

Fonterenza

Interview

This interview with Francesca Padovani took place on the streets of Chicago in April 2011.

Tell us about *Fonterenza*.

Fonterenza is a rather young estate that my twin sister Margarita and I started in 1997. My parents have owned the farm we currently live on since the 70's, and a piece of land my mother had purchased over the years eventually became our vineyards. We moved from Milan to Tuscany in 1997, planted the first vines in 1999, then again in 2002 and the last bit was planted in 2005. Our land comprises of 4 hectares of vines (3.5 Sangiovese and .5 of Cabernet Sauvignon), as well as 7 hectares of olive groves.

In the early years we had to build the estate from the ground up and plant all the vines so the work was split equally but at this point Margarita's responsibilities are in the vines and I am responsible for sales. We do everything in the cellar together.

We currently make five cuvées: a Sangiovese rosé which we've been making for 5 years now, a younger Sangiovese from Brunello and Santasimo classified grapes, the *Rosso de Montalcino* and a Cabernet Sauvignon cuvée that are both aged 20 months in barrel and 8 months in bottle before release, as well as a Brunello that we release after five years.

I've wanted to make a white wine for a long time and we recently discovered a very old parcel of Trebbiano and Malvasia not too far from our home which we vinified last year for the first time. We only made 3 barriques and don't know if we'll be able to sell the wine in the future but I hope so.

What made you want to start the estate?

Our farm is located in Montalcino which is very well located and also quite known for quality wine. Margarita had moved there before me and was working at other estates to support herself. She has a green thumb and is a true lover of nature so the idea was originally hers. Everything happened very organically; we weren't exactly sure of what we were doing at the beginning but step by step, things started taking shape. It's still very much a work in progress.

What's the work in the vines like?

We approach every vintage differently based on its characteristics.

From the beginning we decided we didn't want to work with pesticides or chemicals. We're certified organic and have been incorporating elements of biodynamic agriculture in the vineyards over the last three years.

What about in the cellar?

Because we grow grapes naturally, our goal in the cellar is simply to transform natural fruit into honest wine; what I mean by that is a wine that is closely linked to the vintage, the terroir and to us.

Like in the vineyards, we don't have a systematic approach to the winemaking, but we tend to like long macerations and barrel aging for the Sangiovese because we feel our wines truly benefit from time in the cellar. We use mostly 20 hectoliter Slovenian barrels.

How do you feel about your DOC?

We are currently the only appellation in Italy requiring that the wine be bottled with a 100% of a single varietal, in our case Sangiovese, and people with power are trying to change the rules so they can blend other varietals into their wines.

We are fighting against this because a DOC should be linked to tradition and should guarantee you are getting a product that is unique to where it was produced and that can't be found elsewhere.

What's your take on the whole "natural wine" debate?

I believe in natural wine because I believe this is going to make a better wine. I personally refer to myself as a natural wine producer. I don't like to say "organic" or "biodynamic" because I find these terms are often misleading. At least when I say I make natural wine, people more or less have a grasp of what I mean by that. I know it's difficult to define because many natural wine producers work very differently, but there is definitely a synergy and a like-mindedness that can be tasted in these wines.

What do you like to drink?

Everyday I try different wines. I meet a lot of producers and get to exchange bottles so I'm always discovering something new.

I'm a big fan of Loire wines: for me there is a real charm in all the different varietals available and and numerous expressions of terroir.