Massa Vecchia

Visits

This visit at Massa Vecchia took place in November, 2011.

Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Alex Finberg.

There is no highway to get to Massa Vecchia, and since the estate is high in the mountains, one must navigate the most twisty-turny route EVER.

Because we were late, Alex and Kevin were driving like mad men, taking those turns like Formula 1 racers. Mind you that I hadn't eaten breakfast because, although it is customary to eat insanely large dinners at Sanguineto, apparently breakfast is out of the question. When I woke up, nothing was set on the table and all Dora offered me was coffee.

The combination of an empty stomach, having just tasted a large amount of tannic, acidic red wines, twisty roads and Kevin's Michael Schumacher impersonation was too much. For the first time in my life, I got violently car sick. Luckily, Alex noticed something was wrong when I stuck my head out of the window and promptly pulled over. I rushed out in the nick of time and luckily, things didn't get messy.

Our Massa Veccia visit was to be a quick one and we were late. Kevin looked around and made some phone calls but Francesca was nowhere to be found. I took advantage of this to eat some white chocolate with macadamia nuts, the only thing I could find in the car.

Alas it was looking like we'd missed our chance and the most we were going to get out of the visit was my nausea and this picture Alex took of a donkey.

Kevin wrote a note on the two pack Dora had given us for Francesca, and we hopped back into the

car. Alex turned on the engine and was about to pull out when we heard a van driving up the road. It was none other than Francesca Sfrondrini!

After letting us into the cellar, Francesca gave us the lowdown on 2011. It was a difficult vintage,

and she joked that right around harvest they were worried that they would be stuck with "*1000 kilos of Passito!*". They started harvesting in late August; in the end a few days of rain, along with some much needed cool nights, saved the day.

We spent the bulk of the visit in the cellar. If necessary, a small pied de cuve is made in this concrete tank.

Everything is then fermented in open chestnut vats, with the exception of the Rosato which ferments in stainless steel.

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Francesca explained that they prefer working with big, neutral barrels.

The *Querciola*, made from 72 year old vines planted by Francesca's great-grandfather, is aged in the old, larger Rinaldi barrel you can see to my left.

Francesca also has some small cherry and chestnut barrels reserved for making their Sangiovese Vin Santo.

Side Note: Francesca has the coolest pony tail I've ever seen.

As of this year, a new law has passed, and the wine has to be pressed before Christmas to be given the *Vin Santo* title. Francesca explained, however, that traditionally one does not press until late January, which is what she did. When Kevin asked why this law was passed the answer was simple:

"*It benefits big companies who mass produce Passito.*"

In such, they will be obliged to label the wine as Passito, which is technically false because unlike other straw wine, Vin Santo is made by hanging hand picked grapes to dry from rafters, as opposed to laying them out to dry. Another distinction is that they are then fermented and aged in small cherry, chestnut or pear tree barrels and aged for much longer than the average Passito (up to ten years). Whenever she ends up bottling it, Francesca plans to explain on the back label that the wine was made traditionally but that the law forces them to label it incorrectly.

The visit was ending when I noticed a box that said: "*Etichette McKenna.*"

Kevin wants you to know that, as official *Verifier of Winery Import Label Management* (V.W.I.L.M), everything at Massa Vecchia is in order.

LOUIS/DRESSNER
ETICHETTE
MCKENNA