



SCARBOLLO

Winter solstice 2023: summer, part two

Ed. Lara and I write our newsletters four-handed. We use the first person singular because each writes on the themes that concern her (the winery) or him (the vineyards) the most, hence bear patience when the subject at times changes without a proper clarification. Anyway, we care to point out that we do not work "in silos" and, while each has their competences, we face each facet and task of our work four-handed and with a vision that is fully shared and complicit, as proper sister and brother!

I care a lot for the symbolism of equinoxes and solstices. I see them as Mother Nature's chapters of the book of life and they help me in giving somewhat of a formal rhythm to what I would otherwise remember as a hazy and constant flow of days poor in structure. On September 23rd, celebrating with me the start of Autumn, was a crow, whose croak suddenly felt theatrically grimmer and more grievous, as if it were somewhat chiming the beginning of the season when all perishes a little.

In the following weeks, it felt like we were both played a prank. This year, in fact, Summer tenaciously clung to Fall, finally letting go only well into November, when minimum temperatures started averaging in the single digits and maximum ones fared below 15 degrees. Besides this "seasonal tail", which feels each year more and more normal, the real difference was played by the rainfalls which, at 500 mm, were copious and persistent, similarly to Fall 2019. While beneficial for the soils after a demanding vegetative phase, they were also limiting to our work in the fields in a year when we are implementing many radical changes.

To promote an ever growing autonomous and biodynamic balance of our vineyards, this year we switched from a 2-rows to a 3-rows interrow management. In other words, our tractors transit on a single row every three, leaving the other two pretty much untouched, one for one year and the other for a thrilling two years! This practice will allow us to explore new dimensions in terms of reduction of soil compaction, a key theme in clay soils such as ours, prone to this challenging condition. My theory is that, to take the baton from the tractors will be, at least partially, the beloved worms, Mother Nature's tiny and unstoppable plows with their tunnels and bearers of humification. Besides, this practice goes hand in hand with our goal to gradually reduce the yearly seeding of the cover crop, allowing Nature instead to take its course and the vegetation to go to seed according to its ordinary cycle. The main risk with this approach is that this vegetation may eventually expand to the underrow, hence we decided to sow there crimson clover, a rustic legume challenging to other seeds (and a great nitrogen-fixer), hoping it will allow us to systematically give up underrow tilling (the folding and yearly mowing of the sole wild vegetation, in soils as fertile as the Eastern Grave and with vines as low as ours, is a path with more drawbacks than benefits in the long run).

At the same time, efforts to shape our estate continue. We decided to seed "green corridors" of meadows, scattered across the property, which will never be fully mowed (virtually dividing each



in two and alternating the Fall cutting) so as to provide a perennial refuge to the wildlife. We are working with Seme Nostrum, a spinoff of the University of Udine focusing on picking and propagating seeds from autochthonous wild plants, to further enrich our biodiversity and to contribute to the preservation of local herbs, also the most apt to our pedoclimatic conditions.

As hinted above, though, the yearly “limitations” (the abundant rains) reduced the number of days we could go in the fields, hence the seeding of the underrow and of the meadows is postponed to the upcoming Spring. Together with these will also be the second phase of planting of trees and shrubs. The joy of seeing what was yesterday a dead, flat piece of land return to life, with colors, shapes, and above all bird songs, fills us with pride and satisfaction.

This Autumn, after many years without it, we finally planted the Winter vegetable garden again. High temperatures and abundant showers, in this case, were serendipitous and indulgent with our delay. Besides feeding us, it also forages our latest addition, the precious composting pile – we were eagerly looking forward to close the cycle on this end as well, not only to give a sustainable new life to pomace, stems, pruned canes, and other greenery otherwise regarded as “waste”, but also to leverage its microbial and organic matter enriching power. The pile started fermenting rapidly, with strength and no hiccups, and it was truly an exciting moment, almost as much as when the first pied de cuve of the harvest kicks off.

Something comes to life and something goes. This Fall we farewelled two vineyards we were renting, of Refosco and Pinot Grigio, and we uprooted our vineyards of Merlot. Hence, today we work 15 hectares. While we will eventually plant some small vineyards in the future, we forecast to never grow beyond 20 hectares under vine – we feel this is the right size to work manually instead of mechanically while pursuing an artisanal way dedicated to excellence. No matter what, now and forever, our wines will come to life exclusively from the fruits of our vines, whom we share all year with intimately.

The first small plot will take shape in 2024, consisting of about one hectare to be planted, of course, with Pinot Grigio. This is going to be a key moment because it will be our first time diversifying from the single clone we cultivate today. I find a bit silly the almost obsessive focus on themes such as the vessels for *élevage* in defining the character of the wine, while there is an almost total obscurantism on the starting point, the plant (although it is understandable given how disconnected the subject is from who is not a winegrower). A single clone is quite limiting, especially in the flatlands – where an almost uniform sun exposure robs winegrowers of the key element to diversify the epochs of picking. Moreover, and perhaps of equal importance, is the complexity a sisterhood of non-identical plants can donate to the wine (definitely preferable to a complexity otherwise taking shape in the winery), as well as the reduced phytosanitary risks that follow.

On this same subject, exciting us even further is the fact that we were able to find two old biotypes of Pinot Grigio for the massale selection vineyard we are planning. I cannot stress



enough how surprisingly challenging was finding old, healthy vines to consider for our project – the fact that this cultivar does not enjoy (today as in the past) much fame or appreciation resulted in the uprooting of old vineyards and of plants with the characteristics we seek (mainly a sparse cluster and a thick skin), with a consequential tragic forever loss of a gene pool and a biodiversity we should instead be shepherds of. The luck of finding these plants and the people who still tend to them today, together with their openness to share them, is moving. Finally, during harvest, I chose some clusters (of Pinot Grigio) to start a selection from seeds – it's a big ~~gamble~~ bet, but we hope to contribute to further widening the amphitheater of the characters of Pinot Grigio. Now, they are stratifying and in a few days we will plant them in vases. We are embarking on a long, enriching path and will keep you up to date with developments!

Back to the fruits of this year's work. Most of what was harvest related has been shared in our previous newsletter (which we will publish in an archive on our website soon), but there have since been some updates, also in respect to what we had then anticipated. First of all, we racked all the Refosco after less than three weeks, forgoing the longer maceration, our staple, because skins had already given all that they could to the wine. It's early to tell, but we feel like this was a fortuitous coincidence that will gift us with unexpected satisfactions: despite the limitations of the vintage, the wine is already whispering to us with a delicacy and finesse that we have never witnessed in our Refosco before, usually characterized instead by muscle and power. We are confident to share that this is the direction Mattia and I are seeking for Refosco the way envision it, and hence we are optimistically curious to witness its evolution.

Also worth mentioning are the different tests we made with Salvadi: the part that fermented with the stems has a **big** character, it makes us realize this variety's tannic power, and it's a tool we will use again in the future, although with much parsimony; same thing with the tonneau that underwent a longer maceration (until the end of November): it reached a very profound organoleptic and overall complexity, which may perhaps risk being slightly out of focus with the delicacy we seek but, in time and managed well, it will too be a great resource.

Harvest 2023 gave us wines characterized by a lower acidity than historical average and it will be our responsibility to preserve and protect it as much as possible. Therefore, risking too much opulence and structure, hardly sustainable by this year's wines, we decided to end bâtonnage sooner than usual. In light of a changing climate and as we pursue an ever more limpid representation of our terroir, I do not deny that I am tempted to stop bâtonnage altogether. Far be it from me to legislate on what is acceptable or not for a low intervention wine: it's an endless debate and, to sum it up, just like any other form of art, there is no right or wrong – each performer finds her own dimension; it's up to us to question the border line between the work of Nature and that of humans, and we are trying to move it more and more in favor of the former, to exalt its unique endeavor in our small corner of the World. Narrowing this topic to the subject of lees, then, we prefer to favor their natural suspension instead of mechanically forcing a character the wine



would otherwise not express. If we ever wish to obtain more strength, structure, or other characters, we will seek them in the vineyard.

In other news from the cellar, we are already noticing great balance and expressiveness in the wines now undergoing *élevage*, as well as an ever-clearer path to the conditions that allow Pinot Grigio to express its multitude of characters at best. Big barrels (20hl+) reconfirm as vessels of great breadth, capable of highlighting the variety's character and its vintage-specific facets. This being said, we are eager to start working with cement vessels – we feel they will be an ideal complement.

It's time to let the wines rest, the doors of the cellar are closed, and we now focus our work in the fields. On December 5th, we started the yearly pruning, which will take most of our weeks ahead. Going back to a warm home after a December day spent in the vineyard always warms the heart (as well as hands and feet) but during the holidays it feels a bit more magical. We wish you too enjoy some days that are slow and pregnant of love, laughs, and good wines. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a happy and most positive start of the year now at our doorsteps. Talk to you in March with lots of new information!

Agriculture is Mother Nature's poetry, deciphered for Man by farmers' hands.

Mandi,

Mattia, Lara, Valter, Maria Grazia, Bujar, Shkelzen, Ziri, Shazan, Annalisa, e Daniel