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Vintages Reviews

Poggio Scalette: Il Carbonaione 1992-2007 / 90+ Points – Wine Advocate

Italy Report: Poggio Scalette: Il Carbonaione 1992-2007 July 2008

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| 2007 | Poggio Scalette Il Carbonaione (tank) | (91-94) |
| 2006 | Poggio Scalette Il Carbonaione (barrel) | (91-94) |
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| 2003 | Poggio Scalette Il Carbonaione | 92 |
| 2001 | Poggio Scalette Il Carbonaione (magnum) | 94 |
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Poggio Scalette is a tiny, family-run property located in the hills of Greve right next to neighbors Querciabella. The estate is run by father and son team Vittorio and Jurij Fiore. Vittorio is most well-known as consulting oenologist for a number of top wineries, including Costanti and Il Carnasiale, while Jurij oversees day to day work at Poggio Scalette itself. The hillside vineyards are located at about 500 meters in altitude, which is ideal for making elegant, finessed wines that are capable of aging. Although some vineyards have been planted recently, the majority of the vines are about 70 years old. Space in the cellar is tight, to say the least. Winemaking facilities are as bare-bones and strictly functional as they come. Poggio Scalette's top wine is the 100% Sangiovese Il Carbonaione, a wine with a distinguished track record made all the more notable considering how gracefully the less important vintages have aged. I recently had a chance to sit down with Vittorio and Jurij Fiore to taste through an extensive selection of vintages going back to the inaugural 1992 and I came away very impressed. Readers lucky enough to have well-stored bottles from forgotten vintages such as 1992 and 1994 are in for a treat. Though not inexpensive, Il Carbonaione remains a very fairly-priced wine in today's market considering the quality of what is in the bottle. Poggio Scalette also makes a small amount of Chianti Classico which is sold in bulk as well as a 100% Merlot, Piantonaia.

Il Carbonaione is made from an ancient clone of Sangiovese known as Lamole which is unique to these hills. The wine is fermented in open-top steel tanks after which it undergoes malolactic fermentation in steel, a decision that is mostly dictated by a lack of space. Vintages 2002-2004 did see malo in oak, but after having tasted through this series of wines it doesn't appear that the decision of steel versus oak for the malos is a factor that makes a critical difference in quality. The wine spends about 17 months in 350-liter oak barrels (50% new), of which roughly 90% are French oak and 10% American oak.

The 2007 Carbonaione (from tank) is rich in aromatics and polyphenols, which can be seen in the wine's lively color. It is an incredibly fresh, vibrant wine with refined tannins that frame a gorgeous expression of red fruits, berries, menthol and spices. This is a very promising Carbonaione at this early stage. (91-94). The estate's 2006 Carbonaione (from barrel) is a powerful, massively constituted wine packed with fruit. Today it shows the influence of oak, but this is a wine that will likely require significant patience, so there is plenty of time for the wine to come together. Despite its ripeness and richness, it remains a very elegant, fresh wine. (91-94). By comparison, the 2005 is a lithe, silky-textured Carbonaione, with perfumed aromatics and an attractive core of ripe red fruits. In 2005 the harvest season saw a full week of rain, which can be felt in the wine's smaller scale. Today it comes across as lacking the stuffing of the finest vintages, but this is a wine that ages well, especially in cooler years, and I am confident that will be the case here as well. For now, the wine requires at least another year or two in bottle to absorb the toasted oak that is prominent at this stage. Interestingly, the 2005 shows more overt oak aromas and flavors than the 2006, which was taken directly from barrel, no doubt

owing to the quality of the fruit. 91/Anticipated maturity: 2010-2020. The 2004 Carbonaione is another animal entirely. It bursts from the glass with layers of deeply spiced, mentholated fruit. Sweet and expansive on the palate, this powerful, dense wine offers superb balance. Today the tannins are somewhat imposing, so further bottle age seems prudent. The 2004 is one of the finest in a series of distinguished wines from Vittorio and Jurij Fiore. This is an especially elegant and graceful Carbonaione. 94/Anticipated maturity: 2014-2024. The 2003 Carbonaione is made in a brooding, powerful style that captures the essence of the vintage in its richness while maintaining superb overall balance. It offers generous dark fruit, earthiness, toasted oak and mineral notes with notable length and expansiveness on the palate. Lingering notes of sweetness on the finish and finessed tannins round out this terrific wine. 92/Anticipated maturity: 2009-2021.

Readers looking for a superb Tuscan wine from the 2001 vintage that won't break the bank should consider the 2001 Carbonaione. Tasted from magnum, this layered, sumptuous beauty explodes from the glass with vibrant layers of dark fruit, spices and tobacco. Glorious and expansive on the palate, it is a beautiful wine in every way. 94/Anticipated maturity: 2009-2021. The 1999 Carbonaione has developed beautifully in bottle. It reveals superb elegance, with enticing notes of spices, coffee beans, menthol and ripe dark fruit that emerge from the glass. Made in a more slender style than the 2001, it nevertheless offers lovely harmony and balance. The 1999 has lost some of its baby fat and is approaching its peak of drinkability. 93/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2018.

Poggio Scalette's 1998 Carbonaione is another of the smaller-scaled versions of this wine. This isn't the most complex Carbonaione, but the wine has retained lovely freshness and purity in its dark fruit, menthol and spices. It is an excellent choice for near-term drinking. 91/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2013. The estate's 1997 Carbonaione is sweet, ripe and full-bodied, but with plenty of supporting structure underneath. Complex notes of tobacco, leather, sweet herbs and spices have developed in bottle, rounding out this soft-textured, caressing Carbonaione. As is often the case with wines from warm vintages, provenance is especially critical. Impeccably stored bottles have as much as another decade of prime drinking ahead of them. 93/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2017.

The 1996 Carbonaione, from a poorly-regarded vintage, is somewhat lean and compact relative to the best vintages of this wine. All things considered, it offers outstanding balance and freshness in a linear style. It may continue to hold for some time, but its potential for improvement seems exhausted at this stage. 90/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2013. In 1995 the estate saw a particularly late harvest. The fruit was brought in on the 22nd of October. The 1995 Carbonaione is fresher and more vibrant than the 1997, but also somewhat leaner in style. It shows some of the gamier notes that sometimes develop in the wine, along with spices and worn-in leather. In 1995 the wine was fermented in oak, and even today a layer of sweetness remains. The 1995 has the freshness to continue to hold for at least a few more years, although it doesn't appear to have any further upside potential. 91/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2013.

I was blown away by the 1994 Carbonaione, a wine from an average year. Nothing in particular stands out, but the wine shows exceptional balance. This is not a complex or structured Carbonaione; rather it is an understated wine with delicate notes of menthol, spices and red cherries. It remains fresh and vibrant for a wine of its age, and proves how well this wine can develop, even in smaller vintages. 92/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2014. The 1993 Carbonaione has aged quite well, even if it is not an especially refined wine. Made in a powerful, rustic style, it reveals a wilder side of this wine in its dark fruit, earthiness, game, worn-in leather, cedar, tar and spices. Still quite fresh considering its age, it should continue to drink well for another few years, perhaps beyond. 91/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2011. What I would give to have a few bottles of Poggio Scalette's 1992 Carbonaione in my cellar! The estate's debut vintage started off well, but the fall was marred by rain. Fortunately the Fiore were able to find a small window of good weather in which to harvest their small vineyard. This is a wine of superb class and elegance. Blessed with gorgeous aromatics and elegant fruit, the wine has developed notes of bell pepper, spices and sweet herbs that in some ways recall a great Cabernet Sauvignon, but with an unmistakable sense of Tuscan identity. By any definition, this is a marvelous wine. 92/Anticipated maturity: 2008-2010.

—Antonio Galloni