

Maria Ernesta Berucci

Profile

Maria Ernesta Berucci is a young woman from the gorgeous Hernican town of Piglio, about an hour southeast of Rome at the foot of the Apennine mountains. Vines have always been in her father's family, the Massimi Berucci, and at one time her father Manfredi owned as much as 30 hectares. Manfredi was the head of the Cantina Cooperativa di Piglio from the early 60's up until 1972. In 2004, he created a new entity called Emme and almost all of the family vines transferred to this group with the exception of a beautiful, 1.5 hectare vineyard of more than 50-year-old vines, grown in pergola adjacent to their home in the countryside of Colli Santi (holy hills).

In 2009, Maria and her brother decided it was time to revive the family's roots and produced a wine from this vineyard site called *l'Onda* (the wave) as it announced the next wave of winemakers in the Massimi family. Slowly they have been recuperating some of the family's historic parcels and renting other quality sites. Berucci is looking especially for old vines planted in *Cesanese di Affile*, a strain which produces a noticeably smaller, less compact bunch than the vine known as *Cesanese Comune*. They now are working 2.5 hectares of vines.

The Berrucis also run an agriturismo in the heart of Piglio's medieval old city. Maria's mother, who is from Montenegro, is the chef and her food is delicious. Her father, a true country poet and raconteur, entertains guests with stories of local history, folklore and the vines. His knowledge of the area and it's viticultural history is remarkable.

The Cesanese del Piglio DOC was conferred in 1973 and it is considered one of the legendary grapes of central Italy capable of making very tasty long-lived and versatile wines. It was elevated to DOCG status more recently. The soils in the delineated area are rocky limestone with a good deal of clay. Most vineyards are on gently rising hilltops. And most all the old vines are trained in pergola.

Maria, with the help of her fiancé Giminiano Montecchi, is converting all the vineyards to organics and together they are practicing an agro-homeopathy akin to biodynamics. The purpose is to allow the vines to ward off any maladies themselves. They had been using space at the local cooperative to vinify the wines, but have started construction on their own winery this year.

The *Bianco* is a blend of 70% Passerina and 30% Trebbiano, bottled as IGT Passerina del Frusinate in 2015 (previously a *Vino da Tavola*) and is produced with a very short skin contact in stainless tanks, native yeast, zero sulfur and unfiltered.

The *Rosso* is a blend of the two local strains of the indigenous Cesanese grape previously mentioned, both vinified and aged 8 months in Slavonian oak barrels. It is also bottled as IGT Rosso del Frusinate. The label art for the Bianco and Rosso feature watercolor sketches of family friend Antonietta Raphael Mafai, who created them for a exhibit curated by Manfredi in the early 70's.

L'Onda is Maria Ernesta's Cesanese del Piglio DOCG. It is aged for 18 months in neutral barriques and then aged further in bottle before release. About 1300 bottles are produced annually.

In 2015, a foot-trodden, open-vat fermentation of Cesanese, *Mola da Piedi*, came from an exceptional parcel of old vines that is reached only by footpath, hence its name. It was aged in glass demijohns

in the old tradition. Only 180 bottles were made!