BY APPOINTMENT TO
HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
WINE MERCHANTS
CORNEY & BARROW LIMITED
LONDON

BY APPOINTMENT TO
HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES
WINE MERCHANTS
CORNEY & BARROW LIMITED
LONDON

CORNEY&
BARROW
INDEPENDENT WINE MERCHANTS-1780

# SOLDERA

## 2006 VINTAGE

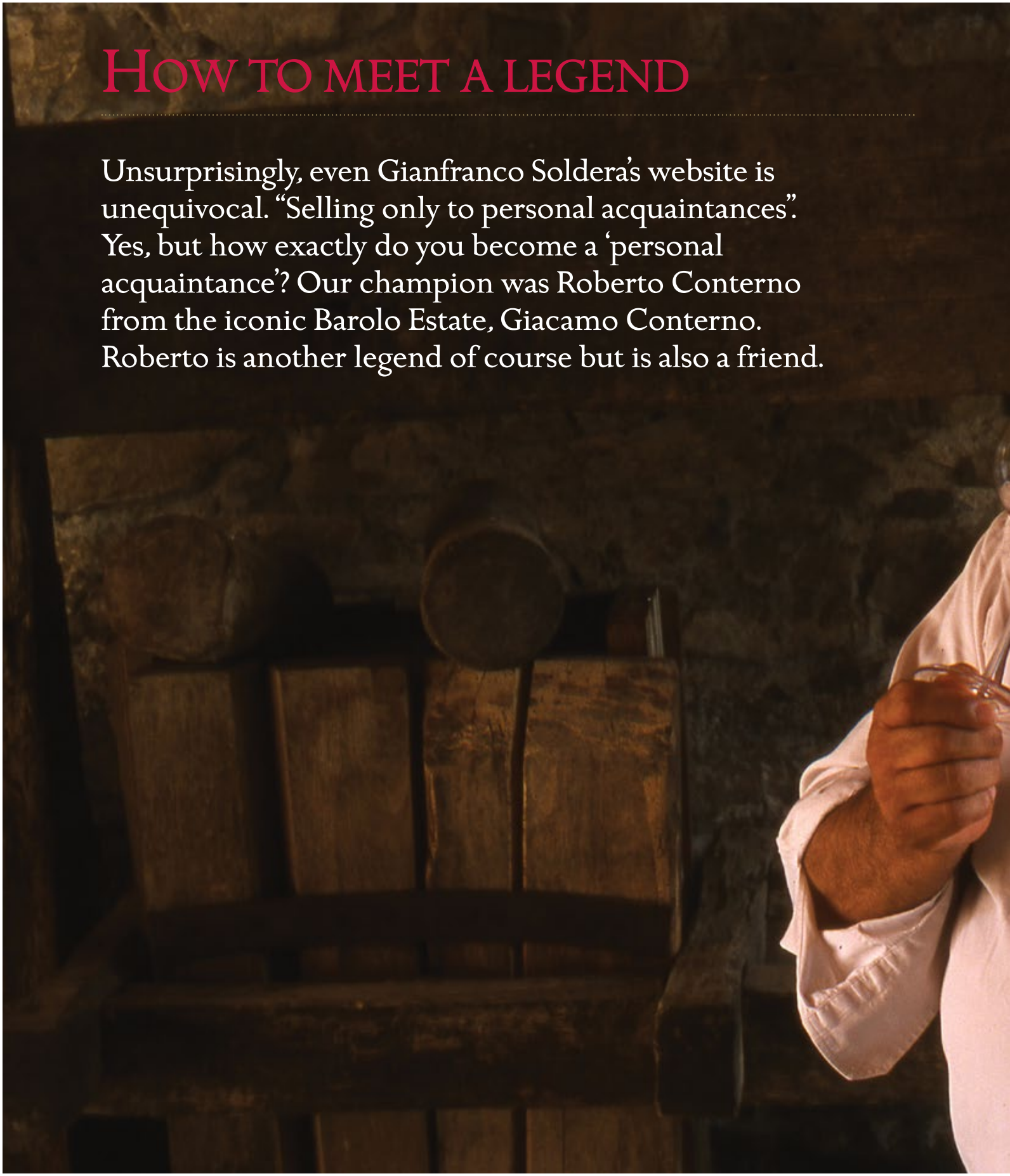
EXCLUSIVE TO CORNEY & BARROW IN SINGAPORE, INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA


*"It's like a work of art: technique is of secondary importance. Culture and a keen sense of smell are what's needed, good quality land, an unmarred environment pared down to its original state. You need to love what you do; wine is not just one product but many things put together. If even just one of these things is missing a balance is broken, it spoils everything, the whole thing comes down like a castle made of playing cards."*

GIANFRANCO SOLDERA

# How to meet a legend

Unsurprisingly, even Gianfranco Soldera's website is unequivocal. "Selling only to personal acquaintances". Yes, but how exactly do you become a 'personal acquaintance'? Our champion was Roberto Conterno from the iconic Barolo Estate, Giacamo Conterno. Roberto is another legend of course but is also a friend.



In truth, I cannot think of many friends who would drive you the 5 hours from Piedmont to Montalcino to make the introductions, observe our respective performances at the theatre of dinner without criticism (noble self-restraint) and then drive us all the way back again – the whole when the man was running a temperature and should have probably been in bed... which, shortly after midnight on the 17th July 2012 is where he headed leaving the Corney & Barrow lambs to a late night slaughter.

Gianfranco Soldera.... takes no prisoners. His opinions are not floated over; they are hammered into the audience with a relentless self-belief that even the use of an interpreter fails to gentle. Occasionally we agreed, even more rarely mounted a token counter attack but more often than not just dug in and kept our heads down before the start of yet another onslaught. He was testing us of course, looking for that flare of disagreement, that lack of unity, the falsity of ingratiation. We passed... just, to the relief of Roberto the next morning. In subsequent meetings other sides to Gianfranco's powerful character became apparent – a wicked sense of humour, a reflective thoughtfulness, a kindness to others, a genuine sense of hospitality, a strong love of family and an awareness of man's mortality. The wanton and near total destruction of nearly six vintages of Brunello di Montalcino 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 in an act of criminal vandalism tested this extraordinary man's character to the limit. It is a testament to Gianfranco's resilience – and his family's, that he asked us to come out to see him at the end of January 2013 to discuss the launch in Hong Kong of Corney & Barrow's newest Asian exclusivity – Soldera. It is, more importantly, a tribute to the Asian market that, despite suspending the sale of his wines from 3rd December 2012 until further notice, Gianfranco has agreed a preferred allocation of the fabulous 2006 vintage which is the subject of this offer. In such beliefs are great relationships born.

We are very proud to have been given exclusive representation of Soldera, Case Basse, Brunello di Montalcino in Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

ADAM BRETT-SMITH

# History

Brunello Montalcino, as a recognised name, is relatively recent, emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century, despite the city of Montalcino itself dating back as far as the mid-fifteenth century and civilisation dating, at least, back to the Romans.

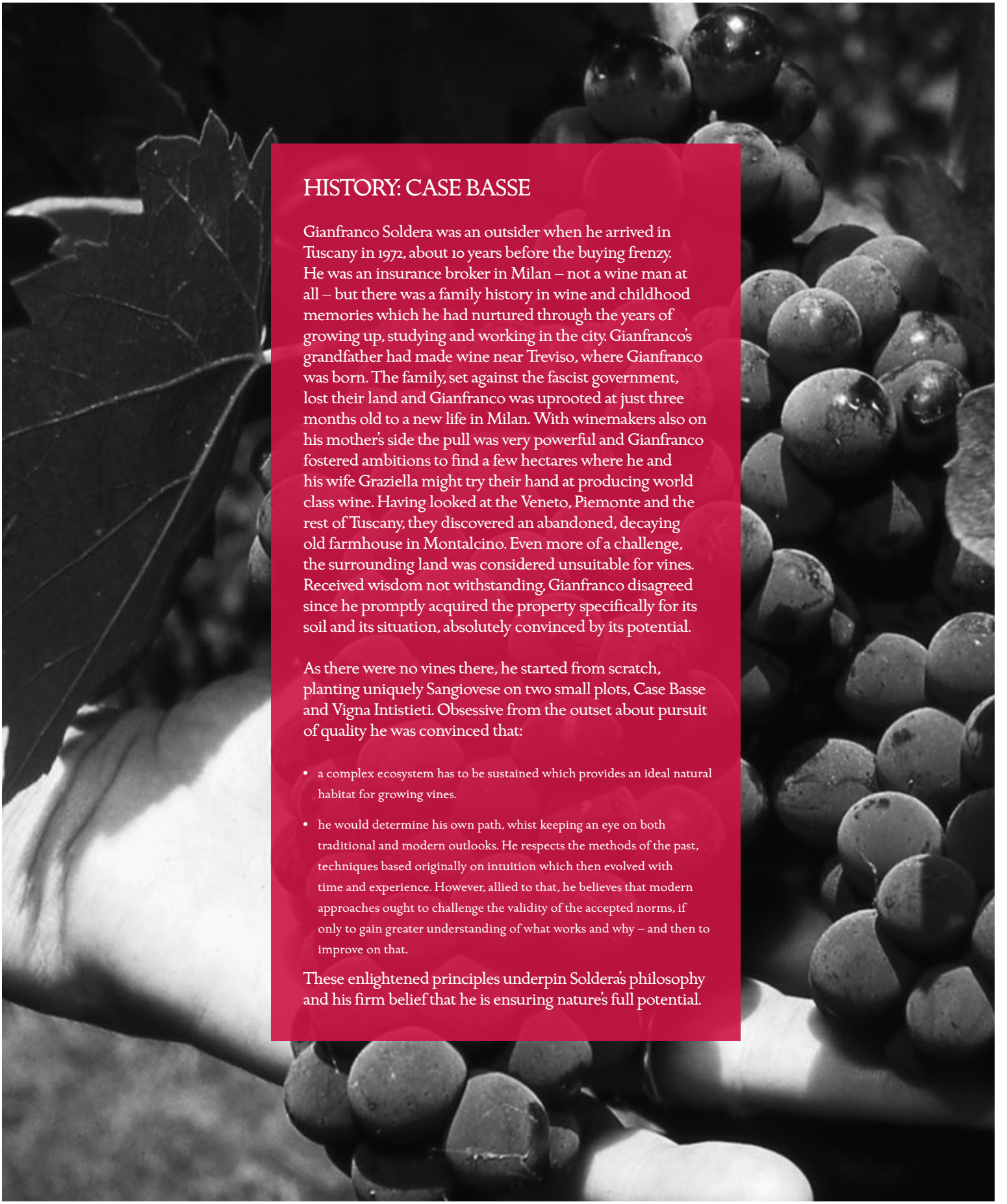


Around 1870, Ferruccio Biondi returned from war to look after the family estate. His grandfather, a pharmacist and oenologist, had previously embarked on a mission to improve quality, experimenting with vines and vinification methods. Crucially, he discovered that the Sangiovese vines of Montalcino were different from those in Chianti and it was his grandson who isolated a clone, Sangiovese Grosso, with which he replanted after the phylloxera epidemic. Due to its brownish colour, it was named…… Brunello.

At the beginning there were few wines and those which did exist were little known, not helped in their marketing by two world wars. Although *Denomenazione di Origine Controllata* (DOC) was awarded in 1967, producers were few in number. Things really started to take off with the conferring of *Denomenazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* (DOCG) status in 1980 and the commune really started to flourish in the eighties, with considerable interest and indeed enormous investment from outside the area.

Brunello di Montalcino producers today are divided quite controversially in terms of style, slotting into either of two camps, traditionalist or modernist. The rules are pretty stark in terms of varietal and ageing. Brunello cannot be released before 1st January of the fifth year after harvest, having had a compulsory 2 years in wood. This last stipulation, however, used to be 42 months, changed in 1998, allowing for some flexibility and experimentation. The fact that the type of wood is not specified is also an opportunity to challenge tradition. In the past methodologies were passed down from father to son but with wealth, investment, travel and a global perspective, it is not surprising that some producers tried other possibilities. Sangiovese is a thick-skinned grape which makes for tannic wines, with high acidity, demanding long ageing. It is logical perhaps to question whether later harvesting and a bit of vanilla-rich, toasty oak might bring something interesting to the party – the latter style new, rather sumptuous, eye-catching and press flattering – the antithesis to traditional Brunello.

In an era of tacit acceptance of experimentation, innovation and questioning of convention, some estates allegedly went just one step too far, flouting the thus far, inviolable rules on blending. Traditionalists have so far won the argument, with the law declaring that Brunello must be 100% Sangiovese being upheld. In 2008, suspicions arose, accusations were made and investigations ensued over supposedly doctored wines, enriched by softer, supple varietals such as Merlot. This was the infamous Brunellogate (*Brunellopoli* in Italy) scandal concerning the 2003 vintage.



## HISTORY: CASE BASSE

Gianfranco Soldera was an outsider when he arrived in Tuscany in 1972, about 10 years before the buying frenzy. He was an insurance broker in Milan – not a wine man at all – but there was a family history in wine and childhood memories which he had nurtured through the years of growing up, studying and working in the city. Gianfranco's grandfather had made wine near Treviso, where Gianfranco was born. The family, set against the fascist government, lost their land and Gianfranco was uprooted at just three months old to a new life in Milan. With winemakers also on his mother's side the pull was very powerful and Gianfranco fostered ambitions to find a few hectares where he and his wife Graziella might try their hand at producing world class wine. Having looked at the Veneto, Piemonte and the rest of Tuscany, they discovered an abandoned, decaying old farmhouse in Montalcino. Even more of a challenge, the surrounding land was considered unsuitable for vines. Received wisdom not withstanding, Gianfranco disagreed since he promptly acquired the property specifically for its soil and its situation, absolutely convinced by its potential.

As there were no vines there, he started from scratch, planting uniquely Sangiovese on two small plots, Case Basse and Vigna Intistieti. Obsessive from the outset about pursuit of quality he was convinced that:

- a complex ecosystem has to be sustained which provides an ideal natural habitat for growing vines.
- he would determine his own path, whist keeping an eye on both traditional and modern outlooks. He respects the methods of the past, techniques based originally on intuition which then evolved with time and experience. However, allied to that, he believes that modern approaches ought to challenge the validity of the accepted norms, if only to gain greater understanding of what works and why – and then to improve on that.

These enlightened principles underpin Soldera's philosophy and his firm belief that he is ensuring nature's full potential.

# Vineyard

## The vineyard lies on the southern side of Montalcino, facing southwest.



The whole property, including woods, garden and buildings comprises 23 hectares today, situated at around 320 metres above sea level. It enjoys dry sunny conditions and a wonderful luminosity which is an often overlooked aspect of *terroir*. There are two parcels of vines, planted exclusively with Sangiovese Grosso, which Gianfranco feels is the only grape which truly belongs to his particular *terroir*. Case Basse is about 2 hectares in size, planted in 1972 and Vigna Intistieti, 4.5 hectares, planted in 1973. The density is 7000 vines per hectare on limestone and schist. The Vigna Intistieti soil is more mineral whilst Case Basse, on lower ground, is heavier and produces richer wines.

Gianfranco's idea of the perfect ecosystem extends beyond the vineyards themselves but the vines are sustained by it in their turn – a perfectly harmonious habitat. Case Basse is constantly evolving as Gianfranco looks for ways in which to encourage a bird and insect-rich environment.

The vines themselves are tended with extraordinary attention to detail. Everything is done by hand, pruning hard and short in winter and then a further green pruning during the season. Oat straw is scattered between the vines revitalising the soil, allowing it to breathe and protecting the roots and the only enriching agent is cow dung from the Val de Chiena. Totally organic, Gianfranco is clear in his own mind that foreign agents ultimately end up in the wine.

Later in the growing season, in autumn, grape-thinning and leaf-thinning provide more light and air, to complete the ripening process.

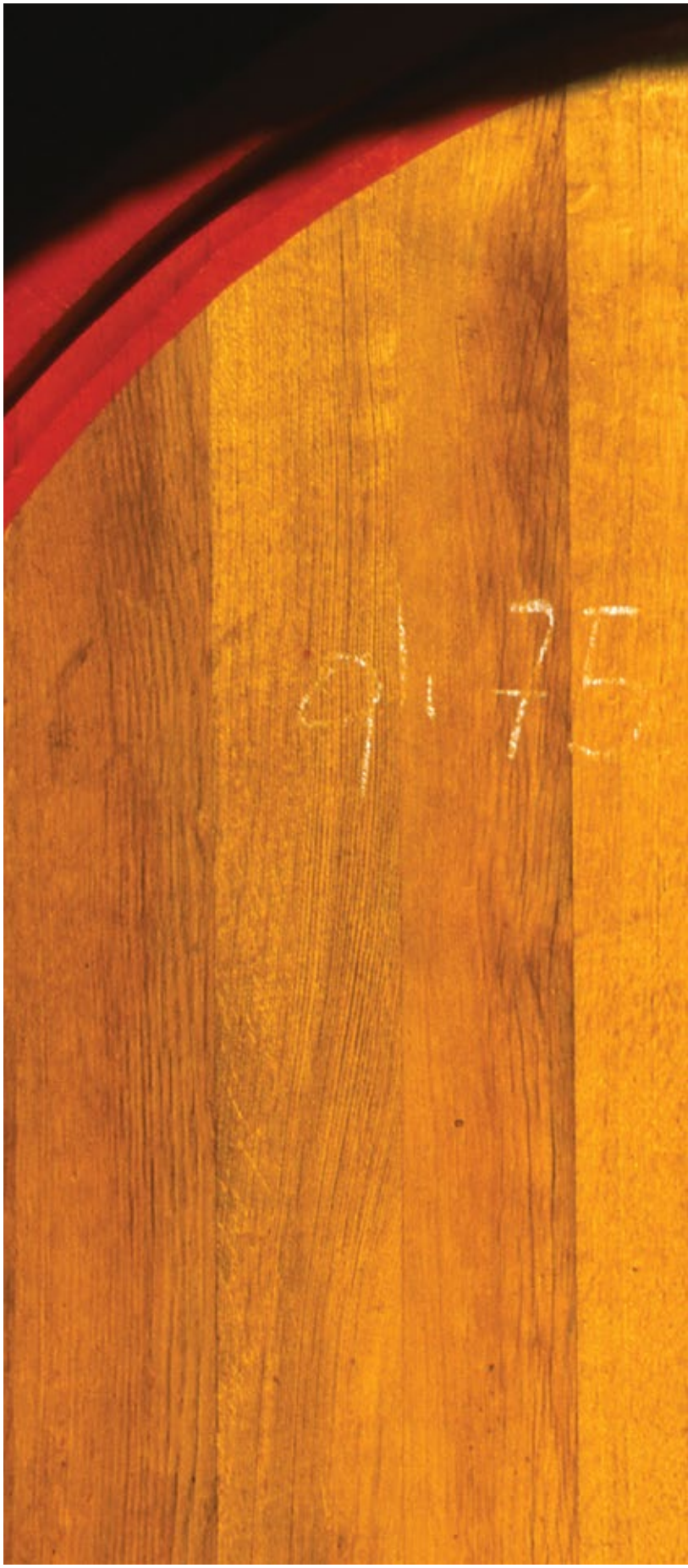
Gianfranco's ideas and ideals cannot be second guessed. In so many areas he sounds traditionalist yet alongside the time-honoured methodologies, he adds not only his own very compelling ideas on sustainability, but he invests in the most modern research. His vineyards and wines are constantly involved in some study at various top universities' agriculture faculties. Climate changes are constantly monitored, reporting on temperature, humidity, and levels of precipitation. The University of Florence is heavily involved with students coming in to monitor various stages of winemaking as well as studying all phases of the production cycle. Steeped in tradition, Gianfranco is also very curious and forward thinking.

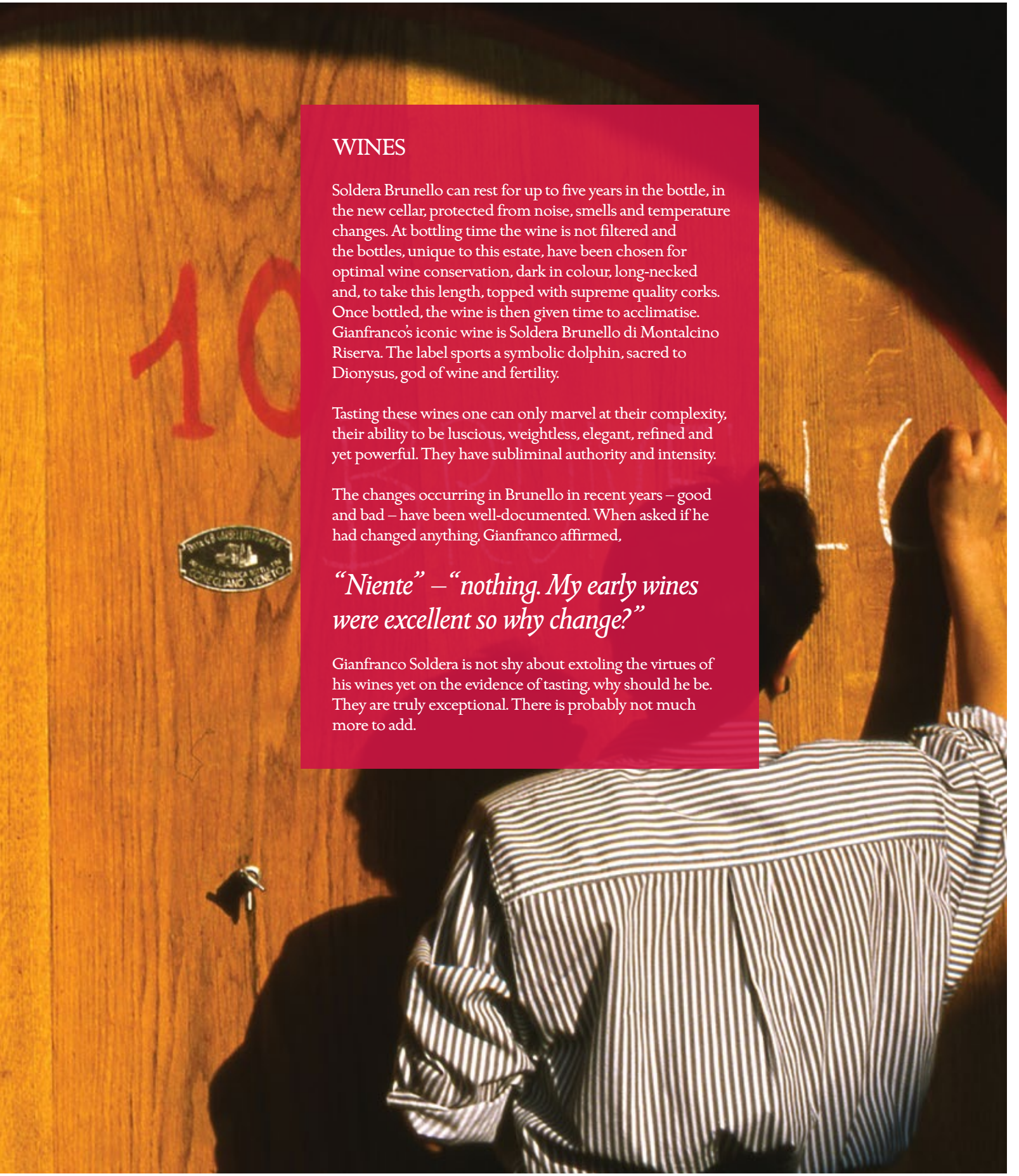
# Cellar

It is perfectly clear to Gianfranco that great wine is made through ruthless selection both in the vineyard and later in the cellar.

We asked Gianfranco how he learned what to do as an outsider, imagining how distinctly unpopular he probably was with his neighbours, this city boy from the north. He learned most from the late Giulio Gambelli, master taster of Poggibonsi, who turned out to be something of a kindred spirit. They shared similar views on how to make wine – namely minimal intervention, no temperature control, no added yeasts, just long maceration on the skins and long ageing in large Slavonian *botti*.

The extraordinary cellar was recently constructed and has an innate beauty in its contrived simplicity. It is completely cement and plaster free, the walls having been built with stones wedged into wire netting and the floor is cobbled. This is all to allow the very building to breathe and the wine to mature even more slowly than in the past.





## WINES

Soldera Brunello can rest for up to five years in the bottle, in the new cellar, protected from noise, smells and temperature changes. At bottling time the wine is not filtered and the bottles, unique to this estate, have been chosen for optimal wine conservation, dark in colour, long-necked and, to take this length, topped with supreme quality corks. Once bottled, the wine is then given time to acclimatise. Gianfranco's iconic wine is Soldera Brunello di Montalcino Riserva. The label sports a symbolic dolphin, sacred to Dionysus, god of wine and fertility.

Tasting these wines one can only marvel at their complexity, their ability to be luscious, weightless, elegant, refined and yet powerful. They have subliminal authority and intensity.

The changes occurring in Brunello in recent years – good and bad – have been well-documented. When asked if he had changed anything, Gianfranco affirmed,

*"Niente" – "nothing. My early wines were excellent so why change?"*

Gianfranco Soldera is not shy about extoling the virtues of his wines yet on the evidence of tasting, why should he be. They are truly exceptional. There is probably not much more to add.

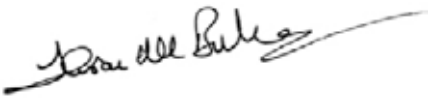
# 2006 Vintage



Spring in Brunello di Montalcino saw a decent amount of rain, restoring reserves which would stand the vines in good stead in the summer to follow.

2006 was a warm year, the summer hot, though not as extreme as 2003. Some rain at the end of August and early in September refreshed the vines, allowing for a longer maturation period – ideal conditions for Montalcino.

The run up to harvest was perfect, with warm days and cool nights, allowing growers to wait and pick at their leisure once the grapes achieved full phenolic ripeness. The weather at harvest was then glorious – sublime conditions.



ALISON BUCHANAN

# Tasting notes

## SOLDERA, BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO RISERVA CASE BASSE 2006

A deep, limpid ruby, this is an extraordinary wine. It presents a wonderfully complex nose, at once sweet, floral, spicy and savoury. Fresh and linear, red cherries dominate, incredibly pure and focused. Similar aromatics come through on the palate, gentle and supple with a mineral seam running throughout. Elegance and refinement prevail throughout yet there is nascent power. Robust, this 2006 vintage is supported by superfine tannins and exhibits latent energy, which drives a protracted, poised finish.

Corney & Barrow Score 18 - 19
Recommended drinking from 2014 - 2022+

Price On Application

## TASTING GUIDE

Our tasting notes provide full details but, at your request, we have also introduced a clear and simple marking system. We hope these guidelines assist you in your selection.

| | |
|---|---|
| 14-16 | A VERY GOOD TO EXCELLENT WINE |
| 16-18 | AN EXCELLENT TO OUTSTANDING WINE |
| 18-20 | AN OUTSTANDING TO LEGENDARY WINE |

Wines are judged within their peergroup, eg, Villages, Premier Cru, Grand Cru. A definitive score of a young wine is almost impossible.

We usually offer a spread (eg, 14 - 16) that relates to a potential to achieve a higher mark. A '+' adds further to that potential.

A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes.

# To order

Please contact

Singapore +65 6809 3900
Email singapore@corneyandbarrow.com

WWW.CORNEYANDBARROW.COM