

The Wines of Tenuta Santa Maria alla Pieve

Charles Scicolone (July 18, 2012)



Beltrami is an Historic Wine Producing Family in the Veneto, I had a chance to chat with Giovanni Bertrami about his winery and the other wines of the Valpolicella and Soave areas. Giovanni began the tasting by saying that his historic wine producing family has put their love of the Veneto and passion for wine into making high quality handcrafted wines at the Tenuta Santa Maria Alla Pieve winery.

Franco Bernabei is the consulting enologist for two different wineries in the Veneto and it was interesting to taste these wines on successive days. Franco was present on one day, but not at the tasting the next day of the wines of [Tenuta Santa Maria Alla Pieve](#) [2].

Representing the winery was Giovanni Bertani. Before the tasting and lunch at the [Club Metropolitan](#)



[3] in the Metropolitan Tower, I had a chance to chat with him about his winery and the other wines of the Valpolicella and Soave areas. Giovanni began the tasting by saying that his historic wine producing family has put their love of the Veneto and passion for wine into making high quality handcrafted wines at the Tenuta Santa Maria Alla Pieve winery.

Tenuta Santa Maria Alla Pieve was established in 1991 by Gaetano Bertani. The property had been owned by the Bertani family since the 1860's and managed by Gaetano since 1971. Today Giovanni and Guglielmo, his two sons, assist him. Gaetano is the wine maker and the consulting enologist is Franco Bernabei.

The 21 hectare property is located at the border between the Valpolicella DOC and the Soave DOC areas. It is 16 kilometers from Verona inside the Val d' Illasi zone which was colonized by the Romans since the Second Century B.C. The Pietra Romana, a Roman stone which lies in front of the Villa, has become the estate's logo and is on the labels. Tenuta Santa Maria is part of the Colognola ai Colli commune.

The Tenuta Santa Maria alla Pieve wines were different from the wines I tasted the day before. As Giovanni indicated, his father Gaetano is a hands-on winemaker and Bernabei is the consultant.

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On the subject of oak Giovanni said that the new oak barriques that they have are mostly for the Merlot and the other barriques used are second and third passage.

Soave "Lepia" 2010 IGT made from 100% Garganega Veronese. The soil is clay with calcareous-marly subsoil. The training system is the pergolella, and there are 3,800 vines per hectare. The grapes are harvested in September at different times of ripening and crushed separately, with cold pre-fermentation skin contact. The grapes are gently pressed and fermented. The wine is blended in January and racked in stainless steel tanks with the thin lees. Then there is a short bottle refinement. The wine has flavors and aromas of pears and peaches with a hint of almonds and nice minerality. I like this Soave because it reflects the indigenous grape and the terroir. \$22

Chardonnay "Torre Pieve" 2008 IGT 100% Chardonnay. Giovanni explained that the training system is rammed cord of 9,500 vines per hectare with a maximum height of vegetation of 125 cm from the ground, a distance between each row of 110 cm, and from vineyard to vineyard one meter. He added that due to the training system, 80% of the work in the vineyard is done mechanically. The grapes are picked in the first half of September and cooled down a few degrees before pressing. The must rests to separate itself from the sediment. 50% of the wine is fermented and aged in new Allier barriques for about 150/180 days. The remainder is fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel containers. In February/ March the wine is assembled and stored at an ideal temperature for another six months. It remains in bottle for another 4 months before release. The wine has aromas and flavors of fresh fruit with hints of pineapple, citrus and a touch of banana. \$35

Veneto "Praga" IGT 2010 Made from Shiraz and Merlot selected from three different clones. The training is rammed cord and there are 9,500 vines per hectare. Because of the high density of the vines, more than 80% of the vineyard's management is mechanical. The winter pruning and the green harvest in spring and summer are done by hand.

The grapes are picked in the second half of September after reaching full ripening. Vinification is conducted with low temperature maceration and temperature controlled fermentation. After pressing, malolactic fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks. The wine is kept in bottle for a short period before release. It was interesting to taste a wine made from these grapes aged in stainless steel. It is an elegant wine with hints of black cherries, blueberries and a hint of black pepper. Giovanni said that they wanted to produce a wine from international grapes that expressed the local terroir with the natural flavors of the grapes. \$22

Valpolicella Ripasso 2009 DOC made from 75% Corvina, 10% Rondinella and 15% Corvinone. The vineyards are located on clay hills with calcareous layers. The training system is the pergolella, there are 5,600 vines per hectare and the harvest is by hand at the end of September. In the middle



of October when the grapes have reached their optimal maturation and sugar level, they are pressed and fermented in temperature controlled stainless tanks for 25/30 days with daily pump over. The wine is later macerated and fermented a second time on the skins and raisins of the grapes used for Amarone, which are still rich in sugar. This is followed by 24 months of aging in tonneaux and barriques where malolactic fermentation takes place. The wine is then aged for 6 months in bottle before release. \$35

Giovanni said that a new law was passed that limited the production of the Ripasso wines. For every bottle of Amarone produced they are only allowed to produce two bottles of the Ripasso.

Decima Aurea 2007 Veneto IGT made from 100% Merlot from 3 different clones. Giovanni explained that this wine was expressing the local terroir with an international grape variety by combining Merlot with the Veronese tradition of the drying process known as appassimento.

The vineyard is situated in the Val d'Illassi, 10 miles east of Verona, with north to south exposure on a slightly sloping hill. The soil is primary clay with deep calcareous

layers. Giovanni said the training system was rammed cord but the winter pruning, selection of spring buds, the thinning of the branches and the harvesting for part of the Merlot, which is usually done mechanically for the light appassimento style is done by hand. Some of the grapes are picked in late September and left to dry for about a month in protected airy locales on the estate. Another part of the harvest takes place in the beginning of October when grapes are becoming over ripe. The two harvests are separated, low-temperature maceration and temperature-controlled fermentation takes place and then they are blended for fining in oak barriques for about 14 months. The wine remains in the bottle for a brief period before release. This wine was the most modern in style that I tasted and lovers of California wines will enjoy it. \$45

Amarone Della Valpolicella DOC 2006 made from 75% Corvina, 10% Rondinella and 15% Corvinone. The training system is the pergoleta and there are 5,600 vines per hectare. The grapes are hand harvested and placed in wooden trays inside rooms with well-circulated air for 4/5 months. In the middle of January after reaching their desired sugar content and losing 25%/30% of their weight, the almost raisin like grapes are pressed and fermented for 25/30 days at controlled temperatures with daily pumping over. After a period of decantation and refining in French barriques and Italian oak tonneaux, where malolactic fermentation takes place. After 48 months the wine is bottled and remains for 6 months before release. It is a complex and elegant wine with hints of dried cherries, prunes and spice. The finish is very long and there is a

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