Giacomo Tachis
Celebrated oenologist who sparked a renaissance in Italian winemaking and popularised the ‘Super Tuscans’

Sir John Cassels
Leading British educationist who championed apprenticeships and bridged the gap between universities and work

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Were it not for the Italian oenologist Giacomo Tachis, crime writing might have been deprived of one of its most memorable lines. In The Godfather, Michael Corleone, played by Marlon Brando, remarks: “I’ll make him an offer he can’t refuse.”

Yet until Tachis’s efforts began to bear fruit in the 1970s, chianti and indeed most Italian wine — was commonly regarded as plonk, by comparison with its French neighbours. It was not for little more than a cheap night out, served up in raffia-covered bottles.

Tachis, however, was less than a renaissance in Italian winemaking, relying not on his nose or on tradition but on science. Using his expert knowledge of chemistry and microbiology to guide cultivation and fermentation, he created a new class of Bordeaux-style chiantis, soon dubbed the “Super Tuscan” wines, which were incontestably talked about worldwide. But, as he admitted, “For the chemistry school was at a distillery in Scotland, which was named for the评论家 Rob Parker called the "wine of the 20th century". It became the first Italian red to beat French wines in a Wine Spectator tasting, and its sales soon did likewise. All this Tachis accomplished without a particular liking for wine as a drink.

He was passionate about the science behind wine — not about drinking it — and he wrote a book on the subject: Wine, which was published in 1988.

Tachis was born in Poirino, near Turin, in 1933. His father was a textile worker. His brother, Antonio Manno, became an expert on music, physics, while Giacomo thought first of being a butcher. He was a rebellious teenager and three times ran away from school. The headteacher told his mother that he would only begin to study if he was no longer taken on. He was.

It was a cousin of his mother’s employed by Martini, the drinks firm, who suggested that there might be an opening there if he trained as an oenologist. After studying at the school at Alba, he had an interview at Martini but was not taken on; he suspected the interviewer was worried he would take his job.

In 1960, he married Maria Vadini. They had a daughter, Ilaria, herself now a winemaker with a small estate in Chianti. She survives her parents. Tachis’s wife having predeceased him by a few months. He had been suffering the effects of Parkinson’s disease and heart problems.

Tachis left Antinori in 1993. Thereafter he worked as a consultant, especially for vineyards in Sicily and Sardinia. For him, winemaking in the south was more satisfying, he was closer to the historical ties with Greek and Phoenician settlers. “They maintained that wine likes to breathe the sea air, and it’s still true today,” he said.

“My father thought that wine was the most beautiful thing in the earth,” he said.

Giacomo Tachis, oenologist, was born on February 6, 1933. He died on February 6, 2016, aged 82.