

### The classification of wine

The European Union system of geographical indications ultimately derives from the system of classification that France created in 1855 to rank winemakers in the Bordeaux area. Over time, the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (controlled appellation of origin) as a legal category was officially established in the 1930s. Following the French example, in 1963 the Italian government issued a law that introduced DOC (controlled denomination of origin, in Italian *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata*) and DOCG (denomination of controlled and guaranteed origin, in Italian *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita*), with the goal of highlighting and protecting the best wine production just when mechanization was stimulating output with little attention to quality. Rules were established to determine who had the power to create new DOCs, and how. Production regulations (called *disciplinare*) delimit the zones in which the wines originate and specify type (or types, since a denomination may include a range of versions), colour, grape varieties, minimum alcohol levels, maximum yields in grapes per hectare and wine from grapes, basic sensory characteristics, fermentation (in wood or otherwise and possibly in sealed tanks), required minimum ageing periods and special designations identifying particular sub-zones, such as *classico* or *superiore*. A DOCG wine must meet standards that are stricter than those stipulated in DOC regulations. One of the main differences is the lower yields imposed by the DOCG rules. The limitations in output have probably done more to boost the quality of wines than any other provision in the regulations, which also require in-depth chemical analyses for all DOCG wines.

The first DOC, Vernaccia di San Gimignano in Tuscany, was declared only in 1966, and the first DOCG, Brunello di Montalcino in Tuscany, in 1980. A third category was established in 1992, in compliance with the European Union regulations: the IGT (typical geographic indication, *Indicazione Geografica Tipica*). The IGT regulations require use of authorized varieties, most of them establishing the use of one type only or in a ratio of at least 85 per cent to other approved grapes. The IGT wines are identified with specific

territories, most of which are larger than the zones specified in the regulations for DOCGs and DOCs. Some are region-wide, as in the case of Toscano in Tuscany and Sicilia in Sicily, while others are limited to a valley or a range of hills. For consumers, the IGT denomination primarily indicates a wide range of wines of acceptable quality available at highly competitive prices. It also allowed many local wines to acquire a higher status than regular table wine (*vino da tavola*), which can come from anywhere in Italy and can be bottled anywhere or even sold in bulk (*sfuso*). In fact, Italy is still one of the most important producers of bulk wine in the world.

From the beginning, some innovative wine producers, who were particularly interested in experimenting with grape varieties and techniques, found these regulations too tight. Already in 1968, in the Maremma area of southern Tuscany, with the help of the oenologist Giacomo Tachis, Count Incisa della Rocchetta created Sassicaia, still considered by many to be one of the best Italian wines. In 1971, again in Tuscany, Antinori launched Tignanello. Though officially classified as *vini da tavola*, these wines, known in the English-speaking world as Supertuscans, gained global renown. In time, together with others such as Ornellaia or Guado al Tasso, they were able to compete with the great Bordeaux on the international market.

While these innovative trends were receiving widespread recognition, in 1986 Italy was struck by a scandal that had deep consequences for many years. Methanol, a poisonous substance, was added to a few Piedmont wines to raise the alcohol content, killing several people and causing intoxication and a few cases of blindness in Lombardy, Liguria and Piedmont. Although the Italian government issued many emergency regulations, the general perception of wine was profoundly tainted. Consumption fell to a historical low, while many Italians resorted, at least for a while, to beer. On the international market Italian wines were seen with growing suspicion. The economic damage was incalculable but at the same time forced wineries to improve their production and become more attentive to questions of safety, consumer perception and certification procedures, allowing Italian wine to acquire global fame.