

CASTAGNA'S SANGIOVESE

It's fair to say that sangiovese has challenged Australia winemakers. First there was clonal selection. It took years to separate the clonal wheat from the chaff, and the process of site selection is ongoing. Let's do a little time travelling and go back only four decades.

Penfolds planted sangiovese in the Kalimna vineyard and Carlo Corino put sangiovese into the ground in the Montrose vineyard at Mudgee in the early-mid seventies. Since then, many have had a crack. Coriole, in McLaren Vale, and Pizzini in the King Valley, have toiled and succeeded with sangiovese, becoming recognised as leaders with the variety. Others have shown the occasional flash of brilliance, but one producer has certainly flown under the radar, and that's Julian Castagna. Julian's vineyard at Beechworth has proved to be an ideal home for the Brunello clone of sangiovese, and a quick tasting in late August prompted me to send a glowing report to our subscribers by email. (see below)

“ 2015 Castagna La Chiave Sangiovese This Beechworth producer has always had a way with sangiovese. The 2015 is possibly the best Australian sangiovese I've tasted – dark cherry, bun spice, lingering savoury tannins. (\$75.00) ★★★★★ ”

Julian saw the review and contacted me with an offer of a complete retrospective tasting of his La Chiave and Un Segreto wines. All I had to do was come to the winery. That was no problem. Winewise taster Lex Howard joined me, and the notes below reflect our opinions.

Un Segreto (60% sangiovese, 40% shiraz)

2005 Castagna Un Segreto Thirteen years down, and it's in great condition. There's a hint of leather in the bouquet – but only a hint – and the dark cherry fruit is full of life. The very fine, lingering tannins provide a Tuscan feel. There's at least another decade ahead of this wine. ★★★★★

2006 Castagna Un Segreto Vintage 2006 was an early one, and Julian was in the USA when he was advised from home that the grapes were ready to pick. They spent eight days in a cool room until Julian made it back to Australia. The ferment then took 15 days to get underway. Given the potential for disaster, the outcome was remarkably positive. The colour is strong, and the wine is comparatively unevolved, with ripe fruit and firm tannins bundled up together. A flavour-packed wine that doesn't have the fineness of the 2005. ★★★★★

2008 Castagna Un Segreto There's true “wow factor” here. The red berry/dark cherry aromas and flavours are supported by beguiling spicy hints. The talc-like tannins support the fruit beautifully on a palate of great length. ★★★★★

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2009 Castagna Un Segreto The aroma reflects a hot vintage, but doesn't get into the dreaded "dead fruit" zone. It's a plummy, plush wine that starts off well, but finishes short. ★★☆☆

2010 Castagna Un Segreto Dried herbs and aniseed show on a fresh, but beautifully mature, nose. The palate is long, dry, elegant and totally satisfying. A joy to drink. ★★★★★

2012 Castagna Un Segreto A vibrant, perfumed wine offering scents of rose petals and violets. The palate is fine-boned and "juicy", delivering considerable drinking pleasure. It will benefit from another 7-10 years' cellaring. ★★★★★

"It's about the use of whole bunch (about 30%) and 100% whole berries if I can." Julian Castagna

2013 Castagna Un Segreto This is a closed-up wine with decidedly primary characteristics. The palate is richly flavoured, but tight, suggesting that over a decade of positive evolution lies ahead. ★★★★★

2014 Castagna Un Segreto The dark cherry, tobacco leaf and bun spice aromas are very appealing, and the reserved, backward palate is balanced by supple, fine tannins. We're several years from seeing the best of this wine. ★★★★★

2015 Castagna Un Segreto The aromas are very alluring, and feature cherry, raspberry, rose petals and violets. Again, we find very fine savoury tannins on an impressive medium-weight palate. Although this wine has a great future, we derived considerable pleasure from drinking it. (\$75.00) ★★★★★

The marriage of sangiovese and shiraz certainly works. The powdery, savoury tannins of sangiovese still make their presence felt, and the shiraz contributes richness to the palate without dominating the blend. Un Segreto bears the stamp of its creator and also that of the vineyard. It's a unique wine.



Order Castagna wine at

<https://www.castagna.com.au/orderform/orderform.html>

La Chiave (100% sangiovese)

2000 Castagna La Chiave Mature, slightly brown colour. Has characteristics similar to an aged chianti from a cool sub-region like Radda. Starting to taper off, but still has fruit. ★★★

2001 Castagna La Chiave Growing weary, but delivers sufficient flavour, making it pleasant to drink. ★★★

2002 Castagna La Chiave There's plenty of life left here, and the classic dark cherry and bun spice of sangiovese are clearly evident. The tannins are fine and savoury. Most enjoyable drinking. ★★★★

2004 Castagna La Chiave The red fruits aromas carry a hint of spearmint suggesting slight greenness. However, the palate is sweet-fruited, savoury and satisfying. ★★★★

2006 Castagna La Chiave Comparatively mature colour and nose. There's still sufficient fruit on the palate, but the finish is quite dry. ★★★☆

2008 Castagna La Chiave The nose shows some maturity and dried herbs which contribute appealing, complex notes. Sweet fruit fills a palate balanced by fine tannins. ★★★★



Adam Castagna, Julian Castagna & Lester Jesberg

2009 Castagna La Chiave This wine strikes a balance between maturity and primary freshness. There's still some red fruit and floral aromatics, while the palate has plenty of weight and structure. It's beginning to drink well. ★★★★☆

2010 Castagna La Chiave A fragrant sangiovese that shows some dried herbs complexity. The palate offers great length of cherry-like fruit backed up by fine, savoury tannins. It's utterly delicious, with decidedly Tuscan overtones, and will age gracefully for at least a decade. ★★★★★

2013 Castagna La Chiave The intense, complex nose can't fail to impress, with hints of tobacco leaf enhancing perfumed cherry aromas. The palate is long, fine and richly flavoured, promising delightful drinking as the wine ages. ★★★★★

2014 Castagna La Chiave Red fruits and bun spice show out on an impressive youthful nose. The palate is intense and coiled up, ready to deliver great pleasure over the years. Patience required. ★★★★★☆

2015 Castagna La Chiave This is an extraordinary wine and, although it's in its childhood, we think all the signs of greatness are there. It has all the attributes of high-quality sangiovese and the perfumed aromatics are very seductive. The fruit:tannin balance is perfect and a long life is assured. (\$75.00) ★★★★★

Although Julian Castagna wasn't the first person to plant sangiovese in Australia, he can be described as a pioneer. What's more, he managed to plant the right clone in the right place as a result of sound thinking and good fortune. His tastes are European, and that is reflected in the wines he makes. However, it's not possible to make Tuscan wine in Australia, and Julian realises that, saying

"I wanted to find one wine that I thought of as uniquely Australian, and I wanted that wine to be considered seriously world-wide. "

Julian is one of a handful of people who have succeeded with sangiovese in Australia. In fact, he's now doing more than that. He's excelling. The wines he creates are very much an expression of himself, and that means they stand apart from the mainstream.

Footnote: Julian is so happy with Diam cork that he sees no reason to change to screwcap.

Lester Jesberg

Other Castagna wines tasted

2016 Castagna Ingenue (100% viognier) The nose is a lively combination of stone fruit (ripe peach/nectarine) with some pear and almond. The richly-flavoured palate is lifted by a refreshing acidity, giving linearity and focus. The oak and lees treatment adds texture and interest. Impressive length finishes the story. (\$55.00) ★★★★★☆

2015 Barbarossa (100% nebbiolo) The nose is fragrant, showing hints of potpourri, and the palate offers long-flowing fruit backed up by very fine, but typical, nebbiolo tannins. Very stylish. "It's taken 12 years. That's the first one." Julian Castagna (\$100.00) ★★★★★☆

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