Iconic Women in Italian Wine: Who, Where & Why?

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This unique event encompassed so much more than the sum of the individual women: two leading international female journalists, the female managing director of **Vinitaly International,** and seven renowned Italian women wine producers collaborated to create an event that set aside the natural competition between the players and focused instead on personal stories, camaraderie, and the aspiration all these women hold for the future of Italian wine.

Why has this event never happened before? An interesting question answered best by **Monica Larner.** "When **Stevie Kim** presented me with this idea, I was excited on many levels; however, most compelling was the opportunity to present beautiful Italian wines with a colleague whose magazine shares market space with my own. **Robert Parks Wine Advocate and Wine Spectator have never collaborated on anything.** With smug certainty I suspect our male colleagues would never pull

resources together in this fashion for such a ground-breaking collaboration with important benefits. Post-pandemic we are all burning with a desire for new beginnings and being together. Inclusivity, camaraderie, creating togetherness. All seven of these individualistic and talents producers instantly recognised the importance and immediately agreed to participate."

Stevie Kim pointed out that this event was the definition of 'iconic': "Two women wine critic titans collaborating for the first time, with seven Italian women who are giants in their industry, is a true demonstration of what it means to be iconic: 'widely recognised and acknowledged for distinctive excellence.'"

Opening the event, **Alison Napjus explained the real gravitas that informed the idea for the discussion.** "Women are better communicators, using more words and more expressive words, with a better ability to listen and to empathise. These women are all around trailblazers, winery leaders, winery founders, wine makers. We all have to find new ways to connect and communicate after the pandemic pivot we all faced. This event gives us the chance to explore, as women, three particular themes in Italian wine; heritage/family, territory, wine ambassadors."

The women winery leaders came from 5 different regions and their age gap spanned 40 years. The idea of women in wine is not new, women are everywhere in the industry, but the gathering to share stories and important vintages, to exchange experiences, ideas and ask questions with leading wine writers was ground-breaking. The honesty and open attitude of all the women involved was clearly part of the magic in the room and what will attract young and savvy wine lovers to the unique soulfulness of Italian wine.

Chiara Boschis of E. Pira & Figli in Barolo, commented "What do I have of iconic in my life? I am not an iconic woman, I

work like a donkey all day, but this vineyard, Cannubi, this is an iconic place, and the diversity in the area is incredible. When I first got together with my friends, the Barolo Boys, I was the only girl, but we all wanted to shine a light on all the differences of our area and understand the potential of our terroir." She shared the 2010 vintage BaroloCannubi, a year that was important because her brother joined her, with his daughters who are all studying enology and will bring a new generation of women to the winery. **"Wine makers usually work alone.** When we start to work together, recognising everyone's unique terroir, we start to learn new things and appreciate all the traditions, we find more opportunities."

Elisabetta Foradori from Trentino expressed her perspective, in a different way. "I actually love making cheese, it's another kind of fermentation. I'm a farmer. Our country has a beauty and a richness of variety and we have a mission to transfer into a bottle this pure message of the different terroirs. We have a great responsibility to save and **improve the genetic variety and express the terroir in the most healthy and connected way possible.** Be creative and responsible farmers for the future." Her pomegranate logo represents 100s of tiny seeds, packed together in one beautiful container, 100's of ideas, creative thinking, and out of the box innovation.

Arianna Occhipinti, from Sicily, youngest of the group, added her experiences as an explorer with a model for young winemakers. "Frappato is the original grape from Vittoria where I grew up. I needed an important grape to grow up as a wine maker. **Thanks to the character of this grape, I learned to make wine.** Now I vinify parcel by parcel to get better expression of the soils, the limestone, the tufa, the red sand. Now I have treasure, for me it is important to show what Vittoria really is, the fresh wines we can make even in the deep south of Sicily."

Marilisa Allegrini spoke of her learning curve after the death of her father and finding her way in the world away from the winery. "Valpolicella was known for inexpensive wines in the 1980's, and Amarone was a niche wine for high end consumers, so it was a challenge for me to communicate. The first time I went to America, the importer wouldn't let me go out to promote the wine until I wrote down absolutely everything about the wine. **Many people said they didn't want a Valpolicella on their wine list,** so I knew I had to communicate everything to make this area known and understood."

Elena Fucci from Mt. Vulture in Basilicata felt much the same as she struggled to put her region on the map. "For me it is a dream to be with these special women in wine today. My journey started in 2000, when my family considered selling the vineyard because we weren't making wines, just selling the grapes to the consortium. I decided to change the course of my study so the house where I was born and lived with my family would not be sold. I went to university to study enology and winemaking. No one knew where Basilicata was. **I had 6 hectares and a single grape:** my wine, my life, my Titolo. I travel a lot to explain my region and my wine, modern but not modernist wine, I work to respect and understand the territory where we are. The vintage I am sharing is 2012 because ten years ago I had no idea what would happen to me and my wine in these ten years since 2012 and how much communicating it would take."

Heritage and legacy were addressed by Albiera Antinori with her family's Tignaello and Priscilla Incisa della Rocchetta with her legendary Sassicaia. Antinori said, "For me, looking at the history of the past 50 years since the start of Tignanello, and the diversity and uniqueness of wines that can be made in Italy – the terroir and the story are the future, terroir still to be discovered, every day you get surprised by wonderful areas with local varieties, an elegance, a

minerality, they've got the sun inside. Even traditional vineyards have been replanted so new things will be coming up, but we must be centered on quality, personality, history and the story we can explain." **Regarding sustainability she added,** "It's a complicated word to use, it can mean different things. For me it is a puzzle made of many things, with the final objective of leaving something better for the next generation. Not only in the winery but also for our workers, our sales force, we need one certification in Italy for sustainable, for economic sustainability as well."

Priscilla Incisa della Rocchetta looked at the idea of safeguarding Italian wine history from outside investors and influences. "It's not easy, there are real issues for family businesses, you have to have a strong sense of pride, family values and the family project. A responsibility to the next generations, we want to pass on what we got in an even better shape than when we received it. We are guardians. We have to combine financial goals with the family goals. **Having a long-term view means we focus less on making short term cash**, but we have to involve the family members to keep everyone interested, our estate is not only wine, we have other ventures and interests and my cousins and I have different interests on the estate. Consultancy helps deal with family generation change issues to and now we have the Primum Familiae Vini group which is a good place to share issues, know-how and support others in similar situations.

Summing up, Allegrini said, "We must put the agricultural product into the cultural context of Italy as a place of art, history, architecture, and beautiful landscape." Larner added, "This is the real way to help Italian wine be more competitive, to communicate differently and better, to tell that story, down to the soil, down to the producer, down to the winery, down to the vineyard, down to the very last rock." Stevie Kim remarked, "Everybody wants to be like Antinori, this is the problem I face as an agency, everyone wants that

beautiful **26 generation story on their home page.** Every winery has to find their own original story, not only the romance of generations and terroir, not only bio and organic and so on, but it has to be economically sustainable as well as. Each winery has to find the uniqueness of their story." Najus concluded that, "You can teach people about wine, but to find the story is much harder."

Looking back on this momentous event, Stevie Kim commented, "This session was never about men versus women or pigeon-holing anyone on the basis of gender, regionality, or points of view. Rather, Iconic Women in Wine at Vinitaly 2022 took a good long look at how to improve communication, **highlight success and exalt the unique power of women to unite in challenging circumstances for a common good.** Larner and Napjus absolutely found the story that needs to be told in order to secure the future of Italian wine in the global market.".