

La Biancara-Angiolino Maule

La Biancara di Angiolino Maule in Gambellara.



Angiolino, Francesco and Alessandro Maule.

Profile

What force of nature brought Angiolino Maule to the vines? On meeting him, you would swear he was born to it, that he breathes it, that the vineyard is deeply a part of his soul. A man of true conviction in viticulture and viniculture, Angiolino actually started his working life as a *pizzaiolo*, or pizza maker, of some renown in Italy. But the earth and the vines were calling him all the while. Through his hard work and sterling reputation, Angiolino was able to save enough money to start his winery. He chose Gambellara and, principally, the Garganega grape to make his magical music in a glass.

Gambellara is ostensibly the extension of the Soave foothills in Veneto into the adjoining province of Vicenza where the wine changes its name, but not its general composition. The principal white grape is Garganega backed up with small amounts of Trebbiano. These hills are volcanic in origin, and have rich, dark mineral soils with good amounts of fine clay. They are south facing slopes that are protected from the blasts of Alpine northern winds by the southern Dolomites. The altitude here is between 150 to 250 meters.

Angiolino's estate, in the hamlet of Biancara, now covers about 9 HA. For more than 16 years now,

he has plowed in his vines and not used any soil treatments, chemical or otherwise. Using biodynamic viticultural practices, Angiolino has created an organic, living soil and ecosystem for benefiting the health of the vines and their resistance to any form of malady. He is unwavering in his belief that great wines are the result of healthy, beautiful, handpicked fruit, and the only way to achieve this is through natural processes.

Furthermore, he believes that the work in the cellar -- vinification, aging and bottling -- must be consistent with the work in the vines and involve no additives that compromise the natural fruit material, for better or worse. The vinifications are conducted without temperature control, the addition of sulfur, enzymes or yeast and without the use of fining or filtration. Annually the production is between 35 to 45K bottles.

"The wine is the fruit of the earth transformed by mankind; it is the oldest natural beverage known to us. The quality of a wine is that which is imparted by the vineyard; it is indispensable to return to a viticulture and viniculture without chemicals in order to make wines that are expressive of their origins, unique and inimitable and that rise above the standardization and homogeneity that defines the majority of wines commercially available today."

-Angiolino Maule.

Visits

This visit at La Biancara took place in November, 2011.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Alex Finberg.

When we arrived to la Biancara, we were a little shocked to see one of the Maule dogs hanging out

on the roof.



Angiolino was off harvesting his olives, which he uses to make oil for personal consumption, so his son Francesco gave us a tour of the vines.



With the exception of a few rows, every vine of the estate has been planted by Angiolino over the years in [Guyot](#) as opposed to Soave traditional [Pergola](#). When I asked why, Francesco answered: "*quality*". While Pergola vine tending is used in hotter climates to protect grapes from the sun, Francesco explained that in the case of Garganega, the main grape grown at the estate, the grape does not benefit in any way from this type of vine tending, and growers hide behind this excuse because Pergola vines are much more productive, resulting in higher yields.



For those who don't know, Angiolino is the founder of [Vinnatur](#), what I consider to be the most forward thinking and progressive association dedicated to "natural wine". Vinnatur is more than a group of vigneroni working in the same way: it's an institution dedicated to exploration, research

and analysis of what goes on in the vineyards -and most importantly in the soil- in order to find reliable and proven methods to work as naturally as possible. Francesco told us their ultimate goal is to eliminate mildew and oidium in order to stop using copper and sulphur treatments, which he and his father feel are the final step to producing 100% natural wines.



Francesco showed us a small plot of six rows that is funded by Vinnatur; in each row a different technique is used (he didn't elaborate further) in order to observe the results and report back to a laboratory in hopes of finding an answer. While they're still searching, one thing is certain: this answer lies in the soil.

Francesco explained that vines have only suffered from chronic illness like mildew and oidium since the beginning of chemical warfare, the very same technology that ultimately led to the creation of all chemical products used in industrial agriculture today. In just 70 years, the soils have completely shifted in their composition, and while Angiolino and Vinnatur hope to find out why and rectify this, he acknowledges that even if they do, we have many generations of work ahead of us to bring the soil back to its' original state.

Francesco then showed us their new cellar at the very top of a beautiful hill surrounded by the family's vineyards. The installation is completely solar powered, and is much more spacious than the one currently used. They also plan to build a tasting room and a kitchen for parties, and maybe have the top floor converted to a bed and breakfast. 2012 will be the first vintage produced here.

Well, that's not entirely true, as the Maule's have begun using a specifically designed open air room to hang the grapes that will become this vintage's Recioto.



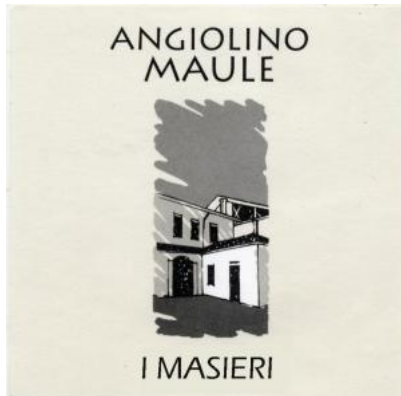
Francesco says that this room is much better than the one they were currently using, because the elevation provides a more steady and constant wind which greatly benefits the drying of the grapes.

We ended our visit by tasting some 2011 barrel samples, currently bottled releases and a special treat no one knew existed:



Angiolino loves Chenin Blanc and planted 3 rows of it for fun. It was a very unique expression of the variety to say the least.

Wines



"I Masieri" Bianco and Rosso:

The white is made from the grapes of the second pass in the vineyard (the first being the grapes selected for the other cuvees) and from the less evocative vineyard sites. It is vinified in stainless steel with no skin contact and bottled in May or June of the following year with a minimal amount of sulfites added before bottling to stabilize the wine for travel.

The red is made from his own grapes and some purchased grapes (Angiolino is active in the practices used in the source material's vineyards) and is a blend of varying amount of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Lagrein depending on the year. Detailed percentages can be found on the back of the bottle. The vinifications are done in open wooden vats with punching down 3-4 times a day for 12-15 days and 10 more days of skin contact before the initial racking. The wine is aged partly in stainless and in large wooden barrels. It is assembled in February and bottled early to capture the fruit and its easy-drinking style.



Sassaia:

White wine made of 80% Garganega and 20% Trebbiano from better vineyard sites more rich in minerals. The fermentation in stainless steel without temperature control that normally peaks at 22-26 degrees F. It is bottled in April/May of the following year without fining or filtration. Often, part of the bottling is done without the addition of any sulfur (the wine we normally choose) and another bottling with a minimal dose of sulfites.



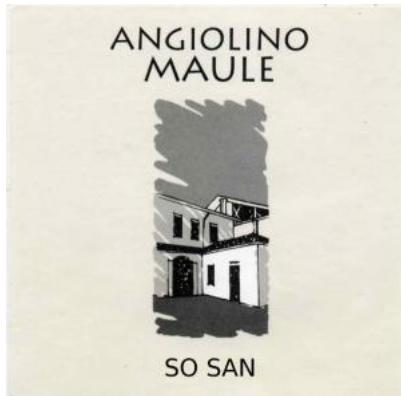
Pico:

Pure Garganega which is heavily selected on harvest and begins its fermentations in open vats without additions or temperature control for 2-4 days. It finishes its fermentation in large 1500ltr barrels (none new) for 12 months. It is bottled without fining or filtration.



Recioto di Gambellara:

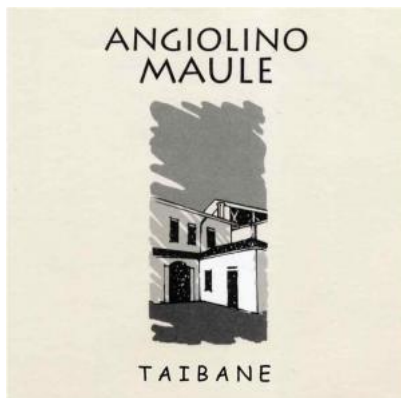
Angiolino's pride and joy. A desert wine made from dessicated Garganega grapes. The fresh grapes are hung vertically on large moveable screens and exposed to the drying winds until the month of December. (In most cases, other winemakers use flat horizontal plastic caskets which do not allow for the grapes to be free of surface contact with the plastic. Angiolino does not agree with this technique.) The grapes normally reach a potential of 33 to 37 degrees and are fermented on their skins in open vats for around 20 days in a way that reinforces the natural microbial flora. (Angiolino has tried using buried amphorae in the past, but has not been completely satisfied with the results.) At this time the natural yeasts on the skins of the grapes are less numerous and viable because of the winter cold. So Angiolino takes a small part of the must to a warmer place, the yeasts activate and he then adds it back to the larger mass of must. After pressing, the wine goes into 1500ltr barrels for 8-9 months and the alcoholic fermentations stop between 14-16 degrees. Three years after the harvest, it is put in bottle.



"So San":

The vines are planted on very calcareous & clay soil with white rocks of marine sedimentary origin.

After the harvest (early September), the grapes are crushed and fermented with the skins for approximately 15 days, then the wine is drawn off and aged for 18 months in 1500 liter casks.



"Taibane":

Pure Garganega late harvested in late November or early December directly in Taibane. Normally a good part of the berries are botrytized with aromas of overripe fruit. Spontaneous fermentation in old casks for about three months, where it remains with the lees for three years.

The wine is bottled without any clarification or stabilization treatments. This wine is only produced in more favorable years with less humidity in the months of October and November; this way the grapes remain healthy and intact on the vine. So far this wine has only been produced in 1991, 1996, 1999 and 2000.