

La Stoppa

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" varieties: 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.