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'Less is more': the Brunello secrets of Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona By rights, the location of Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona in the sultry southeast of the Brunello di Montalcino DOCG should make it especially vulnerable to the impact of climate change. And yet this family-owned winery continues to release wines full of elegance and precision. Richard Woodard finds out how. So far and so rapidly has the star of Brunello di Montalcino risen in the wine universe that it's easy to forget that, relatively recently, this was a poor area populated by subsistence farmers who sold off their grapes or made simple wines for their own consumption. "Until 50 or 60 years ago, there were only 25 wineries in Montalcino. Now there are over 250," says Alex Bianchini, winemaker at Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona, the Brunello estate owned by his father Paolo and his

marriage between Count Alberto Piccolomini d'Aragona (a descendant of Pope Pius II) and Elda Ciacci, the Ciaccis having bought the estate in 1877. When Countess Elda Ciacci died in 1985, she left the property to her farm manager, Giuseppe Bianchini, who had long wanted to make wine commercially. He had planted the first vineyards in 1983 and, in 1985, released the estate's maiden wines: 20,000 bottles of Brunello and 5,000 bottles of Rosso di Montalcino. Since then, production has risen to about 300,000 bottles a year – there is a Syrah, Fabivs, and a Merlot/Cabernet blend, Ateo, but Sangiovese is the dominant focus here, producing a pair of Rosso di Montalcinos (including Rossofonte, from older vines), a classic estate Brunello, and a pair of wines from the Pianrosso vineyard, including a Riserva only made in the best years. Wine may have come relatively

a second chance. “When the 2013s came out, people thought they were green, with a lot of tannin,” says Bianchini. “There was lots of rain during the year. It was hotter in August, but still only 28-30C, so not that hot. Today, when you open a 2013, you can find a perfect expression of Brunello for me, and a lot of my colleagues say the same thing – but people thought it would not be perfect for long ageing.” If there’s one more secret to be unlocked about Ciacci Piccolomini d’Aragona, it’s the estate’s laser focus on tradition in terms of ageing. That means large-format Slavonian oak, and adherence to the “old regulations”: three years in wood for the classic Brunello and Pianrosso; three-and-a-half years for the Riserva. “We only use big barrels for Sangiovese,” says Bianchini. “Brunello was born in big barrels, with Biondi-Santi.” The classic Brunello spends seven to eight