

## The Chronicle Wine Selections: Domestic Sangiovese and Supertuscan-style blends

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Friday, March 7, 2008

Sangiovese, Tuscany's most important red grape and the major variety in Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, is also grown in the United States. In Chianti, the Sangiovese grape is also blended with nontraditional red grape varieties to make Supertuscans.

Locating ideal terroir for Sangiovese in the United States has proven elusive. There are also clonal variations so the wine characteristics vary as well. The panel found wines with varying levels of dark cherry, relatively supple tannins and mouthwatering acidity; they are richer and juicier than would be expected in a Chianti, which would be acidic and somewhat austere by comparison.

Most domestic Sangiovese-based wines are weightier than medium-bodied Chianti, especially if they include a significant percentage of other grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah. These proprietarily named "Supertuscans" in general display the additional aromas and flavors of darker ripe fruit, full body and other characteristics of the dominant grape, as well as plenty of sweet oak.

California Sangiovese production peaked in the early 2000s; 14,460 tons were crushed in 2002. The 2007 vintage was just half that amount. Though fewer domestic vintners are making Sangiovese or using it in their blends, there are still enjoyable wines, many of which offer an unabashedly fruitier, oakier and exuberant style.

**Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS 2005 *Bonny Doon Vineyard Ca' del Solo San Benito County Sangiovese* (\$15)** Winemaker Randall Grahm has added Nero d'Avola (5 percent), Cinsault (3 percent) and Colorino (2 percent) to biodynamically grown Sangiovese sourced primarily from the Gimelli Vineyard. This rather racy, food-friendly wine has layers of aromas and flavors including citrus peel, bright red fruit, slightly jammy strawberry and tobacco. The wine's woody spice even hints at gingerbread, with good acidity and modest but definitive tannins on the finish. Very good value.

Panelists include: Lynne Char Bennett, Chronicle staff writer and wine coordinator; Jon Bonne, Chronicle wine editor; Romuald Toulon, sommelier, Meadowood Napa Valley. For additional recommended wines, go to [sfgate.com/wine](http://sfgate.com/wine).

**Key:** Rating: FOUR STARS Extraordinary Rating: THREE STARS Excellent Rating: TWO STARS Good

- *Lynne Char Bennett*

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/03/07/WIMNVBP89.DTL>

*This article appeared on page F-8 of the San Francisco Chronicle*

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