

Chinati Vergano

Interview

This interview with Mauro Vergano stems from a series of emails in November 2010.

You used to be a chemist before you made wine right?

Exactly. After earning a degree in Chemistry, I started with a chemical company where I worked for about 15 years. This period of work was particularly useful for me: firstly, because I learned how to use certain instruments and equipment, but also to experiment with my recipes.

Secondly, because the company produced substances used in the "flavors and fragrances" sector I was able to practice on my aromatic blends for years; especially to "train" my nose to recognize all the nuances of fragrances.

I must say, however, that ever since I began studying Chemistry I have held a great interest in the world of wines. In fact, once I finished my degree in Chemistry I did a Master's Degree in oenology and grape-growing at one of the most prestigious institutes in the country. This allowed me to bring together my passion for wine and my passion for aromas and fragrances.

Furthermore, I mustn't forget the notions that my father, a pharmacist, and my uncle, a producer of wines and vermouth, handed down to me. In particular my uncle who in his old-age guided me through my first experiences.

At the end of the 70s I started my first trials to make *Chinato*. For years preparing *Chinato* had been a hobby for me: I made it for friends and relatives. Naturally, as the years went by my experience in mixing herbs and spices grew.

When I stopped working in the chemical industry, the idea of transforming my passion from just a hobby into a real job grew on me more and more. It took me about three years, but finally in early 2003 the first bottles of *Chinato* were proudly displayed on the shelves of my laboratory.

Now that more than 7 years have passed, I must say I am really happy with the choice I made. I acknowledge that it has been hard work and risky, but I am aware that my work has been appreciated and enjoyed success well beyond anything I could have dreamed of. My products are highly respected and that makes me very proud and encourages me to improve on them further and to create new products, too.

Your *Chinato* is very classic while your *Americano* is a more modern, unique expression of this style of wine. What was the inspiration for the *Americano*? How do you feel about classicism versus modernism in wine?

I'm not sure if I should define the *Americano* as a modern product and the *Chinato* as a classic one. All of my products are based on the tradition of aromatized wines which started in Piedmont at the end of the 1700s and which has been carried on by larger and smaller producers ever since.

I think that we can say that the *Chinato* is a more classic product because it reconnects with the

tradition of the Barolo Chinati; that said, the *Americano* also comes from the ancient tradition of Vermouth and has been a typical Piedmontese aperitif for more than a century.

All of my products have ancient origins, but they are not simply repetitions or copies of old products from more than 100 years ago; rather they are a re-elaboration that is born of the use of different wines (like Grignolino in the *Americano*) and mixtures of herbs that are no longer what they were in the past (nowadays nearly all herbs are cultivated and no longer grow wild).

Perhaps this is the difference: every product is the synthesis of traditional recipes that are interpreted with the tastes and imagination of today's producers.

Are the bitters you use a secret recipe?

They are secret in part because the ingredients used to aromatize wines are always more or less the same. Surely the quantities are secret; this is probably the only true secret to my products.

The truth is that my products are the result of re-elaboration and modification of old recipes. Why re-elaborate them? Simply because, with a bit of ambition, I have wanted to modify them and further adapt them to my taste and to the wines that I have chosen as my base wines.

You source your grapes from winemakers many would consider as "natural wine" producers. What's your take on the ongoing debate on natural wine?

In my opinion, natural wine is actually a wine that is as "simple" as possible.

"Simple" because it doesn't contain any of the elements that, firstly in the vineyard and then in the cellar, would make it heavier and more complicated.

"Simple" because its fragrance and taste are different from the ones that technologically and scientifically cutting-edge growing and wine-making tend to standardize.

"Simple" because it changes from area to area, from vine-type to vine-type, from year to year and from producer to producer.

"Simple" because it respects the environment and is healthier for those who drink it.

"Simple" because drinking natural wines is a more moving experience: they are full of flavors and fragrances, more easily digested and never "heavy".

"Simple" because natural wine expresses itself more freely, more finely. It is more alive, it has a stronger bond to the area it comes from and of which it is the expression.

And in conclusion,

"Not simple" because in order to choose a natural wine, you have to go beyond a mere tasting; you have to get into how the individual producer actually works. I must say that it has been easy for me to work side-by-side with them because I have been fortunate to meet, get to know and appreciate the wine-makers first and the wines second. Once you have taken that step there is no turning back.□