Decanter

Why has Tuscany's Orcia Valley become a talent magnet?

The Orcia Valley in Tuscany is drawing ambitious winemakers from surrounding areas, such as Chianti Classico and Montalcino. Emily O'Hare investigates the source of this magnetic attraction.



Emily O'Hare
September 29, 2025



Tim Manning, Fabbrica Pienza Credit: Fabbrica Pienza

> '*Orcia is billed as one of the most beautiful DOCs in Italy – but there is substance behind the good looks.*' – Tim Manning

An enchanting landscape, the Val d'Orcia / Orcia Valley is divided in two by the Orcia River running from east to west towards the Tyrhennian sea.

Origo's 'mysterious mountain' is Monte Amiata, an extinct volcano last active some 300,000 years ago. It shelters the vineyards in its shadow, and is sacred to those on its slope now and long, long ago – some say it was the seat of the Etruscan gods, and the lightning storms are quite the spectacle.

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Surrounded by giants

The hills of the Val d'Orcia roll between the mountain, Montalcino and Montepulciano in ripples. The landscape is more gentle on the eye than the dramatic, steep and deeply forested Chianti Classico. Instead, fields of golden wheat and barley cover great stretches of land, interrupted by slithers and points of posturing cypress trees so evenly planted that their presence must have been orchestrated by mathematical minds.

Vineyards appear infrequently, atop grey clay, sand and silt – soils as 'bare and colourless as elephants' backs', noted Origo. Where green vines do not puncture the soil, and cereal and grain cannot grow, mounds of grey, inhospitable clay go on for miles – one might be looking across the moon's surface. For centuries, painters and writers have tried to translate the beauty of this region. And with the relatively new Orcia DOC, established in 2000, winemakers are officially offering their own expressions of this territory.

The DOC encompasses around 160 hectares of vines and has 40 producers, with an annual output of around 300,000 bottles. It's a tiny production in comparison to neighbouring Montalcino with its average production upwards of nine million bottles.

Winemakers previously using the Toscana IGT can label their wines under seven categories: Orcia, Orcia Riserva, Orcia Sangiovese, Orcia Sangiovese Riserva, Orcia Rosato, Orcia Bianco and Orcia Vin Santo. It will be interesting to watch how the Orcia DOC finds its way next to the giants on either side. The seven categories of DOC do not yet seem to fit the potential of the land, or the ambition of the region's winemakers. But their humility, curiosity and respect for the land bodes well for the future of this nascent Tuscan wine appellation.

Tim Manning

For over 20 years, Manchester-born Tim Manning has been working in Chianti Classico. There he has made a reputation for himself with his artisanal and sensitive approach to Sangiovese at Riecine, Il Borghetto and Montecalvi.

In 2020 he joined Fabbrica, a Swiss-owned winery in the outskirts of Pienza. Of the Orcia DOC, he says: 'Orcia is billed as one of the most beautiful DOCs in Italy – but there is substance behind the good looks. Its producers are modest, passionate and unstu"y, it can easily give Montalcino a run for its money and produce Sangiovese-based (or not!) wine with an elegance and drinkability to match Chianti Classico.'

His Orcia Sangiovese Riserva 'Tinia' perfectly exemplifies the capacity for this DOC to compete with its premium neighbours; Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano.
But it is the Syrah that Tim produces, however, that really makes me swoon.

After analysis of the hill morphology (similar to Southern Rhône) and of its soils (similar to Crozes-Hermitage in the Northern Rhône), the owners decided to plant Syrah.
Under Manning's guardianship, the variety is vinified in concrete with 20% whole-cluster fruit, pressed out after around 60 days on the skins, and aged for 18 months in a large 50hl oak barrel.

The aromas are enticing; dark and forest fruity, and the palate is deeply flavoursome, entirely fresh with no jammy notes to dull the appetite. Easily a one-bottle-not-one-glass kind of wine!



Tim Manning. Credit: Fabbrica Pienza

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SINGLE TASTING

95

Tasted by: Emily O'Hare
(at Val d'Orcia, 01 Aug 2025)
Part of Why has Tuscany's Orcia Valley become a talent magnet?
Drinking Window: 2025 - 2031

This is **everything you desire from a Syrah**; it's as glossy as Morticia's hair, haunting in its enticing aromatics, glossy in its deep purple colour, and enticing in its fruit definition. After four years it's still **rich in primary fruit aromas**, but all on the dark side: **sweet herbs and sweet spices, star anise**, and only just some tertiary **notes of dried rose**. **Full bodied, poised and luscious** on the palate without a hint of jamminess, its perfectly haughty tannins hold attention up to and through to a long finish. **Top!**



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