

The king of cashmere's new wine

Peter Howarth previews the knitwear maestro Brunello Cucinelli's latest offering — a sumptuous red



Brunello Cucinelli is launching what he calls an Italian bordeaux, Castello di Solomeo

BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

Peter Howarth
Friday January 27 2023, 1.05pm GMT, The Times

There's an established tradition of successful people going into winemaking.

One of the most famous is the director of *The Godfather*, Francis Ford Coppola, who once quipped: "The two professions are almost the same. Each depends on source material and takes a lot of time to perfect. The big difference is that today's winemakers still worry about quality."

Something similar could be said of the relationship between winemaking and fashion design, and one designer who most certainly cares about quality is Brunello Cucinelli, famed for his softly tailored clothing for men and women. Cucinelli has risen to prominence since the late Seventies when he began as a maker of cashmere knitwear.



Cucinelli restored the medieval town of Solomeo in Umbria

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NICOLA MILLETTI/BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

Now, he — like Coppola — has become a winemaker, launching his first vintage Castello di Solomeo (Castle of Solomeo) 2018. It debuted recently at a celebratory dinner in the Istituto dei Ciechi in Milan, in the kind of setting — historical building,

decorated ceiling — that Cucinelli loves. This, after all, is a man who restored the medieval town of Solomeo in Umbria where his fashion company is headquartered. Solomeo provided the inspiration for the viniculture venture. In 2018 Cucinelli unveiled the culmination of a programme of works on the land he owns around the hilltop town, including five hectares of vines — about 20,000. These were planted in 2011 in the curved form of a series of waves. The soil here is of three types: marly arenaceous, alluvial clay-silt and alluvial clay-sandy. Each has been used to cultivate a separate variety of grape: cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon and merlot. These have been blended to create what the designer describes as an Italian bordeaux, which is completed by the addition of Sangiovese grapes, a nod to the wines of central Italy.

Cucinelli is far too modest to claim he knew what he was doing, enlisting the advice of the well-known oenologist Riccardo Cotarella. The vineyard will aim to make about 9,000 bottles a year.

The resulting red is much like the designer's clothes — structured but also soft. The combination of formal and relaxed style is the Cucinelli signature, and the secret of his popularity. These are not collections that are tied to trends, nor do they have discernible branding, logos or motifs to signify their provenance. The Cucinelli crowd eschews wardrobe ostentation in favour of discreet good taste and the wine aims to appeal to a similarly sophisticated clientele.



The site has five hectares of vines — about 20,000

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Cucinelli is fashion's philosopher, more likely to quote the Roman emperor and Stoic Marcus Aurelius than discuss the width of a lapel. Given this, winemaking, with its ancient history as a social lubricant, is right up his via, as the Romans might have put it.

As the designer says: “I believe there is nothing more beautiful than sharing this precious fruit, born out of a long process of care and custody, with lifelong friends and loved ones. Just as it was in ancient Greece, I like to imagine that this wine of ours can gladden the most pleasant symposia, renewing this most human of rituals.” Cheers.