



Giving Rosso di Montalcino a Second Look Back in 2014, the last time our wine panel tried Rosso di Montalcino, one taster did not restrain himself in criticizing the wines. "I think Chianti blows these wines away," said Chris Cannon, a veteran restaurateur and wine expert who is now the managing partner of Jockey Hollow Bar and Kitchen in Morristown, N.J. I disagreed with him back then, finding a lot to like in the bottles we tasted. But after the wine panel revisited Rosso di Montalcino recently, tasting 20 bottles from the 2016 and 2017 vintages, I have been rethinking my position. It's not generally my inclination to make categorical statements like Chris's. My orientation is almost always to seek out what's good in a wine, and to be open to the subtleties and gray shadings that are often more accurate representations of reality than blanket black-and-white

which must both be 100 percent sangiovese, Chianti needs only to be 80 percent sangiovese. In the best Chiantis, the remainder is generally made up of local grapes like canaiolo and colorino, or the wine is entirely sangiovese. International grapes like cabernet sauvignon and merlot are permitted, and were once common additions. But their presence, even in small percentages, often stuck out, and their popularity in the region has faded over the last 20 years. The Montalcino zone is to the southwest of Chianti, and tends to be warmer and drier. The Montalcino wines are often denser and more muscular than the generally leaner and more angular ones made in the cooler Chianti region. In both areas, wines can range from elegant to powerful, depending on the climate and composition of the soil—particularly its fertility and the presence of clay. But the power in the

pleasantly bitter 2016 Castello Romitorio, No. 8, came from the northwest; the earthy, floral 2017 Altesino was from the north; and the big, powerful, bright 2017 La Palazetta from Flavio Fanti was from the southeast. Some of my favorite producers were not in the tasting. I would always recommend bottles from Le Potazzine , Conti Costanti , Il Paradiso di Manfredi, Fattoria dei Barbi , Il Poggione and, if money is no object, Poggio di Sotto, Biondi-Santi and Stella di Campalto . In the end, despite our mixed feelings about the tasting, I resist disparaging the whole category as Chris Cannon did at our 2014 tasting. I've had too many of these wines that I have liked. Yet Montalcino is simply a different expression of sangiovese than Chianti Classico, and vive la difference. I am not hesitant to hash styles of wine that stray too far into the overblown cocktail world but 1/1