

La Stoppa

Barbera, Bonarda and Malvasia from La Stoppa.



Elena Pantaleoni.



Giulio Armani.

Profile

La Stoppa is a 50 hectare property located in North-West Emilia-Romagna. Founded in the late 19th century by a wealthy lawyer named Gian-Marco Ageno, the estate is currently run by Elena Pantaleoni and head vignaiolo Giulio Armani. 32 hectares of vines are planted in Barbera and Bonarda for red, as well as a small amount of Malvasia Candia, Ortrugo and Trebbiano for whites. Today, the wines produced from La Stoppa are typically Emilia, but this wasn't always the case...

Moving forward occasionally means taking a step back, and in 1996 Elena and Giulio decided to replant the entirety of their estate in Barbera and Bonarda. Interestingly, the prior owner had taken post-phylloxera re-planting as an opportunity to experiment with noble grapes from around the world which, among others, included Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Tokay and Pinot Gris. Elena's father purchased the estate in 1973, and for 20 years these varieties were vinified on their own. But after much reflection, it was decided that these grapes ripened too early and were not resistant enough to the region's hot climate. It was all Barbera and Bonarda from there.

The soils consist of heavy clay, and the estate has been worked organically since the early 90's (certified in 2008). A minimal intervention approach is taken in the cellar: the wines ferment off of their native yeasts and nothing is ever added or subtracted from the juice. Sulfur is never added during vinification, only in small doses at bottling. Because of the region's warm climate, Giulio prefers long skin contact to extract as much as possible. Stainless steel, concrete and wooden tanks are used for fermentation, and small and large oak barrels are used for aging.

Interview

This interview with Elena Pantaleoni took place at L'Herbe Rouge in February, 2013.

Tell us about La Stoppa.

La Stoppa is located in North-West Emilia-Romagna, and was founded at the end of the 19th century by a lawyer from Genova named Gian-Carlo Ageno. He was the first to give value to this land by planting vineyards. In the the 1920's, he had to replant because of phylloxera, so the oldest vineyards we have are from this period. In the aftermath, Mr. Ageno planted many varieties as an experiment to see what was suited for the area.

In 1973, my father -who worked his entire life as a printer- purchased the estate. During the war, he was based in the country side and would pass by the vineyards on his bicycle daily. It was his dream to buy La Stoppa, and when he was finally able to afford it, he made it come true. I personally started working here in 1991.

For our first 20 years of ownership, we vinified every vineyard and grape variety separately. But in 1996, we decided to eliminate most of the early ripening grapes (Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Tokay, Pinot Gris, Grechetto...) as they are not exactly suited for our hot climate. Instead, we focused on replanting Barbera, Bonarda and Malvasia, all local grapes.

We are about 250 m from the sea, working mainly on clay soils. The majority of our production consists of red wines produced with Barbera and Bonarda. We are a rather large estate: 32 hectares of vines and 28 of forest. We make one dry white wine, *Ageno*. We also make a few sweet whites.

Could you elaborate on how the decision to replant local varieties was taken?

For many years, we tried our best to make, for example, a great Pinot Noir. We were always putting our work into question, and eventually came to the conclusion that even if we produced a great Pinot Noir, even if it was the best Pinot Noir in the world, it would still be a copy of something that is already available on the market. This in turn made us realize that these grapes weren't suitable for our place. They ripen too early, as it is very warm here.

Before you made this decision, how much of the estate was already planted in Barbera and Bonarda?

About 50%.

Were you personally satisfied with the Pinot Noirs, Sauvignon Blancs and Cabernet Sauvignons you were producing?

Some vintages, very much. But if you want to be an honest winemaker, it's very dangerous to try making wines based on your personal taste. I think it's our job to make a wine from a place, not to force something based on personal taste. If I really want to drink great Pinot Noir, I'll buy some from Burgundy.

What's the work in the vines like?

We have been certified organic since 2008, but have been working this way since the early 90's. Most of the work is done by hand.

I inherited this estate from my father, and I think one of my nieces and nephews will probably take over. Therefore I feel like a guardian of this place, and I want to preserve and maintain its sanctity. I know the vineyards can last much longer than I ever will!

And in the cellar?

When we started, we were using indigenous yeasts to ferment the wines and minimal intervention in the cellar. There was however a 10 year period in the 80's where we experimented with selected yeasts. But we had always wanted to work traditionally, so this did not last.

We do long skin macerations, because we are in a warm area and want to extract as much as possible. We never add sulfur during vinification. We use stainless steel, cement and wooden tanks for fermentation; big and small barrels are used for aging. The wines need slow and natural oxygenation.

How do you feel about the D.O.C system?

All of our wines are IGT. I don't believe that the D.O.C valorizes place, at least not in our region. We have the right to use 18 different grapes in our DOC (Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay...), and can make still, sparkling, sweet...

The panel who judges the wines is composed solely of winemakers for the region's biggest cooperatives. They don't care about tradition and history; they are more concerned by what the market needs. For example, a lot of Barbera/Bonarda based wines are de-acidified and made slightly sweet.

How do you feel about the ongoing "natural wine" debate?

Personally, I like to say: "*I make wine*". That is what we do. Wine has always been made this way: even as little as 50 years ago, all the great wines of Italy were "natural" simply by being rooted in tradition. I'm astonished how things changed so much, so fast. People were so quick to forget. I'm talking for us old world producers; if I were in Chile or the United States, maybe I would think differently. But in the old world, wine has always related to a sense of place.

Today, young people who are discovering wine for the first time need a little bit of a helping hand to understand this. So I understand why some choose to use the term "natural wine". Maybe for some, it helps them grasp the concept of artisanal vs industrial. But maybe we should be taking things further. For example, I am not against listing all the ingredients like all other food products. This way people would be more aware of what they are consuming.

I laugh when people argue that no wine is natural because it requires the intervention of man to be produced. Of course! But most small, independent estates take an industrial approach to making wine! In the end, it's simply an approach: you are not following the taste of the market or your own personal tastes, you are making the wine that the place and the vintage gives you.

Do you think people are becoming more receptive of this approach?

I think it is becoming easier to sell wines solely off the fact that they are full of personality and that they express something more than a low price point.

What do you like to drink?

I like lighter, more acidic white from more Northern climates. I'm a big fan of older wine. I find that a 20 or 30 year old bottle can be moving.

Visits

This visit to La Stoppa took place in November, 2012.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Jake Halper.

From Parma, we drove off to Rivergaro to visit Elena Pantaleoni and Giulio Armani of La Stoppa. For many of you, this estate needs no introduction, as the wines have been available in the U.S for many years. What I CAN say is that we are extremely happy to be their new national importer (with the exception of Massachusetts and Oregon), and welcome them to the Louis/Dressner family.

La Stoppa sits on top of a hill, and consists of medieval living quarter and cellar surrounded by 30 hectares of vines.







We started the visit with a lunch/tasting combo. Elena and guest-star [Arianna Occhipinti](#) had just landed THAT DAY from a trip to Montreal (where they work with [Oenopole](#)), and told us about dancing all night at a Champagne party where Biz Markie was DJing. Because I know you're not going to believe me (partly because I enjoy keeping the Dressner tradition of making stuff up alive and well), here is proof that it actually happened.



Champagne Cold Chillin'?

UNE SOIRÉE SIGNÉE:
GRUMMAN '78 X VINNOVATION

DIMANCHE LE 4 NOVEMBRE 8:00PM

FEATURING DJ BIZ MARKIE, BDT, GOODVIBES & LOVEZONE CREW

GRUMMAN HQ (630 DE COURCELLE)

THE CHAMPAGNE LIST

FLEURYGEORGES.LAVALMARIE.COURTINH.BILLIOT
TARLANTLAHERTE.FRERESGLY.OURIET
AGRAPARTJACQUES.LASSAIGNEPASCAL.DOQUET
PHILIPPONMATABERECHECEDRIC. BOUCHARD
BENOIT.LAHAYEVOUETTE.ET.SORBEEKRUG
PIERRE.GIMMONETJACQUES.SELOSSESBEAUFORT
CHARTOONE.TAILLETFRANCK.PASCALBARNAUT

\$35 ADMISSION + BOUFFE

What, no [Boulard](#)?

At lunch, we tried the current releases of *Ageno* and all the reds, including some back vintages of of the *Barbera della Stoppa*. The young vine rosso and frizzante have been renamed *Trebbiolo* this year. The name comes from the vines' proximity to the Trebbia river, and Elena admitted that the last thing she expected was everyone to keep asking her if the wine is a blend of Trebbiano and Nebbiolo. This has apparently been happening A LOT, which could be avoided if people realized:

1. La Stoppa is located in Emilia-Romagna, were neither Trebbiano or Nebbiolo is planted.
2. How disgusting that blend would be and how no one in their right mind would ever produce it.

After lunch, it was time to visit some surrounding vineyard sites with Giulio.





Almost all of the estate's 30 h surround the living quarters and cellar. The vines are planted 75% in Barbera/Bornada and 25% in Malvasia at 200m elevation; these are the traditional grapes of this region, but have only been grown here since as a whole since 1995. You see, the viticultural history of the estate is a bit topsy-turvy...

Over a hundred years ago, a wealthy lawyer named Ageno owned the property and decided to plant -along with the local Barbera and Bornada grapes-, 15 hectares of "noble" varietals: Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Tokai, etc... The idea, of course, was to emulate Bordeaux, Burgundy and Sancerre (you can see photos of some of these old labels on

the [home page of their official website](#) that are actually bottled as "Bordeaux").

In 1973, Elena's father bought the estate and continued making wine from these grapes. Giulio Armani took over as head vignaiolo in 1980 and for 15 years, tried his best to produce quality wines from these grapes: he read every book on viticulture and oenology he could get his hands on and followed Sancerre and Bordeaux "recipes" to the best of his ability.

But Giulio is a smart man and a thinker, and the decade plus of trying to crack the code of his vines finally led to a simple but life-altering realization: you just can't make Burgundy or Sancerre in Emilia-Romagna, a very hot region where grapes often end up being high in alcohol and low in acidity.

"Every year, I would see the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes completely burnt from the sun. They weren't meant to be here. We understood we had to make a wine of terroir."

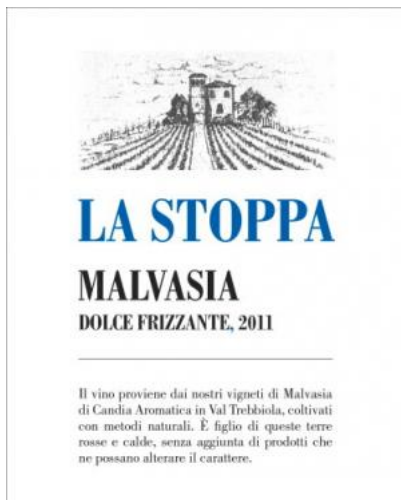
So in 1995, Giulio and Elena decided to return to tradition and replant the local red grapes Barbera and Bornada, and well as Malvasia for white. And lo and behold, this instantly solved their acidity problem!

"The secret to making good red wine in this area is Barbera, which has very high acidity and thrives in this climate. It is needed to balance the wines."

Though the estate had globally been hands off with viticulture and winemaking, there was a period in the 80's where Giulio experimented with conventional viticulture and selected yeasts. The replanting of the region's traditional grapes, however, also meant re-evaluating the work in the vineyard, and a shift was immediately made to organic viticulture. These ideas extended to the cellar, where Giulio started intentionally practicing spontaneous fermentations and eliminating any rectification/manipulation. Today, the wines being produced by La Stoppa are undoubtedly Emilian

And that's a cool story.

Wines



IGt Emilia "Malvasia Dolce"

Soil: Limestone and clay, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Malvasia di Candia Aromatica

Vinification: Natural alcohol degree of 6.5 in autoclave and bottled under pressure.



AGENO

2008

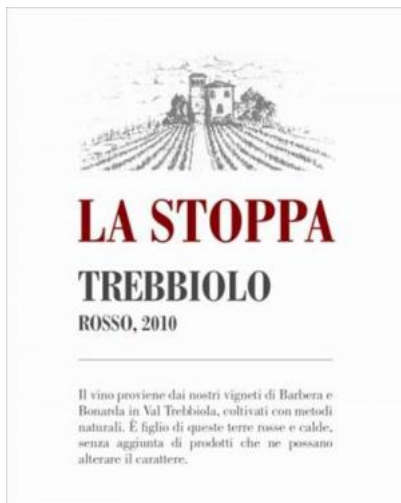
LA STOPPA

IGT Emilia "Ageno"

Soil: Limestone and clay, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Malvasia di Candia Aromatica (60%), Ortrugo and Trebbiano (40%)

Vinification: 30 day skin maceration, aged half in stainless steel, half in barrel.



IGT Emilia "Trebbiolo Rosso"

Soil: Limestone and clay, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Barbera (60%), Bonarda (40%)

Vinification: Stainless steel fermenting and aging of young vines.

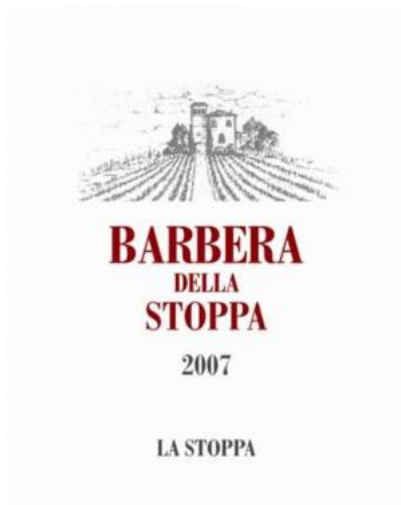


IGT Emilia "Trebbiolo Frizante"

Soil: Lime and clay on stone soils, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Barbera (60%), Bonarda (40%)

Vinification: Same as grapes used in the Trebbiolo Rosso, but fermented in autolave to capture carbon dioxide. Bottled under pressure.



IGT Emilia "Barbera della Stoppa"

Soil: Limestone and clay, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Barbera

Age of vines: 25-40

Vinification: Fermented and aged in barrique for one year, then aged in bottle 2 years before release.



IGT Emilia "Vigne della Volta"

Soil: Limestone and clay, with iron and galet subsoils.

Grape: Malvasia di Candia Aromatico (95%), Moscato (5%)

Vinification: Harvested from the estate's oldest vines. Grapes are aged for a few months, then

pressed.