

'An Italian Wine Journey' (2nd Edition) 'Terroir-Driven' Versus Autochthonous Grapes

The Second Edition of 'An Italian Wine Journey' at Fish Central in London on 4th July 2018 (an atypically hot British summer day), showcased some very high quality Italian wines from 9 regions of Italy and focused on the themes of 'Terroir-driven' and 'Autochthonous grapes'. This trade-only event was organised by Beacon Italy and GS Wines with the support of Loris Propedo, highly experienced sommelier, wine buyer and London Area Development Manager at Mondial Wine. The intimate yet focused nature of our event provided a relaxed arena for ease of interaction between our invited wine producers and attendees, which included wine buyers, wine journalists and bloggers, consultants, sommeliers, restaurateurs and others in the wine trade.



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Our guests were astonished by the diversity and quality of the wine made from autochthonous grapes. We had some superb examples made from virtually unknown grapes from many regions of Italy, some notable examples by

- Firmino Miotti (Veneto) (Gropello, Pedevenda, Marzemina bianca, Vespaiola and Gruaja);
- Cascina Gnocco (Lombardy) (Mornasca - still and sparkling)
- Podere Riosto (Emilia Romagna) (Vite del Fantini - in a blend), who also presented both still and sparkling Pignoletto
- Tenute Sella (Piedmont) (Vespolina - blended with Nebbiolo, Erbaluce blended with Riesling)

Other notable wines from less well known autochthonous grapes include Maggi's 'Buttafuoco Storico' which has a magical blend of Barbera, Croatina and Uva Rara from Lombardy and Baldassarri's refreshing Grechetto, from Umbria. To add to this, we also had wines made from Barbarossa, Cagnulari, Solaris, Pignolo.

More well-known native grape varieties also featured, in some beautifully crafted wines by Orlandini, who presented elegant Tuscan Sangiovese wines aged 14 years'

and older; La Neula, who showed off some delightful youthful Sardinian Vermentino and Cannonau; Briziarelli's mellow Sagrantino di Monetfalco (Umbria).

The wealth of autochthonous grapes in Italy remains a vast, tantalizing, but precarious resource. For example, Cascina Gnocco found an unusual grape variety growing in a corner of their vineyard. They took it to Milan University who classified it as Mornasca, which was thought to be extinct! The potential of this near extinct grape has been realised - in the form of some wonderful still and sparkling red wines that age beautifully.

In addition to the autochthonous varieties, we had on display a superb range of Franciacorta wines from Vigna Cenci La Boscaiola in Lombardy: made using the same method as Champagne. Vigna Cenci's wines have lots of very soft bubbles, are smooth and silky and fully flavoured, and have a delicious fresh finish. Franciacorta is a good example of the effect of terroir. The morain hills on Franciacorta provide a soil base with some similarities to that of the Champagne region in France. With an unique warmer microclimate, the grapes have a slightly higher sugar content and ripen perfectly, making the possibility of higher alcohol, richer 'Champagne-style' wines (i.e. Franciacorta).



Masterclass 'The Allure of Autochthonous Grapes of Italy' led by Loris Propedo. Mondial Wine

In our masterclasses, we explored the way forward for Italian wine makers in promoting the use of autochthonous grapes versus harnessing the concept of 'terroir-driven' wines. We concluded that it is not easy to succeed in either approach! To make headway with promoting a 'terroir', you need a lot of support from the winemakers, the local consortia, the Italian Trade Agencies to bring the wine area to the public's attention. To promote wines made from a specific unusual grape variety, you probably need a high-profile sponsor, such as a prominent wine importer, group of important hotels/restaurants and perhaps wine shops to persuade the general public to try them. However, commercial difficulties aside, as we have seen with previously unappreciated wines such as Prosecco (based on terroir) and Pecorino (almost extinct grape variety), given the huge resource of autochthonous grapes and unique terroirs, we can look forward to exciting new wines from Italy!



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