

# Montemaggiore





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## Overview

Captivated by the genuine quality of life in small Italian hill towns, the Ciolino family moved to Sonoma County in 2001 to follow our dream: grow and produce exceptional red wines and olive oils from our own land. Today, on a small, secluded country estate in western Dry Creek Valley, we grow ten acres of grapes on a mountainside, tend eight hundred olive trees, nurture our flocks of sheep and chickens, and raise our family. We use the most natural, sustainable methods, reflecting the traditions of our ancestral home in southern Italy, a small hillside village called Montemaggiore.

Our values are true to our Old World heritage: living in harmony with the land, keeping close family ties, enjoying great food and festivity. Yet our wines are decidedly New World: ripe, full-flavored, fruit-framed, and immediately enjoyable. Our portfolio includes six wines, headlined by our flagship *Paolo's Vineyard Syrah*, produced exclusively from grapes grown in our cool-climate, estate, mountainside vineyards. We also produce a Syrah with a bit of Viognier called *Syrafina*, and a Cabernet-Syrah blend called *Nobile*. In exceptional years, we blend a bottle a *Reserve Syrah* which may have a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon. A direct-press *Rosé* of Syrah and a Marsanne-Roussanne-Viognier blend called *3Divas* round out our portfolio. We limit total production to 2000 cases, allowing us to do everything ourselves—by hand, with pride and personal care.

Lise is the winemaker while Vincent is the organic and Biodynamic® grower in charge of the grapevines and olive trees. Together, we are creating wines and olive oils that reflect the terroir of Dry Creek Valley and the vitality of Montemaggiore, Italy.

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## Fact Sheet

Intent on producing exceptional estate-grown wines and olive oil, Lise and Vincent Ciolino farm 55 acres on a mountainside along the western edge of Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley. Here we cultivate a 10-acre vineyard of Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Viognier, along with 800 olive trees using organic and Biodynamic® methods—hence no chemical fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides. Our commitment to the environment includes recycling the winery “grey water” for reuse as vineyard irrigation, along with solar power generation.

Brand: **Montemaggiore**

Appellation: Dry Creek Valley

Wines: Paolo's Vineyard Syrah  
Syrarina (Syrah, with a little Viognier)  
Reserve (Syrah, only in exceptional vintages)  
Nobile (Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah blend)  
Rosé (direct-press, from Syrah grapes)  
3Divas (Marsanne-Roussanne-Viognier blend)

Winemaker: Lise Ciolino

Winegrower: Vincent Ciolino

First Vintage: 2002

Estate Vineyards:

Location: Eastern-facing mountainside, 750ft elevation, 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean

Training: Cane pruned, Double Guyot trained, Vertical Shoot Positioned Trellis

Spacing: 70% intensively planted (e.g., 4' x 4'); 30% traditional spacing (e.g., 4' x 10')

Yields: One to two tons per acre

Certification: Biodynamic® by Demeter since July 2009

8.50 acres of Syrah (Paolo's Vineyard), 70% planted in 1999-2002, 30% planted in 2005-2009

Clones: #1, #877 Rootstock: 110R, 101-14

1.25 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, planted in 1991

Clones: #7, #8 Rootstock: 5C

0.25 acres of Viognier, planted in 2009

Clone: #642 Rootstock: 101-14

Production: Typically 1000-1,200 cases per year although has ranged from 500 cases in 2006 to 1,400 in 2003

Coopers: Damy, François Frere, Hermitage, Nadalie, Saury, Seguin-Moreau, Taransaud

Estate Winery: Vaslin-Bucher JLB 12 (automated stainless steel basket press)  
1375-gallon open-top stainless steel tanks with optional close-top lids  
Night-air cooled, naturally-lit, wood-free building

Olive Groves: 2.5 acres of Frantoio, Leccino, and Pendolino

Olive Press: LDM Italia grinder and hydraulic press

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## Winemaking Philosophy

At Montemaggiore we take a minimalist approach in the cellar, giving paramount consideration to the preservation and expression of our estate *terroir*. Our techniques reveal and highlight the fruit-framed and full-bodied nature of our mountainside grapes. Throughout the growing season, we integrate our vineyard practices with our winemaking goals, providing the control required for consistent high quality. For example, as little as 30 minutes elapse from the instant we harvest our estate grapes to the time they are put in a stainless steel tank, ensuring the delivery of pristine fruit at optimum ripeness and temperature.

We hand harvest the grapes, gently destem with little or no crushing, and carefully hand sort the grapes via a gradual, gravity-fed process. Depending on the vintage, we will also include up to 40% whole clusters in our Syrah fermentations. The Syrah grapes are kept on the skins for a short period to maintain their fruit-forward character and gentle tannins, whereas the Cabernet Sauvignon has longer skin contact to emphasize structure and complexity. We age our wines in a combination of new and neutral French oak barrels, taking care to fully integrate and never overpower the *terroir*-based flavors. Our wines typically age *sur-lie*, stirred monthly, in order to round out their mid-palate. We prefer to bottle our wines unfiltered to preserve their full, rich texture and body.

Limiting harvest to 4-5 tons of grapes per day, we are able to give each vineyard block individual attention in the winery, isolating and producing each lot of wine based on its individual characteristics. When we compose our final blends, we make our selection barrel by barrel. Montemaggiore's production is limited to 2,000 cases so that we may handcraft the highest quality wine.

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## Vineyard Practices

Situated on a mountainside in Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, 750 feet above the valley floor, lie Montemaggiore's estate vineyards. Our closely-planted, low-yielding vines cling to the rocky, well-drained soils, producing grapes with intense flavors. We apply organic materials and Biodynamic® farming practices to accentuate and conserve the unique *terroir* of our mountainside property, caring for our vines with attentive handwork.

At Montemaggiore, where our vineyards surround the family home, we live in harmony with the land. We enrich our soils naturally through the use of organic and biodynamic compost. Our flocks of sheep and chickens control vineyard grasses and insect pests naturally while simultaneously fertilizing the soil. Leaving riparian corridors and woodlands intact, we leverage our diverse habitat by encouraging owls and raptors to control the rodent populations. We encourage native grasses to carpet our vineyard, attracting beneficial mites and bugs that prey on insects harmful to grapevines. In order to limit erosion and encourage mycorrhizal activity, we refrain from tilling our vineyard floor. We irrigate our vineyards using winery "grey water" naturally recycled in our wetland. Avoiding chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, we maintain a vital, regenerating ecosystem in our soils and above ground, in flora and fauna populations. After having utilized Biodynamic farming for three years, Montemaggiore was certified in 2009.

Attentive hand work and exacting strategies define our practices: meticulous cane pruning, precise irrigation, vigilant canopy management, rigorous crop thinning, and careful hand harvesting. At Montemaggiore, where our wines come from estate grapes, we care for each individual vine and adapt to the unique *terroir* of each vineyard block.

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## **Lise Ciolino, Winemaker**



My love for Syrah started long ago. As a young girl, my parents enjoyed wine with dinner every night, and offered their children small portions. I always preferred the white wine. I did not develop a taste for red wine until, at age sixteen, I traveled to the Rhône valley with my father, a wine enthusiast. We stopped at the house of Chapoutier to buy wine and, during a magnificent four-hour luncheon, I tasted my first Hermitage. From that day on, Syrah has held a special fascination for me.

As a college student, I studied mathematics and computer science at Brown University and later pursued a career in the software industry, moving to the San Francisco Bay Area. Here in northern California, the romance and my love of wine grew greater and greater—soon becoming an absorbing passion.

I started by helping friends in their vineyard. A weekend course in viticulture at UC Davis led to an enology course. This led to making a barrel of wine in a friend's garage in Palo Alto. Exploratory trips to various wine regions, more courses, more home winemaking, wine tastings, wine seminars—my thirst for wine knowledge was insatiable.

In 2001 my husband Vincent and I purchased 55 acres in Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, planted with 10 acres of mountainside vineyards. Here I approach winemaking with enthusiasm, spirit, and a drive to succeed. I consider myself self-taught, although I have completed many courses at UC Davis ranging from wine chemistry to pest management to wine marketing. Today I focus my energy and curiosity on making world-class Syrahs at Montemaggiore.

Born in Denmark to American parents, I have lived in France, Switzerland, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island. My heart finally found home, however, when my husband Vincent and I settled in Sonoma County to start our small, family wine business.

A handwritten signature of the name "Lise" in a black, cursive script.

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## **Vincent Ciolino** **Wine and Olive Grower**

I have strong family ties to California, Chicago, and Italy. Born in Chicago, I return several times a year to root for the Cubs and include my young California-born son, Paolo, in the lives of my large, spirited Italian-American family.

My forefathers were all farmers living off the land in Montemaggiore, Italy where my grandfather taught my father to raise food and hunt. My parents ran a café there; my mother was an excellent cook with a large repertoire of Italian and Sicilian dishes. Three of my siblings were born in Montemaggiore and one in Palermo (about 40 km away); my twin sister and I were born in Chicago following my family's immigration to the United States in 1957.

Settling in with Chicago's large Italian population, my family enjoyed cherished old world traditions: vegetable gardens, making Sangiovese at home, enjoying the big meal together on Sunday afternoons. My father had a reputation for growing the best tomatoes in all of Chicago, and his secret was a mulch of grass clippings and horse manure – very similar to the cover crops and organic compost I use today on our grapevines and olive trees in Dry Creek Valley. My first language was Italian, and I only learned English when I started Kindergarten.

I remained in Chicago during college at the University of Illinois, where my twin sister and I were the first in our family to receive college degrees. My major was biochemistry, and my minors of mathematics and computer science familiarized me with the computer software industry where I began a career in 1986.

My first trip to Italy was in 1996, the year I moved to Europe with a U.S. software company. Headquartered in London, I worked and traveled all over Europe, with many side trips to visit my relatives in Tuscany and Sicily. I acquired an affinity for wine, especially appreciating the French Syrahs and Cabernet blends. My cousins Mercurio and Michele, who make wine, olive oil, and prosciutto in Siena, introduced me to other favorites: the spicy olive oil and the Super Tuscan wines of the region.

Returning to the U.S. to marry Lise, I settled in California in 2000. We moved to Dry Creek Valley in 2001 and put down roots on 55 mountainside acres where we have developed vineyards, an olive grove, a family winery and olive press. I am the winegrower and master of all things olive. I supplement the green thumb I inherited from my father with classes at U.C. Davis. I enjoy experimenting with new ideas, particularly those associated with sustainable farming. I was very excited to have our vineyards and olive groves certified Biodynamic® in 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Vincent'.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is so special about Montemaggiore?**

Here at Montemaggiore, we believe smaller is better. Thinking small means that we focus on one varietal, Syrah – we can research, experiment, learn and perfect the growing and vinification of Syrah. Thinking small means utilizing small-production mountainside grapes—the steep slope of our estate vineyards naturally yield small grapes in small quantities with big flavors. Thinking small also means taking small steps to reap big rewards, which is why we farm in a sustainable, organic, and Biodynamic® manner. Lastly, thinking small means producing small lots of wine that are vinified separately and blended for the optimal flavors. Never producing more than 2,000 cases enables us to craft exceptional wines that reflect our unique terroir in the Dry Creek Valley.

### **What is the mission of Montemaggiore?**

Montemaggiore's mission is to consistently produce world-class Syrahs and olive oils using Biodynamic farming practices. We intend to produce exceptional wines vintage after vintage, attainable with our mountainside estate grapes. We also intend to be good shepherds of the land, and grow grapes and olives in a sustainable manner without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Ultimately, we want to produce wine that you are proud to share with your friends and family.

### **Why do you have such a long and hard-to-pronounce name: “Montemaggiore”?**

Pronounced “mohn tay ma JOHR ay”, and meaning “great mountain”, we borrowed the name of our ancestral home in southern Italy. This name reflects the steep mountainside of our vineyards while paying homage to our Italian heritage (along with the Italian heritage of California wine industry).

### **Why does Montemaggiore specialize in Syrah?**

Simply said, Syrah is our favorite grape varietal—and above all, we want to produce wines that we enjoy drinking, producing, and sharing. Syrah makes a wonderful wine for many reasons: it is food-friendly, enjoyable both young and after aging, pleasurable to both the novice and sophisticated drinker, yet relatively undiscovered in America. Perhaps most importantly, the mountainside location and climate of Montemaggiore's estate vineyards are perfect for Syrah.



### **Why are estate grapes important?**

Estate grapes are the key to consistently producing world-class wines. Since we don't buy or sell grapes, Montemaggiore has a constant source of grapes that we know intimately while our grapegrowing and winemaking practices can be fully integrated. We can focus on quality over quantity in the vineyard: we can pick the grapes by block at the optimum ripeness in however large or small quantities required, and the time from harvest to fermentation is minimized. Because we own the vineyards, we can develop a consistent style in our wines that you can count on for excellence. Winemakers who don't own grapes are at the mercy of the market; perhaps searching for new grape sources every year, leading to wines of inconsistent style and quality.

### **Why are mountainside vineyards important for wine quality?**

Steep vineyards are the key to producing grapes of great intensity—just look at all the great vineyards of France, Germany, and Italy. Mountainsides tend to be very rocky and have very thin topsoils, along with excellent drainage. This leads to naturally low-yielding vines, small grapes, and wines of wonderful intensity and flavor—especially important for Syrah, a very vigorous vine that can produce high volumes of low quality fruit when grown in deep, moisture-retaining soils.

### **What is so special about Nobile, Montemaggiore's Cabernet-Syrah blend?**

We can't say "we were the first!" because blending Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah is not a new idea. In Provence, the French have been blending these two varieties since the 19th century and the Australians led the charge later in the 20th century. In general, the intense fruit of the Syrah tends to "brighten" the sternness of the Cabernet, while the big tannins of the Cab seem to give the Syrah more structure. For Montemaggiore Nobile (in early vintages known as Superiore), we have put together a special blend in which the exceptional nature of our mountain-grown Syrah and Cabernet fit together perfectly like an elegant hand in a silk glove.

### **Montemaggiore has a unique-looking press, what's up with that?**

We utilize a stainless steel basket press, a high-technology version of an ancient tool (the Egyptian Pharaohs are said to be the first to employ the basket press, made of reeds). A division of the highly-respected French company Vaslin-Bucher, JLB, developed this press in conjunction with the winemaker at Chateau Pétrus in Bordeaux. The JLB press utilizes hydraulics to gently press additional wine from the grape skins after fermentation. The press is very gentle, doesn't over-extract tannins, and produces very clean press wine, as it is partially filtered through the mass of pulp it drains through in the basket.

July 2009