



BRUNELLO: 2005 NOW, 2004 LATER

The tail-end of the vintage was a washout, leading some to write it off. Yet many smaller estates have made impressive Brunellos in 2005, says **KERIN O'KEEFE** – perfect as we wait to open the magnificent riserva 04s...

One of the biggest problems facing producers of the recently released Brunello 2005s is that the vintage is sandwiched between the superb Brunello 2004s and the already much-hyped 2006s, scheduled for release next year. While 2004 is a classic vintage, thanks to perfect climatic conditions that yielded structured, harmonious wines with serious cellaring potential, 2005 was an unstable year in most of Montalcino's growing zone, with a cool summer that culminated in heavy rains at harvest time. 'Let's say that 2005 will not make Montalcino history,' succinctly states Andrea Costanti of the Conti Costanti estate.

There are, however, some surprisingly good Brunellos from the vintage, and those estates – mostly small – that were able to pick entirely before torrential rains arrived, like Costanti, made some of the best 2005s. Many of the larger houses, on the other hand, were not able to finish harvesting before the rain, so had a mixed quality crop.

The 2005 vintage underlines the need for official subzones in Montalcino. While many Brunellos hailing from estates just north and south of the town are delicate, with earthy, floral aromas, Brunellos from Castelnuovo dell'Abate in the southeast have bigger structures (though grape selection was still crucial). The higher areas of Sant'Angelo in Colle in the far south also yielded some very good wines, such as Il Poggione's. 'We were lucky because, until the rains came, we had cool but dry weather, and after the rains strong breezes dried the grapes,' says managing director and winemaker Fabrizio Bindocci.

Approachable elegance

While even the best 2005s lack the power, poise and ageing potential of the 2004s, they are far better than the angular, weedy 2002s and the cooked, unbalanced 2003s. They can best be compared to 1998: an initially undervalued vintage that beat all expectations as it developed. Many '05s are very enjoyable now,



Above: a mixed vintage such as 2005 underlines the need for official subzones in Brunello (highlighted here in red)

boasting hallmark Sangiovese aromas of earth, violet and a hint of leather, with bright cherry and mineral flavours, and will make fine drinking over the next few years while the '04s mature in the cellar. 'I'm very confident the 2005s will sell well,' says David Berry Green, who has been living in Piedmont for the past year to scout out top artisanal estates for London ➤

PHOTOGRAPH: DUTTON COLIN/SIME-4-CORNERS IMAGES. MAP: MAXINE HEATH



Above: Andrea Costanti of Conti Costanti was one of the lucky ones, picking before torrential rain hit the region in 2005

merchant Berry Bros & Rudd. 'They are very elegant Brunellos with lovely mineral notes, almost Burgundy-like, and are in tune with our customers' palates.'

US importer Neil Empson, an Italian wine specialist, agrees. 'The '05s are showing extremely well and I'm surprised by their level of finesse.' Empson notes that in 2009, US sales, mostly at the restaurant level, were slow for all high-end Italian and French wines because of the economic downturn – 'but we're finally seeing signs of recovery'.

Both Empson and Berry Green report little if any fallout from the 2008 Brunello blending scandal. 'Our customers seem unfazed by the scandal,' says Berry Green. 'Brunello is a key part of our Italian portfolio, and despite the weak pound and increased duty, our Italian wine sales have grown 26% in the year to date.' Brunellogate doesn't seem to have influenced US consumers either. 'If anything, the little customer feedback we've had on the Brunello blending issues shows that consumers actually feel reassured, because it seems that the Italian system of checks and controls works,' says Empson.

Brunello 2005s were released alongside the much-anticipated Brunello riserva 2004s, which have matched high expectations and are cellar-worthy investments. Journalists at the Benvenuto Brunello press tasting in February noted a refreshing trend towards a more characteristic Brunello style, with a reduction in the number of inky-black wines for both vintages. That said, an over-enthusiastic use of new wood, while not at the levels of previous years, still dumbs down far too many Brunellos.

The best of Brunello 2005



Il Marroneto, Madonna delle Grazie

★★★★★ (18.5pts/20)

Floral, leather earthy aromas with creamy wild cherry and truffle palate. Extreme elegance. 2012–2020.

£48.99 (2004); PrV



Le Potazzine ★★★★★ (18.5)

Gorgeous nose of leather, earth and underbrush. Ripe cherry flavours and great depth for the vintage. Lovely. Now–2015. **£39–£45; P&S, Ten, Unc**

Fuligni ★★★★★ (18)

Lovely floral nose, vibrant and racy, backed up with succulent fruit. Very elegant, firm tannins. Now–2020. **£33.50; L&S**



Il Poggione ★★★★★ (18)

Succulent berry and vibrant mineral. Structured and delicious. 2011–2015 **£26–£31.25 (2004); L&W, Maj, WDi**

Lisini ★★★★★ (18)

Earthy, with surprisingly ripe fruit flavours. Nice minerality and spice. 2012–2018. **£35 (in bond); BBR**

Mastrojanni ★★★★★ (18)

Lovely earthy floral nose with a hint of leather and eucalyptus. Delicious ripe fruit and spice. Now–2015. **£22.50 (2003); L&W**



Franco Biondi Santi ★★★★★ (17.5)

Lovely nose of strawberry and spice with hints of earth, all of which carry over to the palate. Vibrant, fresh and elegant. Bracing tannins. Good length. 2012–2020. **£64.49; Pyo**

Gianni Brunelli ★★★★★ (17.5)

Rich aromas of berry, leather and spice. Hint of talcum powder. Bright with fresh

acidity and firm tannins. 2012–2020. **£29 (2004); WSo**



Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona ★★★★★ (17.5)

Subtle floral nose. Very fresh and bright, with brooding, dark fruit flavours. now–2015. **£29.12 (2004) Gns**



Conti Costanti ★★★★★ (17.5)

Gorgeous nose layered with spice and berry. Very elegant with bright fruit flavours. Now–2015. **£44.99; DBY, Imb, Rsv, SeL, V&C, WBr**

Podere Salicutti, Piaggione ★★★★★ (17.5)

Burgundy-like aromas of strawberry and mineral. Layered palate with berry and mineral flavours. Arriving in the UK in June. 2012–2018. **£60; Han**



La Gerla ★★★★★ (17)

Ripe berry aromas carry over onto the palate. Rich fruit, very good structure for the vintage. Shows its Castelnuovo dell'Abate structure and northern aromas. Now–2020. **£31.32 (2004); MiG**

Silvio Nardi, Manachiara

★★★★★ (17)

Nose still closed, but there's rich berry-cherry flavours, with spicy and mineral notes. Big, firm tannins. 2012–2018. **£58.50; C&C**

Uccelliera ★★★★★ (17)

Big, ripe with sweet tannins. Very earthy and funky with hint of sweet oak. Good structure for the vintage. Now–2015. **£42.99 (2004); Cdn, PLG**

Belpoggio ★★★★★ (16.5)

Earthy nose of incense, creamy fruit and bracing tannins. Still a bit shy. 2012–2016. **£35 (2004); SmF**

Casisano Colombaio ★★★★★ (16.5)

Very pretty nose, with ripe berry and fresh acidity. Nice length and very friendly. Now–2015. **£29.99 (2004); Ave**

Il Colle ★★★★★ (16.5)

Highly perfumed; earthy notes, leather,



Above: Biondi-Santi's '04 riserva scores a perfect 20/20, doing justice to the picture postcard vineyards around Montalcino (top)

berry and mineral. Hint of animal. Rich fruit for the vintage. Now–2015. **£29.99; Win**

Padelletti ★★★★★ (16.5)

Intense bouquet of rose, violet and iris. Earthy cherry and cinnamon flavours. Delicious. Now–2015. **£35; Bng**

Pertimali ★★★★★ (16.5)

Lovely nose of ripe berry, earth and leather. Crushed cherry flavours with liquorice note. Long, linear and focused. 2011–2015. **£32; J&B**

Barbi ★★★ (16)

Lovely mint and violet aromas. Ripe fruit

flavours and a hint of liquorice. Well balanced and approachable. Now–2015. **£29.95 (2003); SLp, WDi**



Donatella Cinelli Colombini ★★★ (16)

Big and round with ripe plum, spice and vanilla flavours. Well-integrated oak. Now–2015. **£39.99; Har, ELL**

Marchesato degli Aleramici ★★★ (16)

Great Sangiovese nose – ripe berry and spice with a hint of mineral. Now–2015. **£19.50; WCL**

Tenimenti Angelini ★★★ (16)

Very pretty floral nose. Round fruit flavours with bright acidity. Now–2015. **£28.95 (2004); HBa, SeL**

Other top 2005s not available in the UK:

Il Paradiso di Manfredi ★★★★★ (17.5)

www.ilparadisodimanfredi.com

Le Gode ★★★★★ (17.5) www.legode.com

Campogiovanni ★★★★★ (16.5)

www.agricolasanfelicce.com

Canalicchio di Sopra ★★★★★ (16.5)

www.canalicchiodisopra.com

Lambardi ★★★★★ (16.5)

www.lambardimontalcino.it

La Fuga ★★★★★ (16.5)

www.tenutefolinari.com

Abbadia Ardenga ★★★ (16)

www.abbadiardengapoggio.it

SassodiSole ★★★ (15)

www.sassodisole.it

Best Brunello riserva 2004

Franco Biondi Santi ★★★★★ (20)

Breathtaking, reminiscent of the majestic 1975 riserva. Intense, earthy aromas with hint of iris and leather. Mouthwatering cherry with elegant tannins. Impeccably balanced, mesmerizing depth. 2015–2040. **£191.99; Pyo**



Poggio di Sotto ★★★★★ (19)

Big and earthy with leather and spice aromas. Concentrated, ripe cherry-berry flavours with liquorice and mineral notes. Very focused. Great length. 2015–2025. **£107.71 (ib); Dec**



Col d'Orcia, Poggio al Vento 2001

★★★★★ (18.5)

Power and grace from this just-released ➤

PHOTOGRAPHS: BON APPETIT/ALAMY; CEPHAS PICTURE LIBRARY

VINTAGE REPORT: BRUNELLO 2004/05

riserva. Concentrated black cherry, with leather and liquorice. Fabulous depth and length. 2015–2025. **£75 (1999); Evy, Lui, SpD, Wmb**

Fulgini ★★★★★ (18.5)

Still closed on the nose with whiffs of violet and earth. Lush raspberry and plum flavours, chock-full of spice. Young and aggressive, but will be a beauty. 2015–2025. **£53.50; L&S**

Lisini, Ugolaia ★★★★★ (18.5)

Beautiful nose of leather, earth and spice. Complex with fantastic ripe black cherry, mineral and spice flavours. Great depth and fantastic length. 2015–2025. **£65 (ib); BBR, Rae**

Pertimali ★★★★★ (18.5)

Gorgeous nose, lovely ripe cherry-berry flavours with spice. Great balance and structure. Hallmark Brunello. 2015–2025. **£52; J&B**

Sesti, Phenomena ★★★★★ (18.5)

Gorgeous nose of earth, plum, black cherry and leather. Beautiful sweet and supple tannins; great balance. Fantastic depth and length. 2015–2020. **£59; Gdh**

Conti Costanti ★★★★★ (18)

Still closed nose, with concentrated berry and spice flavours plus a hint of well-integrated oak. Great depth, fantastic length. 2012–2020. **£79.95; DBY, Imb, Rsv, SeL, V&C, WBR**



Barbi ★★★★★ (17)

Great Sangiovese character. Big ripe fruit and spice with liquorice close. Well balanced, good length. 2014–2024. **£41.66–£46.90 (2003); F&R, SLP**

Il Poggione, Vigna Paganelli

★★★★ (17)

Very forward with delicious black cherry and liquorice notes. Round with good depth. A bit short on verve. 2012–2018. **£33.50–£44.99; AGW, F&R**



La Fiorita ★★★★★ (17)

Lovely nose, great black cherry and plum fruit with loads of spice. Well balanced with fresh acidity and big ripe tannins. 2015–2025. **£50; Wtd**



Padelletti ★★★★★ (16.5)

Great nose of ripe black cherry and leather. Round berry flavours with leather and truffle. Very fresh acidity and firm tannins. 2012–2020. **£50; Bng**

Tenimenti Angelini, Vigna Spuntali

★★★★ (16.5)

Succulent berry, balsamic and mineral, but still on its oak now. 2015–2019. **£39.95 (2003); Ess, HBa, TWL**



Castelgiocondo ★★★★★ (16)

Floral, berry nose of black cherry and minerals. More delicious than complex. A refreshing return to more typical Brunello character. Now–2015. **£77.99; HaL**

Above and left: neither the Brunellogate blending scandal of 2008 nor last year's economic crisis have deterred consumers in the UK or US, with sales still strong

Banfi, Poggio All'Oro ★★★ (15)

Nose has a hint of mineral and crushed cherry, but overwhelming new oak masks Sangiovese aromas and flavours. Warm palate, very structured. Now–2014. **£84; Bib**

Other top 2004 riservas not available in the UK:

Gianni Brunelli ★★★★★ (18.5)

www.giannibrunelli.it

Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona, Vigna di Pianrosso Riserva Santa Caterina d'Oro ★★★★★ (18.5)

www.ciaccipiccolomini.com

Il Paradiso di Manfredi ★★★★★ (18.5)

www.ilparadisodimanfredi.com

Le Gode ★★★★★ (18.5)

www.legode.com

Podere Salicutti ★★★★★ (18.5)

www.poderesalicutti.it

Abbadia Ardenga ★★★★★ (18)

www.abbadiardengapoggio.it



Canalicchio di Sopra ★★★★★ (18)

www.canalicchiodisopra.com

Capanna ★★★★★ (18)

www.capannamontalcino.com **D**

For full details of UK stockists, see p101

Kerin O'Keefe is a freelance wine writer and author based in Italy. Her forthcoming book on Brunello will be published by the University of California Press.