

## MIGRANTE (Italy, Lazio, Olevano Romano)

**FROM ... TRUCKS TO WINE:** The winery was founded in 2000 by the couple Lorenzo Fanfarillo and Luciana Milana with the help of Luciana's brother, Guido when this trio bought a small plot of land right on top of Olevano Romano hill, an ideal location for the vine cultivation. The estate itself hasn't changed much throughout all these years, while



Lorenzo's wines, with his improved agricultural technique, gained a lot of consideration in Italy. According to his wife Luciana *"Lorenzo wasn't really into wine, he was a truck driver but day in, day out he started to dislike his old time job. On the other hand my father has been one of the founding members of the local wine co-op and I grew so much related to this*

*world and our beloved local grape variety, Cesanese. I really didn't like the idea to lose my family tradition ..."*. Luciana's father always believed that the future of Cesanese would have been marked by selling this wine outside Lazio region: a sort of prediction policy that affected the estate name when time came to pick up one. Migrante (Emigrant) is related to the verb "emigrare" (to emigrate), hence the name which completely merged into Luciana's father philosophy. With Lorenzo's painstaking study of viticulture the destiny was written once again, and wine family tradition survived to any attempt to move away from this path.

After having launched a progressive quality practice in the vineyard and cellar, now Migrante - after 16 consecutive harvests (market debut dates back in 2003) - is considered a solid, qualitative driven name of the new wave movement that put Lazio appellations like Olevano Romano and Piglio on the wine map reaching out critics attention.

**CIOCIARIA (ALIAS THE MYTH OF PRIMITIVE FOOTWEAR):** Currently the estate covers a total area of approximately 3 hectares located within the commune of Olevano Romano where sunny hills and a moderate climate help to produce high-quality products, especially the local hero Cesanese, a grape variety that underwent a deep retooling process in the last 15 years. A couple of more hectares are basically available to increase estate production, but the couple at the moment likes to keep things pretty small. Production levels amount at 18.000 bottles per year. Olevano Romano is part of an area within Lazio called Ciociaria, (the name comes from the primitive footwear of its inhabitants called "ciocie" put on by its early Latin inhabitants) starting roughly 80 km east of Rome and going all the way south to the province of Frosinone and then ending

at the border with Campania. The mountainous vineyards of Olevano Romano DOC and Cesanese di Piglio DOCG (yes, this is one of the two appellations granted in 2008 with the DOCG status in the whole Lazio region), centered around the Piglio commune in the province of Frosinone, are considered by wine experts such as Master of Wine Mary Ewing-Mulligan to produce the best quality Cesanese wine and viticulture in the area has always had to face difficulties due to the hard, painstaking work necessary in such hilly terrains

**ONE CESANESE OR ... MAYBE TWO? TWO:** Many producers, following some local new generation mentors whose wines are already exported in US and Japan, started pulling out Cesanese Comune and replanted it with the less exuberant Cesanese di Affile, a clone definitely more demanding but capable to produce unexpected wines, full of flavor and charme. There are noticeable differences between Cesanese Comune and the grapes found in Cesanese di Affile, including the size of the grape berry itself. Low crops, vines stress and competition, green harvest are elements of this renaissance that took place in this area of Lazio. Indigenous to Lazio region, sensitive to almost all fungal diseases, especially downy mildew, this varietal has to be credited of a constant average productivity and its history dates back to ancient Romans. Cesanese is a difficult variety both in the vineyard and the cellar and the wine making techniques employed in the past had failed to showcase its tremendous potential. That has all begun to change, and there are bottles of Cesanese today that rival the renown famous reds of more fashionable wine areas of Italy. Lorenzo's vineyards (just around the property where his family lives) are not far away from Mount Scalambra and display a special composition of red and white clay coming from volcanic rock.

Following the path of Italian immigration is a difficult task, but even more difficult is following grape varieties movement throughout the decades. Fortunately now we are living in the Internet era and news are available to everyone. It is definitely strange to hear that a bit of Cesanese di Affile has been planted in the early 90s ... nearby Etna volcano, in Sicily. Who did it? Andrea Franchetti, a producer and founder of Passopisciaro estate who strongly believes in the grape's potential in the volcanic Sicilian soils. Like Luciana's father said Cesanese's destiny is to be really appreciated elsewhere.

**MIGRANTE'S VINEYARD MANAGEMENT:** The south facing vineyards are meticulously tended by Lorenzo who knows every single plant, trained with cordon system and with wild grass between the rows and density of about 2500 plants per hectare. At approximately 450 meters above the sea level, harvest guidelines are not written in the books but vary following specific climatic conditions with harvest that usually takes place in mid-October. A single vineyard (3000 vines per hectare) is dedicated to the *passito* style Cesanese wine, which is produced by leaving grapes hanging on the vines till the first fortnight of December. Overall Mlgrante's grapes are considered, even by local competitors, super healthy and benchmark of how this difficult variety should be cultivated.

Not only great attention is paid to vineyards, but the real goal is to achieve the perfect phenolic ripeness; Lorenzo tells us that he starts the harvest only if, besides the obvious sugar levels wanted, the grape seed loses astringency and together with the peel comes off the pulp without difficulty. This is an empirical maturation signal indicating that the desired aromatic development is achieved.

**“A DARK CESANESE? REALLY? GET OUT OF HERE!”:** When Lorenzo showed us his vineyards he seems pretty relaxed and satisfied with the work done: *“It’s a lot of work because I am obsessed with the vines’ health and the green harvest and at the moment is better to keep production’s levels pretty under control. 18 thousand bottles per year is a good number already and there is no need to increase it without a strategic thinking. Let’s see what comes next, I am not in a hurry and so are my vineyards!”* Lorenzo’s style of Cesanese doesn’t like any kind of make up: *“When you see a dark, impenetrable Cesanese ... well it means that has been adjusted. Cesanese can’t be a super dark wine at sight and some producers benefit from the possibility to blend it with another grape variety (up to 15%, no more). All this is allowed by the appellation body of rules, but I just don’t like it. My Cesanese is pure and, most of the times, on the pale side.”* Is it really something to be ashamed of?

Often some producers heavily adopt techniques such as extended skin contact or “bleeding off” to try to extract more color and density, but Migrante wines will never be deep reds as those Cesanese. Sometimes even extreme altitude (more than 600 meters above the sea level) is a problem: the higher are the vineyards, the more chances are that the wine will reach 16% AbV due to natural sugar concentration in the most. *“We use cultured neutral yeasts for the simple reason that natural yeast often fails to carry through the alcoholic fermentation, being Cesanese variety on a very rich sugar level. In this case it would leave a residual sugar, not desirable for the type of wine I want to have. Nevertheless we skip any kind of pathetic aromatic inoculated yeasts to avoid any possible wine distortion ... “.*

**CHEMISTRY OR ... PEAS?** Guess what ...: No chemicals, no herbicides, nothing at all.



Migrante cultivation style could be described as ancestral: Just sulphur and copper in the vineyards and the help of crows which scare other birds and, at the same time, are renown for disliking eating grapes. It couldn’t been better ... When asked about biodynamic systems, Lorenzo is more than explicit: *“No, I am not interested in any kind of official certification of my work. I only know that my family lives around the vineyards, I have three sons and one day this will be their property. Who likes chemistry just around the corner where he is living? Come on, man ...”*

The varied nature of soils (loamy, clayey and calcareous), partly resulting from volcanic formations, combined with a climate characterized by persistent temperature changes, make this area particularly suitable for viticulture and the production of a wine with a strong personality.

*“Have you seen what I did here?”* We are not vineyard managers but it seems that something has been freshly planted between vine rows. *“I planted a bit of fodder peas and clover, that is my way to create a healthy humus providing an habitat to a multitude of useful insects and worms. It’s my unofficial way to pursue biodiversity ...”.*

**LAZIO RENAISSANCE:** What is undeniable is that Lazio is making better wine today than 20-30 years ago or so, and progress seems destined to continue unabated. There are still some areas that lag behind others, but overall, there is a palpable sense of dynamic,



enthusiastic upheaval. Even large volume wine production areas are now characterized by fresh, well made, enjoyable wines, in maximum part devoid of the flaws which once plagued Lazio enology. Today the three Cesanese appellations (Piglio, Affile and Olevano Romano) together combined fall short of one million bottles yearly produced with vines cultivated that barely reach 330-350 hectares. Little numbers that combined with microscopic plots allow the thirty something producers to flourish without being crushed by internal competition.

**The WINES IMPORTED BY STEEP HILL:** Steep Hill currently imports 3 wines, all with Latin names which are reminiscent of the ancient name of Olevano Romano and the old seal of the commune).

**Terre Olibani Cesanese di Olevano Romano DOC 2010:** Migrante entry level wine is fermented and aged in tanks coming from his youngest vines. Quoting Lorenzo: *“I seek freshness and moderate alcohol levels (somewhere between 13% and 13,5%) for this specific wine and if I can’t make it, this wine is simply not produced as it happened in 2011 and 2012”*.

**Consilium Cesanese di Olevano Romano DOC 2011:** Fermented and aged in tanks plus an extended time lying in the bottle. Consilium comes from a selection of vineyards with lower yields compared to the entry level Terre Olibani.

**Sigillum Cesanese di Olevano Romano DOC 2009:** This is Lorenzo flagship wine coming from the best vineyard with severe grapes sorting both on the vine and at the cellar table. Aged 18 months in tank then moved for 12 months in used 225 liters American oak barriques (medium roasted), plus 24 months of bottle ageing resting in the cellar before the market’s release. Using American oak is definitely rare in Lazio: when asked about this specific choice, Lorenzo simply replied that he fell in love with the soft nuances released to the wine, without any kind of beefy overtones.