Riding His Luck in Brunello: Paolo Bianchini and the Rise of Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona by Joanna Simon One of the things I shared with my first section editor on The Sunday Times many moons ago was a love of a good rags-to-riches story. The rise of the Bianchini family at Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona in Brunello di Montalcino would have been perfect. It isn't quite rags to riches, but it's a heart-warming story and all the more so because of the quality of the wines. Their style is notably elegant, which is something owner and winemaker Paolo Bianchini says he strives for, but they retain persuasive Brunello intensity and power. Situated in the warm south east of Montalcino, close to Castelnuovo dell'Abate and the Abbey of Sant'Antimo, the estate dates back to the 17th century with a palazzo built in 1672 by Fabius de' Vecchis, Bishop of Montalcino and Abbot of

raises money for charity. In 1985 the estate was owned by Elda Ciacci, widow of the late count Alberto Piccolomini d'Aragona (a direct descendant of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Pope Pius II). Her farm manager of 13 years was Giuseppe Bianchini, father of Paolo and Lucia. He had always wanted to plant vineyards and produce quality Brunello but the contessa wasn't interested and the estate made wine only for its own and a little local consumption. Giuseppe Bianchini got his opportunity after Elda Ciacci died in 1985. Soon afterwards he learned that, in the absence of heirs, she had left the entire property to him, elevating him overnight to a large-scale landowner and the resident, with his wife Anna and their children, of a historic palazzo. Not exactly from rags but certainly to riches. When Giuseppe died in 2004, leaving Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona to his two children, he

notes. Fine-grained tannins, but firmer and marginally less silky than the 2015. Gives the impression of slightly higher acidity too. Becomes sweeter and sweeter in the glass. Now to 2025. 94 Brunello di Montalcino Pianrosso 2015, Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona Slightly deeper colour than the straight Brunello 2015 and more intense on nose and palate. Black cherry fruit with a lick of orange zest, cake spices, mocha, dark chocolate, roast game, fern and pine-needle and delicate whorls of woodsmoke and vanilla. Persistent, but exceptionally fine-textured tannins alongside the freshness of fine-tuned acidity. Very refined and drinkable already, but has the concentration and balance to repay long cellaring. Now to 2035. 96/7 Brunello di Montalcino Pianrosso 2010, Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona Deep garnet/quarry-tile red. Spicy sweet aromas and flavours of kirsch