

# **Gaja: when Small is Beautiful and Valuable**

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 12 Ottobre 2013



Should we conduct a survey among wine lovers from around the world, and ask them who in their opinion are the most renowned and admired Italian winemakers, we're pretty sure they would mention Angelo Gaja. If not the very first, his name would certainly rank near the top.

The reason behind that is not only the fact that, as he explains, "he has been making wine for 52 years", that he has been working in Piedmont, one of Italy's oldest wine-growing region, that he is nicknamed 'The King of Barbaresco', or that his family has been producing wine in the famous hilly area called *The Langhe* since the mid-nineteenth century.

The main reason for the success and notoriety of Angelo Gaja – born in Barbaresco in 1940 – is that, along with the family winery that was passed down to him by his great-grandfather Giovanni, his grandfather Angelo, and his extraordinary grandmother Clotilde Rey, he also inherited a great, genuine passion for producing top-quality wines.

That, together with his excellent communication skills, have made him one of the best-known ambassador of Italian wine in the world.

That's why we chose him as the first producer to appear in our column devoted to Italian winemakers' profiles. This perfect combination of great manufacturing and communication skills makes Gaja the ideal example of wine artisan. He admits it was his grandmother Clotilde who passed down to him these values and knowledge.

"She used to say that to be successful in both business and life , we should be able to combine these four abilities: to make, to know how to make (like an artisan when pursuing his own project); to let others make (being able to engage your collaborators and let them develop); to let others know (being able to communicate). Actually my grandmother had already grasped the meaning of marketing", adds Gaja.

We interviewed Angelo with the grape harvest in full swing, and he kindly attacked us: "Look, Fabio, I agreed to be interviewed just because you sent me an email full of compliments and because I'm interested in this *Wine Meridian* project. You know I don't often grant interviews, especially during harvest time", he said.

### **Talking about harvest, how is it going?**

It had been great, until a couple of days ago, when it started raining. Now things could rapidly change. This is what makes our job unpredictable. It drives me crazy. If I pick grapes earlier, taking advantage of the sunny weather, and then the sun keeps shining, I get angry because I wish I had waited longer. On the contrary, if I wait too long and then it starts raining, it makes me even angrier. People who work with me know how I feel, so they prefer to keep me at a distance during harvest time.

**It seems hard to find a way to summarize and communicate Italy's wine virtues effectively. There are so many distinctive traits ... Do you have any suggestion?**

That's true but I personally prefer to have many virtues to communicate than only a few. Italy is famous for local squabbles and in the wine industry this is more evident than ever. However I think this is one of our strengths. Even if it is hard to convey one single message on Italy's wine value, this may be a strong drive for each winery – but also for groups of wineries – to increase their ability to promote effectively our diverse and unique characteristics. I feel we can do it, each winery can do it, starting from understanding its own identity, then telling its story and narrating its products better and better.

**Another big issue for Italy's wine industry is the uneasy coexistence between small wineries and industrial ones.**

I believe this is an essentially ideological issue, as we are talking about two different production models which actually complement each other. Many small wineries pioneered and entered new markets, raising awareness and promoting the image of Italian wine abroad. I do not mean small is always beautiful, but being a down-to-earth man, I would say that small is valuable and can be useful for big companies too.

Artisan winemakers still have fascinating stories to tell, what makes us highly recognizable in various international markets. I firmly believe in our craftsmanship and I'm sure this is a key factor in building a stronger reputation of Italian wines in the world.