



The Italian Wine Adventure

It's the one of the biggest wine events in the world. There are more than 4000 exhibitors. It fills 15 huge warehouse-like pavilions spread over 90000 square metres in the Verona Fair and Convention centre. It's really big. It is Vinitaly, the annual five day event where just about everybody in the Italian wine industry is either pouring or tasting wine (or both).

Vinitaly must be a logistic nightmare to organise. Just attending takes militaristic planning. It is essential to have some local contacts, people who regularly attend the exhibition and not only have the lowdown on the exhibitors but also know the area around Veronafiere. For example, our rendezvous point for coffee and croissants at the start of the day, and prosciutto, cheese and a cleansing ale at the end, is the Agip garage and (café) bar about 100 metres from the exhibition entry point. The garage does a roaring trade as a makeshift parking station for exhibition delegates and the stand-up coffee bar sees a steady flow of customers. This is a fascinating place where the Italian passion for cars, coffee and food all meet in one place. Even more extraordinary, the garage café also offers a range of wines, including Champagne Krug, first growth Bordeaux, super-Tuscans and a host of other top-flight wines which can be bought and consumed at the picnic tables adjoining the workshops. Only in Italy!

Once in the exhibition grounds it would be easy to become overwhelmed. This place is so large that mini-buses do the rounds, ferrying delegates from pavilion to pavilion. Large signs indicate the regions represented in each pavilion and once inside the pavilion of your choice, a numbered grid system used in conjunction with a 200-page guide book aids in tracking down any given exhibitor. Even so, getting lost seems to be a regular part of the adventure.

Every Italian wine-growing region that you can think of is represented, and the relative prosperity (and possibly the character) of each region and appellation is reflected in the floorspace occupied by, and the level of elaborate design used for, the exhibitor stands. Tuscany is easily the region with the largest representation, occupying two imposing pavilions, and the local Veneto producers are also well represented. One can only assume that the Prosecco producers are doing well at the moment, if their impressive display stands attended by stunningly attractive models are anything to go by. Coincidentally, the current Italian Minister for

Agriculture, Luca Zaia, was born in Conegliano in the heart of Prosecco country and knows every Prosecco producer on a first name basis, or so it seems as he and his entourage of security guards, photographers and media reporters (and, inexplicably, two extremely tall, very beautiful young ladies) wander through that part of the Veneto pavilion. On the other hand, the producers from Umbria occupy a small part of a pavilion shared by 6 regions, each producer's stand



being of the same design made from, it appears, recycled cardboard. Luxury, some would cry! For many small winemakers, their Vinitaly exposure is a single table set up in a communal area with a host of other like producers. It would be a mistake, however, to pre-judge the wines on the basis of the size and design of the display stands.

There is no doubt that for all the impressive hurly-burly of the exhibition, the pleasure of Vinitaly is the opportunity to sit with the winemaker or the vigneron, one on one, discussing the wines and learning about the people behind the labels. With the larger wine companies, organising appointments prior to the event is important and ensures that you receive the exhibitor's full attention. However, whenever you approach a smaller grower they invariably appear genuinely thrilled that you are taking time to meet them, showing an inexhaustible enthusiasm to share the joys of their wine. It is about some of these people that I will write next month.



Foradori Teroldego Rotaliano 2006

The Teroldego grape is a native variety of the Trentino region and, whilst in Italy, this is a wine that I often found myself drinking with my meals. Elisabetta Foradori is regarded as the foremost maker of the style and the 2006 vintage is an outstanding example. The wine is full of character, with aromas of blood plum, spice, mineral and toast whilst the palate has a delicious piquancy of tanga, dark fruits in concert with ripe, chewy tannins and a lingering finish. A very impressive wine, of firm disposition, yet beautifully structured. Drink it with a traditional Bolognese ragu.

Muri Gries Lagrein 2009

Muri Gries is a Benedictine Monastery near the town of Balzano in the Alto-Adige region of Italy that has been growing and making Lagrein wine for more than 100 years. And they do a pretty good job! The 2009 version is still very youthful but it shows wonderful sour cherry aromas with a hint of dried herbs and fresh earth. In the mouth, the wine has depth and structure yet it dances lightly across the tongue. This is a lovely medium-bodied red that already offers very satisfying drinking.

Piero Gatti Brachetto 2009

One of the pleasures of Vinitaly was meeting the Gatti ladies, mother Rita and daughter Barbara, and tasting their superb Brachetto and Moscato. Brachetto is the red version of Moscato, a sweeter, low alcohol red with very fine bubbles. The Gatti version is fresh, bright and clean, full of sweet raspberry flavour balanced by just enough acidity. This is a very happy wine that is yummy with chocolate or would work with a fresh berry tart.