

Fabbrica di San Martino

Interview

This interview with Giuseppe Ferrua took place at L'Herbe Rouge in February, 2014.

Tell us about Fabbrica di San Martino.

Fabbrica di San Martino is a farm extremely close to the town of Lucca. The property itself is quite ancient, dating back to 1735. In total there are 20 hectares of land, which produce wine and oil, as well as cows for meat. Everything is worked biodynamically.

I've been living there for 20 years, and was lucky to find the land in a very pure state. Everything had always been worked organically by the farmers who took care of the property, though they probably had no idea there was any other way to work! This meant I could be certified from day one!

We work with very old grapes that are traditional of Lucca and its terroir. Many are lesser known, such as Aleatico, Malvasia Nera, Canaiolo or Cilieggiolo. For centuries, the wines from San Martino were sold to locals and nearby restaurants. These were everyday wines for the table. But the farm has long been known as a great place to make wine (mostly due to it being an isolated clos) since the medieval ages. My goal is to continue the tradition of the Fabbrica.

How did you end up at the Fabbrica?

Before committing myself to the Fabbrica, I was a restaurateur for 22 years. It was my first true passion, and my love for quality ingredients is what originally sparked my interest in good wine. Food brought me to wine.

What kind of restaurants were you running?

I've had many experiences over the years. I worked in Spain and all over Italy, but my last restaurant was a trattoria in Lucca. It was very popular, and the goal was always to prepare simple, local food for my patrons. I also gained a reputation for selling quality wine to my customers, and many would come because of the wine list, which was also very locally focused.

This is also where you met your wife, right?

Yes, it's where I "found" my wife! And this is how I ended up in the Fabbrica in the first place. She is the owner of San Martino, and the third generation of her family to live there.

When I first moved in, I was still running the restaurant. There was still a team of old-school contadini taking care of the land at the time, and I started selling the farm's oil and wine in my restaurant, which were of exceptional quality. Out of curiosity, I started helping the old farmers out, which I very much enjoyed.

As time went by, the team, who was already old, reached the age of retirement. It was at this point that I decided to sell the restaurant and commit myself to Fabbrica San Martino full time.

At this point, were you already familiar with organic and biodynamic agriculture?

I've always been a fan of organic ingredients. Food that has been un-manipulated simply has more character, more content. It has its own energy and power. It simply tastes better.

For biodynamics, this came from a realization that organic agriculture wasn't enough. Organic agriculture is great in that it forbids chemicals, but it doesn't necessarily try to restore a natural equilibrium to the land.

When we visited, you mentioned an epiphany that the Fabbrica was a perfect environment to work biodynamically. Can you elaborate?

Fabbrica di San Martino has a lot going for it. It's exposed full South. The olive trees and vines are completely surrounded by forest, and this is also great for my cows, who have a lot of room to live in. The land has never been exposed to any type of chemicals, and save the pollution in the air, it is a very pure place.

I discovered biodynamics when I met Alex Podolinsky at a conference; he gave me some basic instructions to get me started. From the first year, I started to see changes. The color of the soil became darker. The clay stopped sticking on our boots after rainfall. It was clear to me that they were even fuller of life than before.

What are the wines produced at the moment?

The wine that I now bottle as *Arcipressi* used to be the house wine for my restaurant. We would also sell some to locals, but the wine was not bottled or labelled. This comes from a vineyard that I love, from vines that are over 60 years old. *Arcipressi* is a fresh wine made with many varieties, all from the same parcel. The guys before me always made this wine to drink young, and I continue this practice. The best compliment I ever got for this wine was an old farmer jumping up in excitement and telling me: "*This is good, just like 50 years ago!*"

Then, from a younger vineyard (12 years old), I produce a Sangiovese. This is a more "Tuscan" style, and aged three years in the cellar. I also make a bit of *Arcipressi Bianco* from that same parcel, and a *Fabbrica di San Martino Bianco* made in wood.

What's your stance on "natural wine"?

The problem is that too many producers are narcissists. Everything is so self-referential. I think people should care more about doing what they feel is right, and letting the work speak for itself. If you need to make a big deal about how you work so much better than everyone else, I consider this a sign of insecurity.

What do you like to drink?

I like wines that are made simply, that are un-manipulated. To this day I get surprised just how pure the expression of grapes can be, and it's a lot of fun.