

TUSCANY

CIGNALE

Cignale Owners: The Empson Family

Fast Facts

Vineyard surface:
7.5 acres (3 hectares)

Owner:
The Empson Family

Winemaker:
Franco Bernabei

Established:
1981

Location:
Greve in Chianti

Province:
Florence



THE HISTORY

In 1980, Neil and Maria Empson decided that “it was time for us to try the challenge of growing grapes and making a wine whose personality we could mold. After a decade of observing, tasting and judging Italy’s finest examples, we knew just how much whole-hearted dedication went into their making,” Neil recalls.

Vineyard location was their first concern: the Empsons have always believed great soil and microclimate are the prerequisites of great wines. Another keen preoccupation was finding a partner they could trust and work closely with. Their choice fell to a wonderful wine producer and friend, Alessandro “Sandro” François and his wife, Antonietta. The François’ owned a historic estate in the northeastern portion of Chianti Classico, near Greve in Chianti – one of the region’s finest sites.

The first few harvests were treated as experimental harvests, for Neil and Alessandro to work on creating the right flavor profile. In 1983, during one of the first experimental harvest, an incident occurred when the entire crop was wiped out by wild boars. They had lost their crop but, as a silver lining, the Empsons had now gained a name for their wine: Cignale, Tuscan dialect for cinghiale or “wild boar.”

Cignale was finally released in 1990, with the 1986 vintage. The wine had spent two years in 75% new barriques and 25% used ones; in February 1989, Neil made the final component blend with a small percentage of Sangiovese Grosso, then left the wine in stainless steel tanks until bottling in July 1989, unfiltered. Maria Gemma Empson, designed the labels, which feature a series of six pen and ink drawings depicting Cignale’s first, bristly fans.

THE TERROIR

The François’ own a historic estate in the northeastern portion of Chianti Classico, near Greve in Chianti – one of the region’s finest sites. The property is superb: elevated hillsides rising 1,320 to 1,740 feet above sea level, with a unique geological composition; Cretaceous-Eocene polychrome schist, rich in manganese and alkaline earth metals.

One of the key features of the soil is its high nitrogen level, which lends longevity to the wine.

The vineyards were planted with five acres of new, low-yielding clones of Cabernet Sauvignon from Bordeaux, and 1.25 acres of Merlot. Another 1.25 acres were planted with Cabernet Sauvignon grafted onto 20-year-old Sangiovese vines to give some extra depth to the new wine.



“CIGNALE” COLLE DELLA TOSCANA CENTRALE

IGT: 90% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Merlot. Only 65% of the free-run juice is used, and parts of the press-run are then blended back into the mass. After harvesting the grapes macerate on the skins for 21 days at 82.4° F. The resulting wine ages in barriques for 20-24 months, followed by at least six months of bottle aging. Deep, dark ruby in color. Very floral and beautiful with hints of dark fruit, black currant and dried flowers, such as violets. Full body, firm and silky tannins and a

fresh and bright finish. Lots of dried citrus undertones.