

## Q&A: Piero Incisa della Rocchetta of Bodega Chacra



© Bodega Chacra | "If the worst thing that can happen to you is a titanium leg, that's not too bad"

The grandson of Sassicaia's creator was born in Tuscany and today makes Pinot Noir in Patagonia while also representing the family's wines.

Interview by [Katherine Cole](#)  
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### Where is "home" for you?

The first part of my childhood was in Bolgheri, in the Maremma, Tuscany, and then I spent some time in Florence where my mother's family comes from. And then I went away to boarding school in Switzerland. I have lived a little bit like a gypsy over past 15 years. My mother used to say that I'm like a chameleon: I can live anywhere and be happy. Home is, I suppose, my grandparents' house in Bolgheri, where I have my dearest and most cherished memories.

### Your grandfather, the Marchese Mario Incisa della Rocchetta, was the legendary creator of Sassicaia. He was quite a character, wasn't he?

One time, we were all sitting in the dining room waiting for dinner, and the roast beef came and he sent it back, saying it was overcooked. Then we all had to sit and wait for another entire roast beef to be cooked. So my grandfather gave all of us the belief that to make things the right way costs the same amount of money as to make things the wrong way, so you might as well do things right.

## **When Piero Antinori first made Tignanello in 1971 and later Solaia, was there a sense of rivalry between him and your grandfather?**

No. My grandfather was a nonconformist. I don't think he ever compared himself to other people. On the contrary, he always had much affection for Piero and his other nephews. He encouraged Ludovico [Antinori] to create **Ornellaia**. He started making **Sassicaia** simply because he wanted to drink wine that appealed to his palate. He felt that Italian wine, at that time, was a little too rustic. And yet Tuscan cuisine was considered to be perhaps the best in Italy. French wine did not travel to Italy after World War II due to trade restrictions. So he experimented and found that Bolgheri lent itself to a Bordeaux blend.

## **Do you think you might run Tenuta San Guido and Sassicaia one day?**

It's a terrifying thought, the idea that my uncle might not be in charge one day. I hope he will outlive all of us – there are six of us cousins. He has done a stellar job of preserving a heritage. His motivation has never been fame or the dollar sign. He has always been true to the nature of the place and his passion for the wine. Those are incredibly big shoes to fill. It is something I would not wish upon anyone, that kind of responsibility.



© Bodega Chacra; Tenuta San Guido | Piero aims to bring Chacra to the highest level, while also representing Tenuta San Guido

## **What was it that initially drew you to Patagonia and what is it that keeps you there?**

What drew me to Patagonia was a Pinot Noir from **Rio Negro** that I tasted blind in 2001. What keeps me there is the unique microclimate and terroir of the Rio Negro, which I believe are conducive to making wines of

consequence. Our vineyard was originally planted to Pinot Noir in 1932, with additional plantings dating back the 1940s, '50s and '60s. We have done some replanting, as well, which has been quite challenging. The estate is a "Chacra", which is a local word used to describe a square farm that is equally divided into four squares by canals and irrigated by gravity. It is bordered by rows of poplar trees that shelter the vines from the strong wind. This wind not only blows away pests and bacteria, but also increases the thickness of the grape skins.

**You suffered a life-changing accident a couple of years ago. What happened?**

On March 1, 2012, I was doing a **pigeage** on my Chacra Cinquenta y Cinco. I was standing on a new cement vat, with an edge that was some 20 inches narrower than the ones I had been accustomed to working on. When I moved backwards to do a punchdown, I slipped, fell and sustained 16 fractures. I was in the hospital for three weeks and in a wheelchair for three months. But it was the best thing that ever happened in my life. To be conscious of the great privilege of being able to walk on my own feet, to be able to ponder and look at my life and do some introspection. If the worst thing that can happen to you is a titanium leg, that's not too bad.

**You're tough.**

Tough? I really wasn't. It is tough for my vineyard managers to get up in the middle of the night to make sure that the sprinkler system is running to protect against the frost. It's muddy and wet. And then they have to wake up again early in the morning and get their kids off to school. They do this every single day of their lives in the Patagonian desert, which is not easy. There is a windy season in which you can barely see. I don't think most of us are even remotely aware of what "tough" means.

**Your grandparents were environmentalists. How are you continuing that legacy?**

Maybe in a slightly egotistical way, I have tried to build a community at Bodega Chacra. We are very close to the people who work for us. We try to help them and try to maintain their standard of living. We make sure their medical bills are paid and that their kids can go to school and have pens, paper and books. We try to the best of our abilities to ensure that they have housing and things we take for granted, like electricity, heat and hot water. The most rewarding part is when they move out and can buy their own homes.



© Bodega Chacra | Piero is close to the people who work with him at Chacra

## Is Argentinian Pinot Noir difficult to sell?

Let's just say that you have to have a good dose of masochism to try it. The first time I went to England and said to my distributor that I had made Pinot Noir, he said: "I wasn't aware you had bought a property in Burgundy." I said: "Actually, it's in **Argentina**", and he started to laugh.

How are you coping with the economic situation in Argentina?

Right now my mission is to bring Chacra to the highest level I can possibly reach. This task is quite labor-intensive. So I am focusing on that job, which is extremely rewarding and is becoming increasingly difficult given the 50-percent inflation rate we have in Argentina and the political and economic situation there.

Luckily I have a consulting enologist who is crazier than I am. His name is Hans Vinding-Diers; I call him "el Vikingo loco", the crazy Viking. Because it is extremely challenging to do what we do, and to have the stamina and financial commitment to keep investing, to be able to constantly evolve and move forward. Hans is also the enologist at Argiano in Montalcino, which my cousin, Noemi Marone Cinzano, used to own. Hans and Noemi now own Bodega Noemía in Argentina and a couple of their vineyards border mine. I'm going to get a lot of grief for this, but they make probably the best Malbec in Argentina. Actually, it was Noemi who suggested the name Chacra. She has always been my guardian angel, helping me.

## We hear you are a great cook.

I love cooking birds: duck, pigeon, quail. I am crazy for hare. At Chacra we have an enormous population of hare; we drink Chacra Pinot Noir with hare. They eat the grapes, we eat them, and it's a full circle.

## **What do you drink at home?**

Nowadays, I seem to drink Champagne. In particular, **Savart** and **Selosse**. And Chablis and Sancerre. And of course some Sassicaia every once in a while – it is a guilty pleasure.

