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**100 Spitzen-
Rieslinge von
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BEE WHISPERERS

Why Marco Cervellera and Alceo Orsini from
La Vialla ferment wine with pollen



THE last few months have once more demonstrated how important interaction between people is and how much creativity can be generated by intensive dialogue. This is particularly important for a subject as emotional as wine.

The wine community has had the opportunity to meet up and do some network building at wine fairs such as ProWein in Düsseldorf or VieVinum in Vienna. Ambitious newcomers were able to get to know world famous wineries and cultivate or establish international business contacts, seeing that the whole international wine market was finally gathered together again. The fair venues were filled with that successful mix of professionalism and vivacity that makes people in the wine business so likeable. Amidst all the positive dynamics and the novelties to be discovered, however, two fundamental buzzwords emerged, which everyone is talking about – sustainability and wine tourism.

Two complex, forward-looking topics that at first glance don't seem to have much to do with each other, but which are being promoted at an international level with equal emphasis in all countries. Sustainability in viticulture is therefore becoming increasingly important, and winegrowers in particular are realising how essential their responsibility is to pass on healthy agriculture to the next generation. It is important not to consume more resources than can be regrown, but above all to maintain and promote a balance between ecology, economy and social justice. Something elementary in the days of climate change and Co.! Wine tourism is the second major theme at the moment and makes a precious contribution to boosting the visibility of wine regions, where well-organized infrastructure is created for holidaymakers who wish to visit places where wine and pleasure are at home.



We have visited one of the most sustainable farms in Europe, where they also welcome guests. Read the article about Fattoria La Vialla from page 30. You will immediately want to go there yourself. I promise you!

Ilka Lindemann, editor-in-chief, lindemann@meininger.de

IN THE NAME OF THE BEES

There are places you long to return to again after you have visited them once. Fattoria La Vialla is one of those places: olive groves as far as the eye can see, woods, beehives, vineyards, yellow-flowered broom, sheep, cypresses, Tuscan farmhouses on gently rolling hills...

By: Ilka Lindemann



Countless picture-postcard scenes put visitors to Fattoria La Vialla into a sort of holiday mode from the moment they arrive.

Deceleration has been planned and, at the latest, when you sit down for dinner at the long table under the fig tree with the other agritourism guests, you are swept off your feet.

Here you feel free: the Tuscan way of enjoying life, conviviality, but also feeling protected surrounded by unspoilt nature. Aromas of rosemary and roast meat drift out of the kitchen, you can help yourself to the various house wines and olive oil on the table, two “Viallini” bring appetisers and dishes of piping hot pasta with green asparagus. You eat what’s on the table, everything is familiar and authentic.

Far from mass tourism, here guests can experience the finer things in life. No stress, no hustle and bustle, simply relaxing and enjoying life, that is the philosophy here. It goes without saying that a lot of work goes on behind the scenes, in order to offer only the best quality to the international guests.

La Vialla is a large, family-run, organic farm that produces wine, olive oil and food, and also provides hospitality for guests. Since it was founded in 1978, the Fattoria has always used organic methods in harmony with nature; the organic concept and a healthy diet were important for the family. This is why chemical fertiliser, weedkiller and pesticides have never been used. La Vialla was one of the first farms in Italy to obtain organic certification. Since the 90s the land has been cultivated with biodynamic methods, and since 2005 La Vialla has been certified by Demeter, the oldest association for biodynamic agriculture. What began as a way to make the family self-sufficient, has grown over the years. The Lo Franco family bought farmland and woods, specialised in

the restoration of vineyards and renovated numerous derelict stone houses, which are now rented out to guests. In addition to the sheep, whose milk is used to produce pecorino cheese, they also have goats, chickens and, more recently, cattle. More than 200 bee colonies are looked after by two beekeepers...

Today, 1,600 hectares of land belong to the estate and La Vialla is one of the largest biodynamic farms in Europe. The Lo Franco family also cultivates vineyards near San Gimignano, in the Oltrepò Pavese area, in the region of Le Marche and in Sicily. “We could actually sit back, relax and say that we’ve made it,” says Gianni Lo Franco. “But our passion always compels us to carry on. We don’t want to lose the playful side of the business.” So, research is incessant, and we push ahead with regenerative economy. It’s about working with nature, not against it. This strengthens biodiversity.

The word most frequently pronounced during our stay is “pollen”, And it leads directly to the latest project undertaken by the family: obtaining yeast from bee pollen. We meet the three brothers Gianni, Antonio and Bandino Lo Franco, as well as the head oenologist Marco Cervellera and the head agronomist Alceo Orsini, in the cellar to taste the new vintages. We learn that recently the wines are fermented with yeasts obtained from bee pollen. “The idea is to work with extremely pure yeasts,” Marco Cervellera reveals. “We wanted to move away from spontaneous fermentation, because yeasts from the winery always manage to insinuate themselves as well, and progress towards pure yeasts, which in our case are extracted from bee pollen.” >

At Fattoria La Vialla the organic concept is paramount. Only unadulterated, organic, chemical-free wines and food are offered to the guests



WINE



Head oenologist
Marco Cervellera and
head agronomist
Alceo Orsini use bee
pollen to extract
yeasts for the wines

The idea came up five years ago, and two years later the studies were largely completed. With the 2019 grape harvest, a number of selected wines were fermented with these yeasts. First of all, about a kilo of bee pollen was sent to a laboratory for microbiological analyses. Initially four yeast strains were selected, two of which were immediately discarded because they weren't suitable. "The majority of the yeasts died when the alcohol content reached 11% vol," Marco Cervellera tells us, and we learn that, of the two remaining strains extracted, one can be used for wine and the other for bread.

"You have to consider that yeasts multiply very rapidly," explains the oenologist, emphasising how important it was to analyse the pollen in a sterile laboratory. "We were lucky that one was suitable," he says happily today. "But it's still complicated, because our yeasts obtained from pollen have a limited lifespan. While industrial yeasts can be used for three years, ours can only be kept for ten days." But the difference in the wines is fundamental, everything is purer and more distinct, from the aromas to the taste.

As we sip Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc from the 2021 vintage, taken straight from the barrel, we learn that another yeast strain comes directly from the Spedale vineyard, as do the grapes used for the wines we are tasting. "For some of the wines we use selected yeasts from the vineyard, and for others the bee pollen yeast. We decide which with every grape harvest."

"For us it is incredible to now have our own yeasts," comments Bandino Lo Franco. "After all, we want to produce wines that express our terroir!" And Gianni Lo Franco adds, "Everyone always talks about terroir. Now we can say that this is our vineyard, our yeast and our terroir." There are many studies that >

WINE TIPS

Pievina di Spedale 2020

Saline minerality, yellow-fleshed fruit and slightly smoky aromas. The cuvée of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Viognier also has hints of white flowers; on the palate it is dense, concentrated and very elegant.

Pievina di Spedale 2019

Camomile and yellow-fleshed fruit, with a hint of mint and verbenä; on the palate it is powerful, dense and mineral, with lots of ripe yellow fruit, mango and ripe apricot.

Casa Quaranta 2018

The cuvée of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc was vinified in amphoras and bottled without filtering. The nose detects cherry, allspice, Christmas spices, very elegant and soft, with mint and eucalyptus; in the mouth it is incredibly concentrated, with cherries preserved in alcohol and fine Mediterranean herbs. A "meditation wine" that requires a bit of time in the glass. (It is only bottled in a magnum bottle)

Pinot Nero Casa Rossa 2013

Intense, slatey spice, liquorice and dark chocolate, orange zest and finely honed fruit; on the palate it is dense, but at the same time exuberant, red berries and zest, a hint of grapefruit, yet tightly woven and warmly spicy.

Pinot Nero Casa Rossa 2015

Liquorice and red berries, unrefined structure, blood orange and a little zest; exuberant and powerful on the palate, very juicy with a pleasant acidic structure...





A light-hearted "family" group: Antonio, Gianni and Bandino Lo Franco, with oenologist Marco Cervellera and agronomist Alceo Orsini

have looked into the effects of bee pollen. It is no coincidence that it is considered a "superfood", seeing that it contains countless nutrients that are important for the human body and have a positive effect on our health. If a beekeeper wants to collect this pollen, he sets up a so-called pollen trap at the entrance to the beehive. As the bees go through the entrance, they lose part of their load because it gets caught on a sort of scraper and the pollen falls into a box below, from where it can be collected.

For our photo shoot, the Lo Franco brothers, Marco Cervellera and Alceo Orsini nonchalantly don yellow beekeepers' suits, to demonstrate their work with the pollen. "The biggest goal for an oenologist is to obtain healthy grapes from the vineyard and be able to use them," says the head oenologist, and Alceo Orsini, the agronomist, points out once again that bees play an essential role in the ecosystem. "In addition, we interfere with nature as little as possible. Because it finds its own way back to a state of equilibrium. You just have to let it do so!" And he is convinced of this.

Being a Demeter farm, there are strict rules to be followed; so, every process is meticulously documented and coordinated. At Fattoria La Vialla, however, they always go a few steps further. Currently, one hectare of vineyard is being used as an experimental plot to test a reduction in the use of copper. "We are doing tests in two trial vineyards until we are satisfied with the results," Marco Cervellera tells us. For this purpose, one half is treated

with half the amount of copper, and the other with macerated olive leaves and olive polyphenols. "We'll see what happens." The project is being pursued in collaboration with CREA (Council for Agricultural Research and Economics), one of the most important public research bodies in Italy, which uses a multidisciplinary approach to carry out analyse regarding the agri-food sector.

Nothing is left to chance here. "We always come up with something crazy!" says Gianni Lo Franco, bursting into his irresistible laugh. At La Vialla, everything is constantly in motion and goes far beyond technical comprehension... We head off in the direction of Spedale vineyard, following the unpaved road that was once a route for pilgrimages towards Rome. Along the way, the bushes of broom are bright yellow with flowers, the aroma of wild fennel lingers in the air and, during a brief stop at the little Pieve di Spedale church, we enjoy the unbelievably beautiful view of the original Tuscan countryside. A real feast for the eyes. |

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