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Winemaker Talk: Alberto Antonini

Italian winemaker makes outstanding wines from Tuscany to Argentina

James Molesworth

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Tuscany-born winemaker Alberto Antonini, 47, is among the most influential consultants from Italy. His credits include Castello di Bossi's modern Chianti Classicos and all-Merlot Girolamo, as well as the new Poggio al Tesoro wines from the Bolgheri joint venture between the Allegri family and U.S. importer Leonardo LoCascio. But his reach extends far beyond his native country. He is also partner and winemaker for Altos Las Hormigas, which makes some of Argentina's top Malbecs. Antonini studied at the University of Florence in the early- and mid-'80s, as well as the Université de Bordeaux and later at the University of California, Davis. With an international education, it shouldn't come as any surprise that today Antonini's consulting company works with clients from Armenia to South Africa. Among his several South American clients are Concha y Toro in Chile and Bodegas Nieto Senetiner, Bodegas Renacer and Bodega Melipal in Argentina. Despite his globetrotting lifestyle (and the workload that goes with it), however, Antonini is the last to sing his own praises. He's soft-spoken and prefers to keep a low profile.

Wine Spectator: What was your first vintage in the wine business?

Alberto Antonini: 1980 was my first vintage, at my family winery, Poggiotondo, which is located in the Chianti region of Tuscany. I was just helping my father to make the wine. Basically a lot of manual work, like pruning and canopy management in the vineyard, and racking and pumping over in the cellar. It's what got me interested in being a winemaker.

WS: How many wineries do you currently consult for?

AA: Twelve in Italy, 10 in Argentina and 4 in Chile. I also work with three wineries in California, two in Spain and others in Australia, South Africa, Armenia and Romania.

WS: What wineries did you work at before starting your own consulting business?

AA: [I was] assistant winemaker at Frescobaldi in Tuscany, head winemaker at Col d'Orcia and head winemaker at Antinori.

WS: Who have been your biggest influences as a winemaker?

AA: Working for Piero Antinori was a great learning experience. I understood how to combine tradition and innovation in a way to make wine with a strong identity and a sense of place, but also keep in mind what the consumer is looking for.

WS: What's your favorite food pairing with Argentinean Malbec?

AA: A juicy, medium-rare *bife de chorizo*--the typical cut of Argentinean beef.

WS: What's your favorite wine, other than one of your own?

AA: I really love the *Masseto* from Tenuta dell'Ornellaia.

WS: If you could be one other person in the wine business for one day, who would it be, and why?



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Winemaker Alberto Antonini makes outstanding wines in both the Old World and the New.

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AA: André Tchelistcheff, who I met a few years before he died. He had such an amazing wine culture and a charm that impressed me very much as a young winemaker. I could spend hours listening to his professional life, his contribution to the development of the concept of quality in Napa Valley, and all he did in his life. A real "maestro" in a broad sense.

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