



San Felice has a long history, but we will concentrate on the recent past, beginning with the Sixties, an extraordinary and revolutionary period for Tuscan viticulture. San Felice as we know it today was born then, a large estate in the southern half of Chianti Classico. It belonged to RAS, one of Italy's leading insurance companies, which put an inspired team at the helm, people who looked far beyond standard company strategies and had a major impact on the entire region.

San Felice anticipated many of the crucial viticultural developments that have recently taken place in Tuscany. A few examples: 1968 saw the introduction of Vigorello, the first Supertuscan, which spearheaded the so-called Renaissance of Tuscan wine. In 1974, with the first nucleus of what was destined to become the *Vitiarium*, San Felice began to systematically collect autochthonous varieties, at a time when the concept of autochthonous variety was virtually unknown. 1978 was the first vintage of Poggio Rosso, a cru of Sangiovese and Colorino born of a *selezione massale*, the propagation of the estate's best Sangiovese and Colorino vines. And so on, until the introduction of Pugnello, a fruit of the study of traditional varieties that began 20 years ago, in 2003.

San Felice has quietly followed a revolutionary path, communicating in an uncommon way, that of a farm whose strength is the cultivation of the land: With pride, study, rigor, and flashes of intuition.



### A Research Winery: From Dream to Method

San Felice's first vintage dates to 1967, and represented a new path for an estate that had been a part of the lands of the Del Taja family, Sienese nobility. Before then the property had been managed traditionally, with tenant farmers cultivating the land as they always had, despite the changes brought by the end of the War that were rendering the old ways obsolete.

Innovation came in a rush in 1968; the shift from the old ways to modern agricultural management was immediate, and it was immediately evident that the new team wanted to combine a strong local identity with carefully reasoned long-term planning. A characteristic combination that has made the San Felice experience distinctive from the outset.

It is impossible not to mention Enzo Morganti here, and despite the 14 years that have passed since his death the projects he set in motion continue to be surprisingly current. Mr. Morganti devised the "metodo San Felice," saying that the goal of the search for excellence should not be an extraordinary, impromptu development, but rather a path based both on a thorough knowledge of one's land – Land that Mr. Morganti, with his great experience as estate manager in Chianti knew very well – and on a scientific protocol featuring systematic studies and experimentation, with the support, especially, of the University of Florence.

With some simplification, one can say that over the years this has meant working in three directions: To improve Sangiovese, increasing its quality to reflect its status as the primary grape of the region; to identify, among the lesser varietals grown by farmers throughout Tuscany, those with the potential to become protagonists in the future; to study the international varietals and determine how the terroir reacts to them and how they grow in other areas.

We were speaking of the Metodo San Felice: passion and a strong bond with the land were clearly the departure point for a dream whose goal was to give new dignity to an entire region. However, production, especially in a real winery, is serious business: not a "romantic moment," but the result of work supported by scientific study and carefully reasoned decisions, not sudden inspirations. A new enlightenment. San Felice does not want to win its clients because it puts its name on its labels with authority, but rather with the authority born of its devotion to research and quality.



In this sense, over the years nothing has changed, and what began as an intuition has become a concrete reality that can be confirmed by those familiar with San Felice's true calling cards, the wines that have set the pace for Chianti Classico for decades.

### The Archetype Wines

The revolution in bottle began immediately, in 1968, with **Vigorello**. Granted that Sangiovese is a great varietal, it is its duty to reveal itself *in purezza*, removed from the stifling strictures of the Chianti Classico Disciplinare of the time. Thus, the first great red of Chianti, a wine that, though modestly labeled table wine, had the character and structure sufficient to open the doors to a new conception of the art of making wine. Ten years later, in 1978, another standard bearer for all of Chianti Classico was introduced, a cru called **Poggio Rosso** derived from the Poggio Rosso vineyard, ten hectares of Sangiovese and Colorino with the new vines propagated from vines already present at San Felice. Even the "rustic" vines of Chianti can produce elegance!

So far, we have discussed the fruits of research on the varietals that have long distinguished Chianti Classico, the winners of a long-term selection process that saved some varietals while sacrificing others, whose names we may remember, though we know little else about them. However, in 1974 San Felice planted about fifteen presumed clones of traditional varietals in a slightly more than half hectare vineyard, an *ante litteram* experiment that expanded considerably in 1987 with the arrival of Professor Roberto Bandinelli of the University of Florence. The varietals increased to 270 (of which 161 are red) and the area of the vineyard, now known as the **Vitarium**, a Latin word meaning a collection of grape vines, to more than two hectares. The Vitarium can be considered a Tuscan ampelographic dictionary; it looks like a garden, but is an experimental vineyard planted to determine – having collected and observed Tuscany's viticultural genetic heritage, what agronomists call the germplasm – the true productive potential of the varietals of yore. Over the years thirty varietals have been selected for further study, and of these Pugnello's personality stood out, as it is capable of giving great satisfaction vinified *in purezza*, and also does a fine job supporting Sangiovese.

Thus we come to 2003, the first vintage of Pugnello. However, fifteen years ago San Felice also began to devote attention to the so-called International varietals, in particular Cabernet Sauvignon, which entered the blend of Vigorello in 1979, together with Merlot, Chardonnay and Sauvignon



Blanc, while the historic white grapes, Malvasia del Chianti and Trebbiano Toscano are dedicated exclusively to Vinsanto.

The San Felice method is, therefore, the systematic study of subjects chosen by the heart, of belonging to a land, and of recognizing one's self in it. The results have been anything but nostalgic reminiscences, rather results that are exceptional from the scientific and productive standpoints, and allowed the development of wines that were revolutionary when introduced: Vigorello, Poggio Rosso and Pugnello.

#### The Centro Studi Enzo Morganti

One can easily imagine the quantity of material, data, and studies that has accumulated in more than thirty years of research. Briefly, the work ranges from clonal selection to pruning systems, from germplasm to the observation of vines on native rootstocks. And then there are the minutes of the many scientific meetings San Felice has hosted, the material related to the theses presented within the framework of the Chianti Classico 2000 project, and the conclusions of wine tastings (the comparison between Chianti Classico and Bordeaux was especially memorable). In short, a treasure trove of precious information, now gathered in a Research Center dedicated to Enzo Morganti.

New, important lines of research will further enrich the Center: Agricola San Felice has recently reached an agreement with the University of Milano, and is planning a regional pruning school. In addition, San Felice continues to work with the University of Florence on three other projects, one regarding the evaluation of autochthonous varieties, another leaf canopies, and a third the impact of the environment upon grape vines.

#### Not Just Science

The world of San Felice is not limited to wine and research. Quite the contrary; tourism, which plays a vital role in the economy of the region, has become steadily more important over the years; visitors are especially attracted to intriguing places where they best experience the atmosphere of the region. In 1990 San Felice became involved with luxury accommodations, transforming part of the hamlet of San Felice into a charming hotel that immediately became part of the Relais & Châteaux chain. And thus



the medieval hamlet inhabited by generations of Chiantigiani now caters to travel's elite, welcoming visitors with charm and offering them mouthwatering morsels from its restaurant. All around is the beauty of the place; the relaxing colors of the gentlest part of Chianti, that around Castelnuovo Berardenga, where the eye flows over rows of vines, oak and scrub oak forests, and sees the towers of Siena, in the distance.

Chianti is unique, but even within this context San Felice is a singularly successful – perhaps because of its name? – confluence of productive activities, scientific research, tourism and cultural activities. A lot, but evidently not enough, because over the years two other wineries have joined San Felice: Campogiovanni in Montalcino, and Tenuta Perolla in the Tuscan Maremma. Because dreams cannot have boundaries.



### San Felice, the historic estate

San Felice's history begins near Castelnuovo Berardenga, the southernmost Commune of Chianti Classico: 650 hectares of land, centered around an old country church, with the manor house, farming village, productive activities, and then vineyards, olive groves, and forests that follow the gentle lay of the land, at altitudes ranging from 350 to 450 meters above sea level. The terrains are prevalently clayey-calcareous, and stony, and have a ground water regime perfect for red grapes; there are also some sandy-marly areas where the grapes ripen about a week early with respect to the rest. The climate is the continental climate typical of the area, but with less rainfall (700 mm per year), concentrated between November and March.

There are 140 hectares of vineyards, 70% of which are Sangiovese, with decreasing percentages of Pignatello, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Colorino, Petit Verdot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Trebbiano, and Malvasia del Chianti. The replanting of the vineyards that began in 1994 is by now almost completed, and planting density now ranges from 6000 to 8500 vines per hectare.

### THE WINES

A symphony of reds – as one might expect given the reputation of the area – emerges from San Felice's cellars, both as Chianti Classico and as IGT Toscana. The line is completed by a white wine, Vin Santo, Grappa, and, finally, extra virgin olive oil.

San Felice Chianti Classico DOCG - Pure Sangiovese for San Felice's young version of Chianti Classico, a medium bodied, lively, fruity wine. A classic wine whose pleasantness brings to mind the easy drinkability of Tuscan wines of yore.

Il Grigio Chianti Classico Riserva - This is San Felice's best-known wine, a Riserva made from a selection of the best Sangiovese from the estate's vineyards. Its celebrity derives both from the considerable volume produced (about 400 thousand bottles per year) and its quality, which revolves around elegance and vigor.

Poggio Rosso Chianti Classico Riserva - A historic Chianti Classico cru produced from a selection of the grapes in the 10-hectare Poggio Rosso vineyard, which has always displayed



great elegance, intensity and concentration. It's the most aristocratic wine produced by San Felice, full and intense with juicy tannins, and capable of extraordinary longevity. Made from Sangiovese, with a slight addition of Colorino.

Pugnitello Toscana IGT - The most recent label born on the hills of San Felice, and also the most recently won wager of the estate's technical staff. From lost varietal to star soloist, Pugnitello has a unique voice, thanks in particular to its fruity, spicy aromas, and flavors that would be aggressive were they not tempered by soft tannins. The varietal deserves a few words, because, despite its great age it has only recently been added to the list of varietals authorized in Tuscany, thanks to the efforts of San Felice and the University. It originated somewhere around Grosseto, vanished from view, and upon rediscovery stood out in the *Vitiarium* thanks to a number of agronomic characteristics, including leaf vigor, limited productivity, and small grape bunches, while from a qualitative standpoint its forceful personality and capacity to either nicely complement Sangiovese or stand alone made it interesting. From the outset it has been planted in all three of San Felice's estates, to evaluate its performance in very different terroirs.

Vigorello Toscana IGT - The first Supertuscan produced in Chianti, born as a Sangiovese *in purezza*, and now a blend with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Regardless of its composition, it has always displayed fullness and balance, coupled with the force and vigor that inspired its name.

Ancherona Toscana IGT - A white from a land of reds, and, what's more, from strictly allochthonous varietals: A blend of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, the former conferring structure and complexity, and the latter elegance of aromas and freshness.

Vin Santo del Chianti Classico DOC - A most authentic tradition, which San Felice follows both in terms of varietals and in terms of production technique. 75% Trebbiano Toscano and 25% Malvasia del Chianti are hung from the rafters to dry, pressed, and the resultant must transformed to wine in caratelli, sealed casks, over a period of five years.



In Pincis Vin Santo del Chianti Classico DOC - Vin Santo In Pincis is only produced in the best vintages, when the conditions can guarantee perfect grapes and very high sugar concentrations. It is once again Trebbiano and Malvasia del Chianti, carefully selected, dried for longer than the regular Vin Santo, and aged for seven years in small casks.

Grappa del Chianti Classico - San Felice's crystal-clear grappa, with its dry, pungent flavors, is born of Chianti Classico wine marks.

#### THE OLIVE OILS

San Felice also has olive trees, which are anything but a simple adjunct to wine production for the estate, both because olives are part of the culture of Chianti, and because the estate has more than 15,000 trees planted on about 60 hectares of land, primarily the Frantoio cultivar (75%), followed by Moraiolo and Leccino - enough to make San Felice the top producer in Chianti of DOP extra virgin olive oil. The trees are pruned in the classic *Vasetto Toscano* manner, which greatly facilitates harvesting, even though the pruning is being changed to the *vasetto cespugliato* style for qualitative reasons. Production varies from 8 to 10 kilos of olives per plant, about a liter of oil. The olives are pressed in San Felice, using a modern continuous feed press.

San Felice Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva DOP - It displays all of the characteristics sought by lovers of extra virgin Chianti Classico oil: brilliant green that becomes golden yellow with time, aromas of heather from the fields, artichokes, and lettuce, and on the palate harmonious bitter and peppery flavors.

Il Velato Olio Extra Vergine di Olive - It's unfiltered, and owes both its name (hazy, in English) and its appearance to this; it has the rich fragrance of new oil and grassy bitter flavors. A small percentage of the Moraiolo cultivar tempers the pepperiness typical of Frantoio.



### Campogiovanni: The illustrious Denomination

Those who believe in Sangiovese cannot help but feel an almost fatal attraction for the land of Montalcino, whose Brunello is the standard bearer for pure Sangiovese, its highest expression. San Felice was one of the first wineries to understand the necessity of expanding beyond its historic roots and "conquering" other great wine-making areas. It was almost a requirement, in the early 1980s, to look towards Montalcino, which was already renowned as the home of Brunello, though it had not yet reached the star status it enjoys today.

In 1984 San Felice purchased Campogiovanni, a beautiful farmhouse and 65 hectares of land in a fantastic location, on the southwest flank of the hill of Montalcino, looking towards the sea, and "protected" by the medieval walls of Sant'Angelo in Colle. All around the peace of a land far from trafficked roads, a paradise made of cypress-lined lanes and rows of vines, of farm houses and country villas, of woods and Mediterranean scrub. Located at elevations ranging from 230 and 300 meters above sea level, the Campogiovanni estate enjoys full exposure until the sun sets below the Tyrrhenian sea, while the same sea produces breezes, sometimes Scirocco and sometimes Maestrale, which keep humidity from accumulating. Thanks to the position of the estate, annual rainfall is limited to about 550 mm, concentrated primarily in the months of May, October and November.

Aside from a small section of vineyard set aside for Pugnello, the estate's 20 hectares are planted entirely to Sangiovese, with 14 dedicated to Brunello and 6 to Rosso. Some vines were already present when the property was purchased, but many more were planted during the 1980s, while the last three hectares were planted in 2003, at a very high density, more than 8,500 vines per hectare.



## THE WINES

The wines of Campogiovanni are practically a declaration of faith with respect to the area's Appellations: three exercises of just Sangiovese, produced with the intent of allowing the wines to express all their potential, rather than bending them towards a preconceived ideal wine.

Campogiovanni Rosso di Montalcino DOC - Pleasant character from Brunello's younger brother too. Campogiovanni's Rosso displays harmonious, elegant perfumes and nice, soft structure.

Campogiovanni Brunello di Montalcino DOCG - Mythic wines are always difficult to define, but its balance, powerful but elegant structure, and aging capacity make the Campogiovanni Brunello, which is produced according to the "traditional school," truly exemplary.

Quercione Brunello di Montalcino Riserva DOCG - Each year, during the harvest, the best grapes from the Quercione vineyard, 2.5 hectares destined to the Riserva, are set aside and vinified separately. Not all vintages are memorable, and only if the vintage is awarded 5 stars - in 1990, 1995, 1997, and 1999 - is Quercione released. Otherwise, it goes to enrich the basic Brunello.

Grappa di Brunello di Montalcino - The noble Brunello marks yield a grappa of great finesse that ages several months in wood.

## THE OIL

And finally, Olives: More than 2000 trees, prevalently Frantoio and Moraiolo, with smaller percentages of Leccino and Olivastra di Montalcino, the cultivar characteristic of the area.

Campogiovanni Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva - the mild climate and early ripening of the olives with respect to the rest of inland Tuscany round the organoleptic characteristics of this extra virgin oil, which is soft, with just a touch of pepperyness, and slight bitter notes.



### Tenuta Perolla, The Land of Innovation

A thousand hectares between Massa Marittima and the sea. This is Tenuta Perolla, property of San Felice since the 1990s, a large estate that combines the two ways the land is used in this section of Tuscany: the traditional herding, and more recent viticulture. The raising of Chianina beef cattle, one of the most important Italian breeds, continues to be Tenuta Perolla's primary activity, though a small part of the estate, 50 hectares in all, of which only 35 are currently in production, are suited to viticulture, thus offering San Felice the opportunity to try something new: to make wines independent of the limitations imposed by Appellation codes or the viticultural traditions of the area. In truth, there already was a vineyard at Perolla, with a few rows of Sangiovese, Cilieggiolo, and Vermentino, which have been joined by Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Pugnitello. The composition of the terrains varies considerably within the property, while the climatic conditions are instead homogenous, and greatly conditioned by the vicinity of the sea, which allows the grapes to ripen gradually and completely.

### THE WINES

At present three wines are produced at Tenuta Perolla, a mixture of new and old, of international and traditional varietals. Young, modern wines, but that's not all.

Vermentino Maremma Toscana IGT - The delicacy of the white grape typical of the area, coupled with the nice structure that derives from a small addition of Sauvignon Blanc from San Felice.

Perolla Maremma Toscana IGT - Young, fresh, fruity, from Sangiovese, Syrah, and Merlot: A pleasant wine that reflects the Maremma, for simple wine-food pairings.

Poggibano Maremma Toscana IGT - From the small Poggibano vineyard, two and a half hectares in all, with clayey loams that immediately demonstrated an extremely interesting potential. Because of this, it was used to produce the Poggibano cru, a powerful, soft wine from Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.



### The Relais Borgo San Felice

A stop at San Felice allows one to visit the winery, taste the wines in the Enoteca, and stroll the hamlet, which has kept the enticing atmosphere of old – though it is perfectly restored – with alleys, tabernacles, loggias, and cobblestones. But the highlight of the town is undoubtedly the Relais Borgo San Felice, four stars of hospitality that easily meet the exacting standards set by Relais & Châteaux.

Restraint prevails; the welcome is warm but not wild, the most refined comforts are almost hidden from view in a setting that must remain the most classic of Tuscan villages. The Relais boasts 43 rooms and suites, some in the manor house that dominates the town square, and some in the houses hidden in the alleyways. For the guests of the Relais, and others as well, there is also the refined, creative kitchen of the Ristorante Poggio Rosso.

Delicacy, softness, nothing too brightly colored or loud, because a vacation in Chianti must mean abandoning oneself to nature, enjoying the gentle panoramas or following the marked trails that wind through forests and vineyards, or biking the white dirt roads of Chianti. And then a small golf course, tennis courts, a pool, a gym, and finally the Centro Benessere where one can enjoy wine therapy: for once polyphenols are no longer mysterious components of wine, but the source of the antioxidants that defeat free radicals, and thus fight obesity and stress.



### The protagonists

We have already mentioned Enzo Morganti, one of the people who shaped modern Chianti Classico thanks to his knowledge of the land and his tremendous foresight. He was the new man who allowed San Felice to become a modern, highly competitive winery. Of course, Mr. Morganti's philosophy has been carried forward by his collaborators and those who came following his passing, with the same passion as 40 years ago.

In order of seniority, the first name is Carlo Salvinelli, agronomist and San Felice's living memory, who arrived in 1973. He has witnessed all the major moments of recent Tuscan viticultural history, from the passage from tenant farming to specialized viticulture, and from doing things by hand to doing them with machines. Now he is flanked in the management of the vineyards by Roberta Pugliese, agronomist. 1984 was the year of Leonardo Bellaccini, enologist, who came not much more than a boy, but immediately threw himself into San Felice's major projects; he now oversees production, and is recognized as the father of Pugnello. In 2005 Fabrizio Nencioni arrived to take the post of sales director; he has spent his life in and for Chianti Classico, and knows all the aspects of wine making and sales. Since May of 2007 the general management of San Felice has been entrusted to Alessandro Marchionne, Florentine by birth and Milanese by training; after a career in upper level management in multinationals of the food sector in Italy and abroad he decided to return to Tuscany and take on the challenge of bringing a new shine to San Felice and highlight the excellence of its products.

A team, assembled by chance or perhaps not, but all Tuscan, and whose very DNA naturally leads it to interpret the values of San Felice.



### And Finally, The History

This is the last topic, because familiarity with Chianti's two thousand years of history is not necessary to understand the reality of a modern company like San Felice, which was born in its present form 40 years ago and is run by people who don't claim titles or more or less famous ancestors. But some mention of the history of this corner of Chianti is necessary; the town was inhabited by the Etruscans – tombs dating to the VI century BC will soon be open to the public in the immediate vicinity of San Felice – and then fought over by Arezzo and Siena from the beginning of the VIII Century. In 714 the bone in contention was dominion over the Church of San Felice in Avane, whose name became San Felice in Pincis in the XI Century. The people gathered around the parish church – in 998 its status was increased, and the certainty of the date indicates it is one of the oldest churches in the area – a few dozens who made do with little and practiced subsistence farming. Then came the end of the wars between Florence and Siena and the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and the arrival of the House of Lorraine, but for the people of San Felice the patronage of the Cerretani family, Siennese nobility that lived here from the XV to the XVIII Century was certainly more important, as was the subsequent arrival of the Taja Family, who carried out many of the structural modifications that still shape the hamlet today.

In 1968 the property was sold to a Milanese industrial company, which in 1978 turned it over to RAS, now of the Gruppo Allianz, which has always supported the business strategies of San Felice, and its growth and development. Allianz - RAS is interested in much more than just agriculture: Reception, with the Relais, animal husbandry with the herds at Perolla, environmental protection with the relationships forged with the WWF regarding the Oasi San Felice in the Tuscan Maremma. That one of the most important insurance-financial groups in the world should make a concrete display of its interest in environmental protection and prevention of global warming is truly a good sign.