

THE SOURCE
I FABBRI DI SUSANNA GRASSI
LAMOLE, CHIANTI CLASSICO



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Likely lost on seekers of powerful wines, Susanna's full range of elegant Chianti Classicos is like a collection of albums from a great musician, where each one builds upon the last. Alone, each delivers; but together, in a genre of finesse, they are an unbeatable catalog.

During my first visit in May 2026, Susanna lined up her wines at the cantina on the ancient, rebuilt castle terrace, where her brilliantly witty son, Vittorio, joined us. My wife and my friend, Gino Della Porta, winegrower and founder of Nizza Monferrato's Sette, were with us at the table, and, speaking for myself, the world could've ended, and I would've been at one of the summits of my life; I would've accepted those wines accompanied by the best company, with a simple but perfect meal as my last supper. Susanna kept things moving through dinner, but I wanted to continue sniffing and drinking them until the sun rose. On my way back to the perfectly rustic rock room at I Fabbri, I was physically sober but happy and spiritually drunk.

LAMOLE: CHIANTI CLASSICO IN THE CLOUDS

Imagine leaving the most celebrated areas of Chianti Classico—Radda, Greve, Panzano with all its famous butcher-inspired restaurants and expansive vineyard views—and hopping off the pavement onto a long, winding gravel road that climbs slowly but steadily. At its peak, the reward: Lamole, the land of irises grown for perfume, some of the region's highest and steepest vineyards, a one-restaurant town (with great views, mind you) sitting amid some of the hardest terrain to work in all of Chianti Classico, yet home to some of its most elegant, perfumy and lifted wines. It's gorgeous and worth the drive, but you could call it a 20th-century vineyard-rescue investment few would've wanted to make, considering the times, when bigger and bolder won the day. But things are different now, and many in the wine world say, "Yes, please! We still want our daily glass or two (or ...), but we're tired of the hangover from those delicious but too forceful wines doing the bodybuilding pose for the critics."



I FABBRI IN SUSANNA'S WORDS

Susanna is the 11th generation of her family in Casole, dating to 1620. The family made wine and worked as blacksmiths, and her great-grandfather Olinto was already bottling wine from the property in the 1920s.

When asked how Susanna found her way back to I Fabbri, her answers told a story best left in her voice, with only slight modifications, though her English is impeccable.

“The aspect that really excites me is the growing recognition and prestige that Lamole is having. 25 years ago, this area was not highly considered due to the difficult terrain and the mild-bodied wines. What is important is seeing Lamole finally recognized for what we are: a fresher, more elegant side of Chianti Classico. Those fresh, easy-to-drink wines have brought us recognition. At this altitude, we used to fear cool temperatures. Warmer seasons have helped us reach good ripeness, and in that respect they give me hope for Lamole’s future.

When I returned, though, my concern was the family estate. After so many years rented out, it had suffered from intensive and exploitative farming. I felt called back to my roots. I wanted to restore its dignity and give it the care it deserved.

My grandfather Roberto and my father Giuliano taught me their love, passion, and respect for nature—Earth and humans. They inspired me to pick up the hoe and restore dignity to our estate and our past. Since the beginning, I have taken part physically in every harvest, with my grandfather’s scissors from the 1960s in one hand and a basket in the other. I have done every job, from the vineyards to the cellar. It never felt like a burden because I wanted to learn everything, understand the potential of my vineyards, and clarify my idea of wine.

That is also why I search for the right representation of Lamole in my wines. We wouldn’t be anything without the territory and its nature. But understanding how I wanted to express it took time. My ‘Lamole’ was the last Chianti Classico label I introduced. By then, I had grasped the terroir and its potential more clearly, and I finally understood which style suited my taste and how I wanted to interpret the territory. It was a revelation: finesse and elegance could challenge the bold stereotype of Chianti Classico. My ‘Lamole’ was my signal to continue in that direction.



I wanted people to discover a fresher side of the appellation, with Lamole's elegance and aromatic complexity. The terraces, altitude, and wind give us a special microclimate. Those are the characteristics I want to preserve in the wines.

I always say we are organic, flirting with biodynamic. We follow lunar phases and use natural fertilization with compost because these were the practices of our old farmers, passed down by their ancestors. It's our way of honoring tradition and respecting nature.

Every season still requires close attention. Warmer temperatures have helped us, but increasing climate variability worries me more than heat. It asks us to be more present in the vineyards and pay more attention to individual plants. In the cellar, we try to keep things simple and natural, intervening as little as possible. Our attention belongs first in the vineyards; the grapes and the growing season should speak for themselves.



Over time, we reduced pumpovers and extractions, and shortened the time before pressing the skins from 21 days to 10 to 12 days. We replace only a small proportion of our barrels each year to avoid as much presence of the wood as possible. What matters is preserving the fruit and the territory. When I open a bottle of my first wine, the 2000 vintage of I Fabbri, which we now call Riserva, I can still recognize Lamole's signature. That makes me happy.

But what I want from wine is very simple. It should be enjoyable, easy to drink, and shared with the people you love, just as we do at home. Life is already too complex; there is no need to drink

complicated wines. I hope people find the joy of life and living, the bliss of sharing with their loved ones, and the breathtaking power and elegance of nature.”



THE STRING QUARTET + 2

The four Chianti Classicos are Susanna’s life arc. Lamole: youthful, full of the sun’s energy and dreams. She grew up believing she would take care of the farm, but life led her to study economics, live abroad, and enter the fashion world. Terra di Lamole shows much greater depth of life experience outside Lamole. A consulting job brought her back to Casole at the end of the 1990s, where she found the family property “empty and sad, but still bewilderingly beautiful.” In 2000, she got married, then pregnant, created I Fabbri, and started rebuilding the family history in one year: that’s Riserva. Gran Selezione has it all: the refined but realized youthful dreams of Lamole; the becoming and strength of Terra; the fortitude and depth of Riserva. Gran Selezione is Susanna: wise, unshakeable, generous and full of joy. Susanna’s I Fabbri range hums a tune of deep emotion, and a life lived with a ceaselessly lifted spirit. They are a gift.

The range moves fluidly from pure Sangiovese planted high in Lamole’s siliceous, Macigno formation-derived sand topsoil and underlying sandstone bedrock with old mixed vineyards surrounded by wild, indigenous forest, with Sangiovese, Canaiolo and the traditional white grapes of Chianti, some planted as far back as 1965 and others as recently as 2022.

In the Chianti Classico range, '**LAMOLE**' comes entirely from Sangiovese planted in 2005 and 2018 on a medium-steep southeast-facing slope at 630–680 meters of altitude. '**TERRA DI LAMOLE**' moves down to 550 meters and uses older vines, planted in 1965 and 1984 on a medium-steep south-facing slope, with 90% Sangiovese and 10% Canaiolo. '**RISERVA**' also comes from vines of the same age, elevation and exposure, but is composed entirely of Sangiovese. '**GRAN SELEZIONE**' narrows the focus further to Sangiovese planted in 1965 on a medium-steep south-facing slope at 550 meters, produced only in the most ideal vintages and in small quantities from what Susanna considers her top single vineyard.

The wines are naturally fermented and handled gently, with concrete doing much of the work. Older 500L French tonneaux are introduced as the range gains depth and strength through Terra di Lamole, Riserva and the tiny production of Gran Selezione.



She created her white, '**CASOLE BIANCO**,' because she couldn't use as many of the old vineyards' white grapes in her Chianti Classicos as she used to, bringing Trebbiano Toscano, Malvasia Lunga and San Colombano together on their own. She also makes a beautiful '**CASOLE ROSÉ**' composed entirely of Sangiovese.

Across the range, the winemaking is remarkably simple and deliberately unforced, so the ancient sands, high altitude, cooler weather and Sangiovese selections do most of the talking.

EXTRA CREDIT: A DEEPER DIG

ONE MESS TO ANOTHER

Chianti Classico is complicated, disorienting, even—without a hot air balloon view, a tangle. The endless 20-km-per-hour cutbacks and dense forests between communes let in only teased views of the vineyards and no safe way to stop with the lead-footed locals stuck to your bumper like a trailer.

This mess started long before cultivation in these dreamy hills and their nightly skyline poetry, waiting to be written. It happened well below the surface of an ancient ocean whose water is elsewhere now. Sediments that would eventually become the Chianti hills accumulated at different depths under water and over tens of millions of years.

THE CAST: the Ligurian-Piedmont Ocean, a branch of the Tethys (named for the Greek Titan goddess of the sea) destined to disappear; the Adria block (named after the Adriatic Sea, which is believed to take its name from an ancient, once-important, *former* port town, Adria, that now, thanks to millennia of sediment deposited by the Po and Adige rivers, is 22 km removed from the coastline!), moving north and northwest toward Eurasia while broadly rotating counterclockwise; Africa, advancing behind it; Eurasia, quietly waiting to the north; and then, millions of years later, the rising Apennines themselves.

As Adria converged with Eurasia, a former ocean called the Ligurian-Piedmont started to shrink, eventually disappearing altogether, and its remnants are most notably present today in the Ligurian Mountains. Oceanic crust subducted while enormous accumulations of marine sediment were scraped and plowed ahead of the collision, thrust into immense sheets of rock, folded, faulted, stacked, and eventually lifted with the rise of the Apennines. But Adria didn't simply drive straight north. It moved and rotated against Eurasia at an angle, as the subducting plate retreated eastward, progressively drawing the Apennines into the long, narrow, north-to-south spine that would help give Italy its boot-like shape.



This is a drone shot I filmed at almost the perfect moment on a perfect day. However, I forgot to focus it correctly ... Full disclosure: this is the sole A.I.-enhanced photo (though only slightly!) in our catalog of thousands of human-made photos I've taken and will be replaced once I can go back to Lamole and redo it! But for now, you get the idea: it's gorgeous!

The growing Apennines became so heavy that their advancing weight bent the Adriatic crust downward ahead of them, creating a deep marine trough. Sand eroded from mountains to the north

and northwest, including the rising Alps. Layer after layer was buried, compressed, and cemented into Macigno sandstone. As the mountain front continued advancing, it eventually caught the very basin its weight had helped create, folding and thrusting its sandstone upward into the growing Apennines.

The Apennines rose to hundreds of meters high in Chianti Classico, nearly a thousand at Monte San Michele's 892-meter summit. Erosion stripped enormous quantities of rock from above through millions of years of simultaneous construction and destruction. That erosion continues today: sandstone lifted from the sea is being dismantled grain by grain, turning the Macigno sandstone into the sands of Lamole where Susanna's vines grow.

CHIANTI CLASSICO, ROCKS!

An even more important cast of characters, much more practical and relevant to what we wine people really want to know: Chianti Classico's rock stars! Before we dig deeper into what is most relevant here, Macigno, we need to cover some ground with its neighboring rock formations.

The most famous (and seemingly most confusing!) of rock types is what the Tuscans call **GALESTRO**. This clay-rich rock naturally splits into thin, brittle sheets and often resembles metamorphic rock due to its laminated look. It includes shales, mudstones and argillite-type materials—the latter a harder rock between mudstone and true metamorphic rock. Despite its appearance, Galestro is generally not classified as metamorphic simply because of this layered structure: fissility (the thin sheets) and tectonic deformation alone don't mean that its minerals have recrystallized, reorganized, or formed new minerals under sufficient heat and pressure. Originally, it was fine marine sediment, like clay and silt rather than sand. Because it formed in many different environments, its composition is variable: for example, some Galestro formations are high in calcium carbonate, while others are not. Like all the marine sedimentary rocks in Chianti Classico, it was also buried beneath the sea, compacted into rock, then fractured and deformed by the tectonic forces that built the Apennines, intensifying its tendency to split along thin planes, and today weathers into those thin, flaky, plate-like (*fissile*) fragments. Broadly, Galestro comes from the Early Cretaceous all the way to the Early Oligocene in the Chianti context—roughly between 113-28 million years old (Ma). Though “Galestro” is a traditional name for several clay-rich rocks, it's not a single geological formation.

The most relevant factor here is how the rocks' properties relate to viticulture. Galestro preferentially breaks into flaky shards and, as weathering continues, breaks down into increasingly fine, clay-rich material. Beneath the surface, water is already working its way through cracks and fractures, chemically and physically breaking down the underlying rocks and contributing gravels, sands, silts and clays to the developing soil. In the vineyards, Galestro can look like dried-out, foliated rock, but its weathering produces a much finer, clay-rich material—and clay is the most water-retentive of the principal soil particle sizes underneath.

While the shattered Galestro on the surface seems almost incapable of holding water, the decomposition below can do exactly that. Galestro's extremely friable nature lets water move downward easily, so roots can follow it into pockets of finer materials capable of storing moisture. This is one of Galestro's great contributions to vines, making it a principal building block in some of Tuscany's greatest terroirs.

Don't we all love to talk about limestone? Well, I suppose I should speak for myself ... But we can't deny that those calcareous sea creatures and plants left behind some kind of magic for grapevines to soak up and express in their wines.

If Galestro is Chianti Classico's lead guitar, the famous blocky, angular, pale white, marly limestone, **ALBERESE** is on drums. A remnant of the Piemonte-Ligurian Ocean, this is the second-youngest of our rock stars, and with limestone like this often comes great range and depth. Born mainly between ~48–41 Ma, it's principally composed of marine carbonate sediments partly from fossilized coccolithophores and foraminifera (microscopic marine algae and shelled single-celled organisms, respectively) mixed to varying degrees with clay. As Alberese fractures, water can easily make its way deeper into the soil while slowly dissolving some of the calcium carbonate, leaving behind clay and other finer particles that contribute to more water retention; however, when it's shallow and highly fractured, it can drain rapidly.



Alberese, Gaiole

Probably connected to the rock's pale, almost white color, possibly from Latin *albus*, meaning “white,” the name Alberese has also been associated with *albero*, Italian for “tree,” because iron and manganese oxides sometimes form delicate branching, tree-like patterns called dendrites across this otherwise pale limestone. Its generally high calcium carbonate content makes it a very alkaline soil—among the most alkaline of the main regional rock types. Galestro would be next in line, though very variable in carbonates given its ~85-million-year window of development. Galestro looks dry but can weather toward water-retentive clay; Alberese looks impenetrably hard, but fractures can become highways for roots and water. In deeper soil beds, it retains water, while in thinner topsoil

parcels, it is much more drought-prone. However, two different Alberese vineyards can behave very differently depending on slope, fracturing, depth, marl/clay content and many other factors. Like many limestone terroirs, Alberese-dominated soils can render well-structured and firmer wines.

A LINE IN THE SANDSTONES

There are a few sandstone formations in these parts. Pietraforte, which quite literally means “hard stone,” is the band’s bassist. This Late Cretaceous rock formation is much older, at approximately 90-70 Ma, making it about 40-70 million years older than Susanna’s Macigno sandstones. Pietraforte originates in the ancient Ligurian-Piedmont Ocean on the western side of what is now Italy; Macigno comes from the deep marine basin that replaced it as the rising Apennines bent the Adriatic crust downward. Pietraforte is an older sandstone made from a mixture of broken rock and limestone-rich material deposited in the disappearing Ligurian-Piedmont Ocean; Macigno came much later, made largely from quartz-rich sand eroded from mountains to the north, including the rising Alps. Perhaps the most important distinction is that Pietraforte’s sand grains are bound together substantially by calcite-rich cement while Macigno’s were compacted and fused by mostly non-calcareous minerals deposited between the grains during burial, with silica and clay playing a greater role and calcite generally less important, if present at all.

That difference becomes particularly important once the rocks begin to weather. Sandstone doesn’t necessarily mean only sand. Pietraforte doesn’t weather into the same coarse, silica-rich sands in Lamole’s Macigno-dominated vineyards. As with all these rock types, water works its way into Pietraforte’s joints and fractures, breaking the rock into increasingly smaller, often angular fragments, and also dissolving some of this rock’s calcite-rich cement holding the sand grains together. It contributes the remaining sand and rock fragments to the soil, along with finer material from its matrix. In other words, Pietraforte is a coarse, rocky material that generally drains well, and fractures through the sandstone provide routes for water and roots to move deeper—a little more like Alberese, but only the fracturing element. Similarly, those fractures collect finer material and moisture, creating small reservoirs beneath what can appear to be an exceptionally dry, rocky surface. Its carbonate-bearing material also gives it a different soil chemistry from the generally less calcareous Macigno.

Where Pietraforte-derived soils are shallow and rocky, water, and, especially on steeper slopes, the sand with it, can disappear quickly. Somewhere between the calcareous world of Alberese and the Macigno sands, Pietraforte is also excellent for drainage and deep rooting.

Now to the main event, the lead singer: **MACIGNO**, a lyric tenor, the youngest of our four rock stars, formed roughly 30–20 Ma. Unlike the carbonate-rich Alberese or somewhat carbonate-rich Galestro and Pietraforte, Macigno is predominantly a quartz- and feldspar-rich sandstone with relatively little carbonate. When avalanching into the deep marine basin, much of that sand came from mountains to the north and northwest, including the rising Alps. Constant burial of new materials compressed these layers, and minerals deposited between the grains eventually cemented the sand into rock. Then the Apennines caught it and pushed it upward.



Macigno sandstone, Lamole

As the mountain front continued to advance, the sandstone was compressed, folded, faulted, and eventually lifted out of the ancient marine basin and into the mountains themselves—a circuitous journey from mountain rock to sand to seabed and back up into the mountains as rock, decomposing yet again to sand for another journey back down. Many of those individual sand grains may have already been part of many different mountains before the Chianti hills and the last mountains that slid off into that ancient deep marine basin. When you think of it this way, a tiny piece of sand looks a little different.

As Macigno sandstone erodes, it releases quartz sand, and its feldspars and other less-resistant minerals break down into finer material, including clay. Because these soils can remain remarkably skeletal, they often hold fewer nutrients than clay-rich soils. Like the others in this rock band, what may appear to be a completely dry surface at the summer's peak isn't the entire story: fractures in the underlying sandstone create routes for roots to find safer harbor in the moisture of the finer materials below the surface.

While Macigno's coarse sands shed water efficiently, the cooler conditions of these high-elevation vineyards temper some of the consequences. What can be an advantage during wetter periods (rapid drainage, aerated soils and restrained vigor) can become a liability during prolonged drought. Lamole's steep slopes add another vulnerability: water and gravity continually carry some of the sandier soil downhill. The mountain disappears yet again only to become another mountain in the very distant future.

That difference may help explain the distinction often found in the wines. Pietraforte sites can give Sangiovese a similar shape to Alberese, with greater solidity, breadth and structural weight, while Galestro brings its water-retentive clays and distinguished power and freshness. The coarse Macigno sands of Lamole, the highest-altitude area of Chianti Classico, embody their environment: their lift into the clouds, the high-toned flower and wild fruit aromas, the lightness of unimpeded mountain winds and beguiling effect of fine sands on noble terroirs and varieties.

UNEARTHED CONTRADICTIONS?

Alessandro Masnaghetti, the talented and deeply committed Italian terroir mapper (best known for his books on Barolo, Barbaresco and Chianti Classico), describes Lamole as geologically exceptional, writing that it “alone among the UGAs of Chianti Classico is affected by only one geological formation: Macigno.” Lamole di Lamole, however, describes the vineyard soils as predominantly ochre-colored Macigno sandstone, but “mingled with them are inserts of Alberese and Galestro.”

The contradiction may come down to scale. Masnaghetti identifies the mapped geological formation underlying the UGA (Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive—for comparison, the equivalent of Barolo and Barbaresco MGA), while Lamole di Lamole describes rock types they actually have in their vineyards, clearly illustrated in the photo on their website. In other words, Lamole can be a fundamentally Macigno formation while still containing localized Alberese and Galestro material in the soils.



Galestro, a rare rock formation in Lamole, with a more representative Macigno sandstone of the region on the bottom left.

When I first walked the vineyards with Susanna, Macigno was entirely visible from a superficial vantage point on terrace walls and the topsoil, and she confirmed that we were indeed walking on that ancient sandstone ocean floor. I'm not a geologist, but I've seen a lot of Galestro and the other rock formations covered here, and when Susanna took us to her newly built winery between I Fabbri and Casole, the newly ripped area around the building, only a stone's throw from some of her vineyard terraces appeared to be pure Galestro. The photo provided seems to make it clear that it couldn't be anything else—well, except that solitary sandstone rock in the bottom left.