

## A noble pastime

Nobility is an attribute that's all too often associated with wines; it's rather less common when it refers to the winemaker. But such is the case with the il Pollenza estate, whose proprietary family traces its first title back to 1904. Descending from long-established Marche roots, Count Aldo Brachetti-Peretti launched his "grand experiment" in the late 1990s, planting the first international vines in unproven soils near Tolentino's Castello della Rancia.

But being the patriarch of Anonima Petroli Italiana – better known as "api" – affords some useful resources, such as his long-time friend and world-renowned enologist, Giacomo Tachis, otherwise known as the "father of Super Tuscan wines." Under his guidance, along with advanced laboratory and fermentation techniques, a state of the art winery was born.

To visit il Pollenza is an experience in itself – the 200-hectare estate houses a number of restored eighteenth-century houses, as well as a sixteenth-century edifice designed by Sangallo. The furniture, statuary, and appointments can only be described as sumptuous. Inside the main complex, red wines ferment in vitrified cement vats, while at an optimal 7m below ground, they age in French and Slovenian oak in a humidity-controlled environment.



So much for the technology, the expertise, and the environment – what about the wines? Well, to say that the "grand experiment" has been a success is something of an understatement.

The winery's flagship, the I.G.T. Marche red wine il Pollenza, has earned the "5 Grappoli" (five bunches: wines of excellence) award from the Associazione Italiana Sommelier (AIS) for its 2001 and 2003 vintages. The 2002 vintage earned four bunches, signifying it as a wine of great "prestige". Not bad when one considers that its first year of production was 2001. Indeed, these



days this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot is mentioned in the same breath (if not ahead of) Tachis' legendary Super Tuscan, Sassicaia.

Another high rater is the Pius IX Mastai dessert wine, named after a family ancestor who was pope from 1846-1878 (the longest reign in church history). The 2004 Aromatic Traminer-Sauvignon Blanc blend was a five-buncher, while the 2003 and 2005 vintages earned four. Other four-bunchers include the smooth and elegant Cosmino (2002, 2003; Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot), the powerful and intensely spiced Brachetti (2003; Pinot Noir), and the floral and fruity Brianello (2005; Malvasia, Trebbiano, Maceratine, Sauvignon Blanc).

Other wines include Porpora (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sangiovese), which earned a value-for-money award, DiDi (Merlot), and Briano, made from the same grapes as the Brianello.

Giovanni Campodonico oversees the 50ha under vine cultivation, along with the estate's annual production of 80,000 bottles. He's been there since 2003, and has seen the transition of the consultant's role from Tachis to Carlo Ferrini, another renowned enologist with Tuscan connections. One of the results of this change is the uncertainty of the future of the winery's offering of Pinot Noir (Brachetti), a grape that Ferrini has less experience working with.



Another fixture in the Count's camp is Commandante Carlo Ferrini, retired *carabiniere* and long-time pilot and aide of the petroleum executive. It's a small team operating on a loose hierarchy, one that clearly works, giving rise to the thought that, even if oil doesn't mix with water, it certainly does with wine...

### Il Pollenza

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Bring along your empty 5-liter jugs – you can fill them at very reasonable prices with a variety of quality wines.