

# Tuscany's Hidden Gem: Carmignano

BY ALISON NAPJUS

taly boasts some of the wine world's best-known names as well as its quirkiest entries, from Barolo to Zibibbo. But it's also home to what may be one of the country's best-kept secrets: the wines of Carmignano.

Carmignano is a small-footprint DOCG with fewer than 300 acres under vine, located just to the northwest of Florence, in Tuscany. While it doesn't get a lot of name recognition today, wine production in the area dates to ancient Rome and notably benefited from great PR during the reign of the Medici.

"The Medici invited many important families to go hunting [at their Barco Reale estate, in Carmignano]. In that period it became a very famous wine [after guests] had exposure to Carmignano and later had it shipped to them," says Beatrice Contini Bonacossi, whose family owns Carmignano's leading Capezzana estate.

The name Carmignano fell out of use in modern times, largely due to vine abandonment in the area, and the vineyard acreage was absorbed into the Chianti DOC's Montalbano sub-zone. In 1975, with the backing of the Contini Bonacossi family and others, the Carmignano DOC was reestablished and then later elevated to DOCG status in 1990. But today, total production of the Carmignano DOCG and the Barco Reale di Carmignano DOC (20 acres of vines within the larger, delineated Carmignano DOCG) is only about 100,000 cases annually, with just 11 winery members in the Carmignano consortium.

So why should you be seeking out this little-known wine?

Beyond the delicious and distinctive flavors on display, part of Carmignano's allure is in its backstory. In some ways it's the *original* super Tuscan, or at least a patriarch. During her time as queen of France in the 1550s, Catherine de Medici sent French varieties back to the family in Italy. As a result, the historical blend of Carmignano has always included Sangiovese with Cabernet, and today it's regulated as at least 50% Sangiovese with 10% to 20% Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Cabernet Franc, and up to 20% Canaiolo Nero and 10% other approved red varieties.

"In our area Cabernet is not an international grape," says Annabella Pascale, part of the third generation helming her family's Tenuta



**93 | \$75**  
**Capezzana**  
Carmignano Trefiano  
Riserva 2020



**91 | \$23**  
**Enrico Pierazuoli**  
Carmignano  
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**90 | \$45**  
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**90 | \$49**  
**Pratesi** Carmignano  
Carmione 2022



**88 | \$23**  
**Ambra** Carmignano  
Santa Cristina  
in Pili 2022



Clockwise from lower right:  
Capezzana's Beatrice,  
Filippo and Benedetta  
Contini Bonacossi with  
grandchildren Serena,  
Ettore and Gaddo

Artimino estate. "It's been here for more than 300 years. Local people call it *uva francesca*," or French grape.

Vineyards in Carmignano are set on a series of low-lying hills, with most planted between 165 and 655 feet. As a comparison, this is well below plantings in Chianti Classico, which range from roughly 950 to 1,650 feet above sea level. Even before climate change, Sangiovese in Carmignano typically ripened fully, and before Tuscany's Maremma region came to the fore it was a better environment for the late-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon grape.

The resulting Sangiovese wines are typically lower in acidity with firmer tannins, characteristics that blend well with Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Franc. The appellation's aging requirements specify a minimum of 20 months, with at least eight months in oak barrels. For the *riserva* category, the minimum period increases to three years, with at least 12 months in barrel.

"Carmignano is a hidden treasure," summarizes Silvia Vannucci, owner and winemaker at her family's Piaggia winery. "Most people may not be as familiar with it, but Carmignano is very unique, with a special *terroir* as well as a special story: traditional winemaking, quality and longevity." □



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