

TENUTA BELVEDERE (Italy, Lombardia, Oltrepò Pavese)

The **Oltrepò Pavese** (Italian pronunciation: [ˌoltreˈpo ˈppaˈveːze]) is an area of the Province of Pavia, in the Italian region of Lombardia, which lies to the south of the river Po. It extends over a 70 km long territory south of the Po river, stretching from east to west. It is *Oltre* ('beyond') the Po and basically this is a district where food and wine



traditions are different from the rest of Lombardia as the borders with both Piemonte and Emilia Romagna are not far away. Pretty unknown abroad, the Oltrepò offers several attractions: smooth hills, medieval villages and castles, panoramic views, authentic Italian food and local wines. This district happens to be the largest wine producing area of Lombardy and the largest one in all Italy for the Pinot Nero. The landscape is scattered with vineyards that are freely accessible for hikers or even mountain biking. Towards the south the terrain is rather hilly. Gianni Brera, a famous journalist and bon vivant, claimed that in the Oltrepò Pavese “wine is

wine”. In saying this Brera is reflecting upon the geographical layout of the Oltrepò Pavese, which is shaped like a bunch of grapes.

THE ESTATE’S BACKGROUND: Tenuta Belvedere is a small family managed estate located roughly 35 km south of Pavia in the village of Montecalvo Versiggia. Belvedere was once part of the municipality of the village, hence the name of the estate and at the same time was the name of the property bought by Sarchi Pasturenzi’s family. Today the estate is the continuation of a wine-making passion and tradition that began in the 2nd half of the 19th century, when this family began growing grapes.

Early production was mainly to meet the consumption needs of family and friends. Over time and over the generations, what was once a “simple” passion turned into a professional commitment. It was Mario Pasturenzi who, after the 2nd World War, created a turning point in the farm’s wine production. With the aim of creating a quality product, land ownership was slowly expanded, the old vineyards were replanted several times and the current wine cellar was built.

Even after Mario’s death, in 2004, the farm was carefully managed by his wife, Maria Luisa Sarchi, assisted by the family, of which thirty-something Gianluca Cabrini became a member by marrying Maria Luisa’s granddaughter, Federica. It was Gianluca himself who, in 2013, decided to leave the automotive sector, where he had worked for many years, to devote himself full-time to his passion for wine and the pure love for the Oltrepò area.

GRAPE VARIETIES: Gianluca Cabrini is limiting the use of the grape varieties involved in the wine production by working only the ones really belonging to the local tradition: Rhine Riesling (in Italian Riesling Renano), Riesling Italico (known in Austria as Welschriesling and absolutely not related genetically wise to Rhine Riesling), Pinot Grigio and for the reds Croatina, Barbera, Uva Rara and Pinot Nero.

Even the so called international varieties have been planted here during 1850 and adapted themselves perfectly to local conditions.

First things first: Bonarda in the Oltrepò Pavese appellation system is not a grape, it’s a

wine which can be produced both still and frizzante (semi-sparkling). Croatina grape plays a fundamental role (min. 85% required), while the rest can be Uva Rara, Barbera, Vespolina, etc. Croatina's etymology is pretty fun to learn: the name would come from a "croatta" and "cravatta"- (respectively archaic and current Italian nouns equivalent for "tie") and would indicate that the Croatina wine was drunk on the feast days when the tie was actually worn. Somehow this variety displays characteristics similar to the Dolcetto grape in that it tends to produce fruity, deeply colored wines that are mildly tannic and can benefit from bottle ageing. This same variety is also planted in the Piacenza province in Emilia.

Useless to say Bonarda Oltrepò's wine has nothing to share with the second most planted Argentinean grape variety imported 150 years ago by Italian immigrants. The Bonarda widely grown in Argentina may be more related to the the Bonarda Novarese of Piemonte in Italy or the Corbeau or Douce Noir of Savoie in France (Charbono grape of California is a descendent as well).

Beside the current wines already available, however Gianluca and his wife Federica have a set of single vintages Pinot Nero sparkling wine produced with the Champenoise method which are still resting on the lees (minimum 30 months) and the 2014 debut vintage will be ready for consumption only in the summer of 2018.

KEY NUMBERS AND TERROIR: Nowadays the estate comprises 9 vineyard hectares with production levels never exceeding 18.000 bottles per year. Potentially Gianluca could bottle more wine, but he is slowly growing year in year out, preferring to sell part of the fruit to bigger local growers.

Placed at roughly 300 mts above the sea level, the terrain here consists typically of calcareous and clay soil with marine origin. The temperature variation between night and day in this area also provides good climatic conditions for the production of Pinot Noir. Regarding their smaller Riesling and Pinot Grigio vineyards, they are on mining terrain and the soil is limestone with a layer of chalk. This kind of soil gives a good level of minerality to the wines.



NO CHEMICALS: Fully aware that high-quality wines are made in the vineyard, even before grapes reach the cellar, thanks to its partnership with the agronomist, Tenuta Belvedere implements particularly meticulous agronomic practices. Pruning takes place using the "Simonit & Sirch" method, according to which reducing the cutting surfaces and the protective wood technique ensure a long, healthy life for the plant.

In addition to rigorous pruning, always starting after the first frost, suckering and bunch selection by hand are also implemented. The excellent quality of the grapes goes hand in hand with respect for nature. It is for this reason that the agricultural practices have always had a very low environmental impact, eliminating the use of chemical fertilizers, agrochemicals and herbicides.

This encourages grassing, without working the land, so as to prevent erosion and soil

impoverishment. Fertilizing, if necessary, is exclusively organic and carried out before winter. The pruning shoots are shredded in the vineyard in order to return substances to the earth. Fungicidal treatments take place exclusively using copper and sulphur and the water used for these processes comes exclusively from estate's wells.

Tenuta Belvedere's commitment to environment and artisanal wines is nationally recognized by wine critics and fans as the estates only attends wine fairs in which is mandatory for the attending estates the use of indigenous yeast carrying natural fermentations with no manipulation and the use of copper and sulphur in the vineyard. The estate is a proud member of Vinnatur, one of the most "extreme" natural wine association in Italy.

THE WINE CELLAR: Recently renovated (2013), the wine cellar, located in a central position in relation to the farm's vineyards, faces north and two-thirds of it lies underground. These characteristics make it naturally possible to maintain an almost constant temperature and the right level of humidity. The rooms are divided into three areas, each dedicated to different stages of production: wine-making, bottling and storage, ageing. The area devoted to wine-making is equipped with stainless steel tanks and vitrified concrete tanks, all featuring temperature control. The last (but not least important) area in the wine cellar is dedicated to host classic method sparkling and frizzante wine while it's resting on the lees. Furthermore Gianluca's Pinot Nero ages in French oak casks (500 liters) in this insulated and temperature-controlled room.

HARVEST AND HEALTHY GRAPES: The stages of the grape harvest and wine-making, always harbingers of happiness and tension, represent a crucial moment and for this reason the greatest attention is paid to the harvest, which takes place following a few essential rules:

1. the grapes are hand-picked and placed in 18 kg boxes, with particular care taken when placing the bunches into the boxes to make sure the grapes themselves remain intact;
2. the freshly harvested grapes are immediately carried to the wine cellar, where they rest in the naturally cool cellar for at least one night;
3. further grapes selection takes place before proceeding to the wine-making stage.

Thanks to the partnership with oenologist Stefano Torre, Tenuta Belvedere is able to reproduce in the cellar the same philosophy used in the vineyard: wine making is driven by minimum interventionism. All this is made possible thanks to the close attention paid year round in vineyard's management and the utmost care during the harvest time. Only "healthy" grapes are allowed in the cellar and production levels are overall pretty low. Since the 2014 vintage, Tenuta Belvedere has not added sulfites in the production of red wines (Bonarda and Coccinea) and limits their use in still and sparkling white wines.

Steep Hill is presenting 4 wines made by Gianluca:



WAI Provincia di Pavia IGT 2017: Frizzante style wine sur lie refermented in the bottle (topped by a crown cap). Tank Fermentation is interrupted by the cold with 20 gr/l of residual sugar and then the wine bottled. With the rising of the temperature the following spring, the wine completes the fermentation without adding any frozen must

to the base still wine. This is a blend of Pinot Noir (70%) and Riesling Italico and is totally unfiltered and undisgorged (aka made in the ancestral method). WAI is a traditional greeting in the Thai language and the name was chosen by Gianluca's mother in law. Definitely a fun and tasty wine.

Beside the white version, Belvedere produces the WAI Rosè, made of 100% Pinot Nero, and the Wai red (50% Croatina - 25% Pinot Nero - 25% Barbera)

Pinot Grigio Oltrepò Pavese DOC 2017: the fruit for this wine is sourced from the only vineyard planted with Pinot Grigio grapes with northern exposure. Hand harvest in the 3rd week of August, destemmed and spontaneously fermented after very short skin maceration. Raised in stainless steel vats with weekly batonnage for roughly 8 months. 1640 bottles produced.

Bonarda Oltrepò Pavese DOC 2017: 90% Croatina plus equal parts of Barbera and Uva Rara. Only 10/12 days of maceration in order to extract the right level of color and tannins. Tank fermented and aged, this is a frizzante or vivace styled wine (in Italian both names are used) and perfect food companion (pizza, salami, fat cheeses, fried chicken, etc). The Bonarda undergoes the first fermentation in cement tanks while the second fermentation to become a frizzante wine is made in inox tanks. No added sulphites. Less than 3.000 bottles produced yearly.

Coccinea Provincia di Pavia IGT 2015: 100% Croatina coming from a pretty hot vintage giving way to a full bodied red which perfectly reflects the terroir and the vintage with its lively tannins wrapped around a core of dark fruit. No added sulphites. Hand harvested grapes are totally destemmed. The must is left to ferment with the skins in concrete vats for about 15 days with daily pump-overs. Then the wine rests for 30 months until bottling, preceded by a single coarse filtration (10 micron). Before being placed on the market, the wine is left in the bottle for about 10/12 months. Sulphites are never used, neither during vinification nor before bottling. The name Coccinea (accent on the "i") means red scarlet in Latin. 2.500 bottles produced.

FOOD AND WINE PAIRING: Apart from the wine, which is mainly guaranteed by IGT, DOC and DOCG status, there is also a host of good food in the Oltrepò Pavese area. It is home to one of the most famous salames in the world - the superb Salame of Varzi made from coarsely minced pure pork (Varzi is a small village in the Valle Stàffora, in the deep south of Lombardy). Generally speaking the Oltrepò abounds with cold cuts, cheeses, fine sauces just like the Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia and Modena provinces (all located in Emilia) where ... (guess what?) fizzy Gutturnio (a blend of Barbera and Croatina) or famed Lambrusco or fizzy white wines (think of Spermola) are a great pairing.

When it comes to Oltrepò's local treats, just substitute Lambrusco with Bonarda and you are all set! You can't go wrong, but the possible ideal wine pairing list could include something more. Whenever you're having foods like charcuterie that have salt, fat, savory spices and textures that can run the gamut from silky and moist to really, really dry and intense, you've got to look for beverages that are refreshing, that can cleanse the palate.

This means wines that can be chilled, wines that are low in alcohol and high in acid, sometimes wines that are a little bit sweet, and sometimes wines that have a few (or many) bubbles in them. That is the reason why this wine district is packed with bubbles of all kind (full sparklers or frizzante style) made in a wide array of styles (classic method, charmat or bottle re-fermented, either naturally or with must addition) from pas dosè to semi sweet range, displaying any kind of color (white, orange, rosè and red).