

Croci Tenuta Vitivinicola

Profile

When we like a region we tend to double down. Emilia-Romagna, a perpetual underdog with obscure and under-appreciated varieties, incredible food, joie de vivre (sorry, no such term in Italian...) embodies everything we love. And over the past decade, it's been a pleasure constructing an impressive portfolio of Emilian *vignaioli* and their fabulous wines. Today we add a crucial missing link: Tenuta Croci.

A fixture in Italy's natural wine circles, Massimiliano Croci's wines have been familiar to us for many years. We've always made a point to taste with him at various wine fairs and have sat down together for many meals, often with his close friend [Elena Pantaleoni of La Stoppa](#). When the opportunity to work together came about, we were quite excited.

Massi's focus is primarily on the traditional bottle re-fermented wines of his area, representing 80 to 90% of his production in a normal year. Set atop a picturesque hill, his poly-cultural farm has cows, grain for the animals, pastures for grazing and of course vines. The whole estate represents 16 hectares, with 8.5 dedicated to viticulture.

Milk was the farm's main production until 1970. At that time, competing with bigger, more modern institutions became too difficult for Massi's father. So he pivoted exclusively to wine, starting with bulk sales in demijohns before eventually bottling and selling locally. While initially successful, in the 80's his rustic wines were scoffed at as a wave of "clean" industrial wines swept Emilia. Chermat and heavy filtration became the norm, with cloudiness/sediment in the bottle to be avoided at all costs.

Massimiliano took over the vineyards and winemaking in 1999, where he quickly dropped the chermat method eventually adopted by his father. He took inspiration from his grandfather's wines from the 30's, where he would always bottle with sugars so they would re-ferment in bottle. Filtration was dropped as well: "Without filtration and chermat, you taste the land. With it the wines could be from anywhere."

Distinct terroir is also at play here. The Croci vines are planted on a formation of fossilized seabed....sandy and full of limestone fossils. This is the chief reason, we feel, the wines are so distinctive in their minerality, structure and fruit, distinguishing themselves from nearby La Stoppa and Denavolo. The other aspect that makes us appreciate the wines is Massimiliano's commitment to tradition and hard work. Their 8.5 hectares of vineyards are worked with short pruning, only manual weeding and minimally treated with bordeaux mix; the grapes are hand-harvested and all the wines are naturally fermented first as wines and then naturally re-fermented in bottle as frizzante wines.

Massi believes he is continuing the tradition of winemaking begun by his family in the 30's. We think he has found an even better sense of the wines and the vineyards. A refreshing and pure expression.