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wine feature

Lands of wine

Treasures to be discovered and rediscovered in the vineyard. The labels to keep your eyes on. And the protagonists of tomorrow.

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FORBES

An Eden of sustainability

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La Vialla farm has become a case, with its 1,400 entirely eco-friendly hectares of land, from Lombardy to Sicily. The result of constant commitment and work, which results in excellent agriculture.



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Fattoria La Vialla, at Castiglion Fibocchi in the hills of Arezzo, is one of those realities that one always hopes to be able to write about, an emblematic case in which form and substance coincide. The idea of this farm and wine estate, which now comprises

a total of almost 1,400 hectares, between the main centre of activity, San Gimignano, Maremma, Oltrepò Pavese, Marche and Sicily, has a precise beginning. In fact it was 1978 when the Lo Franco family – to be precise the founders, Piero and Giuliana – decided to reclaim from abandon several hectares of land on the hillsides around Arezzo, which then became the first hub of the estate. They did so with clear-cut ideas right from the start, if it's true (and it is) that the first

From the left, Bandino, Gianni and Antonio Lo Franco in the wine cellar at Fattoria La Vialla

stone of organic management was laid in that precise moment, and in an extraordinarily shrewd manner from a technical point of view, when the philosophy was still far from being defined, above all in Italy.

To the founders, it probably seemed inappropriate to entrust this process of substantial rebirth to chemistry, rather than to the human hand. The fact remains that, if organic was pioneering, conversion of the vineyards to biodynamics (a total of around 80 hectares, along with 210 of cultivated land, while the rest is woodlands – a good 770 hectares – or areas used for other activities, amongst which animal farming) began in 2000, and was certified in 2006, the largest Demeter area (that's to say cultivated with biodynamic techniques) in Europe. Now management is firmly in the hands of Piero and Giuliana's sons – Gianni, Antonio and Bandino – and their families, and La Vialla is a sort of Eden set on land where cars are forbidden (you move around solely with small electric vehicles similar to golf carts) dedicated to typical Tuscan crops: grapevines, olive trees (29 thousand), wheat, grazing land (530 Sardinian sheep and 900 chickens, 600 of which belonging to the famous, rare, Valdarnese breed), beekeeping and vegetables. In the various production areas (winery, olive mill, kitchen, dairy, mill and bakery, vinegar works, Vin Santo cellar) the fruits of cultivation are transformed according to traditional recipes and methods – in which tradition and technology combine perfectly – that guarantee maximum attention is paid to conserving flavour and nutritional values, and go to supply the amazing romantic old-world style dining area, for what at the estate they, modestly, call a “snack”. All the products, which include wine, oil, cheese, honey, vinegar and other delicacies such as jams, bread, biscuits and pasta, are either sold at the estate or can be ordered from the website. They strategically avoid massification in the style of large-scale distribution, there are no agents and, quite the contrary, one of the company's strong point is the fact that the packages they ship are, proudly, hand-prepared by in-house staff, representing not only added local value, but also consolidating the brand. Moving on to questions more strictly related to winemaking, it's impossible not to begin with the concepts on which the La Vialla is based, amongst which, shall we say, the production of wine is the apotheosis. One of the greatest risks in using Steinerian principles is that of dogmatism. Biodynamics intended come “putting oneself in the hands of the creator”, convinced that going along with nature is always the right choice. La



Cuvée N. 1 Metodo Classico DOCG 2013

A clamorously well-made sparkling wine that comes from vineyards of Pinot Nero, about 12 years old, located in the Oltrepò Pavese area. A full-bodied, sapid bubbly, which strikes you as soon as you smell it, with intense notes of freshly mown grass, persimmon, green-skinned fruit. Decidedly mineral on the palate, extremely alluring, with very elegant bubbles.



Barricato Bianco

A unique label, with great character and interesting technical facets; not filtering makes it possible to maintain the yeasts in contact with the wine, and together they continue to evolve naturally in the bottle and increase the stability of the product. Aroma of apricot purée, complex vegetal notes, full, persistent on the palate.



Chianti Classico DOCG Riserva "Casa Conforto" 2015

A spicy, compact wine, striking above all for its drinkability. Aromas of pepper and small red fruits, juicy, compact on the palate, with well-rounded tannins and extremely long persistence.

Vialla's way of seeing it is very different, based, albeit respecting the principles, on the concept of constant monitoring. Considering that in biodynamics curing is always more difficult than prevention, the method is scientific: they prepare homeopathic remedies that are tested on small prototype plots, with typical characteristics, and subsequently – only if the results are satisfactory – the process is extended to the remaining hectares. The only traditional product still used is copper, even though they hope to completely eliminate its use soon. The other key concept at La Vialla is recycling. Beginning with the crops, which are all extensive, periodically alternated and rotated. The natural regeneration cycle is followed, and actually helped, by using all the waste products, in a sort of company closed loop. The manure from the animals, together with waste from the processes in the workshops (fruit-water from the olives, pomace, grape stalks, vegetables scraps, bran from the mill, whey, etc.) are put back into the organic cycle – after being adequately turned into compost – becoming valuable fertilizer, lowering the so-called carbon footprint (parameter used to estimate greenhouse gas emissions) and helping make the company carbon neutral. In addition to this, a photovoltaic plant that covers the company's entire energy needs and numerous – not secondary – ecological-environmental interventions complete the picture, in line with the company's farming methods and philosophy. For example at La Vialla the waste water from production is phyto-purified (a natural purification system), as well as harvesting the rainwater for irrigation. So it is a format of absolute sustainability, in which the hard work of the sizeable in-house staff is enhanced by the collaboration of experts, confirming the adage that nature can never be dominated, but only supported and assisted in the best possible way. In this zero environmental impact world, with its concept of local raw materials and consequently of food characterised by the rediscovery of the flavours and simplicity of the past, what is surprising is actually the quality of the wines. Aside from the praiseworthy intentions of the production philosophy, the non-filtering, the use of traditional grape varieties and so-called international blends, what stands out is the meticulous workmanship. Products that maintain their spontaneity but are also refined, correctly actualised and intense on both the nose and the palate. In other words, evidence of how objectives of sustainability can be achieved, in combination with technical astuteness, in products of absolute value, to be tried. 