

## First taste: Ornellaia 2018

Aldo Fiordelli tastes the new-release Ornellaia 2018 and reports on the vintage at this acclaimed Super Tuscan winery.



Aldo Fiordelli  
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Among the vineyards of [Bolgheri](#), on the north side of the famed 'Viale dei Cipressi', there is a centenary oak tree so big that you can't embrace it on your own.

The great wooden terrace next to it is one of the best points of view in the appellation, a unique enclave tucked between the sea and the protective hillside of the Tuscan coast, no more than 10km away, that serves to block colder winds and rains from moving inland.

The secular oak is the symbol of the Bellaria vineyard, from which there is an intoxicating view, but also a tactical point of observation over some of Ornellaia's top vineyards.

Founded in 1981, Ornellaia is approaching its 40th anniversary.

In this relatively short timespan, Ornellaia has contributed greatly to the prestige of the Bolgheri area with its 115 hectares under vine.

Behind the label, Ornellaia is a detail-oriented project made up of land destined for winemaking, with meticulous care given to the precious vines climbing the hillside.

At up to 100 metres above sea level, Bellaria is one of the higher plots, a cool and well ventilated late-ripening site.

'The old Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot of this area represent the heart of the Ornellaia blend,' said Axel Heinz, estate director.

The soil is based on clay with thin or deep gravel in Bellaria, and loamy clay, calcareous with thin or deep gravel in the larger Bellaria Alta vineyard.

This differs to other plots of the tenuta, such as the shallow calcareous clay of Ferrugini, or the gravelly and calcareous sand of Fornace.

In addition to red grapes, some white grapes for the outstanding Ornellaia Bianco are grown around here. Together, these elements magically interpret the climate of the Tuscan coast, its vital breezes off the Mediterranean sea and its clear, intense light.

Separately, Ornellaia has also recently announced a new partnership with Dalla Valle in Napa.

## Ornellaia 2018

On 10 February, Ornellaia presented the 2018 vintage for the first time. After the powerful 2015, the outstanding 2016 and the austere yet very good 2017, we return to a slightly cooler vintage with normal climatic conditions.

Temperatures spent enough time below zero for the vines to begin their well-deserved winter rest.

The spring will be remembered as one of the wettest in history, with three-times the seasonal average rainfall, and then high temperatures in April. *Veraison* took place between 22 and 25 July.

September was warm and dry with temperatures which were higher than the seasonal average, but cooler nights enabled the vines to recover and preserve the aromas and acidity.

The red grape harvest began on 31 August with the Merlot and ended on 8 October with the later ripening varieties. By comparison, in the hot 2015 vintage harvest began in mid-September.

Ornellaia 2018 is lighter than usual, 'mostly due to the spring rainfalls,' according to Heinz.

The style of the 2018 vintage is supported by the blend composition: Merlot accounts for 51% – the highest ever proportion of this grape – joined by 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot.

The wine is deliciously balanced and complex, and although it's not quite as powerful as usual it will age gracefully.



## Ornellaia Vendemmia d'Artista

Every year since 2009, Ornellaia has commissioned a leading artist to express the character of the new vintage in sculpture and label art.

For the 2018 vintage, the estate called upon Belgian artist Jan Fabre to interpret 'La Grazia' – or grace.

The result is a series of three sculptures – 'A Candle of Mercy', 'The Crown of Kindness', and 'The Heart of Virtue' – made from coral, each topping a salmanazar of Ornellaia 2018.

Of his designs, Fabre explained that, 'I knew already I wanted to work with coral, and made a lot of different drawings until I came out with the series from which I made the sculptures'.

He enlisted the help of an artisan workshop in Naples, a city with a long and distinguished history of working with the material, to produce the coral sculptures.

In addition, Fabre also produced a set of 10 labels. One bottle in each case of Ornellaia 2018 will feature one of his unique designs.



The full set of 10 labels designed by Jan Fabre captures plenty of movement. Credit: Ornellaia

## Auction

A charity auction will be held at Sotheby's in September. It will give collectors the opportunity to purchase some of these unique 'vendemmia d'artista' expressions of Ornellaia 2018, including one of the three coral-topped salmanazars and a very limited number of cases featuring the full set of 10 labels.

All proceeds will go to the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation's 'Mind's Eye' project for the third consecutive year. This project enables blind and partially-sighted visitors to experience art using all their senses.

*By James Button*

## Ornellaia, Bolgheri, Superiore, Tuscany, Italy, 2018



Often seen as one of the most powerful wines from Bolgheri, and possibly too muscular up until the first decade of the 2000s, Ornellaia 2018 is lighter than usual - a fact which is the result of both the cooler vintage and a thoughtful style. In this vintage, Merlot is the prominent grape, reaching 51% of the blend. The nose is intoxicatingly fresh and full of spice, with restrained cassis, citrus, clove and black pepper, most likely benefitting from lighter extraction. Graphite minerality dominates the palate, together with sweet blond tobacco and dark fruits. The mid-palate shows good concentration, with crunchy, ripe tannins and brilliant acidity. A really great expression of Bolgheri, more focused on elegance than powerful. It perhaps has slightly less ageing potential - 20 years instead of 30 - yet it's full of complexity. A blend of 51% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot.

Drinking Window 2021 - 2041