The courage of the winemaker sometimes lies in not doing anything

scritto da Claudia Meo | 23 Gennaio 2023



Taking a cue from the climatic issue, **Paolo Tiefenthaler, oenologist historically tied to the Santarelli family,** demonstrates the production philosophy of Casale del Giglio and his method of interpreting the wines of the Agro Pontino.

Paolo, how is this region's viticulture responding to the challenges brought on by climate change, which has been affecting our nation quite unevenly this year? And what methods do you employ to deal with these harsh circumstances?

The coastal strip south of Rome was not notably affected by the rise in temperatures; rather, we saw aggravated water

shortages and a concentration of rainfall in a short period: between the beginning of June and the end of August, about 70% of the projected rainfall was missing.

In years like these, it is crucial to have properly prepared the soil, providing water before flowering, so that the plant is already well formed by mid-June and can devote itself to slow ripening rather than foliar growth. We then adopt the practice of green manure, **which helps us to create a layer of dry grass that keeps the underlying soil moist and to counteract the development of weeds**, a water competitor of the plant.

Working the ground in extreme heat risks causing the soil to lose structure: sometimes you have to resist the need to "do" and simply stand still. The border between success and failure is razor thin: during these times, I spend more time on the vineyard than in the cellar.

In years like the one recently finished, the winning strategy is to spend as much attention as possible on the ideal time for harvesting, because even a few days can damage the genuine qualitative potential of any individual variety. **Additionally, it's crucial to handle the grapes as little as possible, make brief macerations without pumping over, and allow the fermentation to occur at the temperatures that are best for that particular year.** Doing so results in excellent lees that enable a longer permanence on the lees, which is necessary for having wines with greater integrity and longevity.

It is critical not to make decisions based on prior years' results; instead, **make an effort to grasp the differences between vintages and avoid thinking about creating the same wine every year**. Wine isn't a stamp; it can't and shouldn't always be the same, or even necessarily better, than the year before. Rather, my oenological purpose is to interpret the vintage.

The great variety of Casale del Giglio vines gives you a unique perspective on the behavior of the many kinds in relation to environmental conditions: what can you tell us about this?

Our region likes later types, particularly in climatic situations like this: if the climate accelerates, we attempt to get the most out of slower-growing varieties: Petit Manseng and Bellone ripen later than Chardonnay; Shiraz currently outperforms Merlot. **This understanding guides even our most recent projects: Biancolella in Ponza and Cesanese in Affile mature more slowly than other types.** We often pick the opposite of shortcuts and are rewarded with wines that define a location and reflect a vintage. We are not seeking for the most palatable grape, and we are not interested in producing what is most popular.

What is Casale del Giglio's take on the dispute over resistant varieties and genetic techniques?

It is a fact that some Piwi types are tolerant of harsh weather and allow for a reduction in the use of plant protection measures. We have a responsibility to learn, comprehend, and grow. I have been part of several experimentation protocols. **Personally I don't agree with the attempts to colonize vineyards in extreme areas; I believe that expanding the cultivation of vines in new areas must be carefully assessed in the light of the risks of unwanted spread of pathogens;** roads certainly to be beaten, but with extreme respect for the environment. We are now working with 7-8 resistant types, and I can tell that the whites are more satisfying than the reds; for our weather, the delayed developing white variety allow us to work with our criteria, reducing phytosanitary needs.

I am always **more concerned with the earth than with the grapes: my goal is to leave good soil for future generations.**

How was the 2022 harvest for Casale del Giglio wines, and what specifics will we see on your labels?

Quantitatively, we saw a small decline of around 5% from the norm, but the grapes are sanitaryly perfect, as they always are when there is no humidity. The white wines feature citrus notes and great sapidity, while the red wines have significant phenolic maturations, mostly because of the later varieties: they have a lot of tannin but also contribute significantly to the fruit. **Although the acidity is quite fresh and energetic and the gradations aren't overdone, the microbiological structure of the grapes is so superb that it enables us to make significant improvements.**

What enological and manufacturing advancements might we expect from Casale del Giglio in the near future?

I am pleased to mention the Pecorino project in Accumoli, which responds to a wish of the Santarelli family, originally from Amatrice: the wine is not yet on the market, but we have already completed 2 harvests. We also have a new project in Affile, Cesanese: an educational vineyard inside the Monastery of Santa Scolastica that we believe will help safeguard the environment by producing work possibilities and visitor appreciation.

CAMPAGNA FINANZIATA AI SENSI
DEL REG. UE N. 1308/2013

CAMPAIGN FINANCED ACCORDING
TO EU REG. NO. 1308/2013