Gabriele Gorelli paves the way for Italian Masters of Wine

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 11 Giugno 2021



I first met, in an indirect way, Gabriele Gorelli, the first Italian Master of wine, about two years ago. I talked about him with Andrea Lonardi, operations manager of Bertani Domains, who was also in the running to join the prestigious London association. I asked Andrea if he thought he could be the first Italian Master of Wine and his answer was: “I don’t know if it will be me, even though I would obviously be pleased, but I can say there would be an Italian who would have all the ideal requirements to become one, Gabriele Gorelli”. I then had the good fortune to get to know him well thanks again to Andrea Lonardi who, on behalf of the Consorzio di tutela, involved us in a wonderful analysis of the Nobile di Montepulciano denomination.

In this job together I have well understood Gabriele’s values,

both professional and human.Great competence combined to an excellent humility, a mix not easy to find in our beloved world of wine.

So when the news arrived that Gabriele Gorelli was finally the first Italian Master of Wine, the satisfaction was double, because he is probably the best profile of a professional to represent the best of Italy's wine in the world.

Yes, it is true, with the judgment above mentioned I probably already described the possible "use" of a resource such as Master of wine Gabriele Gorelli. However I think, and I want to underline this in the preface of the interview Gabriele kindly gave us, that today more than ever Italy needs authoritative ambassadors capable of representing us in the world with an international profile as well as with an adequate communication method.

The Master of Wine training course represents, in fact, the best model today to get to "communication" professionals capable of knowing the production system and at the same time the key interlocutors of the market, trade and consumers.

I have no doubt there will be many, even in these days probably, who will try to convince Gabriele to represent a specific winery or a particular appellation. It is normal, we should not be scandalized, but I would like to think Gabriele Gorelli can be "protected" as much as possible in order to guarantee us an Italian Master of wine in permanent service to the cause of Italian wine.

I interviewed Gabriele Gorelli on his way back home from Bordeaux, after a week of lessons about Italian wines in the prestigious capital of French wine.

A long interview which covered many areas and allowed me to further understand Gabriele's values.

First of all Gabriele, how did you get into the world of wine?

Actually I could say I was born into the world of wine thanks to my paternal grandfather who made me grow up in his small vineyard, less than half an acre of Brunello that for me still represents one of the most beautiful memories of my childhood. Like my uncle, he was one of the first to become an eno-technician and then an enologist, always in Montalcino, working then in the Consorzio di tutela. I then collaborated with my father in making the classic wine for home consumption. And then for some years I was the only male in the family, even those of the closest relatives, and this led me to be the first to receive the "baptism with wine" from adult males. Certainly being born and raised in Montalcino has greatly contributed to my viticultural imprinting, but we should not think that in the 80's and early 90's Montalcino was the territory of the wine now known all over the world. I did in fact live through the rise of this appellation from almost unknown to its current popularity.

But when did you realize "wine"could become a profession?

Even in this case the awareness was born very early. During my first year of high school, in fact, I made my first computer catalog for the exhibitions organized by my maternal grandfather, an agronomist who never practiced his profession. I soon understood that the "communicative" side of wine was well suited for me.

When did you start getting interested in the production part of the wine?

I can say mine has been a "backwards" path, that is starting from curiosity towards wine tasting and then trying, going backwards, to understand the "productive" reasons of the characteristics of the wines tasted. Curiosity has always been for me a fundamental spring to try to deepen more and more the knowledge of wines, even of the less known appellations. Since the beginning I understood the beauty of wine was also in its

capacity of being a “transversal” product which can be read under many different points of view: cultural, anthropological, historical, artistic and, of course, also viticultural and enological. But without this “transversality” wine would not be able to have the charm that many people recognize.

You are right Gabriele, however the so called “experts” do not always seem to be aware of this transversality of wine and they continue to concentrate on exasperatingly technical aspects which often drive away wine lovers as well.

It is true and this allows me to debunk a dangerous commonplace, that is the one of thinking Masters of wine are an exclusive sect which speaks a language only for a select few. As a matter of fact, the purpose of Masters of wine is absolutely devoted to inclusiveness. It is no coincidence that their genesis is precisely that of helping the trade to select products suited to the market, to consumers, supporting them in communication that is as comprehensible as possible. The key point, therefore, is that the more competent you are, the more you can be highly informative and therefore comprehensible to different types of interlocutors. And this is the reason why the training course of the Masters of wine is so hard, complex, certainly not to feed a culture as an end in itself.

I would like to stay on this aspect of “wine communication” which I think is particularly strategic for the future of our sector as well. You rightly talk about inclusiveness but the feeling is that wine communication, at least the official one, continues to move on models that are not very popular and when it tries to be “simpler” it often falls into banality.

First of all I would like to be optimistic by saying we are still in time to be more inclusive in wine communication. And also looking at a difficult year such as 2020, it was very

nice and important to see how many young people enrolled in digital courses dedicated to wine. Even in France, in the Wset course where I am a teacher, there have been many new trainees who even arrive in Bordeaux from various parts of the world, do their quarantine in order to then be able to participate in in-person lessons. It is therefore fundamental to train these young people from the beginning to have an inclusive attitude in order for their communication about wine to be more and more effective. I think we have the means to make up for lost time.

But it must not be easy for a Master of wine to talk to a "normal" person not an expert in wine.

But here is the beauty of it. The most important goal of those who are competent about wine is to make themselves understood, to make those who are not curious about it. The greatest satisfaction, in fact, in our job of "wine communicators" at different levels is to fascinate those who listen to us and to make them become aware wine consumers and therefore extraordinary testimonials for our sector. Making a communication as an end to itself just to show knowledge is useless.

It is inevitable to ask why it took so long to get to an Italian Master of wine?

I think it was largely by chance. There was certainly no ostracism or prejudice on the part of the Master of Wine association towards Italians. Just recently I received a beautiful and very welcome email from Sarah Jane Evans, the first Master of wine I met when I attended their seminar in Florence in 2014. She wrote to me that she was very happy about this entry of an Italian in the association and that she hopes it will be the first of many others and that it testifies the absolute openness of Masters of wine to everyone regardless of their nationality. Of course, it must also be

honestly admitted that the English language is much more suitable for a “drier” communication, clearer, more direct, more adequate even in terms of technical information. Italian is more likely to be elitist and cryptic. We have a series of linguistic byzantinists that often push wine communication towards common places and not very clear contents. I know it is not easy to transfer the “cleanliness” of English language to Italian but it is an effort that should be done. This direction can also help us tools such as social media which impose a more direct communication, with fewer words but not for this reason with less important contents.

But how has the Master of Wine path changed you?

First of all, I came to this path without really knowing at the beginning what I was getting into. The symposium organized by the Grandi Marchi in Florence was a thunderbolt for me, but even then I did not have a clear idea of the mechanism and dynamics I would be entering into. But with hindsight I have to say that this was positive because I entered this path absolutely “clean”, without any prejudice or predefined expectations. This gave me the opportunity, I believe, to be able to take the best out of this difficult journey that has profoundly changed me. It has led me to be much more agile in my reasoning, to go into detail only where necessary, to go quickly to the heart of the issues without unnecessary dispersion. Only this way allows you to seriously deal with a subject as vast as wine at a worldwide level. Only an approach of this nature allows you to quickly understand the strengths and weaknesses of a production area, of a product, but above all it allows you to give adequate answers to the many “whys” of wine.

However, I also want to underline that I was able to face the Master of Wine course in the best way possible thanks to my previous educational experiences which were also precious. Starting from the Ais course I completed in 2011 where I met,

for example, a good teacher such as Leonardo Romanelli. It also helped me a lot with my will, against the opinion of many, to become an official taster as well, which allowed me to strengthen myself in terms of (many) blind tastings. Without forgetting the many seminars I attended in many wine territories (from Champagne to California). This is to underline that training never ends and probably there are no ideal paths if not the sum of many training experiences.

What are you going to do now Gabriele?

Question that is not easy to answer. I am still in the so-called “washing machine” post recognition. What is clear to me is that I would like to dedicate myself as much as possible to promote Italian wine in the world. I think this is my main vocation and also the one I was able to cultivate the most during my training with the Masters of wine. For a long time I have been hearing, for example, about a control room for the promotion of Italian wine in the world, I would like to be a candidate for a role in a “container” of this kind that I think is essential to build an adequate and winning communication of Italian wine at international level.