

Iconic Grapes: Distinctive Regions, by James Hilferty

Kristina Sazama captured my imagination while speaking of the wines from Masi in Valpolicella wine region in Veneto, Italy. The terroir of Valpolicella creates exceptional fruit in a warm, moderately continental climate. Moderating coolness comes from the cold air that slides down the slopes of the Alps to the north, upon the foothills below, where the vines grow upon soils consisting of limestone, clay and volcanic rock. These soils possess the high quality texture and structure which will allow for slow ripening grapes with high acid from wide diurnal temperature swings from warm days and cool nights.

Tradition and Innovative risk - taking combine to synthesize centuries old Roman ways of drying out grapes (appassimento method to produce Recioto and Amarone styled wine) to Masi's sixth generation family owner, Sandro Boscaini, inventing Ripasso styled wine in the 1970's (adding unpressed grape skins from Amarone production to referment with fresh Valpolicella grapes of varieties of: Corvina which gives red cherry flavor, Corvinone for tannin structure and good drying ability, Rondinella for complexity and pigment and Molinara for fresh acidity).

Sandro Boscaini, also known as "Mr. Amarone", kept improving and invented a ground breaking style of wine in the 1980's called the Double Fermentation method for his Masi Campofiorin wine. This involved the process of freshly fermented Valpolicella grapes and adding 25 percent of a separate second fermentation of six week old dried grapes. These grapes were dried out on bamboo trays in low humidity lofts to give magnified, indigenous fruit flavors because of concentrated sugar and acidity. Grapes are picked slightly early to retain crisp acidity and Venetian loft drying unlocks special aromas and hidden flavors. These Super Venetian wines uniquely express their terroir with their special sense of place and being, designed by Mr. Boscaini's creative ingenuity. This gorgeous wine became a unifying canvas of color, where the sum of their parts were greater than any one part. These two wine styles bridged the ancient republics' method of Appassimento Amarone (just 6 weeks of drying instead of the required 3 to 4 months for full Amarone and Recioto styles) blended with faster fermenting conventional style from cultured yeast, imparting a wine of bright red cherry fruits with a morning freshness of newness, not reminiscent of oxidised, rustic wines. Masi Campofiorin is the most widely sold IGT wine in the world, filling the gap between Amarone and Valpolicella.

Mr. Amarone did not stop there, building upon his success, he produces the Brolo Campofiorin Oro which adds more concentrated flavor with 30 percent passito wine blended in with fermented grapes of Corvina, Rondinella and brought back from the edge of extinction, Oseleta. Mr. Boscaini brought this grape back to full glory as winemakers abandoned this variety post-phylloxera looking in favor of bigger grapes which would give larger yields. The sixth generation Masi owner knew that the notoriously small grapes would impart a big flavor. Finishing the wine in very small casks transforms Venetian combination of healthy, fresh grapes seamlessly woven in to the magically dried grapes, giving us a gift of a wine with velvet texture, a kaleidoscope of fresh and dried red cherry fruit, framed in whispers of vanilla, clove and earthy sage.

After all is said and done, the centuries of winemaking tradition and Mr. Boscaini's meticulous and passionate pursuit of elevating winemaking to an art, you may find simply....Masi, is just sublimely fun to drink.