri.eu**

#### Guado al Melo, Guado al Melo, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (17)

Plum compote on the nose. Intense, tangy palate with slightly edgy tannins which need time, and a long finish. 2011–2015.

**£19.99; ItD**

#### Caccia al Piano, Ruit Hora, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (16.5)

Herbs and black cherries on the nose. Dry,

grippy palate with good fruit and long, juicy finish. 2010–2014. **£21.99; ItD**

#### Campo alla Sughera, Adè, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (16.5)

Blackberry, vanilla and cinnamon on the nose. Velvety concentration of tannins on the palate, good oak integration, complex finish. 2010–2015. **£26.50 (2007); ViG**

#### Casa di Terra, Mosaico, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (16.5)

Big, smoky nose and juicy palate with intense wild berry flavours. 2010–2012. **N/A UK; www.fattoriacasaditerra.com**

#### I Luoghi, Podere Ritorti, Bolgheri Rosso

★★★★★ (16.5)

Complex nose of red fruit with leather. Fleshy palate with ripe fruit. 2010–2012. **N/A UK; www.iluoghi.it**

## Bolgheri Rosso Superiore

FIVE STARS



### Tenuta San Guido, Sassicaia Bolgheri Rosso Superiore

★★★★★ (19.5)

Beautiful aromas of berries, herbs, mint, spices and white chocolate. Penetrating intensity on the palate, with great fruit concentration, very fine tannic weave and firm acidity. 2016–2050. **£83.33–£150; Ant, Bdi, Far, Fou, Har, L&W, Wdn**

### Michele Satta, I Castagni, Bolgheri Rosso Superiore

★★★★★ (19)

Very fresh nose of plum and blackcurrent laced with creamy oak. Big palate, but soft texture and wonderful elegance. 2015–2025. **N/A UK; www.michelesatta.com**

### Tenuta dell'Ornellaia, Ornellaia, Bolgheri Rosso Superiore

★★★★★ (19)

Intense nose of fresh fruit and cassis with touches of creamy oak. Very big impact on the palate, richness of fruit balanced by juicy acidity. A rare combination of concentration and elegance. 2015–2030. **£100–£180; Ant, Bdi, CkW, F&R, Har**

### Donna Olimpia, Millepassi, Bolgheri Rosso Superiore

★★★★★ (18.5)

Dense nose with a huge array of fruit and floral aromas. Vibrant intensity on the palate, with a long finish of chocolate raisins, wild herbs and tea. 2012–2020. **N/A UK; www.philarmonica.it**

## Grattamacco, L'Alberello, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (18.5)

Delicate, slightly waxy nose of red cherries and sweet spice. Huge depth of natural, savoury tannins and infinite length.

Austere and earthy but very big personality. 2014–2025. **N/A UK; [www.collemassari.it](http://www.collemassari.it)**

### FOUR STARS

## Argentiera, Argentiera, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (18)

Slightly closed, but full-bodied palate with rich, deep texture and a long, complex finish. 2016–2030.

**N/A UK; [www.argentiera.com](http://www.argentiera.com)**

## Tringali-Casanuova, Renzo, Bolgheri

**Rosso Superiore** ★★★★★ (18)

Sweet cherry nose with floral notes. Velvety palate with lovely depth of soft round tannins and earthy-mineral grip behind the fruit. 2012–2025.

**N/A UK; [www.tringalipro.it](http://www.tringalipro.it)**

## I Greppi, Greppicaia, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (17.5)

Ripe, juicy black cherries and prunes aromas. Punchy, concentrated palate with excellent balance, and a lovely soft finish. 2012–2020.

**N/A UK; [www.fattoriaviticcio.com](http://www.fattoriaviticcio.com)**

## Guado al Melo, Guado al Melo, Bolgheri

**Rosso Superiore** ★★★★★ (17)

Intense berry fruit on the nose with smoky tea and tobacco notes. Tangy fruit on the palate with lots of complexity on the finish. 2012–2020.

**N/A UK; [www.guadoalmelo.it](http://www.guadoalmelo.it)**

## I Luoghi, Campo al Fico, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (16.5)

Precise nose of cherry, sweet violets and spices. Elegant palate with delicate tannins, well-handled oak and long, fresh finish. 2010–2016. **N/A UK; [www.iluoghi.it](http://www.iluoghi.it)**



## Cipriana, San Martino, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (16.5)

Intriguing nose of Turkish Delight and sour cherry. Lots of firm acidity and some oak, but good tannin and pure fruit. 2015–2020. **N/A UK; [www.lacipriana.it](http://www.lacipriana.it)**

## Podere Sapaio, Sapaio, Bolgheri Rosso

**Superiore** ★★★★★ (16.5)

Huge nose of fruit and toasty oak. Massive impact on the palate with vibrant acidity and lots of raw tannins but also generous fruit. 2015–2018.

**N/A UK; [www.sapaio.it](http://www.sapaio.it)**

## IGT wines

### FIVE STARS



## Ornellaia, Masseto, Toscana (Merlot)

★★★★★ (19.5)

Intense nose of dark fruit and spices. Huge reserves of fruit hidden away in the depths of the tannins. Taut, grippy length with flashes of berries, chocolate mousse, red pepper and sweet spices. 2016–2036.

**£500–£575; Ant, Bdi, F&R**

## Le Macchiole, Paleo Rosso, Toscana

**(Cabernet Franc)** ★★★★★ (19)

Intense, juicy, berry-fruit nose with hints of cut grass and peatiness. Big, raw, compressed palate bursting with energy. Huge length in the finish, with freshly-picked raspberries and blackcurrants.

Stunning. 2014–2025. **£56; F&R**

## Guado al Melo, Jassarte, Rosso Toscana

**(estate cuvée)** ★★★★★ (18.5)

Elegant aromas of red berries, wild thyme and tobacco. Broad and long on the palate, with fleshy tannins, delicate fruit and a long, grippy finish. 2010–2025.

**£24.99; ITD**



## Le Macchiole, Sciro, Rosso Toscana (Syrah)

★★★★★ (18.5)

Opulently scented fruit, spice, herbs and flowers. Dry palate with tough tannins but great freshness and vitality. Long, tangy finish. 2016–2030. **£59.50 (2005); F&R**

## Le Macchiole, Messorio, Rosso Toscana

**(Merlot)** ★★★★★ (18.5)

Intense wild-berry nose with smoky oak and mint. Big fruit on the palate with a touch of spikiness in the tannins. Great structure and personality. 2016–2030.

**£240–£252; Ant, F&R**

## Poggio al Tesoro, Dedicato a Walter, Toscana

**Rosso (Cabernet Franc)** ★★★★★ (18.5)

Fresh, enticing nose of red cherries, raspberry and eucalyptus. Intense fruit and powdery fine tannins, with some oak. Raw on the finish, but dripping with class. 2014–2025. **£40 (2005); WBr**

## Tenuta San Guido, Guidalberto, Toscana

**(Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon/**

**Sangiovese)** ★★★★★ (18.5)

Beautifully handled oak merges with blueberry, plum, dark cherries and aromatic

herbs. Intense, elegant palate with fleshy tannins and delicious sweet fruit.

2010–2020. **£18.71–£29.54; AGW, Ant, VVi**

### FOUR STARS

## Ca'Marcanda, Promis Toscana (Merlot/

**Syrah/Sangiovese)** ★★★★★ (17.5)

Cherry, fig and spice on the nose. Very appetising, with elegant, peppery fruit and a savoury, mineral finish. 2010–2015.

**£17.86–£29.95; 5RW, AGW, Han, Har, Maj**

## Poggio al Tesoro, Mediterra, (Syrah/

**Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon)** ★★★★★ (17.5)

Big, ripe nose of plum brandy, dried figs and herbs. Fresh, with fine tannins, and a rich, spicy finish. 2010–2014. **£14.25; Mar**

## Terre del Marchesato, Marchesale, Syrah

**Toscana** ★★★★★ (17.5)

Complex nose of mulberry, parma violets and pot pourri. Intense with a fine tannic weave and long savoury finish. 2012–2020.

**N/A UK; [www.fattoriaterredelmarchesato.it](http://www.fattoriaterredelmarchesato.it)**

## Chiappini, Lienà Cabernet Sauvignon

**Toscana** ★★★★★ (17.2)

Toasty oak on the nose, with cherry brandy and fig leaf. Smooth, full-bodied palate with good grip in the finish. 2012–2020.

**N/A UK; [www.giovannichiappini.it](http://www.giovannichiappini.it)**

## Argentiera, Giorgio Bartholomaeus, Rosso

**Toscana (Merlot)** ★★★★★ (17)

Ripe nose of plum pudding with leather and mushroom. Round, soft palate with a long, savoury finish. Full of personality. 2010–2016. **N/A UK; [www.argentiera.com](http://www.argentiera.com)**

## Cà Marcanda, Magari, Toscana (Merlot/

**Cabernet Sauvignon/Cabernet Franc)**

★★★★★ (17)

Ripe plum and prune on the nose, with dark chocolate and eucalyptus. Dry, full-bodied palate with fine tannins.

2016–2025. **£32.99–£39.95; Har, ScC**

## Campo al Noce, Syrah, Toscana

★★★★★ (17)

Floral, fruity nose. Generous fruit, ripe tannins and great freshness. 2010–2015.

**N/A UK; [www.campoalnoce.it](http://www.campoalnoce.it)**

## Chiappini, Lienà Cabernet Franc, Toscana

★★★★★ (17)

Red-berry and herbal nose. Dryish tannins, but excellent length. 2014–2020.

**N/A UK; [www.giovannichiappini.it](http://www.giovannichiappini.it)**

For full UK stockist contact details, see p64 of our February issue or go to [www.decanter.com/italystockists](http://www.decanter.com/italystockists)

Richard Baudains is joint Regional Chair for Italy at the Decanter World Wine Awards