



● Antonio Galloni
WINE IS



Canalicchio di Sopra: Brunello di Montalcino 1970-2008 - Antonio Galloni 2008 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 94 2006 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 93+ 2005 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 94 2005 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 93 2004 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 96 2004 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 96 2001 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 93 1998 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 93 1995 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 89 1995 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 94 1990 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 97 1988 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 93 1985 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 92 1970 Canalicchio di Sopra – Ripaccioli Brunello di Montalcino 96
Primo Pacenti was one of the true pioneers of Montalcino. Pacenti purchased his property in the Canalicchio district, on the northern edge of town, in 1952, well before Brunello di Montalcino as we know it today existed. At the time, the estate was planted with mixed grains and olives. Given today's standard of living and general wealth that has been created in the wine world over the last few decades, it is hard to imagine just how brutally hard the agrarian life was back then. Pacenti planted a hectare and a half of vineyards between 1958 and 1959 and made his first Brunello in 1966, the same



year Brunello di Montalcino became a DOC wine. A year later, Pacenti was one of the founding members of the producers' Consorzio, where he held leadership positions throughout his long, distinguished career. Sadly, Pacenti passed away in 2013, but he left behind a rich legacy. Pier Luigi Ripaccioli, Pacenti's son-in-law, bought his property in Le Gode di Montosoli in 1958. Ripaccioli planted in the early 1970s and sold fruit to other wineries while he worked in the vineyards at Castelgiocondo. Holding down multiple jobs to make ends meet was typical back then. In 1987, Pacenti and Ripaccioli joined forces to create Canalicchio di Sopra pretty much as it exists today. Savvy readers will notice that wines bottled after 1987 show both estate names on the label (Canalicchio di Sopra and Le Gode di Montosoli) but it is only from the 1987 vintage on that fruit from both estates is used together in the wines. Canalicchio di Sopra went through a bit of a rough patch after Pier Luigi Ripaccioli's stroke in 1999, but things seem to have rebounded in a big way. Today, Ripaccioli's children are in charge. Francesco makes the wines, his brother Marco tends the vineyards and their sister Simonetta takes care of hospitality. The estate's Brunello is made of a blend from the Canalicchio and Montosoli properties and spends around 36 months in Slavonian oak botti. In the best years, Canalicchio di Sopra also makes a Riserva, which is sourced predominantly from a parcel of the oldest vines in Canalicchio plus 5-10% fruit from Montosoli. First produced in 1987, the Riserva sees about 42 months in cask. Beginning in 2003, the Riserva spends the first six months of its time in the cellar in French oak casks. The Riserva tends to be richer, deeper and riper than the straight bottling with, naturally, a bit of French oak influence. Within the broader context of Montalcino, both Brunellos are powerful, classic-leaning wines that need time to show some of the more refined qualities of the northern side of Montalcino. I find differences between the two Brunellos tend to be more stylistic than qualitative, especially in recent years. In many vintages, I prefer the straight bottling, although Francesco Ripaccioli contends the Riserva only shows its pedigree after ten years or so. Either way, both Canalicchio Brunellos are striking, full of personality and well worth checking out. Best of all, the wines will reward consumers with many years, and in some cases, decades, of exceptional drinking. Today, Canalicchio di Sopra is without question one of the most exciting properties in Montalcino. A dark, powerful wine, the 2008 Brunello di Montalcino hits the palate with intense dark fruit, smoke, tobacco, licorice, menthol and spices. In 2008, the estate's Brunello is decidedly powerful and brooding in style, with ferocious tannins that need time to settle down and enough overall structure to age for many years. A blast of game, smoke, licorice and incense reappears on the finish. The 2008 is a real powerhouse, partly because there was no Riserva bottled that year. Readers will have to be patient. Still, if I were looking for an under the radar Brunello that remains undiscovered, this would be it. 94 /Drinking window: 2018-2038. The 2006 Brunello di Montalcino comes across as austere and closed today, with very little in the way of expression. I imagine the 2006 will remain tightly wound for some time. That said, it shows tons of potential for the future. I did not taste the 2006 as part of this vertical, but it is likely to be at least as unevolved as the straight Brunello. 93+ /Drinking window: 2018-2036. One of the highlights of this uneven vintage, the 2005 Brunello di Montalcino has entered the very early part of its maturity, as the tannins have begun to soften, releasing the aromatics and fruit. Crushed flowers, mint, sweet tobacco, cedar and dried cherries are all laced together in a gorgeous, highly expressive Brunello that has plenty to offer today. The 2005 is not the typical Canalicchio blockbuster Brunello; instead it is a wine that impresses for its balance and total class. 94 /Drinking window: 2015-2030. The 2005 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva is all about texture and class. As always, the Riserva is richer and deeper than the straight Brunello bottling, with softer contours and a bit more voluptuousness. The flavors are dark, bold and intense, while the French oak influence is definitely felt. 93 /Drinking window: 2015-2030. The 2004 Brunello di Montalcino is endowed with notable energy and class. Aromatic, vibrant and still quite fresh, the 2004 has it all. As is often the case with great wines, the 2004 is going to provide a wide window of pure drinking pleasure. Today, the 2004 is stellar, but it also has the pedigree to age well for many years. Hints of sweet tobacco,



licorice and dried flowers all add nuance on the highly expressive, finessed finish. The 2004 is just beginning to enter the early part of its maturity, yet there is no rush; the 2004 is a long-distance runner. 96 /Drinking window: 2016-2034. An absolutely compelling Brunello, Canalicchio's 2004 Riserva is magnificent from the very first taste. Rich and ample on the palate with silky tannins in support, the 2004 Riserva captures the very best qualities of a vintage in which the wines are sensual and finessed to the core. Still very, very young, the 2004 Riserva will drink well for another 20 years or more. Put quite simply, the 2004 Riserva is a knock out. This is a perfect example where the differences between the Brunello and the Riserva are more about stylistic and personal preferences rather than absolute quality. 96 /Drinking window: 2016-2034. The 2001 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva is in a beautiful spot today, now that the tannins have begun to soften a touch. Bold and broadly sketched, the 2001 Riserva shows the more voluptuous side of the year. This is a classic Canalicchio wine, but with a little more power, ripeness and richness than is often found. Black fruit, smoke, tobacco, licorice and game add the final layers of nuance. 93 /Drinking window: 2015-2024. The 1998 Brunello di Montalcino is a very pretty wine to drink now and over the next 15-20 years. This is one of the juicier Brunellos in this vertical. While the 1998 doesn't have the pedigree or complexity of the very best vintages, it does offer fabulous drinking in a fruit-forward style. Menthol, sage, tobacco and worn-in leather grace the dark, racy finish. 93 /Drinking window: 2015-2034. Tobacco, cedar, mushrooms, earthiness and crushed flowers lift from the glass in the 1995 Brunello di Montalcino. Although fully mature, the 1995 clearly has enough depth to hang on for another 5-10 years. The 1995 will appeal most to readers who enjoy wines with a fair amount of tertiary nuance. 89 /Drinking window: 2015. The 1995 Brunello di Montalcino Riserva is quite a bit fresher than the straight Brunello bottling. As always, the wines of this era here show an element of rusticity, but within that context, the Riserva is quite pretty and expressive. Still vibrant, the 1995 Riserva will drink well for another decade or so. 94 /Drinking window: 2015-2025. The 1990 Brunello di Montalcino is a fabulous example of the heights Brunello can reach. Racy and sweet on the palate, the 1990 simply towers with its magnificent expression of Sangiovese. Hints of cedar, tobacco, white pepper and orange peel add an element of exoticism that is incredibly intriguing. The flavors are sweet, layered and exquisitely nuanced. With time in the glass the 1990 continues to blossom, offering superb resonance and a pure visceral thrill that equals all of the enthusiasm the vintage received when it was first released. 97 /Drinking window: 2015-2025. Even at 27 years of age, the 1988 Brunello di Montalcino retains its piercing acidity, freshness and slightly austere personality. The translucent color and overall impression of freshness speak to a wine that has held up very well over time. This is as classic as classic gets in aged Brunello di Montalcino. 93 /Drinking window: 2015-2020. A wine that has reached the end of the road gracefully, the 1985 Brunello di Montalcino is quite pretty today. Dried fruits, Marsala, hard candy and worn-in leather are laced together in a pretty, resonant Brunello that is peaking. There is no further upside from cellaring, so readers will want to finish any remaining bottles. 92 /Drinking window: 2015. The 1970 Brunello di Montalcino is a real head-turner. Wow. I am not sure words are adequate. In a nutshell, Canalicchio's 1970 Riserva is everything fine, aged Sangiovese can be. Sweet, layered and exquisitely perfumed, the 1970 captivates all the senses. Hints of sweet tobacco, anise, dried herbs, mint and crushed flowers open up in the glass, but above all else the 1970 is a wine of pure texture and silkiness. Stylistically, the 1970 comes across as similar to the 1990 because of its inner sweetness, but of course, more softened by time. In just their fourth vintage, Canalicchio di Sopra made a nearly immortal wine that shows just how profound Brunello can be. 96 /Drinking window: 2015-2020.