

BOFFALORA (Italy, Lombardia, Valtellina)

BACKGROUND: Forty-something Giuseppe Guglielmo grew up in the vineyards, spending there the whole childhood and his teenager years, but like so many kids of parents and grandparents who made wine, he first plied his trade elsewhere. What happened? Agriculture was in deep crises and people were leaving wine villages in Valtellina heading to Milan and some other industrialized places in Lombardia to make money. Giuseppe spent several years as an auto part mechanic and part-time beekeeper, before he was called back to the vineyards in 2002 taking over his father-in-law's vineyards.

Giuseppe and his wife took the wine plunge in 2002, originally selling their grapes to



others. The first wines under their own label came from the 2009 vintage, and here we are just some years later, with the 1st ever export shipping to New York State.

SUCH A TINY ESTATE!: Giuseppe farms a few hectares, including some pre-phylloxera, broken into a patchwork of vineyards in Castione Andevenno (province of Sondrio), just west of the Sassella

zone. This is the heart of the Valtellina valley, in Northern Lombardia by the the border with Switzerland. *“Mine is an artisanal winery of about 7 hectares, of which 3.5 of vineyards, the rest meadows and woodland. I also manage about 40 beehives. I produce 4 different red wines from Chiavennasca grapes, and my vineyards are between 350 and 700 meters above sea levels. I have planted part of them, others are historic vineyards with very old vines.”*

Don't get scared. Chiavennasca is the local name for ... Nebbiolo.

“Starting a new winery from scratch is a huge investment, even for the vinification of just few thousand bottles” Giuseppe underlines. That's why many growers still prefer to sell the grapes to one of the largest and most ubiquitous producers, Nino Negri which, for context, owns or has access to nearly 200 hectares of vineyards.

Giuseppe produces roughly 15.000 bottles per year due to a low yield viticultural approach. That said, beginning from 2009 Giuseppe and his wife Paola have realized their dream to bottle estate wine under their labels.

The viticulture in Valtellina is often described in Italian as “eroica” ... simply meaning that is a pain in the neck cultivating terraced steep vines with no mechanical help. The glorious and unique east/west Valtellina valley, silently carved over the years by the Adda River is not for lazy guys! You need good health and high level of resiliency in order to do the job.

LITTLE INTERVENTION: Boffalora has no official organic certification, but Giuseppe is well beyond the organic protocol. He farms with no chemicals at all (just sulphur and copper) with as little treatments as possible, leaving the rows covered with grass and drying up the bottom of the rows only once a year. Each hectare of vineyard yearly requires 1,200/1,300 hours of work to produce the Umo and Pietrisco wines (for context in the Langhe in Piemonte only 300-400 hours are needed).

“Throughout the years I started working with a more environmentally friendly attitude and this represents a logical vineyard management evolution to me, as I reduced and changed treatments with no problem at all. My vineyards adapted pretty well and are now healthier and stronger”. His bees help him practice integrated pest management and all farming is carried out naturally and, of course, by hand—the vineyards are so steep that he uses a funicular to transport crates of harvested grapes down the slope. Furthermore the bees favor biodiversity for sure.

Asked about his cellar techniques, he states with a smile on his face: *“Techniques? Pretty much easy to explain: I like to use indigenous yeast for all my wines which are*



unfined and unfiltered. Working properly with local Nebbiolo should require none to little wine transferring and pump-over, as this grape easily can be affected by oxidation and I find myself comfortable working with big casks avoiding any kind of small vessels”

The name “Boffalora” is meant to evoke the interplay of Brega winds that swoop up from Lake Como in the morning and the evening Tivano breezes coming down

from the Alps.

Chiavennasca is basically a local clone of the Nebbiolo grape. In Valtellina it makes a lighter framed wine compared to its Piemonte siblings, built more on finesse than power. But what is really striking about Giuseppe’s wines is its energy and perfume. Incredibly fine, there are notes of rose, orange, red berries and tea, the wine’s shape and feel driven by the purity of fruit and silky tannins. More than most other Italian wines, Nebbiolo, demands food to be at its best. A little fat and salt, enhance the texture and bring out the flavours. Boffalora’s production is tiny, just a few thousand bottles, and we are privileged to bring some to NYS.

VALTELLINA VALLEY: The Valtellina valley runs from Ardenno on the West to Tirano on the East. It’s about a 45 kilometer trip from one end to the other. Right in the middle sits the bustling (and largest) town of Sondrio. Given the East/West orientation of the valley, all the vineyards are found on the North side and face the South.

The Southern exposure provides the vineyards long, sunlit days that help ripen fruit that without this perfect orientation would struggle to reach maturity this far North.

Valtellina is located at 46° parallel of North latitude, sheltered by the mountains. To the South, the Alps make very humid Mediterranean currents discharged much of rain on this side. To the North, the Rhaetian Alps protect the valley from cold winds coming from the Arctic regions, making their way thanks to Favonio (Föhn in German, a warm and very dry wind).

These climatic conditions allow the Valtellina territory to be particularly suited to grape growing, despite the mountains, with their steep slopes and steep, make it very difficult.

VITICULTURA EROICA: Italian wine writers and experts usually refer to this area as a fine example of the so called “Viticultura eroica” and the adjective should be not so difficult to understand even for a non Italian speaking person.

For real there is something else that makes these gravelly, stony, shallow soil vineyards special - the truly frightening angle of the slopes on which these grapes grow. I'm not exaggerating when I say that as you make your way up the vineyards, wondering if you should be roped and harnessed, there is an overwhelming feeling that you'll make your way down by falling “off” the mountain. This is a tough place to make wine.

For example, add to the rigors and stresses that come with winemaking on flat terrain, the need to rebuild rock terraces by hand in order to keep from seeing your vines slide off the hillside. The men and women who spend their days nurturing and working in these vineyards deserve to be commended. Without the overwhelming sense of tradition and history, it would be an easy call to instead look for a safe desk job.

THE WINE PYRAMID SYSTEM: This entire East/West expanse has been designated Rosso di Valtellina DOC, and wines from this zone are considered to be at the first quality level in the region. Above Rosso di Valtellina DOC is the next and highest quality level known as Valtellina Superiore DOCG whose wines must come from certain specific areas in the valley. Several of the specific Valtellina Superiore growing areas have been designated as special and have their own names that precede the Valtellina Superiore designation. You can think of these areas as “classified” or the Grand Cru vineyards of Valtellina Superiore: Maroggia, Sassella, Grumello, Inferno and Valgella. Each of these designated vineyard areas have been separately named following the specific wine style that is perceived to come from them.

Just few words on Sassella: the historic and perhaps most famous Cru of Valtellina Superiore extends between the village of Castione Andevenno and the territory west of the provincial town of Sondrio, gathering together only 114 hectares. A steep and sunny terroir, whose name probably derives from the eponymous Holy Mary sanctuary located on scenic cliff of Sassella. Sassella's wines are less powerful and more velvety compared to Grumello and Inferno, yet capable to age gracefully.

THE NEW WAVE: The appellation body of rules requires Nebbiolo varietal (locally called Chiavennasca) minimum at 90%; other non-aromatic red grape varieties coming from the province of Sondrio may be added to the maximum of 10% of the total (namely

Brugnola, Pignola Valtellinese and Rossola). But all this doesn't say much about the new wave movement that affected this valley with a bursting energy that gained more and more consideration by wine writers and lovers. Young and motivated vigneroni sharing the same age, almost a decade ago, rethought Valtellina wines in a more artisanal way, forgetting over extracted wines and turning their back to cellar supposedly magic touches and manipulating tricks.

Giuseppe Guglielmo (Boffalora), Siro Buzzetti (Terrazzi Alti), Alfio Mozzi and moreover

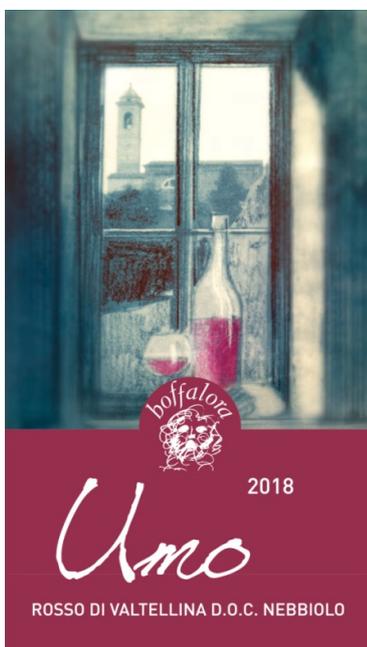


Dirupi estate (managed by Pierpaolo Di Franco and Davide Fasolini) and Walter Menegola, followed more recently by the Barbacan winery. A bunch of guys that easily accepted the risk to produce wines according to what the vintage's features bring on the table and putting aside a preconceived notion of what a bottle of wine should taste in order to please customers.

Back in 2016 Eric Asimov, the famed wine editor at New York Times, wrote an article about Valtellina wines mentioning some young

talents. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/dining/wine-review-valtellina.html?_r=0). Quoting Asimov: “ *By reputation, Valtellinas are wiry, angular wines, but we found a wide variation of styles ranging from lean to rich and round. Not only that, while Valtellina Superiore must be aged at least two years before going to market, and three years if the wine is labeled “riserva,” vintages in our blind tasting ranged from 2012 all the way back to 2004, indicating two things: Some producers may hold bottles even longer before releasing them ...* ”.

THE WINES IMPORTED: Currently Steep Hill imports two wines.



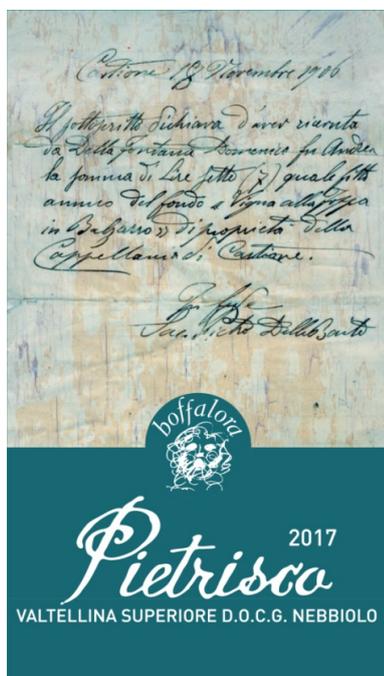
Umo Rosso di Valtellina DOC 2018: 100% hand harvested Nebbiolo (locally called Chiavennasca). Grapes are sourced from different vineyards more sandy than rocky. Umo is fermented with indigenous yeast in stainless steel tanks (no temperature control) and aged for 6 months in used big casks and refined 3 more months in the bottle. Unfined and unfiltered.

An elegant example that has exceptionally bright fruit, freshness and a warmth, but not heaviness. The flavor profile is marked by red cherry, roses, tar and lavender. This wine is medium bodied with lively acidity. Perfect paired with Bresaola or other cured or air dried meats. Here you will find the recipe for a Valtellina tradition, Pizzoccheri (which have nothing to share with pizza. Pizzoccheri are namely the rustic buckwheat and wheat flour noodles originating from

this same area). <http://www.disgracesonthemenu.com/2011/01/pizzoccheri-della-valtellina.html>. It's worth the time and effort, if the food and wine pairing thing is your bag.

Pietrisco Valtellina Superiore DOCG 2017: The Pietrisco is 100% Nebbiolo (locally called Chiavennasca) coming from the oldest plots. Fermented with indigenous yeast in stainless steel tanks and aged for 12 months in used big casks. Unfined and unfiltered.

From soils of sand, silt, and stone (much of it hauled up from the valley floor to



construct the terraces) and harvested in late October/early November, the Nebbiolo/Chiavennasca for Pietrisco is fermented in stainless steel and macerated on its skins for about two weeks. It is aged in large, used oak casks for 12-15 months and then rested in tank and later bottle for about six months before release. Pietrisco is textbook Valtellina Nebbiolo through and through!

There is a subtlety and delicacy about Giuseppe's wines that is thoroughly thought-provoking and exciting. Classic, intense aromas of red cherry, roses, leather and tar. There is a thrilling level of acidity and tannin in this offering that provide it with that alpine featheriness that helps us place these Nebbiolo masterpieces squarely in Valtellina. It is persistent with a growing intensity on the finish. This wine will need air in its youth to open and unfold, which also gives it great longevity in the cellar. No risk keeping this

around for 15+ years under the right conditions. Great with grilled veal, lamb, mild sausages and mature hard cheeses.