

Elisabetta Foradori

Interview

This interview with Elisabetta Foradori took place in Los Angeles in March 2011.

Tell us about your estate.

I live in the Dolomites, which is in the north of Italy, close to the Austrian border. A lot of mountains, a fresh climate; it's a place where the people are very much surrounded by nature and a bit closed off from the rest of the world.

Our region has a very interesting history with Austria. The area used to be under Austrian domination for 800 years, and many cultural traits remain, including agricultural work.

As for the wines, I work primarily with Teroldego, and indigenous varietal. I have around 18 hectares of it. For white I grow Nosiola, another local varietal, and Manzoni Bianco, a hybrid of Riesling and Pinot Bianco. Because of our history with Austria, Riesling found itself being planted in the area and this is how this varietal came to be. So I work mostly with Teroldego but in the last three years I've had a lot of fun making my whites because I feel these are relatively unknown varietals that have a lot of personality.

How did find yourself at the head of this estate?

I was born in the small village of Mezzolombardo. Our house is in the vineyards, and I was born there. My grandfather started the estate, and my father followed in his footsteps but died very young. I was the only child and had to take over. I had just finished high school; I started studying oenology and took over at 20. At the time it didn't feel like a choice. It's not obvious being 20 and in this position; I struggled with it at first.

But even as a very young child, I always felt a very strong connection with nature. As a young girl I loved working the garden, playing in the forest... I had a passion for plants and flowers then, and I still have it now. And regardless of the ups and downs over the years, I am very grateful for what I have today.

What's the work like in the vineyards?

For a long time Foradori was a wine that didn't get much farther than Trentino. It was a local wine for local people to drink at the bar. Besides Damijan, not many wines left the Dolomites.

When I took over I wouldn't say I took over a tradition. Of course my land was linked to Trentino but it was more or less a disaster. Clones and mechanical work were the norm in the area and my father had done just that. The grapes made some perfectly fine table wine but not much else.

As a young oenologist I was taught that working industrially was normal, and at that point I didn't know any better. Eventually I realized what I was doing and decided to change everything. I replanted a large part of the vineyard with selection massales and everything eventually changed for the better. It was very instinctive and happened naturally and at my own pace.

Around the year 2000, I got tired of my work. I still think I was making very good wine, but it didn't speak to me. I took this as a sign that I needed to start over. This eventually led me to Rudolph Steiner's philosophies and biodynamic agriculture. A good friend in Alsace happened to have been working biodynamically for years and this was a big inspiration to me.

Are you certified organic or biodynamic?

Yes I am certified both, but I didn't do this just to put demeter on the label. Rather It permits me to meet and interact with a group of people who share a common philosophy in how they work.

I started working organically and biodynamically because I needed to move away from technical agriculture and cellar work. I am an advocate of science, but science without a philosophy is all technique and technique has no soul. It's a dry process; you're making wine but it has no connection to nature.

Do you have an opinion on "natural wine"?

The most important thing is to be a good farmer. You need to interact with nature in order to make a wine that symbolizes a region. And to do this you have to be proud of what you do. For me this is working the right way: with respect and knowledge of your land and your roots.

What food would you pair with Teroldego?

The food from the area is very simple. A lot of what we eat comes from the forest. We also make delicious cheeses. These might not sound like the best food pairings, but when you're here in the mountains, it just makes sense and everything tastes great together.

What's important to me is the feeling of the moment. Taste is personal. If the food or the wine or both is making you feel good, then go for it. A lot of people don't give themselves enough freedom when it comes to trying something new. This is a beautiful thing.

What wines do you like to drink?

I'm a big fan of wines from the Mâconnais and Beaujolais: Morgon, Fleurie, Cote du Py...

For Italian I really like Nebbiolo. I think Italy is changing for the better right now. It's almost like a renaissance. People are working closer to nature and wines are becoming distinctive again. For example, I think it's great you that you can now find a pure, honest expression of Trebbiano in Italy.