

## NEWS

# Big in Bolgheri: A Live Chat with Ornellaia's Axel Heinz

The star winemaker opens up about his philosophy toward making wine on Tuscany's coast, the magic behind Masseto and pandemic challenges in the U.S. market



After 15 years, Axel Heinz is super Tuscan estate Ornellaia's longest tenured winemaker.

By [Shawn Zylberberg](#)  
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What happens when you bring both Bordeaux and German know-how to Bolgheri? For wine star [Axel Heinz](#), it's paid off, as he has helped Ornellaia become one of the biggest names in Italian wine. Born and raised in Germany, but influenced by his family's Bordeaux origins, Heinz became estate director of [Ornellaia](#) in 2005. In the latest episode of [Straight Talk with Wine Spectator](#), Heinz swirled a glass of his [2018 Poggio alle Gazze](#) and spoke with senior editor Bruce Sanderson about his winemaking philosophy, Ornellaia's new white wines and how the winery is adapting to the pandemic.

Whether it's [big time MLB pitchers](#) or [renowned artists](#), Ornellaia has attracted high-status wine lovers, partly due to its famed Merlot [Masseto](#). Heinz cites it as proof that Bordeaux varieties are better suited for this coastal part of Tuscany.

"I think it's a question of terroir and the particular and peculiar climate of the coast, combined with its soils which are quite markedly different from central Tuscany," Heinz said. "Things are quite different on the coast as the climate is much milder and creates perfect conditions for all the Bordeaux varieties, who find a particular expression which is more Mediterranean, ripe and a little more opulent."

Heinz has the longest tenure of any estate director at the property. He says the wines at Ornellaia have evolved since he joined 15 years ago. New vineyards have brought added nuance to the wines, and the power of the estate's *terroir* has been a clear guideline for the style and its winemakers.

"I think every producer in Bolgheri shares a common philosophy, which is linked to the fact that we all have the privilege to somehow contribute to the emergence of a great *terroir* which for decades went unnoticed," he said.

In recent years, Heinz has [added white wines to Ornellaia's lineup](#), seeking to redefine Italian whites and introduce an "alter ego" to his ambitious reds.

"We are giving it a try and exploring how great a white wine we can produce in this nice territory," he said. "Making a great wine is a lifetime job so we know we can still do a lot better than we're doing, but in the meantime we are happy with the feedback we get for this wine."

The pandemic hasn't been easy for Ornellaia. Their affordable red, [Le Volte](#), is a major source of revenue thanks to U.S. restaurants, where 75 percent of bottles are sold. Heinz says the company has focused on retail as shutdowns continue.

But he's quick to add that it hasn't been all that bad. "We were quite astonished by how well we fared; it's probably testifying that there's a really great following in the U.S. for our wines," he said.

Watch the full episode with Heinz on [Wine Spectator's IGTV channel](#),