



The 50th Anniversary of Verdicchio di Matelica Doc

Verdicchio di Matelica, the symbol of rebirth

One valley, 13 wineries and the first appellation to secure Doc status in the Marche region. - described as a “red wine disguised as a white”, Verdicchio di Matelica is highly sought-after for its complexity, minerality and ageing potential. With the generational turnover, wine production is no longer merely a side-job but has become the core business for many families, hence drawing greater attention to quality, foreign markets and wine tourism.

By Irene Graziotto

Photographs: Courtesy of the Consorzio Produttori del Verdicchio di Matelica, Provima, Bisci, Belisario

ITALY – GRAPES –



The landscape of Verdicchio di Matelica

“Verdicchio is the second business in town”. This expression by Alessandro Delpriori, mayor of Matelica, is the necessary starting point to understand the importance of wine production in the area. The economic role of Verdicchio was underlined by Delpriori during the recent celebration of the appellation’s 50th anniversary – it was July 21st 1967 when the small but already promising Verdicchio di Matelica became the first Doc in the Marche. However, wine production in the area started much earlier: Matelica was a Roman town – and it was probably the Romans who introduced wine in the 3rd century B.C. – but the first settlements date back to the Paleolithic age. It was then that the town was given its enigmatic name which may mean “place covered in snow”. Not a minor detail when it comes to explaining the aromatic profile and higher acidity content of Verdicchio di Matelica with respect to Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi.

A PLACE COVERED IN SNOW

Matelica differs significantly as far as climate is concerned from the warmer flood plain of Jesi, the homeland of Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi Docg. Winters in Matelica are snowy but in summer too, temperatures plunge overnight. “On an average August day, we’ll likely have a day-night temperature variation of 33-18°C in Matelica versus a variation of 33-28°C in Jesi, although the two regions are only 20 km away from each other” says Aroldo Bellelli, winemaker at Bisci winery. The cooler weather in Matelica is determined by the north-south aspect of the Vallesina valley plus a higher altitude and the fact that the Apennine Mountains bordering the valley on both east and west sides block the mitigating effect of the sea – whose tepid winds blow instead on Jesi.

VERDICCHIO DI MATELICA AND VERDICCHIO DEI CASTELLI DI JESI.

Climate, altitude and soil differences – clay and skeletal deposits in Jesi, mineral compounds in Matelica – account for two distinct personalities, even though Verdicchio di Matelica and Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi are produced from the same native grape variety, Verdicchio (regulations for both require a minimum proportion of 85%). Whereas the latter is associated with ripe fruity notes and a softer palate, the former offers fresher aromas of flowers and



Umberto Gagliardi, Chairman of the Consorzio Verdicchio Matelica

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Mauro Bisci of Bisci winery



The Provima team



Generational turnover was one of the topics debated at the 50th anniversary conference

citrus fruit, a mineral grip and good acidity content which accounts for it being one of the longest-lived dry whites in Italy. During the 50th anniversary of the appellation, it was possible to taste vintages such as 2013, 2011, 2008, 2004 and 1998. “The most common remark I get from French friends tasting Verdicchio di Matelica, is that it reminds them of Chablis” reveals Mauro Bisci of Bisci winery.

GENERATIONAL TURNOVER

Chablis but also Riesling are the most common analogies for Verdicchio in order to facilitate its comprehension abroad. Promotion in foreign markets has become a matter of necessity due to a shift in perspective related to generational turnover. Bisci winery illustrates this well: the estate was established in the early 1970s by a clutch of related entrepreneurs but over time it has become the core business for Mauro Bisci, his father Giuseppe and his brother Tito. “We are moving towards businesses totally committed



François Gilbert (right) with Patrizio Gagliardi, sales director of Belisario winery

to wine,” commented Antonio Centocanti, chairman of the Istituto Marchigiano Tutela Vini charged with regional wine promotion, during last July’s celebrations. “This fact casts a new light on the role of the co-ops: members are totally dependent on income derived from grapes”.

SEEKING NEW MARKETS

Seeking new markets has therefore become a priority for the new generations although some wineries such as Belisario started exporting many years ago. “I still remember the first times at US fairs: buyers and consumers were all very pleased but could not pinpoint the region the wine came from” recalls Patrizio Gagliardi, sales director at Belisario. “Even now, our greatest challenge is to help people understand where Marche is located”, continues Gagliardi, “we are miles behind the popularity of regions such as Tuscany and Piedmont”. Antonio Centocanti adds: “There is no promotion of the wine without promotion of the region”, at the same time underlining the important role played by Italian immigrants in foreign markets such as Canada. The region is nevertheless also garnering attention from small but highly educated wine markets, such as Japan, as witnessed by Riccardo Pellegrini, head of marketing for Provima and Lamelia brands. This trend is likely to increase thanks to the promotional activities the Consorzio is carrying out, including those planned for next year’s Vinitaly which are aimed mainly at buyers.

A NEW LOCAL FOCUS

Although the US, Central Europe, the UK, Canada and Asia are showing growing interest in Verdicchio di Matelica, the Italian market still absorbs almost two thirds of production and producers have recently experienced increased interest from local consumers. “We have noticed the catering trade is getting more and more interested in our products” says Umberto Gagliardi, chairman of the Consorzio Produttori Verdicchio di Matelica. “It is not unusual nowadays to find a wine list with two separate sections, one for each kind of Verdicchio, even in pizzerias and everyday restaurants”. The Master in Wine Export Management taught at the nearby University of Camerino has undoubtedly helped to draw attention to the local wine identity. But more than this, the economic crisis of 2009 and the 2016 earthquake played a key role, prompting greater awareness of the region and fostering Verdicchio as a symbol of the rebirth.



A moment of the tasting carried out at the 50th anniversary of the appellation