

Andrea Gabbrielli



Pierluigi Talenti

The other Brunello



the seeds

CENTRE-STAGE PLAYERS IN MATERIAL CULTURE



PIERLUIGI TALENTI

Illustrations by Chiara Veronelli

VERONELLI EDITORE

PIERLUIGI TALENTI

Andrea Gabbrielli

translated by

Isabelle Johnson



CENTRE-STAGE PLAYERS
IN MATERIAL CULTURE

V:

SANT'ANGELO IN COLLE.

In Sienese lands we are aware, to a greater extent than elsewhere, of the constant succession of light and shade. Sometimes it is a light that reflects across the whole land like a huge, shimmering mirror, sometimes it takes on substance. It is that eternal struggle between light and darkness, a cosmic struggle present in the universe and which passes through us. A land of contrasts, now sunny, now nocturnal, as a source of light and, equally, of the murky and dark. In this perennial sequence, which is the world's dialectic - Sienese lands feel rather like a planet whose vicissitudes are day and night.

(from I mesi della terra di Siena. Le Crete e la Val d'Orcia, by Mario Luzi - APT Siena 1999)

As far back as 1208 Sant' Angelo in Colle was part of Siena and subject to an extraordinary tax. Four years later, on 12th July 1212 consul Ildebrando di Bando swore loyalty to the Siena Comune and promised to pay a yearly wealth tax of 9 lire, 8 soldi and 6 denari. In 1225 the pact was reconfirmed and that same year the Siena Comune brought Sant'Angelo under its wing. In 1252 and 1253 it was a Sienese military base for soldiers fighting against Montalcino and, in 1265, together with Castelnuovo dell'Abate, it was designated border castle. In 1282 it was occupied by Ghibelline rebels and, having been retaken by Sienese troops and with its defences in ruins, was given to the Salimbeni family as a fief. In 1337 and 1339, with the reorganisation of the lands of the Sienese state, Sant'Angelo was made seat of the second vicariate with control over a vast area between Orcio, Ombrone and Val di Merse. In the second decade of the 14th century, the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, a granary was opened which remained active until the early years of the following century. The granary was based in the keep and specialised in pig and sheep breeding as a fundamentally important stop on the transhumance route to Maremma. (from Viaggio nell'architettura del territorio montalcinese - Arci/Comune di Montalcino)

The people of Montalcino are shrewd and for the most part possessed of natural eloquence. Its citizens and the wealthy are extremely civilised. The subtlety of their intelligence means that they are not very docile. They are well respected and effectively a little quarrelsome. They are industrious and active. (from Visita fatta a Montalcino, Castelnuovo Abate, Sant'Angelo in Colle, Argiano, Poggio alle Mura nel 1676, by Bartolomeo Gherardini - Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo 2071/2072)

Depending on where they live the nicknames given to the people of Montalcino vary. The inhabitants of the capital are called 'morticians' in memory of the task forced on them by Siena after the battle of Montaperti, to punish them for their late arrival. The 'bears' live in the village of Castelnuovo dell'Abate and acquired this nickname thanks to their reserved character and habit of spending the winter amongst themselves with the help of cards and, above all, wine. The nickname of the inhabitants of the two villages of Sant'Angelo is 'cats' but no-one remembers how this delightful nickname originated...".

(from Beccamorti & Buongustai, by Donatella Cinelli - Siena 1987)

CENTRE-STAGE PLAYERS
IN MATERIAL CULTURE

4



PIERLUIGI TALENTI

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The 1999 harvest is difficult to forget: the grapes had never been so attractive and healthy as they were that year in Montalcino. They were a pleasure for the eye, the juicy Sangiovese bunches were ultra-sweet, and Pierluigi Talenti, or 'Piero' to his friends, knew that it would be an exceptional year. 9th September was a normal busy day and against the advice of those who had been nagging him affectionately since his heart had let him down, he couldn't resist going alone to examine them for one last time. After a full life in which he never did things by halves, he had never accepted the limits his health required of him. He started to leave us while he was walking through the Sant'Angelo in Colle vineyards he loved and knew more than anyone else, in that land which had become his and where he had lived and worked for forty years. This book tells the story of a very special farmer and producer. A great winegrower, with all his humanity and joie de vivre, centre-stage player in

Brunello del Montalcino's modern rebirth. Piero was one of the few highly prestigious and authoritative voices who was always ahead of the times and never lost either his lucidity or his critical ability in the face of Brunello's extraordinary, overwhelming success. Very rare qualities when everything is going well and swimming against the tide makes you an awkward presence. In these short term memory times, his story testifies to an era which seems far off but isn't. For me it is also a way of paying homage to a very reserved man I always respected, bringing to mind the times we met, the stories he told and, above all, the very pleasant hours spent together. It is a memory with no sadness in it, however, just nostalgia, the feeling which best conjures up absence.

*Andrea
Gabbrielli*

A WORLD IN CRISIS

The sun is starting to set behind the hills and the young man at the wheel cannot wait to get to Sant'Angelo in Colle, a small hamlet of Montalcino. Piero Talenti had left three hours earlier from the town he was born in, Santa Sofia, in Romagna. In 1958 there were very cars on the gravel roads which cut across this patch of deepest Tuscany. He is driving very carefully and observing the panorama with an expert eye because he is a highly skilled farmer and a glance is all it takes.

His gaze is frequently directed at the hills alongside the road which still show signs of the terrible frost of 1956. Two years after the disaster, the dry, grey branches of the frost damaged olives are still pointing skywards in silent rage. It isn't a great sight because there are truly a great many damaged trees and the landscape suffers.

Olives have always been one of this land's great assets and, at olive picking time, not only did all the skilled labourers of Montalcino and its



SANTA SOFIA. *The Easter Monday fair in an old 1933 photo. The town's residential area, crossed by the Bidente river, was, at length, divided between Santa Sofia, on its left bank, and Mortano, on its right bank. This part of the region was known as Tuscan Romagna and was, in fact, part of Florence province until 1923.*

hamlets disappear but veritable armies of people, male and female, young and old, made their way here from as far away as Monte Amiata and the Arbia valley. There isn't much traffic on the roads and what little there is quickly disappears after he's crossed the Cassia road. The only people to be seen are the charcoal men walking from one part of the wood to another, leading long columns of mules with chestnut wood baskets overflowing with charcoal.

The forests were another of Montalcino's great assets, although it was a subsistence trade and nothing more. It was piecemeal and the more you worked the more you earned. Working days were extremely long, beginning before dawn and ending well into the night. Now there are plenty of vineyards along the road but then were none at all along the Sant'Angelo road.

So Piero had plenty of food for thought, because what he was looking at was far behind his Romagna, the place he'd lived and worked in thus far.

The sharecropping model had had its day and the land owners, almost all short of ideas and frightened by the new world, were not willing to invest or embark on new paths: the agricultural world was at a point of no return. Italy was at the dawn of consumer civilisation and even young farmers wanted their Lambrettas. Income was no longer measured as subsistence but spending capacity.

In this area, however, such desires clashed with extremely hard facts. 6% of Montalcino's people and those of the areas around it were on the town council's poor list. In 1959 the *La Fortezza* newspaper illustrated the results of an enquiry, showing that "210 farms were in bad condition, 281 without toilets, 243 without electricity, 281 without drinking water, 135 without rational fertilisation systems".

It was an increasingly impoverished agriculture with sharecroppers

beginning to abandon the land and owners preferring to sell their land or leaving it unfarmed. Ilio Raffaelli, Montalcino mayor from 1960 to 1980 and keen local historian, remembered this period with the words “after the end of the Second World War, it can be estimated that 70-80% of the area’s land changed hands. Those who gave up their lands were the last of soporific breed”.

This is the Sienese countryside in the late 1950s. Piero Talenti is 33 years of age and looking for his chance and it is possible that Sant'Angelo in Colle may give him the chance of a lifetime.



THE VILLA DEI FRANCESCHI ENTRANCEWAY ON THE SANT'ANGELO IN COLLE SQUARE. *It passed into the family's hands in 1890 when Lavinio Franceschi bought Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle. The building is 16th century and had previously belonged to the Servadio and Tolomei families.*

PIERO'S STORY

Pierluigi Talenti, called Piero by everyone, was born on 19th April 1925 in Santa Sofia, in Forlì province. He was the third child of Pietro, bricklayer, and Ida Micheletti, known as Ermelinda. Maria (1914) and Francesco (1919) had preceded him. Santa Sofia is on the banks of the Bidente river which marked the border between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Papal States for many years, dividing the residential area into two different towns. After the fall of the Papal States, it remained split between two provinces and regions, a geo-political anomaly which lasted until 1923 when Vittorio Emanuele III decreed that it should transfer from Florence to Forli province. It was then that Piero became Romagnolo for just two years even though the historic Circondario di San Casciano district, of which Santa Sofia was part together with many other of the area's towns, is still today known as Tuscan Romagna.

Piero attended primary school and professional training in Santa



IN HIS BROTHER'S UNIFORM Piero, on the right, with the ever present cigarette in his hand, is wearing one of Francesco's uniforms. After winning a 15 day cruise on the Roma Trans-Atlantic ship as a prize for school achievement his brother had fallen in love with life on board ship and succeeded in obtaining a place at the Crem (Corpo Reale Equipaggi Marittimi) school in Pola at the age of 16, where he became helmsman. After that his life was spent on the seas. The photo was probably taken in 1941 on the terrace of the family's trattoria.

Sofia. He did well at school and paid great attention to his lessons, thus avoiding having to study at home. He enjoyed maths and geography. His primary school teacher told of his having quickly been able to suggest solutions to maths problems given him in class. Geography allowed him to explain the site of any place “as if he had the world before his eyes”. When his professional training was complete Piero moved to Florence to attend its Istituto Tecnico Agrario where he learnt farm management fundamentals. Far from home, he lived at a family run pension where he rented a room. He enjoyed the subject and learn quickly here too.

My brother

BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

Piero always loved swimming which for us in our town meant going to the river. He specialised in catching fish with his bare hands. River Bidente was full of trout and he fished them underwater on the go. He was familiar with all the nooks and crannies of a river which was packed with fish at the time and an important source of food for many of the town's families. He also used another unusual technique, that is making 'l'asciutto' - a dry area - which involved isolating a part of the river and drying it out to get the fish. He looked a bit skinny at first sight but for us children he had the strength, skill and physique of a sort of Tarzan.

Piero was used to eating well at home and his love of a good plate of food never left him. His mother was a tried and tested cook who had learnt the tricks of the trade at the town's wedding lunches and then honed her skills in villas at Pietrasanta in Versilia, where she oversaw the kitchens of the aristocratic English families who lived there

for long periods. So it is no surprise that Piero's mum and dad decided to take over management of Trattoria della Contessa in Santa Sofia. They were, in fact, so successful that the family was comfortably off, at least until the authorities - in the Fascist era - closed the trattoria down because an anonymous letter had reported that it was frequented by 'subversives', the word then used for the political opposition.

It was a generic accusation but that was all it took.

The family suddenly fell on hard times and Francesco, Piero's older brother, had to break off his studies. The subject of what exactly happened was the subject of much debate both within the family and elsewhere. Many noted that a neighbouring trattoria owned by a friend of the local Fascists had lost clients when the Contessa opened. By accusing the Talenti of hosting 'subversives' he was freed of an awkward rival as Ermelinda cooked all too well. The trattoria remained Talenti property until 1956.

WAR AND RESISTANCE

Piero's youth, like that of many of the young people of his generation, was interrupted when, in late 1943, he was conscripted as a sapper and billeted in barracks in Incisa, near Florence. 8th September was just a few months ago, a fateful day in Italian history. After the armistice with the Allies and the end of the alliance with Germany, the Italian army was in disarray. Without orders from King Vittorio Emanuele III and Marshal Badoglio, who had escaped to Pescara on 9th September, thousands of soldiers were at the mercy of German soldiers.

Piero had been to visit his family who were evacuees at Pian dell'Olmo, not far away from Santa Sofia, to escape bombings. And precisely in those days the Germans were once again rounding people up after the killing of certain TODT workers, but their objective was to flush out the partisans hidden in the high hills.



THE MEDAL. Mussolini on Razza pier in the port of Naples awarding Francesco Talenti a bronze medal for bravery for conduct during the 'Mezzo-Giugno' air-sea battle which took place from 12th to 16th June 1942 in Pantelleria town against the English Mediterranean fleet. Francesco was helmsman at the service of light battlecruiser Eugenio di Savoia. This photo saved Piero and his family during a Nazi round-up.

A life saving photo

BY ERO BRACCESI

An SS division was arriving for checks and in the meantime we heard explosions coming from a farmhouse higher up in the hills. Fearing that there were partisans in hiding, the SS made Piero go to see what was happening. Even though I was very young I remember as if it were yesterday that my uncle, who was in uniform, moved very cautiously towards the farmhouse. After a while he came back down and explained to the SS that the farmhouse was burning, together with all its contents, and this was causing small explosions. Not finding Piero's explanation very convincing they took my father and others hostage with the clear intention of shooting them. I was sitting at home on a makeshift bed and did not move because my real task was to hide a precious ham under the sheets. Seeing that events were taking a turn for the worse - the Germans had already shot a number of peasants and you could cut the tension with a knife - my mother Maria came up with the brilliant idea of taking out that photo of her brother Francesco having a medal for his part in the Pantelleria battle being pinned on his chest by Mussolini. "Here you are", she said to the Germans, "this is a photo of my brother, decorated by il Duce. Please leave us in peace. We have nothing to do with all this". This photo and the medal convinced the SS that we were not involved and they left. They couldn't know that after 8th September Francesco had transferred his loyalties to the Allies".

After that episode Piero threw his uniform into the nettles, did not return to his corps and made for the hills, joining the VIII Romagna Garibaldi partisan brigade. It was 2nd January 1944 and after that he was known by his *nom de guerre* Piron. Having joined the III company

commanded by Vero (Vero Stoppioni), also from Santa Sofia, he took part in various military operations against the Nazis at Badia Prataglia and Bagno di Romagna where he was involved in an attack on the local GNR (Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana) headquarters. Planning to start up fighting once again - the front was then stuck on the Gustav Line, the German defensive line which cut across Italy from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic at its narrowest point - in spring 1944 the Germans embarked on a vast offensive against the partisans designed to ensure them safe supply routes. The Romagna and Tuscan partisan formations operating in the Tuscan-Romagna Apennines had to be wiped out. Here the Germans took advantage of the unusual land conformation to build the Gothic Line, a defensive line which ran from La Spezia to Pesaro, on which they were to settle once they lost their Gustav Line positions. At the end of March 1944 the brigade, now numbering almost 1000 partisans, was led by Ilario Tabarri (Pietro), a veteran of the International Brigades in Spain, who, convinced that a massive round-up was imminent, decided to distribute the divisions in a much larger areas, believing this to be safer.

Whilst this was underway the round-up began with 10,000 Germans and 5,000 Fascists spanning a vast area, from 6th to 25th April. Desperate resistance notwithstanding, the operation ended with extremely heavy losses for the partisans with over 200 dead, wounded and taken prisoner.

For many days Pietro was a fugitive, hunted down by the Germans and in very difficult circumstances, eating what he could find or not at all. When circumstances allowed he slept, a little, in makeshift shelters or under the stars, exposed to the cold of the night and the rain with the Germans always on the hunt.



ALLOS PEDALE MILITARE. Piero is the second from the right, on the bench. He is wearing a bandage and dark glasses as a result of a wound to his right eye.

He gritted his teeth and put up with the cold, bad weather and lack of food but then, at the end of April, he fell ill and was obliged to take shelter near Santa Sofia, where medical attention and food were easier to find. He remained in hiding for a month and then, on the first of June, rejoined the brigade and became a partisan courier. His tiring and very risky task was to guarantee contacts between detachment and division refuges, frequently a considerable distance apart, and the battalion, zone or brigade command. Involving hours and hours of walking along footpaths to keep contact lines open and survey the area. Acting as a courier meant knowing every footpath in detail, every possible hiding place or refuge of use in the event of danger, and being well known to the peasant farmers. And then further hours of walking, by night, to accompany those needing to get to where the action was happening or where the Germans were to be ambushed, as the latter usually travelled by night when they were safe from Allied planes.

Piero was ideal because he knew every nook and cranny of the area. The last months of the year were terrible. Over the summer there were many massacres including those of Tavollicci (22nd July) - in which 64 people were killed, 20 men, 25 women and 19 children - and Camaio (25th July) with 27 dead, and many more. In September in San Piero in Bagno the first contact took place between the VIII Garibaldi brigade and the Allies. The VIII Brigade was brought into the military operations of the advancing troops. On 27th September 1944 Piero took part, with his brigade, in the liberation of Santa Sofia. A month later, having handed in his weapons, he returned to civilian life although he was then called up once again to complete the military duty interrupted for partisan work. "After the war", his nephew Ero narrates, "I often heard older partisans remember Piero as a man "who'd been very brave and never shirked his duty", characteristics which were an integral part of his character".

MADE KING

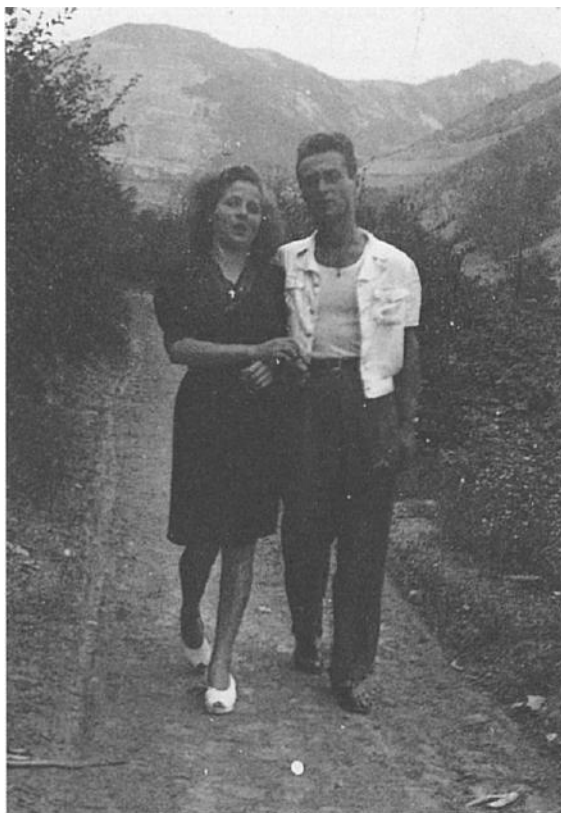
After the war Piero returned to normal life and, in 1946, completed his studies in Cesena and obtained his agricultural technician diploma. His tough experiences did not darken his character and he remained a lively young man who loved Westerns and playing cards.

He started playing in the evening and finished in the morning

BY ERO BRACCESI

In the evenings when he was not out with friends I had to fill up his bedside table with comics which the son of the town council secretary gave him, because he was a great reader of Flash Gordon and Mandrake.

He always adored Westerns, a passion he retained for his whole life. As a young man he loved playing cards and was very good at it. I kept accounts for his winnings. He started playing in the evenings and sometimes went on to the early morning, when it was time to get up. Despite his understandable tiredness, he just popped back home, washed his face and then ran off to work



A LIFE COMPANION. In May 1945 Piero got engaged to Carla Ceccacci, a pretty girl from Stia who spent long periods in Santa Sofia where one of her relatives lived. They'd met as children and time had changed their friendship and liking into love. Piero was a good looking boy and Carla had remained attracted to his cheerfulness and sociability.

not before smoking his last cigarette together with yet another cab. Piero was unstoppable, knew 'concia', a game like 'scopa', in the finest detail and kept it up all night long without ever giving up.

Skill, a memory for the cards which had already come out, just the right amount of devil-may-care and that touch of necessary luck - all this made him an unbeatable adversary. His winnings, converted into today's money, were considerable. On the best days the stakes were very high but he seemed more interested in playing than ruining whoever the friend in question was, who he would maybe see again the next day for the usual card game and, as his nephew Ero always said, this was why he never actually got his hands on more than 20% of his winnings.

But despite everything the goddess of blind luck loved Piero and not only when he was playing cards. After 1946 he struck 11 on Sisal and bought a Vespa with his prize money, the first of a long series of two wheelers. He loved motorbikes and speed, bought an Airone Guzzi 250 Sport, a red racer, ultra-beautiful with those stylish black and gold trimmings which made history. When the Giro passed through San Marino he had some fun. His brother Francesco went with him and still remembers his dare devil riding performances in which "he went like the wind".

We got engaged in April 1945.

BY CARLA CECCACCI TALENTI

I was born in Stia, in Arezzo province, but I had a childless aunt who lived in Santa Sofia and went there very frequently. We met as children but only got together in April/May 1945 when he was twenty. He'd spent three years in Florence at the Istituto Agrario but when the war broke out he'd been called up, interrupting his studies. After the change of sides, they'd taken him to Cesena

where he went by bike, setting off on Monday and returning on Saturday. When he'd finished studying he found work right away. Piero was a good looking boy, happy and very sociable. A typical Romagnolo with great joie de vivre. He was capable of going to the square for five minutes and deciding, on the spur of the moment, to go to Rimini with friends, just for a coffee. He loved motorbikes and always chose the fastest until he got pleurisy and had to leave them behind, moving on to a Topolino C. We married in 1950 when he was already working for the Franceschis at Mercatale di Galatea.

The best man was one of the Franceschi managers, Rindi, under whose supervision Piero had started work and who died suddenly while the couple were on their honeymoon. Piero had to return to Santa Sofia in a rush and was appointed manager to replace him. He managed various Franceschi family farms in Romagna, growing wheat, fruit and forage crops and raising cattle. These were hard years in which he learnt the manager's job the hard way and encountered a number of problems. It was an era of serious social tensions: unemployment was sky high, wages low and managing farms both large and small was fraught with social tensions in a world still rocked by the war.

Hunger was widespread

BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

The family trattoria reopened but Piero worked as a farm manager for various owners. Hunger was widespread at the time and thefts of wheat and other crops was the order of the day. In this area a sort of 'tithe' to the party and trade union was in place. If you had taken part in the I/H Brigade you were automatically enrolled in the PCI, but he wasn't a Communist and rejected the membership foisted on him. To get their hands on food people were ready to do anything, including distracting you with a pretty, flirty girl while others stole a



THE WEDDING In 1950 Piero and Carla married. Here they are with family leaving the Stia parish church where the wedding was held.



AT THE SEASIDE *Carla with their son Roberto bathing in the sea at Rimini in July 1955.*

sack of wheat. They were very tough years and the only industry in Santa Sofia was Stabilimento Tipografico dei Comuni (40-50 employees) and otherwise there was only the land, cattle and a few artisan crafts. In the late 1950s a great many people migrated to Ravenna, where Anic was based, but also abroad, to Luxembourg.

They were years of crisis and work was hard to find. The labour tax laws obliged farms to offer labourers a certain number of working days to ensure them at least some wages to stave off hunger. Piero was under constant pressure. After fulfilling his legal obligations - employment for temporary work - he was constantly threatened because he took on staff even when the work wasn't there. The fact that he had been a partisan like those asking for work heightened the tensions. Here, too, he showed his courage, taking on very difficult situations head on, including threats of violence by no means veiled and plenty of criticism.

Dino and Piero

BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

Leopoldo (Dino) Franceschi was at the home of Torquato Nanni, a landowner, and sent for Piero to notify him of his intention to entrust him with the management of the Sant'Angelo farm. "But", Dino said to him, "I know that you play cards". "That's right", said Piero, "when work is over I have to fill my time and make a few lira". Dino returned home and told his wife of his conversation with Piero. She didn't bat an eyelid and said to her husband "call him right away and give him the job because he's honest and didn't hide anything". Later the owner was flooded with anonymous letters telling him of Piero's passion for cards, written by jealous people managing other farms and wanting to make life difficult for him.

Thus Piero became the Franceschi family's trusted manager and, in fact, the task of valuing the Sant'Angelo in Colle farm for the purposes of dividing up the business between brothers Leopoldo and Stefano Franceschi was given to him. The firm had been bought in 1890 by Lavinio Franceschi, an aristocratic landowner from Scandicci, on the advice of an employee of his, an old shepherd, who had told him of a remote place in Siena province he'd seen on his transhumance called Sant'Angelo, a beautiful farm whose only defect, in his words, was that it was "the back end of nowhere". After a visit Lavinio Franceschi was convinced of the potential of the purchase and bought it for 700,000 lire from Abramo Servadio, the former owner.

Agriculture in Montalcino

BY RICCARDO MARGHERITI

In the 1950s and 60s Montalcino's agriculture was still mainly made up of sharecropping farms with living and working conditions on most plots being very harsh, incomes barely enough for subsistence, no social services and inadequate living conditions. This prompted a renewed peasant movement in a situation of overall economic, social and cultural change which brought out the by then untenable failure of the sharecropping institution itself. Absenteeism, on one hand, and the mechanisation process, on the other, together with the powerful attractions of industry led to that phenomenon historically known as the 'rural exodus'. The production and landowning order thus began to change with mixed farming shifting to specialised farming giving an insight into the fact that quality products were the key to increased earnings and thus Montalcino, too, set out on that economic, social and cultural renaissance whose results are still visible today.

A VERY FAR OFF PLACE

It is Pietro's own words which tell of his arrival in the land of Brunello, words which still emerge clearly from my pocket tape recorder, despite the passage of time. In fact, entirely unexpectedly, I rediscovered, among my forgotten bits and bobs, a dusty tape of a long interview with him which I had completely forgotten. It was recorded just a few months before he died and went back over his memories, his history.

It felt like I'd got to the end of the earth

BY PIERO TALENTI

I had been told to value a large Franceschi property, Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle, near Montalcino, and then divide it up between the two brothers, Leopoldo and Stefano, who had inherited it. I visited Sant'Angelo in Colle for the first time on 10th September 1958. It was nearly evening but the sun was still lighting up the landscape. At the time the roads here were almost all gravel roads and there was hardly any

tarmac. In fact, the current route wasn't even there, the bypass road, and you had to go through Osticcio, at the top of the Montalcino pine forests. After that the route was the same as today's: it crossed Passo del Lume Spento and continued in the direction of the valley, towards Orcia. It was in bad condition and some of the bends were so tight that you had to make several manoeuvres to get around them. A few kilometres further on and I realised that that little village perched on a hill against the backdrop of Mt. Amiata was Sant'Angelo. Three hours had gone by since I'd left Santa Sofia in Romagna but it felt like I'd got to the end of the earth. That evening the old manager put me up and the next day I started exploring the estate.

The farm comprised 1210 hectares near the village of Sant'Angelo and stretched as far as the Orcia River. Much of the land was taken up by woods but there were also olive groves, fruit orchards, a few fields of wheat, tobacco fields, vines and cattle. In the 1920 and 30s, the diplomas and prizes still hanging on the walls in the estate offices testified to the fact that its productivity had been exemplary. Those were the years of maximum vineyard expansion and in 1929 there were 925 hectares of vineyard and 1243 hectares of mixed farm land in Montalcino. These vineyards produced Chianti, Moscadello and a generic red wine mainly sold in bulk. In 1933, on the occasion of the Siena wine fair Mostra dei Vini Tipici, Roberto Franceschi's Fattoria Sant'Angelo in Colle, together with certain other estates (Cantina Sociale Biondi Santi & C., Fattorie di Montosoli and Castelgiocondo di Guido Angelini and Fattoria dei Barbi dei Colombini), had presented bottled Brunello. But with the devastating arrival of phylloxera, seriously damaged vineyards had not been replanted and the few surviving vines, now old and increasingly unproductive, had been further



AN ORIGINAL STAND September 1965. Montalcino's fortress has always been the preferred location for Brunello promotion events. This photo shows Piero Talenti in front of his Il Poggione stand made out of an old barrel..



A DESIRE FOR MODERNITY. In 1967 Piero Talenti and Bruno Ciatti of the inspectorate organised an agricultural machinery course at Sant'Angelo which gave staff the chance to obtain licenses to drive tractors and cars. In this way the firm began to increase staff specialisation. Piero is third from left in this photo.

decimated. The final straw for Montalcino's agriculture was Italy's changing sides in World War Two. The 1955 issue of the La Fortezza magazine reports a "90% reduction in wine production since 1938. Over the last six years only 560 metres of vines have been planted by farms..." .

A hard life

BY ILIO RAFFAELLI

Life in the village was very tough with working days which began at dawn and ended at dusk. If some, the few, managed to live well for most it was a matter of eking out a living. The land was mainly worked by hand by sharecroppers and mechanisation was almost non-existent. It was the forests which enabled many to survive with wood and even more charcoal - which the town produced a lot of - as assets. The autarchy which the Fascists had foisted on Italy had led, in Montalcino, to intensive exploitation of the forests for charcoal production and its derivatives to be used as fuel. Of the population of 10,023 censused in 1951, as many as 800 were still working in the forests but from the mid-50s onwards they all lost their jobs: with peace and the end of sanctions charcoal was no longer needed. Gas and petrol were the order of the day.

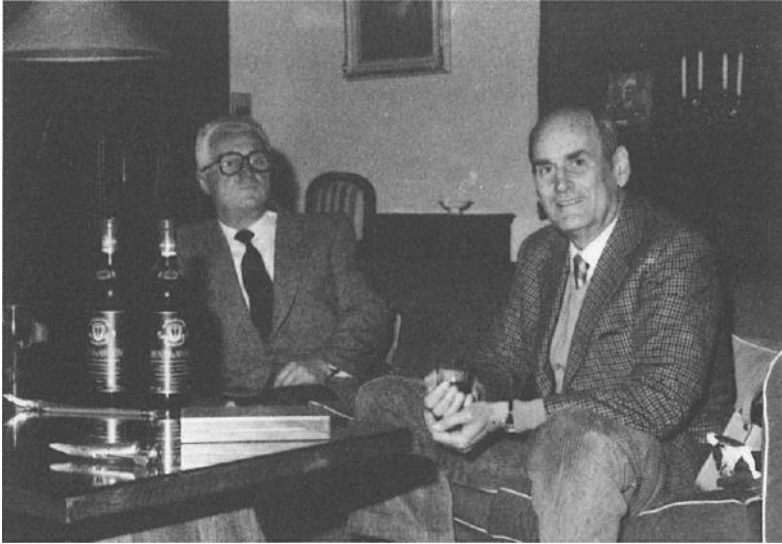
After a first four day stay Piero returned to Santa Sofia and then travelled to and fro every two weeks until his task had been completed. It was a matter of exploring all the fields, making an inventory of its lands and farmhouses, cataloguing crops and machinery, creating new estates of equal value which were called Il Poggione - 610 hectares - and Col d'Orcia - 600. Piero finished this process in December and, on 31st January 1959, the two brothers drew straws for the new estates.

Leopoldo got Il Poggione and Stefano Col d'Orcia. The next morning, after packing his suitcase, Piero left for Sant'Angelo and took over the farm. He was the new manager of Il Poggione. He was extremely determined and in a rush to begin because in these three months, from September to December, he'd had the opportunity to explore the whole estate and was familiar with its potential. But, above all, he'd fallen in love with it and these rather wild lands were soon to become his homeland. When he began work at Il Poggione the estate was in a parlous state and very little remained of its 1920s and 30s golden age. Still organised in accordance with sharecropping systems, the estate was oil and cereal based with a bit of fodder crops and a few cattle but the overall quality of its produce was low as were its revenues. To date no-one with the ability and technical know-how had been available to make it as profitable as it could be.

An emotional attachment too

BY CARLA TALENTI

Piero's relationship with the Franceschis was always good, starting with Leopoldo and continuing with his sons Clemente and Roberto. He'd built up a friendship with them and they were often in each other's company and when they came to Sant'Angelo Piero never came home. He was always with them in their villa, including on Sundays. It isn't common that owners and employees form such close friendships. He wasn't deferential to them and enjoyed their company. That's why he was happy when they came and spent hours talking about the estate and wandering around the fields. This respect and trust began with Dino and was handed down to his sons. The owners knew that Piero was open and honest, something which was not to be taken for granted in farm managers. He always said "they pay me well to do this



A RELATIONSHIP OF GREAT RESPECT. *Piero Talenti and Clemente Franceschi during a meeting in the living room at the Sant'Angelo villa. Piero always had an excellent relationship with the Franceschis. This respect and trust began with Dino and was handed down to his sons Clemente and Roberto. They enjoyed each other's company and spent hours talking about the estate and wandering around the fields.*

job and it is right that I look after their interests". This honesty was recognised.

In Montalcino, after removing the less profitable crops, Piero began planting vines straightaway. The farms he'd managed in Romagna had very few vines because they were high up in the hills and yields were high, but vines were always his obsession. The few vineyards there were at Il Poggione were sharecropping plots, and half the wine produced went to these. The other half was sold while the best wine went to the owners.

One of Piero's characteristics was always being ahead of his time but his hunches would not have come to fruition if they had not been supported by Il Poggione's owner, Leopoldo Franceschi who not only gave him carte blanche but travelled around Italy and Europe and reported back on any interesting experiences in order to try them out at the estate. These experiments led to sometimes tough clashes between these two strong personalities but they always respected each other and behaved fairly.

Total understanding between them

BY FRANCESCA COLOMBINI

We were very friendly with the Franceschis and Leopoldo had this young farm manager in Romagna, very lively and capable. He was a great gentleman who had an eye for people and decided to take him to Montalcino to manage the estate. He was very fond of Talenti and the feeling was mutual, you could tell. They were very fond of each other and when Leopoldo came he dropped everything and spent time with him. Not out of servitude or sycophancy but because they respected each other profoundly. There was a total understanding between them, serenity and huge trust. Leopoldo had handed over everything to him and he constantly changed things but I'm sure that

this trust was mutual, knowing how precise he was. Also because he was never an ordinary manager, he had realised the way things would go some time ago and acted accordingly. At the time there were very few estates in the race and it was the time of the farm managers. At that time these managers were as at sea as owners in the face of the epoch making changes underway and the majority of the agricultural landowners didn't understand a thing. With the end of the sharecropping system no-one knew which direction to move in. The difference between Talenti and the other managers was that he understood what to do at that time and how to do it. In fact he planted vines and focused on wines.

At the time the sharecroppers vinified all the grapes together, both white and red, while the estates did a little selection. The vats were left open and winemaking was rough and ready. Remember that many people left their wines on the skins for a month without breaking the cap or pumping over. The wine was considered ready when the cap sunk into the vat on its own. Naturally the wine's volatile acidity was ultra-high and in spring it was undrinkable.

One of the first things Piero did was to build the wine cellars, eliminating by now rotten wooden vats and replacing them with concrete vats made right there. To do this he gutted an old farm, making a press, wine cellars and two houses out of it. The cellar was fitted out with mainly second hand equipment because there wasn't much money to invest in it and it had to be earned.

Twelve demijohns of vinegary wine

BY PIERO TALENTI

In the division my share was a part of the old cellars minus equipment and very shabby wooden vats. I had to start from scratch and source everything, from a small pump for



AMONG THE BRUNELLO GREATS. *Piero, in the centre of the photo, during a Brunello meeting. Alongside him are Franco Biondi Santi and Francesca Colombini. To the left, in a dark suit, is Professor Giovanni Garoglio, internationally famous scholar.*

press racking and so on. As wine I'd been allocated twelve demijohns which had gone vinegary which I managed to sell to a peasant for 28,000 lire. As a specialist vineyard I had around 200 metres in which white and red grapes had been planted randomly... And another 2000 metres of mixed land. You had to go looking for the Sangiovese amongst the rows. That's all I had to start off with.

The situation was much the same elsewhere in Montalcino: a few rows scattered here and there in the farms for the sharecroppers' own consumption, and there was rarely enough and many people got their wine in Poggibonsi, one of Italy's most important wine centres, or even at Gradoli in Viterbo province. The large local firms had been abandoned by their owners to farm managers who often lived from day to day and knew little or nothing of modern fertilisation systems or the use of pesticides. Piero began employing the most skilled sharecroppers as agricultural labourers, people who were then being attracted to Poggibonsi's industries. In this way he staved off the loss of a whole patrimony of know-how and experience and the abandonment of the land. This won over a lot of people.

Piero settled in immediately, that was how he was

BY CARLA TALENTI

His was a strong personality and he managed the estate decisively. I joined him at Sant'Angelo in 1959, at the time still lived in. Piero settled in immediately. I used to say to him "even if you went to central Africa, you'd feel at home after a few days". That was how he was. It was different for me and it took me a bit longer to feel at home. The town was very remote but all the women of my generation needed was work, family, a fixed income and a home. They didn't ask more of life because they didn't have the needs today's women have.

The terrible frost of 1956 had decimated the olive crops which had accounted for 50% of Montalcino's agricultural income until then. Many trees had died, others were sending out shoots. Very few had survived intact. Estimates of damage were dire: out of 188,000 olive trees in the area, a grand total of 122,210 had been damaged by the frost and Il Poggione was no exception.

The estate's oil patrimony had always been large but the managers before Piero had never made the most of it. The olives were customarily harvested very ripe and then piled up in a room where they often fell victim to mould while they were awaiting delivery to the oil press. Thus advanced ripening produced more oil. In practice the result was a lamp oil with 10-12% acidity because the sharecroppers were used to this type of flavour. Olive fly treatments were not done because it was believed that their 'worms' were an essential component in the oil. To get these treatments done Piero took decisive action, having recalcitrant farmers accompanied by hunting wardens. And the arguments around pressing the olives as soon as possible after the harvest were also gruelling.

He and dad had certain snacks...

BY FRANCESCA COLOMBINI

Like all post-war estates, there were many problems. I am totally aware what it must have been like for this young man to come to a place whose mind-set and problems were so different, for him as Romagnolo and remaining such.

He never changed his personality. I don't know what problems he had to deal with in the fields but I can imagine them as I know what I myself had to deal with. It was a question of starting from scratch and I think that Talenti's competence and attitude meant that he began doing so. I knew him when I imagine that the worst was behind him. We'd met him earlier on because my father bought wine from him (he'd had the good sense to plant many vines from the outset and in the best areas). And so we went around together to choose the grapes "No, I can't give you these. These I can..." Then they came to Barbi and sat down around the table and continued talking and bargaining pleasantly. Talenti loved his food and we had a good cook. He and dad had certain snacks... He and my father, who was an entrepreneur rather than a farmer, understood each other perfectly and my father always had a great deal of respect for him. He was an open and straight talking person and you always found a solution with him, and very quickly too.

INTERMEZZO

Initially there had been only short trips and equally short stays for the purposes of seeking out some good Brunello wine to buy for my wine shop. And thus I took the opportunity to explore Montalcino, visiting wine estates and tasting wines.

In the 1980s these visits became increasingly frequent because the area grew rapidly. Then when, in 1987, I started working for a wine guide book, at certain times of year, it happened that I stayed even ten days in a row.

The Il Poggione's wines, which I had tasted and appreciated many times, were old friends by then whilst my dealings with Piero had been only episodic. Not because either of us were lacking a desire to get to know one another better but simply because the right opportunity had never presented itself. It must have been '88 or '89.

I had gone to Montalcino for one of my usual exploratory trips and made an appointment with him in Sant'Angelo. It was a sunny afternoon in May and Piero, together with Fabrizio

Bindocci, was sitting on the wall closing off the town square waiting for me, admiring the beautiful view in which the horizon merges into the sea.

After the usual introductions we moved over to the wine cellars.

The series of tastings was ultra-long and I was feeling a bit tired. I'd been visiting wine estates since 9 that morning and Il Poggione was the sixth of the day. Fabrizio never stopped for a minute and tapped out samples of the various Brunello vintages ageing there. Each one of them was the subject of intense debate with Piero: perhaps a comment on the differences between barrels or a comparison between the various vintages. In the intervals between wines we spat out our wine into a little drain which Fabrizio had specially uncovered for us and which, as if in a contest, we hit with long red jets. Then it was the turn of the already bottled wine. Now that initial coolness and distance between us had reduced.

It was only later that I realised that that long and tiring tasting was as good a way as any of putting to the test not only my tasting abilities but, above all, my judgement. I wasn't offended at all. I was actually pleased. Effectively my task was to judge his wines and assign 'glasses', classifying and assigning points and thus it was entirely legitimate that he would want to be sure that the critic was up to the job. Piero amazed me by telling me that I was a 'balanced' person, a judgement that my father would probably not have shared entirely. So I was floored because I was not expecting it.

Then, as it was nearly dinner time, he invited me to dinner at the Il Pozzo trattoria, a veritable town institution and a sort of extension of Il Poggione's offices. Piero believed that people got to know each other best over a meal. At around 11 pm we finished off our large meal



CIGARETTES *At least as long as his health allowed, Piero was always a heavy smoker. He started in his youth and kept it up until 1993, when he was obliged to give it up.*

washed down with equally lavish amounts of wine as required by the occasion. Those hours spent together had passed very quickly. We'd chatted about many things: Montalcino, Brunello, the Consortium and much more. Now we knew each other better and whatever diffidence there had been between us had disappeared.

After that evening whenever I could fit it in I detoured to Sant'Angelo to meet up with him. I've never totted up how many times I went to Il Pozzo with Fabrizio and him. I only know that the trattoria changed hands many times over the period. And I still go today when I see Fabrizio. It's no longer cold, as it used to be, and it's also cosier. Yes, this book began precisely at Il Pozzo, in some ways.

IL POGGIONE

The estate didn't even have the equipment (motorised pumps) needed to treat the olives he went to buy in Cesena together with treatment products because even the agricultural consortium had none. He also changed the pruning system: what little was done was entirely ineffective for the purposes of plant productivity and took place only every 3-4 years and even every 5 for wild olives.

From that moment on the olives were regularly pruned. The best results took years and many clashes with local shopkeepers who found the oil too low in acidity. So he started packaging it into cans for sale in Florence and Romagna, where the markets were ready for fresh oil and paid the right price for it. He always said that the agricultural world in Romagna was at least twenty years ahead of the Montalcino area. Another of his hunches was having understood before everyone else that the future, not only of Il Poggione as an estate but also Montalcino as an area, was to be Sangiovese and above

All Brunello. In fact he identified the most suitable land and sunniest slopes and then planted his first vineyards. He had to skip certain steps in order to create a solid basis for the estate and Brunello was a great opportunity.

Hunting out sparse bunches

BY PIERO TALENTI

I got to work right away on making ditches in which to plant vines in the summer of 1959. We first planted the wild vine and then grafted on the cuttings. I wanted to select the Sangiovese and for this reason I went to look around. I began travelling around the Montalcino area and where I knew there was a row of old vines I returned in summer, noted them down together with their location and then, when the time was right, I took cuttings for grafting. I made massal selections of the best, smallest and most sparse bunches but I never had time to have clonal selection done. I also found the Moscadello on my wine hunts. In the first week of October 1960, while I was wandering around the vineyards, I cut through the farmyard of the Le Capannace farm and noticed a very strong and unusual aroma of fermenting Muscat grapes. I went to speak to the farmer and asked him what was fermenting in his vats. Poor thing, he was afraid to speak up as he thought I was going to accuse him of grape theft. I reassured him immediately and said “Don’t worry. Look, I’m not bothered if you’ve taken even a hundred kilos of grapes for yourself. I just want to know which grapes you’ve taken and where from?” He took me behind the house where there were two or three rows of vines with a few Muscat vines. I marked them down and the next year I went to collect cuttings to make a little vineyard of them. I was first to get Moscadello back on the market in 1964-5. I fermented it in the bottle and then, if I could manage it, moved onto the degorging phase. Otherwise I left the lees and the wine was good anyway.



FROM THE SOLCIS. *In 1975 in Milan, at Enoteca Solci producers presented the first Brunello di Montalcino. Piero Talenti, in the middle of the photo, listens to the comments of celebrity taster, the actor Ugo Tognazzi.*

One of the first things he did was to identify the best position for the vines and then he began planting at greater densities in order to increase the number of vines from the traditional 2250 to at least 2900 per hectare. In 1963 a framework law was drawn up creating the DOC system and Brunello di Montalcino obtained this recognition on 28th March 1966. Its production regulations had been essentially formulated in accordance with an outline supplied by Tancredi Biondi Santi. Whilst viewing the DOC favourably, Piero was immediately critical of chemical-physical values which largely corresponded to the Greppo production protocol and traditions which could not be generalised to the whole of the Montalcino area, with its variations in sun exposure, altitude and climate. He thus began working to modify these in dry extract and total acidity, for example.

I met him when I was a boy

BY FABRIZIO BINDOCCI

I met Piero at Sant'Angelo in the early 1960s. I was a friend of his son Roberto's, because it was a small town and the children all played together. We often went to his house because he had a TV and offered us a snack as well. I saw Piero often because his office was in the square. When I attended the Istituto Tecnico Agrario in Siena he told me that he would help me find work. When I finished school he did, in fact, try to find me a job but all the estates wanted people who were exempt from military service and so I went back to Piero and, as I still had to do my military service, I explained to him that afterwards I'd run the risk of not finding anything. So Piero said that he'd spoken to Commendator Franceschi and told him he was getting old and needed a replacement and given him my name. He agreed. The day after I

my military service ended, in September 1976, I went to work at Il Poggione.

Another problem was ageing. The regulations effectively require a considerable financial investment by estates, as four years of ageing in wood (and five for the Riserva) requires buying enough barrels to contain the wine of four vintages and naturally having large spaces available to store them in. In the event of new vineyard plantings, moreover, a further three years had to be added to these four before the wine could come out. This means a grand total of seven years before money can be made with all the expenses and financial investments involved. The way out was Rosso dei Vigneti di Brunello, a wine which was later made DOC under the name Rosso di Montalcino, which can be sold the year after the harvest. Piero paid considerable attention to this wine and some of his old vintages are still in excellent shape.

There were great celebrations when we met up

BY GIACOMO TACHIS

I met Piero Talenti in the late 1960s. That was the period of the used and reconditioned barrel boom. The technical-empirical opinion of the day was that already used barrels produced the best wine if they were suitably scraped out. We at Antinori had bought many barrels made from former railway carts, had them scraped inside and outside and made them new again. They were wonderful. They had a 7518 hectolitre capacity and when I was introduced to Piero by the then owner of the Fustella - now Bonollo - distillery, he liked them a lot. It wasn't a difficult deal. As there were a lot of them half went to Il Poggione and the other half to Col d'Orcia. So these eighty



FINALLY A HOLIDAY. After Fabrizio Bindocci joined the estate there was a little less pressure on Piero and he sometimes even managed to go on holiday. In the photo Piero and Carla Talenti are in Yalta on a summer cruise stop off.

wonderful barrels all went to the two Franceschi brothers in Montalcino. Piero could not have been more correct in his bargaining and collection. I still remember him and the impression I took away with me was that he was an agreeable person, a skilled wine technician and an excellent farm manager. We got on right away and became friends. He was an excellent winemaker and knew a lot about wine. He was Romagnolo and lived life to the full: work, family, good food and many other great things! He had a weakness for the ladies but only in words and never left his backyard. Piero knew about agriculture and vines in particular: his vines at Il Poggione were used as an example and the grapes he produced made for sophisticated wine. He was absolutely not vain: he loved his profession jealously, certainly, and put his heart and soul into the estate and the Franceschis had a great deal of respect for him and repaid him with trust and gratitude. Talenti was one of the Consortium's very first founders and his commitment to promoting it was truly remarkable. Without him it would not have taken off to the extent it did. He was a man people liked. He loved his work and being with people, he was cheerful and willing to help anyone whatever their social class and status. I remember excellent lunches at Trattoria Il Pozzo in Sant'Angelo, the tortellini at his house, carefully made by his wife. There were great celebrations when we met up. It was really a party!

In April 1967 the Brunello di Montalcino Consortium was set up, with Piero as one of its most enthusiastic exponents and for which he met people across half of Italy in an attempt to understand how and what to do from people who'd already had this experience. The first president of the new-born organisation was precisely his employer Leopoldo Franceschi. That same year there were 21 estates who reported making

Brunello, making 19,600 tons of grapes and 2077 hectolitres of wine. For mayor Ilio Raffaelli “the Brunello economy era had begun”. With the DOC and the birth of the Consortium, Montalcino’s fame grew and it began to attract investment from other regions too.

The new estates arrived

BY PIERO TALENTI

Coming here cost nothing and all those with money to invest had realised that Brunello might be a good business opportunity. The first to arrive in 1970 was Altesino, which produced Caparzo, to whom I gave the first ten wines to get themselves known on the market. Then it was Roberto Bellini’s turn followed by Soldera, Sergio Rossi de La Gerla and many others. Altesino, old style, that is comprising Caparzo, around 180 hectares. I think they paid 100 million. Campogiovanni, who initially had 106 hectares, in 1974 119,75, and was worth 210 million and had the potential to make 10,000 tons of oil and 2 hectares of Brunello vineyards. My employer didn’t want to buy it, even though I had found a buyer for our La Casaccia farm who would have given us 150 million, so with 60 million we could have bought a great estate. So I rang Giacomo Tachis, who I’d met years before, who came together with someone from Prato. In three days we explored half of Montalcino but they didn’t find anything of interest.

In 1971 there were 146 hectares of vineyards in Montalcino, double the year before. At the end of the decade, with a sensational investment by brothers John and Henry Mariani, Italian-American financiers, wine importers and creators of the Lambrusco phenomenon in the US, the Banfi colossus arrived in Montalcino. To begin with they bought only 1800 hectares in the south-western part of Montalcino, which soon became 2830 when they built immense wine cellars and restored Poggio alle Mura



AMONGST FRIENDS *Piero Talenti* always used *Trattoria Il Pozzo* in *Sant'Angelo* as a part of his estate to host friends and clients. In the photo, to Piero's left, *Sasaki Hitoshi*, *Il Poggione* importer to Japan, sitting in front, *Fabrizio Bindocci*. Standing up *Paolo Cecchini*, the estate's accountancy 'elder statesman'.

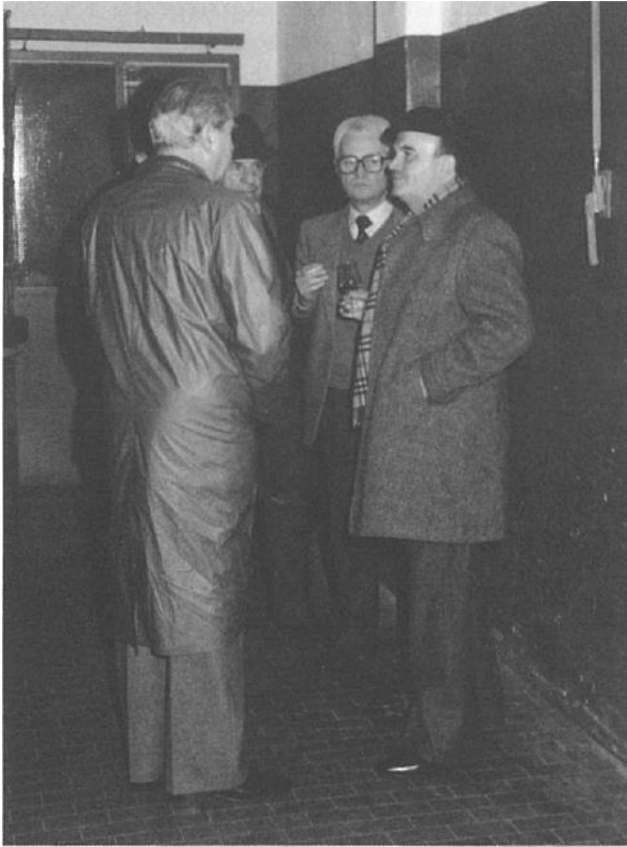
castle. Work went on for years and required investments of around 200 billion lire. People and the new-born small estates were a little worried and suspicious. But the strangest thing is that while Brunello was increasingly making a name for itself and generating ever wider wealth, some were still talking of Muscat, a wine which was entirely marginal to Montalcino. It was, in fact, the very future of Brunello which was up for debate. It is Piero himself who told the story.

Moscadello or Brunello?

BY PIERO TALENTI

The only firm we weren't so welcoming to was Banfi because it was initially not much interested in Brunello. I argued with Rivella, in fact, at a town council meeting open to local people because he maintained that we should root out all our Brunello wines as Montalcino's future was to be Moscadello. Banfi itself undertook to collect and buy the grapes from estates. I couldn't have agreed less and said "You Rivello can certainly continue to plant Muscat if you believe in it so much. I'll press on with Brunello. We'll see in future who's right". And so Banfi planted 350 hectares of Moscadello and using a training system which blocked the grapes from seeing the sun at that. The idea was to sell this sweet, sparking wine in America, attempting to achieve the same success they had had with Lambrusco. But he had to keep the lot and regraft all his vineyards.

Piero proceeded professionally in the Sangiovese massal selection process for Montalcino. He progressively extended this to Canaiolo and Colorino grapes too, both of which he had learnt to appreciate. His decisions have been much discussed but the best proof of its value is II



WITH EZIO RIVELLA. *In March 1985 an Accademia della Vite e del Vino session was held in Montalcino including a visit to the Il Poggione wine cellars. In the photo, Piero Talenti and Ezio Rivella of Banfi.*

Poggione's rich, powerful wines, which have always been top quality even in the most challenging years. The word spread and as there were relatively few good Sangioveses around and the demand for cuttings was constantly increasing, one of the largest Italian plant nurseries in Italy, the Rauscedo co-operative, came knocking at the door.

Partnership with Rauscedo

BY PIERO TALENTI

In the years 1968-70 I began working with Vivai Cooperativi di Rauscedo which had heard about this rather unusual Sangiovese and asked me to send cuttings. Since then I have been supplying them with 20,000 tons of cuttings every year and they have made millions of vines from these which have been sold all over the world, including in Australia and California. They selected the VCR 5 and VCR 6 from my Sangiovese. In 1963 and 1964 I did massal selection of red Colorino and Canaiolo, too. People thought I was crazy in those years because I put Canaiolo in my Sangiovese. It is very different from white Canaiolo and in aroma and flavour terms it is definitely interesting with soft, gentle tannins. They thought it wasn't worthy of attention but there is Canaiolo and Canaiolo...

Piero Talenti then decided to try out something different from Sangiovese. At the time the Super Tuscans were just emerging and Sassicaia had set out on the road to success some years earlier. He wasn't especially convinced but wanted to give it a go. He always thought that Montalcino had a special bond with Sangiovese while other grapes were good "for those lands which were not lucky enough to have a Saint Brunello". It was 1974 when a hectare and a half of Cabernet was planted in Ferrarino. It was a bit higher and thus

cooler than the other estate vineyards. The choice of grape variety was a result of his friendship with Tachis who had worked in Bolgheri with the Incisas. When they met up in Florence he'd had him taste the most fashionable wines of the day.

But Piero regretted it almost immediately. He gave it a go in 1977 and some of the grapes were made into wine in 1978 with the rest being sold to Tuscan estates keen to buy it. It was only bottled in 1977 and the bottle I was treated to in the early 1990s was truly important. Piero gave a few bottles to Gino Veronelli who went to visit the estate on the advice of Claudio Basla of Altesino. The Cabernet was never again bottled and for years the grapes were used to flesh out Chianti Classicos and then experimental Montalcino wines and others until, in 1995, they made their way into San Leopoldo, an excellent Il Poggione IGT Rosso di Toscana.

A far-sighted man

BY EDOARDO VIRANO

The 1960s and 70s period in which sharecropping was abandoned in favour of directly farmed land was a very challenging one partly because estate managers were not ready for the great change ushered in by it, in addition to organisational difficulties involved in direct management - balancing the books. Talenti was far-sighted and dynamic, progressively developing Il Poggione's activities and taking quality standards to the absolute top. His experience was precious in the management of the Consortium, too, in its formative years and in the drawing up of its various regulations.

For Brunello, the late 1970s coincided with an important watershed in its history. In March 1971 the Consortium had drawn up the documents required



A FAMILY CHRISTMAS Piero with his son Roberto and grandson Riccardo after Christmas eve dinner in 1985.

to obtain a DOCG, a denomination that no Italian wine had obtained to date. The process was much longer and more complex than expected and was only completed nine years later with the related decree in November 1980. The number of estates had increased in those years and Brunello was an increasingly prestigious wine. As the highest Italian wine denomination the DOCG had also contributed to popularising it in Italy and abroad. This fame raised demand for Brunello in many countries and an increasing number of importers came to Montalcino to make new business deals. Il Poggione had long been a flagship estate and its wines had an excellent reputation and its production volume was sufficient to take on international markets.

It was then that the business relationship with Paterno Imports was formed, one which is still underway. For some time now it has been not solely a cold and ascetic commercial association but a friendly business relationship. This change was also down to Tony Terlato who frequently took his family to Montalcino as well as his staff.

I want to import your wines into America

BY ANTHONY TERLATO

I met Pierluigi Talenti in 1978. At the time I was looking for a Brunello to import into the USA. Together with Mario Cortevesio, a tasting master who worked with us in Greve in Chianti, we went to Montalcino and ordered something like 8110 bottles of Brunello in five restaurants. At 5 pm we had made our choice: Il Poggione. I knew where Leopoldo Franceschi lived in Sant'Angelo in Colle. When we got to the house it was getting dark and had started



WITH LEE IACOCCA. *Piero Talenti receiving Lee Iacocca and one of his staff in the living room at Villa Franceschi in Sant'Angelo. This American automobile executive of Italian origin owned a farmhouse in Grosseto province and had asked Il Poggione to bottle some Brunello and Rosso di Montalcino under a Villa Nicola label. The wines were then drunk at Chrysler meetings.*

raining heavily. I rang the bell and a smart gentleman with a distinguished appearance appeared at the door. It was Pierluigi. I said quickly - partly because it was raining - "I'm Anthony Terlato. I want to import your wines into America". He immediately replied that he was not interested in the United States. I was shocked. But a voice from inside the house asked: "Who is it Piero?" And Piero answered "Someone from America" and the voice said "Let him in, it's raining". And so we went in. Piero took us into a room in which was sitting, if my memory serves me right, a gentleman with a blanket over his knees in what looked like a wheelchair. It was old Leopoldo who died the next year, in 1979. He asked if we'd eaten and asked us to sit down. We'd been to five restaurants and had five lunches but I replied that we hadn't yet had lunch. He had ham, pecorino cheese, bread and a bottle of wine brought out and we started chatting about politics, wine, art and music for two hours until Francesco said to Piero "Let this young man take some of our wines to the United States. He's been here two hours and he's never asked the price". When I shook Piero's hand he had an unusual smile on his face. It was the beginning of a friendship and mutual respect which lasted until his death. I invited Piero to the US many times and he always said yes but then, for one reason or another, he always put it off and never came.

Over these years overseas publications describing the new Italian and Tuscan wine situation were very few and far between but interest was growing and wine lovers undertook to spread the word. Burton Anderson, an American journalist who had been living in the Arezzo hills for several years and was an attentive Italian wine scene observer, told of meeting Piero and getting to know Il Poggione in an 1980 book

entitled *Vino*.

A proud, straight-talking man

BY BURTON ANDERSON

A leading firm in the top quality wine at a reasonable price field is Tenuta Il Poggione owned by Leopoldo Franceschi and managed by Piero Talenti, one of the shrewdest and most intelligent of what the Tuscans call 'fattori'. Romagnolo by birth, Talenti is a proud, straight-talking man with a pale complexion which makes him look more Austrian than Italian. He has clear ideas on what Brunello di Montalcino's image should be, one which is very different from what it currently is. "Brunello should be accessible to people at a justifiably high price because it is truly a great wine", he says, "but the great wines should not be the preserve of millionaires". Il Poggione is one of the Montalcino area's top estates and its wines are undoubtedly some of the best. Talenti challenges some of the traditional Brunello making rules and he does so in an admirable way. "Four years in the barrel is too much for any wine", he says, "and five years for the Riserva is ridiculous. I am in favour of one year in the barrel for non-exceptional vintages and two years at most for the great vintages. After that the wine develops its aromas best in the bottle. And this is recognised in the best wine areas the world over, but our traditionalists do not agree. Some of us want to change the DOC rules, diminishing the time spent in the barrel but it is unlikely that we'll succeed. We are accused of looking for financial shortcuts. It's nonsense. My opinion is that those who want to can keep their wine in wood for as long as they like. Perfect. But those of us with other opinions, ideas validated by plenty of research, should be able to put these in practice".



TOPPING OFF In 1985 old bottles of Brunello Riserva del Popone. Were topped off.

One of the reasons for Piero's excellent reputation among Montalcino's small producers, many of whom are former sharecroppers who bought their farms and started making Brunello, was his external wine consultancy work, free of charge. Many came to ask his advice at Sant'Angelo and he never turned them away. It was overall consultancy which ranged over many different fields from winemaking and ageing techniques to barrel purchase or advice on the best way to renovate old cattle sheds to make them into wine cellars.

For many years, in fact, the only space available in the farmhouses turned over to winemaking was these, but if they were not suitably renovated the risk of pungent aromas damaging the wine was ever present. Piero was always generous with his advice, arguing that "if Brunello quality increases in Montalcino, it is good for them but also better for everyone". This means that the higher average quality is the better Brunello's image will be. Of these small producers Primo Pacenti formed a special relationship with him. A former sharecropper he and Piero formed a genuine friendship which lasted over the years. Montalcino has, in fact, always welcomed outsiders, but not especially enthusiastically. Fitting in is not easy but Piero's personality and willingness to help won people over.

Quality testing

BY SHELDON AND PAULINE WASSERMAN

Quality checks at Il Poggione began with careful grape selection in the vineyards and then a second selection took place when the winemaking process was complete. If the wine was judged to be below the estate's rigorous quality standards it was sold in bulk. In spring, after fermentation, Talenti did a second selection and decided which would be made into Brunello and which sold as

Rosso di Montalcino. Il Poggione's Rosso di Montalcino is one of the area's best, we believe. Exceptionally, in 1982, they made 5000 cases.

Talenti does not believe in leaving wine in wood at length and as far as we know he has never made a wine that is any less than good. Even in a difficult year like 1976 he succeeded in producing good wines thanks to careful selection and attention to quality.

THE MAESTRO

Retirement was nearing for Piero but he'd already got his replacement ready. Fabrizio Bindocci had been working alongside him in his everyday work for some time. They were long days which began early in the morning and ended late in the evening. It was a long learning period dealing with the problems and complexities inherent to a large estate which no school can teach you. And Talenti was a very unusual teacher.

At school with Piero

BY FABRIZIO BINDOCCI

He often jokingly said to me: "Your experience is still limited. I need you because you're young and work hard, you need me because I'm old and have plenty of experience". It was a very different relationship from the one you have with a father but in many ways he was an employer, a friend and also a father. I talked to him a lot, including about personal matters, with that familiarity which comes from knowing someone since you were a child, spending time with them as adults and working



THE FUTURE AND PASSION Piero in the villa's living room with his grandson Riccardo, sipping a glass of Il Poggione's Entnello. Riccardo inherited his grandfather's passion for the countryside and wine.

together side by side twelve hours a day. Also because whilst with a son there's a certain reticence on certain subjects, when you're not it is easier to find the right way to speak about certain subjects. As far as the estate was concerned he always said to me: "If there's a problem don't let it get too set in, don't be afraid to bring it out into the open. At the beginning it might be nothing but it'll get bigger and cause problems. We'll solve it together". In this sense he was a great teacher because he passed on his experience continually, without fearing that this would enhance my autonomy.

His first thought when thinking of the future was of retiring to Romagna, where his family was and "it was a different world from Tuscany". But this lasted only a second. His roots were now deep in Sant'Angelo and his son Roberto had married there and had his doctor's clinic in Montalcino and his grandson Riccardo had been born and raised there. Why return to Santa Sofia?

So Piero pulled out his old but never forgotten dream - his own estate. First he talked to old Leopoldo and then with his sons, Clemente and Roberto. In recognition of his honesty, attachment to the family and proven ability to enhance the estate over the years, the Franceschis sold him Pian di Conte, an old Il Poggione farm, instead of his retirement pay. It was 1980. Piero Talenti no longer thought of returning to Romagna. He retired and remained at Il Poggione as a consultant. The dream of a lifetime had come true thanks to the Franceschis. The farm was then extended with further, neighbouring lands. Over time Piero renovated the old farmhouse, planted vines and created a small but functional wine cellar and an attractive house for his son Roberto. Now Piero was himself a Brunello producer.

The Midas touch

BY JAMES SUCKLING

Talenti seemed to have the Midas touch where Brunello was concerned. In addition to Il Poggione, which local people consider one of the best Brunello's, Talenti also managed Pian di Conte's wines. "The great producers make great wines from bad vintages", said Talenti, "I don't really have the Midas touch. All it takes to make great wine is passion and honesty". If we look at the first, 1981, harvest as a sign of wines to come, Pian di Conte will soon be making great Brunello. It has depth and intensity but is also stylish. It is a classic Brunello made with modern methods and Talenti is, in fact, convinced that a rigorous selection in the vineyard and wine cellars is essential to making the best possible wine. All the best producers insist on this. They throw out the mediocre grapes during the harvest or throw out the wine after the last taste, including after years of barrel ageing. "Sometimes only 30 to 35% of our wine is made into Brunello", says Talenti, "and the rest is sold in bulk as table wine".

In those Brunello boom years he always argued that "it was important to grow but gradually". Making Brunello, certainly, but keeping some aside for Rosso di Montalcino to ensure the firm's liquidity while Brunello completes its required ageing cycle so that when it is ready the numbers are there to avoid imbalances between supply and demand. This, he believed, involves using the best suited lands, avoiding sites which are better suited to wheat than vines in order to ensure the base conditions for quality wine production.



HIS WINE Piero Talenti with his Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1990 Pian di Conte. Piero's wine won fame right away and its clarity and good structure were much appreciated.

PIERLUIGI TALENTI

He knew how to get onto first name terms with Sangiovese

BY PIERO SELVAGGIO

For me Piero Talenti was Mr Brunello. I remember him as Tenuta Il Poggione's 'fattore' but it would be more appropriate to call him its 'doctor'. Piero had a personal relationship with wine. He was perhaps one of the few to have been capable of getting onto first name terms with Sangiovese grosso, even in difficult years like 1972, 74 and 76. Piero was sure that 4 or 5 years in the barrel were too much. Dr Talenti would have preferred 1 or 2 years depending on the quality of the vintage with the remaining years in the bottle developing aromas and flavours. He was a fighter and time proved him right! I was one of Pian di Conte and Il Poggione's first fans as I've always preferred friends' wines - warm, authentic, well-made and memorable.

This critical stance brought him quite a few enemies among those whose lands were not especially well-suited to vines but wanted to grow. A further point that Piero tended to emphasise was the importance of keeping Brunello's characteristics intact. He was critical of the plant nurseries which provided low quality Sangiovese di Romagna leading to a certain lowering of standards. "It's not Brunello but a generic Sangiovese", he used to say when he tasted certain wines. The overall situation was much improved in both vineyard and wine terms but, Piero used to complain, checks on the plants used were very limited. Essentially, he used to say, experimentation has always been lacking because the experiences of the individual estates in this field cannot be generalised as the climatic and soil conditions and altitude only partially coincide with the four zones into which the Montacino terroir is traditionally divided up.

A talent with Brunello

BY DAVID GLEAVE

Talenti, as "the honourable side of Montalcino", says that he wants to make "a soft wine with better fruit". For this reason the majority is starting to believe that it would be better to leave the wine in the bottle longer than in wood. But why, now that he has his own estate Pian di Conte, is he still working for Il Poggione? For a man at retirement age Talenti is incredibly energetic. Perhaps after managing a 600 hectare estate Pian di Conte isn't enough. But there is a special pride in his voice as he speaks of Pian di Conte. It is fundamentally important for Montalcino's future that Talenti's philosophy, his way of seeing things, remains alive amongst winemakers. Otherwise Montalcino risks becoming a Chianti satellite zone producing ultra-highly priced wines at debatable prices.

Pian di Conte extended its original ten hectares to a good forty hectare size of which twenty were planted to vine, four to olives and the remaining land to orchards, woods and crops. The Sangiovese, "Piero's own", at 15 hectares, is a significant presence but so are the other five planted with his massal selections of Colorino and Canaiolo grapes with small amounts of Syrah, Cabernet and Merlot. Piero did nothing in particular to publicise his estate but his fame and his wines' reputation progressively increased the number of countries importing his wines.

I wasn't used to drinking wine

BY SASAKI HITOSHI

I first encountered Talenti's wine in autumn 1988 because one of the Brunellos offered by Enoteca Pinchiorri was his. I liked it



LOOKING AFTER THE VINEYARDS *Piero always paid a great deal of attention to his vineyards. As soon as he arrived in Sant'Angelo he started looking for Sangiovese across the whole Montalcino area wherever there were old vineyards. He never stopped doing this and it led to the birth of a selection now distributed around the world by the Rauscedo plant nursery.*

right away although I wasn't familiar with the Pian di Conte label. So when I got back to my hotel I called Talenti to tell him that I wanted to buy some of his wines for the Japanese market. At midday the next day I arrived in Sant'Angelo in Colle in a rented car and Talenti invited me to lunch at Trattoria Il Pozzo. As soon as we sat down he told me that his 1983 was finished. He had me taste his 1984 but it wasn't very interesting, like all the Tuscan wines of that year. Then I admitted to Talenti that although I was a wine buyer, even 23 years in this line of work I am, to this day, a teetotaler like my father who went red and a bit tipsy after even half a glass of beer. At that point Talenti looked at me with a certain embarrassment because he had noticed that the wine had already begun having a certain effect on my face. My reply was that I wasn't used to drinking alcohol. To which Talenti replied, in an attempt to make me feel better, that with food you can drink as much wine as you want and that if I started to feel unwell he'd call Roberto, his doctor son. Thus, from that moment onwards and in the years that followed, at the end of every lunch together Roberto always dropped in to see me and check that I was OK.

He never held back. Long days at work alternated with a love of good food, a lifelong passion. Piero was also a heavy smoker and despite all his son Roberto's fond warnings, there's hardly a photo in which he isn't smoking. It was a very common weakness amongst men of his generation. He never had any particular health problems. He bore up well to the hard work and never even went on holiday for many years. But even the strongest physique has its limits which cannot be crossed. In 1993 he nearly died of a heart attack. It was a miracle he survived and above all thanks to Roberto's prompt action. It was like

lightning in a clear sky. On that tragic occasion, too, the Franceschis attachment to Piero Talenti came through strongly with Clemente and Roberto taking turns at his bedside. His recovery was very long and slow. He never accepted his illness and this story of that small part of heart that was still functioning was something he never believed. The only true cure was rest and a controlled diet. So, goodbye overdoing it, of any sort.

Il Poggione

BY N. K. YONG

Talenti had replied kindly to my fax, saying that it was to be a pleasure as well as an honour to show us around. As we found out right away the name Talenti had something magical about it in Montalcino, the warmth and generous hospitality with which you were welcomed to the wine cellars is one of my fondest memories. At Il Poggione Talenti treated us with all consideration and seeing that we didn't speak Italian he brought in the writer Giuseppe M. Sesti as interpreter, as the latter spoke excellent English. And this alone was a measure of the interest he paid us. Small and meticulously well-dressed Talenti had a serious manner but behind those glasses was an acute and smiling gaze, especially at lunch at a small trattoria. The doctor had put him on a strict diet but he evidently had no intention of following it and continued to order dish after dish in his eagerness to have us try out all the local specialities. "His wife isn't here", was Giuseppe the interpreter's amused comment.

Piero's desire for debate was undiminished by his physical illness which, amongst other things, required a life as quiet and relaxed as



PIAN DI CONTE. *Podere Pian di Conte - Talenti is near the town of Sant'Angelo in Colle at an altitude of 350 metres. Piero's dream had always been to have his own estate and thanks to the Franceschis he was able to make it come true in 1980 when he retired. With 20 hectares of vineyards the estate was left to Riccardo Talenti who employed well-known Tuscan agronomist Carlo Ferrini to help him.*

possible. But that was just not the way he was. In the 1990s the Brunello phenomenon burst onto the stage. The number of estates making it grew exponentially with the 100 or so in the mid-80s doubling in the space of just a few years. This encouraged an increase in the land planted to vines which Piero did not see as risky as long as selection continued and was stepped up. For him more hectares meant better selection and not just a chance to increase bottle numbers and it was clear to him that when the “demand is so strong”, as he once said to me, “you can sell almost anything. The Brunello name is all it takes, with the risk that the label’s reputation might be ruined”. They were words spoken with the usual sincerity and directness, the salient features of his personality. “The only vices Piero never puts up with”, his wife used to say, “are falseness and hypocrisy and”, she added, with characteristically sound female common sense, “a little falseness now and then is useful in life”.

A man of great passions and strong beliefs

BY DONATELLA CINELLI COLOMBINI

Piero Talenti had a positive attitude to real life to a much greater extent than most Tuscans. It was probably something to do with his having been profoundly Romagnolo. He preferred doing to talking and this way of being is typical of the people of his region. He was a hot blooded man of great passions and strong beliefs, who fought his battles in the Consortium with great energy but never lost his humanity. I remember that, even when we were on opposite sides, he was capable of demonstrating affection in a touching way. Like the time that my brother Stefano was operated on urgently for a very serious and risky problem and my family were all in Siena. The evening afterwards I took part in a meeting

At the Consortium and I saw him coming towards me with a zeal that you don't expect from someone you were arguing fairly animatedly with just a moment earlier. For we hypercritical and rational Tuscans these are things which make their mark, because we are not used to showing our feelings in such a direct way.

But doubt was never cast on Piero's moral rigour and he argued that the Brunello Consortium should officially urge the Siena Chamber of Commerce's tasting commission to be more rigorous. Piero, who kept his place as president of the tasting commission, grasped that the Brunello we knew was changing. He spoke of it often with another grand old man of the Tuscan wine world, Giulio Gambelli. Both felt that the characteristics of Sangiovese as they had always known it, were being adulterated with new alien or at least anomalous aromas. The arrival of new firms interested solely in doing business and less in the territory ultimately damaged an equilibrium painstakingly achieved.

It wasn't going to be a walk in the park

BY STEFANO CAMPATELLI

I met Pierluigi Talenti in 1983. At the time he came to Siena every Wednesday, market day, and spent the morning in town before going to Ristorante Mugolone for lunch together with other Siena province estate managers. I sometimes joined them and spent a few hours in their pleasant company. I say "a few hours" with reason because it was effectively not a quick lunch before getting back to work. It was a full-blown meal from starter to dessert which never ended before 3-3.30 pm. I liked Piero and the others. Many of them knew my father -



HIS ESTATE *The entrance to Pian di Conte's old ageing cellars with its tower turned into estate office.*

also a farm manager - and felt on the same wavelength as them because my world was the same as theirs and always had been. I shared many experiences with Piero Talenti after 1990, when I arrived at the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino: I remember many board meetings (he was a member until 1995), I remember the debates which he always got involved in in his hot blooded and determined way. A moment I remember with great pleasure and very clearly was in January 1990 when I was still working at Unione Agricoltori. The Consortium's board had decided to employ me and he was the first to ring me that morning to congratulate me. He told me that it wouldn't be a walk in the park but that if I was willing to work hard Montalcino was the right place also because the area's potential had still largely not been fulfilled. Thinking back to that conversation now I must say that he was absolutely correct.

Even during the Brunello golden age, when making wine in Montalcino was glamorous, the TV and world of wine spotlight was on it and the desire for countryside and a slow life came to the fore, as guidebooks awarded glasses, stars and everything else, Piero remained solidly imbedded in the real life of a world rooted in the land and reflected in it. The 1988 Gambero Rosso Slow Food guide Vini d'Italia, on its debut, wrote of him "Pierluigi Talenti, farm manager, public relations man, essentially the estate's factotum, is considered a sort of elder statesman of Brunello... Since Brunello fever broke out... behind many labels there were really Il Poggione's wines, largely bought covertly to cover up some technical error. This means that Il Poggione's Brunello is an honest and constant product and that Pierluigi Talenti knows his business".

Modest when talking of himself and rock solid in his profession

BY CARLO CAMBI

It is often said that Montalcino owes everything first to Tancredi Biondi Santi and then to Ezio Rivella, who, with Banfi, projected the Brunello world onto the international markets. But loving this wine as much as I do, I have a moving, intense, authentic memory linked to a man who was modest when talking of himself and rock solid in his profession. This man was Piero Talenti. It is to him that we owe the new Brunello and this tribute to him may be late in coming but it is sacrosanct. Our first meeting was at the Il Poggione wine cellars - it is a struggle to remember how many years ago it was. It was a Montalcino friend who introduced us. I was introduced to the mysteries of Piero with a glass of wine exploding with blackcurrants and violets. Piero awaited judgement as if I was someone important and he a newbie, whilst in actual fact he was one of Montalcino's shrewdest and most modern oenologists, one of its greats. For him wine was a way of getting across local values (this was his modernity) and, at the same time, he was respectful of Sangiovese's potential (and this was his shrewdness). Another memory also emerges from time's baggage: one evening at Osticcio when he came with Roberto (the doctor, his son) to speak about his little estate, of how he intended to make a Brunello in his likeness, i.e. everyone's friend and sober. And he succeeded. And now, when I taste that Brunello I remember Piero's gentle smile and his raw countryman's strength and future oriented mind.

INTERMEZZO 2

I'd agreed with Piero that I'd drop in at the end of July on the occasion of a visit to Montalcino. In June I'd sent him issue 46 of Veronelli's *Ex Vinis* containing an interview with him entitled "The grand old man of Brunello" which he had given a few months ago. On the phone he'd already expressed his satisfaction and we had put off all further comment until my visit. As usual he was waiting for me in the town square which the castle keep's shadow kept relatively cool. In Sant'Angelo even in the hottest summers there's always a little breeze in the evening. I parked my car alongside the church and he came up to me smiling. He was pleased and you could tell. For him that article had been much more important than I'd initially realised.

He'd cleared the air a little and felt less isolated. His critical attitude to certain new Brunello directions was no mystery. The interview had probably compensated for certain resentments. He knew that some people

Had received what he'd had to say with ill-concealed impatience while a few others had been waiting eagerly for it. Piero's opinion continued to have its weight.

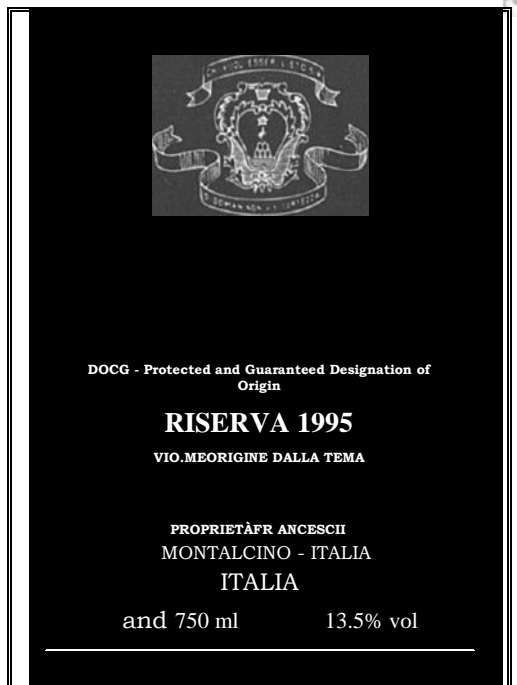
But my trip to Sant'Angelo was not only for a chat but also to find out how he was doing and he wasn't at all well. When I rang to find out more, he brushed it off and so I tried to get Fabrizio on his own to ask about it. We often spoke in the evenings at home and I asked for a rundown of the latest medical examinations but, especially towards the end, there was very little good news to be had. The situation was not at all good and he was increasingly tired. And so I tried to avoid getting there near lunch or dinner time. I didn't want to be used as an excuse for a meal out.

For him the days of game crostini, large plates of pasta and great juicy chunks of Florentine steak washed down with Rosso and Brunello were over. He had to restrain himself and, above all, eat less, drink almost nothing and rest. It was a very difficult treatment, knowing Piero. So my visits were a little less frequent but that time I really couldn't refuse his usual invitation to Il Pozzo. As well as Il Poggione there was also Pian di Conte to taste.

Without in any way detracting from his Brunello, right from the outset I truly loved his Talenti Rosso. It was Piero's answer to the various new experimental wines. His personal take on the Super Tuscans obtained with his selection of Sangiovese, Colorino and Canaiolo to which he had added an 'exotic' and transgressive touch of Syrah. It had always been a very pleasant wine, with powerful ripe red fruit aromas and its only defect was that it went down too quickly. That evening I asked to dine with this very wine.

Fabrizio was affectionately worried about Piero and you could tell.

GOLD MEDAL
XX BANCO D'ASSAGGIO DEIVINI D'ITALIA



e.

AWARDS *Postcard for the XX Banco di assaggio di Torgiano gold medal won by Brunello di Montalcino Riserva 1995 Il Poggione.*

PIERLUIGI TALENTI

He tried to get him to eat and drink as little as possible but it wasn't easy. For a few minutes I felt mildly guilty for having accepted the invitation. But then the pleasure of his company and us all being together took over. Piero was happy and that evening we spoke of Riccardo, his grandson who was attending agricultural school and who he'd decided to leave the estate to. He was very proud that his grandson was getting ready to take over what he had started, ensuring Pian di Conte's continuity. Roberto, his son, now a well-established doctor, had all his time taken up by his patients.

The evening went very well, helped by the cool air coming in through the window. Il Pozzo in winter can certainly not be called warm but at least in summer it's a good place to be. Then we said goodbye and agreed to meet after the harvest and I went back to Montalcino to my bed. I couldn't have known that that would be the last time I was to see him.

THE LAST HARVEST

Piero Talenti is 74 now and his long Tuscan period has made no impact on his Romagnolo accent. But if there's someone who isn't an outsider and isn't considered such, it is him. In the Sienese countryside outsiders are always welcomed but never completely accepted because the sense of belonging is very deeply rooted. He, however, had become a full-blown 'cat'. This is the name given by the Montalcino 'morticians' and the Castelnuovo dell'Abate 'bears' to people from Sant'Angelo in Colle. Piero had lived most of his life in this little village and it was here that he had raised his family, made his home and his estate. Everyone knew him, respected him and loved him. And since he got ill everyone is even kinder and more affectionate with him. But that wretched heart attack which had come out of the blue six years earlier had damaged his heart too much. A will of iron is not enough. Now September has come around, there are thousands of things to do, the harvest is nearing and



WINTER Piero at the entrance to the villa in February 1999.

it's no time for mistakes.

It was 9th September

BY CARLA TALENTI

That morning he got up earlier than normal. I was watering the garden and heard the car engine being turned on and asked: "Why so early?" "Today I've got a hundred things to do", he answered and went up because Clemente Franceschi was arriving that day and they were to have lunch together. Then he returned home but didn't rest for long and set off again early because the workers stopped work at five. He went on his own to the Pian di Conte vineyard to look at the grapes there. At 6 they brought him home and I understood right away that it was serious. My son Roberto got there immediately but by then he was no longer responding. It was 9th September.

The news spread like wild fire. "Talentì is dead". Fabrizio rang me the next morning with his tears continually interrupting his account, told me of the specific, desperate attempts Roberto had made to save his father once again. But he is a good doctor and knew that nothing more could be done. I was very upset, too, and did not hide it.

Come back soon, I could go at any time

BY GIACOMO TACHIS

I was very fond of Piero. The last time I saw him was right there at Sant'Angelo, a few hours before that last, definitive heart attack. He kept me company at Trattoria Il Pozzo and took it upon himself to have a plate of loin of pork served up to me quickly as

I had a lot to do that day. He brought me a bottle of wine produced at his farm, a wonderful farm that the Franceschis had ceded to him. He often spoke to me of his Brunello. It was an excellent wine and expressed all his positivity. Sometimes the wines people make and the people who make them are similar. In that last afternoon Piero told his wife how happy he was to have seen me and then, after meeting Mr Franceschi, he went to the vineyards for the last time. I remember what he said when we said our fond goodbyes: “When are you coming back to spend a bit of time with me? Come back soon, I could go at any time!”. I miss Piero a great deal. He was a true, dear friend.

On the day of his funeral the cars were parked right down to the provincial road junction. You had to come up on foot along all the bends along the road to the village. The church was packed and couldn't fit everyone in and the town square was difficult to get around. There were a great many people at the funeral: producers, Consortium staff, Il Poggione staff, people from Montalcino, Sant'Angelo and all its villages and plenty of friends, too. And the Franceschis and their relatives. When mass ended a long procession accompanied him to Sant'Angelo's small graveyard.

He'd cleared the way for the younger generations

BY NICOLAS BELFRAGE

I met Piero Talenti for the first time when he was already old and ill but naturally his fame had preceded him. I'd gone to Il Poggione looking for excellent wine and oil because I had to do some research for an article. While I was in the office, speaking to Fabrizio Bindocci, a small man with white



PER EX VINIS. Piero in the Podere Pian di Conte winemaking cellars. This photo was taken on the occasion of a long interview published in Ex Vinis issue 46 April-May 1999 entitled “The grand old man of Brunello”, just a few months before he died.

hair slipped furtively in. I didn't recognise him right away but was very much struck, when we were introduced, by the unpretentious air of this man of such great reputation. He had a very serious but also humble air about him and you could tell that he didn't see himself as someone who'd done something extraordinary, but simply his duty. Over the next three or four years I met him again and my first impression didn't change. He spoke very objectively about his health problems and I wasn't surprised when I heard he died. I wasn't especially sad either because I'd got the impression that he had this quasi-Socratic vision of death and had already cleared the way for the younger generation of trusted men.

EPILOGUE

On Piero's death it was Roberto Talenti's task to ensure Pian di Conte's destiny. His son Riccardo had still to complete his agricultural school studies and then go to university. But he is a chip off the old block and despite his difficulties in reconciling his medical work with the duties of a winemaker Roberto guided the estate ably in the wait for his son to take over.

Riccardo had inherited his grandfather's passion for the countryside and agriculture and is now a much respected member of the Consortium. He called to Pian di Conte Carlo Ferrini, one of Tuscany's best known and respected agronomer-oenologists. The estate's wines were always up to the mark. Fabrizio, who had worked alongside Piero in managing Il Poggione, became its new director. The word 'fattore' was no longer used. The property had now been inherited by Leopoldo and Livia Franceschi, who had set to work achieving new triumphs, proud of the estate's history and its achievements. They had just finished building a new wine cellar. Il Poggione has remained a flagship Brunello estate. I suggested Gino Veronelli name a seed after Piero Talenti and he agreed. This book is in memory of both.

CHRONOLOGY

1925

Piero is born on 19th April in Santa Sofia of Pietro Talenti and Ida Micheletti. He is the third child, after Maria (1914) and Francesco (1919).

1939

On 1st September World War Two begins after Germany's attack on Poland.

1940

On 10th June Italy declares war on France and Great Britain and, at the end of October, it is Greece's turn. Piero attends the Istituto Tecnico Agrario in Florence, one of Italy's oldest (1882) where he learns the farm management essentials. Set in Parco delle Cascine the school was attended by aspiring farm managers

1941

In December Germany and Italy declare war on the US.

1943

Fascism falls. In March great worker strikes against the war take place in the north. In September the armistice with the Allies is signed. The king and Badoglio escape. The Allies land in Calabria and Campania. In late 1943 Piero is conscripted but his military service as sapper lasts only 20 days.

1944

In early January Piero goes into hiding and joins the partisans of the VIII Brigata Garibaldi Romagna. Piron is his *nom de guerre* and he takes part in various attacks on the Fascists. In June he becomes a partisan courier.

On 27th September Piero takes part, with his brigade, in the liberation of Santa Sofia. On 29th October he leaves his partisan formation and, a few months later, leaves to complete his military service.

1945

In April he gets engaged to Carla Ceccacci, an attractive girl he met in Santa Sofia where she often visited her aunt. He returns to his studies at Istituto Tecnico Agrario Giuseppe Garibaldi in Cesena.

1946

On 12th June the Italians vote in a referendum to decide to remain a monarchy or become a republic. The result is a republic and the claimant to the throne, Umberto II, goes into exile.

1947

The Constituent Assembly approves the Italian Constitution. Piero completes his studies in Cesena and obtains his agricultural technician diploma. He starts work as farm manager for the Franceschis in Mercatale di Galatea and other landowners.

1948

On 1st January the Republican Constitution comes into force.

1950

Piero and Carla get married in Stia, her hometown, in Arezzo province.

1951

On 19th May Piero and Carla's only child is born in Santa Sofia, Roberto.

1958

On 10th September Piero leaves for Sant'Angelo in Colle, a small village in Montalcino, with the task of valuing a large estate owned by the Franceschis, Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle, which is to be divided up equally between

brothers Leopoldo and Stefano who have inherited it. Two new estates are born - Il Poggione and Col d'Orcia.

1959

On 31st January the two estates are drawn out of a hat before a notary from Bastia di Ravenna. Leopoldo gets Il Poggione and Stefano Col d'Orcia. Piero becomes Il Poggione's manager. A few months later Carla also moves to Sant'Angelo together with her son Roberto. In summer the first ditches are dug for vines and the old cellars are repaired. In autumn Piero begins the first Sangiovese massal selections in the Montalcino area.

1963

Law no. 930 on Denominazioni di Origine Controllata (DOC) comes into force.

1964

Piero does the first massal selections of Colorino and red Canaiolo. He oversees the planting of vines in Paganelli and Capannacce.

1965

The first Il Poggione Brunello vintage.

1966

Brunello di Montalcino becomes DOC. The DOC can be backdated and thus old bottled vintages can be labelled DOC. Il Poggione has old vintages dating back to 1936 inherited from Fattoria di Sant'Angelo in Colle.

1967

Producers set up the Brunello di Montalcino Consortium. Piero is a powerful exponent of the initiative. Leopoldo Franceschi is appointed its first president.

1968

Piero begins working with the Rauscedo plant nursery. Every year Il Poggione sends 20,000 tons of Sangiovese cuttings to it, the result of his massal selections.

1970

Business people start coming to Montalcino, from Lombardy in particular, to buy land and old semi-abandoned estates in order to plant vineyards and make Brunello. Piero builds Il Poggione's new cellars in Perinetto.

1974

Piero plants 1.5 hectares of Cabernet vines at Podere Ferrarino at an altitude of over 400 metres. He makes wine out of only two vintages (1977 and 1978) and thereafter the grapes are sold to Chianti Classico and Montalcino. He joins the board of directors at the Brunello Consortium as statutory auditor.

1975

The first Rosso vintage from the Il Poggione Brunello vineyards.

1976

Fabrizio Bindocci begins work at Il Poggione alongside Piero.

1977

Piero becomes director at the Brunello Consortium.

1978

The Olivetone vineyard is the last to be planted with grafting in the vineyard.

1979

On 19th June his grandson Riccardo is born of Antonella and Roberto Talenti.

Il Poggione starts using cuttings for new plantings: 'innestini', workers specialised in this task, are now a dying breed. On 27th November Leopoldo Franceschi dies, a man Piero was very fond of. Il Poggione is inherited by brothers Clemente and Roberto. The relationship between Piero and the family which had started so long ago continues unchanged.

1980

Brunello di Montalcino is made Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG). The Perinetto wine cellars are further extended. Thanks to the generosity of the Franceschis, Piero becomes owner of Podere Pian di Conte. It is a lifelong dream come true.

1984

At Pian di Conte the first three hectares of vineyard are planted.

1985

Pian di Conte presents its Rosso di Montalcino of 1985 and Brunello di Montalcino 1981. These are the estate's first bottles. Piero is confirmed as president of the Brunello Consortium's technical committee, a post he holds until the end of 1988.

1987

At Pian di Conte a further three hectares of vineyard are planted and work begins on renovating the estate's buildings.

1989

At Pian di Conte Piero plants Vigna del Parettaio, which will be the name of his Brunello, Cru and Riserva at the same time.

1993

At the beginning of the summer Piero suffers a serious heart attack. His recovery is slow and difficult. He never accepts the limitations which

his health now requires of him. He resigns his board member post.

1994

The new Pian di Conte wine cellars are opened.

1995

At Il Poggione the Cabernet grapes previously sold to other estates begin to be used in a new innovative blended wine, San Leopoldo.

1996

Piero buys land at Castelnuovo dell'Abate and plants another three hectares at Pian di Conte which will increase further in 1998.

1998

On 7th January Roberto Franceschi dies. Il Poggione passes to his brother Clemente.

1999

Piero buys 11 hectares of land at Cinigliano, beyond the Orcia valley. On 9th September, while preparing for the harvest, he suffers a new heart attack and dies. Fabrizio Bindocci becomes the new manager of Il Poggione. Roberto Talenti takes over the estate while Riccardo, who has inherited the estate from his grandfather, completes his studies.

2001

After completing his Istituto Tecnico Agrario studies, Riccardo enrolls at Florence University to study oenology. In the meantime he takes over from his father and begins working full time at Pian di Conte.

2002

On 17th March Clemente Franceschi dies. Il Poggione is inherited by his children Leopoldo and Livia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brunello di Montalcino. Un vino, una storia, by Emanuele Pellucci - Fiesole 1979

This was one of the first books entirely written about wine and the Montalcino area. It is an insight into an era when there were still very few books written about this subject.

Vino. The Wines & Winemakers of Italy, by Burton Anderson - Little, Brown and Co.- Boston 1980

Burton Anderson, an American journalist for a lengthy period, was one of the first writers in English to describe the new Italian wine scene, paying special attention to Tuscany, his home for many years.

Brunello, sei grande, by Aldo Santini - Franco Muzzio Editore, Padua 1997

In this very enjoyable book Santini tells the Brunello story through those of the people who made it a 'cult' wine.

Prima dell'economia del Brunello, by Ilio Raffaelli - Le Balze, Montepulciano 2001

This book by Raffaelli, Montalcino mayor from 1960 to 1980, is a fundamentally important text for an understanding of the Montalcino environment which Brunello expressed, before and after its rise to international wine phenomenon.

NOTES

All these accounts were written for this book with the exception of the following:

Una vita dura, by Ilio Raffaelli, taken from *Prima dell'economia del Brunello*, 2001;

Un uomo fiero e franco, by Burton Anderson, taken from *Vino. The Wines and Winemakers of Italy*, 1980;

Il controllo di qualità, by Sheldon and Pauline Wasserman, taken from *Italy's Noble Red Wines*, 1985;

Il tocco di Re Mida, by James Suckling, taken from *The Wine Spectator*, September 15, 1986;

Un talento per il Brunello, by David Gleave, taken from *Wine*, November, 1990;

Il Poggione, by N. K. Yong, taken from *Wine and Dine*, June/July 1990.

As regards the accounts by Piero Talenti himself, the texts were taken from *Il grande vecchio del Brunello*, by Andrea Gabbrielli (interview published in *Ex Vinis* no. 46 Aprile-Maggio 1999, Veronelli Editore).

INDEX

7 AUTHOR'S NOTE

9 A WORLD IN CRISIS

15 PIERO'S STORY

17 *My brother* BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

19 WAR AND RESISTANCE

21 *A life saving photo* BY ERO BRACCESI

25 FARM MANAGER

25 *He started playing in the evening and finished in the morning* BY ERO BRACCESI

27 *We got engaged in April 1945* BY CARLA CECCACCI
TALENTI

28 *Hunger was widespread* BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

31 *Dino and Piero* BY FRANCESCO TALENTI

32 *Montalcino agriculture* BY RICCARDO MARGHERITI

33 A VERY FAR OFF PLACE

33 *It felt like I'd got to the end of the earth* BY PIERO TALENTI

37 *A hard life* BY ILIO RAFFAELLI

38 *An emotional attachment too* BY CARLA TALENTI

40 *Total understanding between them* BY FRANCESCA
COLOMBINI

41 *Twelve demijohns of vinegary wine* BY PIERO TALENTI

43 *Piero settled in immediately, that was how he was*
BY CARLA TALENTI

44 *He and dad had certain snacks...* BY FRANCESCA
COLOMBINI

47 INTERMEZZO 1

51 IL POGGIONE

52 *Hunting out sparse bunches* BY PIERO TALENTI

54 *I met him when I was a boy* BY FABRIZIO BINDOCCHI

55 *There were great celebrations when we met up*
BY GIACOMO TACHIS

- 58 *The new estates arrived* **BY PIERO TALENTI**
 60 *Moscadello or Brunello?* **BY PIERO TALENTI**
 62 *Partnership with Rauscedo* **BY PIERO TALENTI**
 63 *A far-sighted man* **BY EDOARDO VIRANO**
 65 *I want to import your wines into America*
BY ANTHONY TERLATO
 68 *A proud, straight-talking man* **BY BURTON ANDERSON**
 70 *Quality checks* **BY SHELDON AND PAULINE WASSERMAN**

73 THE MAESTRO

- 73 *At school with Piero* **BY FABRIZIO BINDOCCI**
 76 *The Midas touch* **BY JAMES SUCKLING**
 78 *He knew how to get onto first name terms with Sangiovese* **BY PIERO SELVAGGIO**
 79 *A talent with Brunello* **BY DAVID GLEAVE**
 81 *I wasn't used to drinking wine* **BY SASAKI HITOSHI**
 82 *Il Poggione* **BY N. K. YONG**
 84 *A man of great passions and strong beliefs* **BY DONATELLA CINELLI COLOMBINI**
 85 *It wasn't going to be a walk in the park* **BY STEFANO CAMPATELLI**
 88 *Modest when talking of himself and rock solid in his profession* **BY CARLO CAMBI**

89 INTERMEZZO 2

93 THE LAST HARVEST

- 95 *It was 9th September* **BY CARLA TALENTI**
 95 *Come back soon, I could go at any time* **BY GIACOMO TACHIS**
 96 *He'd cleared the way for the younger generations*
BY NICOLAS BELFRAGE

99 EPILOGUE

100 CRONOLOGY

106 BIBLIOGRAPHY

107 NOTES.

PUBLISHED VOLUMES

L'Abbé Alexandre Bougeat

Giacomo Bologna

Cosimo Taurino

Mario d'Ambra

Mario Schiopetto

Paola Di Mauro

Riccardo Riccardi

Marco De Bartoli

Franco Biondi Santi

Franco Biondi Santi *English*

edition

Ave Ninchi

Pina Amarelli

NEW ARRIVALS

Giuliano Bortolomiol

Tonino Guerra

Pierluigi Talenti
Andrea Gabbrielli



CENTRE-STAGE PLAYERS IN MATERIAL CULTURE

Series managed by Nichi Stefi

Editorial direction: *Gian Arturo Rota*
Graphic design: *Studio Grafico Artigiano*
Page layout: *Luca Bersanetti*

Photolithography and photo composition: *2B*
Fotolito

Printing: *Nuovo Istituto Italiano di Arti Grafiche*

Copyright © 2005
Veronelli Editore
Via Sudorno 44 - 24129 Bergamo
tel. 035-260402 fax 035-255338
www.veronelli.com
info@luigiveronelli.it

Printing completed in July 2005.
Reproduction forbidden. All rights reserved.

CENTRE-STAGE PLAYERS IN MATERIAL CULTURE