

Cà de Noci

Natural Reggiano Wines from Cà de Noci.



Alberto Masini. Photo by Alex Finberg.



Giovanni Masini. Photo by Alex Finberg.

Profile

Cà de Noci was established in 1993 by the brothers Giovanni and Alberto Masini on their family's estate near Reggio Emilia. For more than thirty years, the family has had a walnut forest on the property (hence the name "Walnut Farm"). In the 700's the province of Emilia Romagna was known to have over 100 different grape varieties. The Masinis wanted to plant local traditional grapes that were slowly disappearing, among them the Spergola, Malbo Gentile and Montericco grapes.

The vines are planted in 5 hectares of rocky limestone soil along the Crostolo river. The dryness, and general poorness of the soils help give these grapes all their powerful flavor and minerality. All the vines were planted in the 90's and, therefore are fairly young. They are cultivated using certified organic methods and only minimal treatments of natural copper sulfate and decoctions from plant or animal sources are used.

The grapes are hand-harvested in small caskets at maximum ripeness, with healthy skins, then destemmed and left in vats in the cool outside air overnight for extraction. The caps are punched down in the morning and the maceration on the skins continues for a long period, for some wines more than a week. The grapes are then pressed on a manual press and then racked into wood barrels or neutral vats. The wines are aged without filtration or fining.

The Spergola grape, due to its high acid levels, has always had a reputation as fine material for sparkling wine. For many years it was considered a type of Sauvignon, but has now been genetically proven to be a grape variety of its own. The Masinis make two distinct wines that are 100% Spergola: First, there is a metodo tradizionale sparkling wine called *Riserva dei Fratelli*, which is refermented in bottle using only the lees of the wine and has no dosage. The second wine, *Quercirole*, is a natural refermentation in bottle to give a *frizzante* style. It is unfiltered so may it throw sediment.

Another white wine, *Nottediluna*, is made in small quantities using Malvasia Candia, Moscato Giallo and Spergola with extended skin contact of 5 days and aged in large wooden barrels, or *botti*.

The *Sottobosco* is a wine from three red grapes: Lambrusco Grasparossa, Lambrusco Maestri and Malbo Gentile, distinctive grapes of the Emilia Romagna region. The grapes are macerated for 10 days on their skins. It is also a natural refermentation in bottle to produce a dry, *frizzante* wine, and is unfiltered. Because they are not in one of the delineated zones for DOC Lambrusco, the wine is simply vino da tavola. Like the *La Querciola*, the *Sottobosco* is unfiltered and may have some sediment.

Both wines should be served at cellar temperature (56 degrees F) and poured somewhat gently. Enjoy these with a range of dishes, but fatty meats and dry sausages are winners.

Interview

This interview with Alberto Masini took place during Vini di Vignaioli in Fornovo in November, 2011. It was conducted by Kevin Mckenna and translated by Pietro Straccia.

Tell us about Cà de Noci's history.

We started eighteen years ago, in 1993. At the time, the only grape planted in our area was Lambrusco, which was being produced mainly by large, commercial wineries. Mass produced

Lambrusco! When we decided we wanted to work under an artisan model, we weren't quite sure what was possible or not, because other varietals had been abolished from our region's vineyards.

Ten years ago we started to replant Lambrusco, but more importantly we began planting other native varietals that had been abandoned throughout the years: Spergola, Lambrusco di Montericcho, Marbo Gentile and Sgavetta. Once upon a time, these were the traditional varietals of our area.

Choosing to work with these grapes also led to a reevaluation of our work as vignaoli, and we eventually decided to work the vineyard organically and to use simple methods of vinification in the cellar. This quickly led us to understand something very important: to make good wine, you need good grapes. To get good grapes, you need low yields.

The next big realization was that fermentation must be controlled with the least amount of manipulation as possible. This is much easier said than done, as it has taken us eighteen years to figure it out! I feel that we now do a good job with this.

Can you elaborate on the process of learning how to work this way (organics/low intervention in the cellar)?

It started with my father, who had the vineyards in the 70's. There was no cellar until 2000, when my brother and I decided to build one. This was at the same time we started replanting all the varietals I've just mentioned, so it's been a very slow evolution.

Initially we were only making frizzante wine, which is the local tradition. Our desire to make an authentic product led us to work with re-fermentation (secondary fermentation) in bottle, a tradition that had vanished since the industrialization of wine in our region (**note:** typically, mass produced Lambrusco is now made in the charmat method). This decision was key to our identity, because we were amongst the first to reintroduce it and work with the methods of our grandparents.

As time went by we were able to perfect these methods, and we were able to elevate rare varietals: Spergola in particular, but also the hill grown Lambrusco's, which are the Montericcho and Marbo Gentile. The various phases that the vineyards went through were not immediate; it took a very, very long time. In the end I believe the most important thing that we obtained was to give value to the land. We've brought back tradition and value to a land that had forgotten what that was.

What about the work in the vineyard?

It's the most important part. With organic production, you must control all phases of production. You cannot leave anything behind. You have to be present for everything, from the pruning to the harvest. Our work begins with good pruning and maintaining the land without fertilizers. It took us a long time, but we were able to find a perfect balance in the vineyard, which results in high quality grapes and very low yields. This allows us to vinify our wines with a fruit that is always very concentrated, very intense.

All the work in the vineyard allows you to work "organically" in the cellar and not use sulfites. There is simply no need to, because the fermentation develops sulfites naturally. These same sulfites actually protect the wine already. If I did not have a healthy fruit I would have a "sick" wine and I would have to use a lot of sulfur. This is not the case.

How does Cà de Noci relate to the conversation of DOC, IGT?

There is confusion because no one is sure of what they want to do. The legislators, those who are in charge of creating these regulations, do not have a clear agenda. This is a problem for us.

We have chosen to go with Indicazione Geografica (IGT) because we want to assure the consumer that our origins and location are well understood. However, it is not important to have a denomination because it doesn't guarantee quality. It doesn't guarantee low yields per hectare. If I am under a DOC I could have very high yields.

We must always trust the farmer who tends the land. He's the only one who knows what's truly going on. This is who we should rely on as a testament to quality. Regulations and DOC's are made for industrial wines.

What do you think of terms like *Natural Wines*, *Vivacious Wines* or *Real Wines*?

Everyone uses their own name to differentiate themselves but in essence we are wine artisans. As long as you can drink a lot of what you're making in your own cellar, you're doing a good job.

What food do you recommend for your wine?

Emilia is the homeland of pork and also the homeland of pasta. Stuffed pasta: Tortelli, il Cappelletto; basically the Tortellino.

It's fun to be in the land of frizzante wines because we need to pair fatty foods with our acidity and vivaciousness. This a historical pairing that was born unknowingly and naturally. It works really well!

Aside from your wine are there other wines other regions that you like?

We grew up in the 80's. When we were 18, my brother and I would go around Italy to get an idea of other realities, of different places. We are lovers of Piemonte but also of Tuscany because it was THE legendary region for wine.

We also realized that in every region, there are many small producers that work very well, and little by little we have learned about these small regions. I can no longer say that I'm in love with only one region but of all regions and small, independently made wine.

Visits

This visit to Cà de Noci took place in November, 2012.



Words and photos by Jules Dressner.

Two coinciding trends with the last two Italian Fall trips:

[1. They keep almost not happening](#) and [2. I get to fly in business class and learn all about wine from the airline's master sommelier.](#)

For hurricane Sandy related reasons, it was looking like we weren't going to be able to go to Italy at all. After some desperate rescheduling (including a particularly daunting option that involved flying to Moscow to connect to Milan), we somehow managed to nab a direct flight two days later than scheduled. It meant missing visits with [Fonterenza](#), [Sanguineto](#) and [Luciano Saetti](#) (BUMMER!), but it was better than not going at all.

When we arrived, we all got upgraded and for the second year in a row I once again got to enjoy the laps of luxury that is business class. I totally recommend spending the 5000 dollars it would normally cost to do this: made to order hot fudge Sundaes, [seats that turn into beds](#), getting to watch everyone in economy stare at you in contempt as they walk by and MOST OF ALL, having master sommelier Andrea Robinson answer every question you've ever had about wine!

Legs? Who knew? Also, worth viewing, [this video](#) lets you know that "*Once you get to 30 000 feet, your sense of taste and smell are really attenuated*". You do get used to the beds though...

Enough funny business!

After landing in Milan and driving to Parma -where we'd stay for the next three days- we set off to the commune of [Quattro Castella](#) to visit the Masini brothers of [Cà de Noci](#).



Alberto and Giovanni were there to greet us, as was their father Vittorio.



Vittorio had never met Kevin (or any of us, for that matter), and was delighted to finally put a face to a name he'd been hearing for years.

"Every time I have to add the back labels or hear about the U.S.A, it's always Kevin, Kevin. Kevin! Finally I know what you look like!"

A large portion of the vines surround the farm, so after saying our hello's we jumped right into the visit by checking out their old vine Spergola.





These were all planted in 1970 by Vittorio. As you can see from the pictures, every single vine has grown independently and differently. This is where the *Querciole* is produced; the cuvée is named after the large oak tree in the middle of the parcel.

Close by, they have bee hives. Alberto explained:

"It's very important for pollination. Grapes like Malbo Gentile would have a hard time without them."

The whites all grow in the less fertile soils around the farm, and with the exception of the older Spergola, all the vines are younger re-plantings of almost extinct local varieties. A short walk from the old vines, we got to check out young vine Spergola, Malvasia and Muscat all randomly co-planted together.





The fall colors of the leaves were beautiful, including some strikingly red plants.





This year, the brothers tried using a new, mineral based product on six rows of these vines to protect them, the idea being to find a substitute for copper and sulfur. It was a first year experiment, and they lost about 50% of the grapes. They are still motivated to make this work, and will try again.

After walking around the farm, we took a short drive into the hills to visit the reds.



Up in the hills, the soils are composed of sand and are more fertile. The oldest vines are Cabernet Sauvignon of 15 years. All the different red varieties are planted here, which include: Lambrusco Grasparossa, Lambrusco Maestri, Lambrusco Montericco, Malbo Gentile and Cabernet Sauvignon. In total, the brothers have 5,4 hectares of vines. Alberto does the majority of vineyard work and Giovanni makes the wines.

After visiting the vines, we took a quick tour of the cellar before tasting.



For aging, they only use old French barrels. With the exception of *Riserva dei Fratelli*, the frizzante wines are made using old vine Spergola must. The wines referment in bottle, but are never disgorged.

Riserva dei Fratelli, on the other hand, ferments three years in bottle before being disgorged. Look at all that floaty stuff in there!



The Masinis disgorge every bottle manually, which is an extremely time-consuming process. It takes about a month to do 140 bottles, because you can only do it very early in the winter morning, when the day is at its coldest (has to be done at 0 degrees). You also lose about 10% of each bottle per disgorgement. While tedious, this permits the brothers to produce a disgorged sparkling with no added sulfites (a true rarity), and is totally worth the extra labor.

Speaking of no sulfites, nothing at Cà de Noci ever sees added sulfur, even at bottling. Though they make skin contact whites and work with thick-skinned red grapes, I still have to say that I am very impressed by how consistently stable these wines are. Kudos!

It was officially tasting time, and we got things started by disgorging a magnum of *Fratelli 09*. This was actually the first time Alberto and Giovanni were tasting it! It was savory, tangy and very dry. Next, we opened up some *Querciole 11*, which was excellent; giving on the fruit and very a long finish. We also tasted some the still *Spergola* from 2012 pre-must: it was obviously very young, but still tasty.

At dinner, we went through a vertical of *Sottobosco* 08, 09, 10 and 11 to compare and prove that Lambrusco really can be a wine that expresses vintage: for example, the 08 was super robust and tannic, while 10 was fruity and fresh. Still tannic though!

Wines



Frizzante "Querciole":

Soil: Limestone and clay

Grape: Spergola

Vines: 37 years old

Vinification: Fermentation in vats. Skin maceration for 3 days. Natural secondary fermentation in bottle.



"Notte di Luna":

Soil: Stony, medium texture

Grapes: Moscato Giallo (50%), Spergola (30%), Malvasia Aromatica (20%)

Vinification: fermentation in vats. Maceration on the skins for 5 days.



Frizzante "Riserva Dei Fratelli":

Soil: Clay and limestone

Grape: Spergola

Vines: 37 years old

Vinification: Fermentation and maceration on the skins for 3 days. Natural secondary fermentation occurs in bottle. Aged in bottle for 36 months.



Frizzante "Sottobosco":

Soil: Gravelly-stone

Grapes: Lambrusco gasparossa (30%), Lambrusco di montericco (30%), Malbo gentile (20%), Sgavetta (20%)

Vinification: fermentation and maceration on the skins in vats for 15 days. Natural secondary fermentation in bottle.



"Gheppio":

Soil: Sand and limestone

Grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon (50%), Malbo Gentile (50%)

Vinification: Fermentation in wood vats. Maceration on the skins for 15 days. Aged 24 months in barrel then another 12 months in bottle.



"Tre Dame"

Soil: clay and limestone

Grapes: Termarina, Sgavetta

Vinification: Fermentation in vats with short skin maceration. Natural secondary fermentation in bottle.