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Il Molino di Grace

TUSCANY



Gerhard Hirmer

Founded: 1995
Winemaker: Gerhard Hirmer
Viticulturalist: Franco Bernabei
Acres owned: 110
Annual production: 30,000 cases
Estate grown: 90%
Owner: Frank Grace
Known for: Powerful Chianti Classico from Panzano
Importer: Domaine Select Wine Estates, NY
Website: ilmolinodigrace.com

“I hate the word hobby,” Tim Grace told me this past summer. “It took us nine years to find the property; it’s a real venture and our biggest market is Italy.”

Indeed, the American-owned Il Molino di Grace is anything but a vanity project. In 1995, Grace’s father, Frank, bought an old property in Panzano, the heart of Chianti Classico, with existing vineyards and an old farmhouse. Frank Grace then met Gerhard Hirmer, a former German banker who’d moved to Tuscany to study the region’s wines. Frank and Hirmer, along with Tim and consultant Franco Bernabei, set out to build a new winery, inaugurated with the 1999 vintage. They also worked to modernize the old vineyards and plant new ones.



The oldest vines on the property, averaging 55 years old, are reserved for Gratus, an impressive sangiovese that seems to pull its power directly from the estate’s marl and limestone soils. Il Molino di Grace’s top-performing wine this year, the ’05 Chianti Classico Riserva, shows a similar intensity. Sourced from a mix of younger and mature vines averaging 25 years of age, it’s a potent expression of sangiovese. Hirmer ages the wine in a combination of large oak casks and barriques (first and second use), so it feels integrated and rich. A stylish Chianti Classico, it combines wild strawberry and mineral tannins, finishing smooth. The wine will age well, but it’s tempting to drink it now with a grilled bone-in pork chop.

The ’04 Il Margone shows the riper, more international style of Chianti Classico. Aged entirely in barrique and rounded out with a small percentage of merlot, it balances rich, plummy fruit and oak scents with bright acidity. The basic Chianti Classico bottling is, perhaps, the most true to the region of Panzano. Made entirely from sangiovese, the ’05 is smoky and savory, with aromas of rosemary and ripe strawberry flavors that last through the finish. Match its firm tannins with a roast rack of lamb. —W.M.W.

TOP-SCORING WINES

- 93 '05 Chianti Classico Riserva \$35 (4/09)
- 90 '05 Chianti Classico \$20 (4/09)
- 90 '04 Chianti Classico Riserva Il Margone \$50 (4/09)