

A Visit to Azienda Agricola Elvio Cogno

Charles Scicolone (January 23, 2011)



A Unique White Wine and Traditional Barolo at its Best

The fog had lifted and it was a bright clear day as we arrived at the [Elvio Cogno winery](#) [2] at the top of Bricco Rivera, near Novello, one of the eleven communes in which Barolo is produced in the Langhe region of Piemonte. For many years Elvio Cogno had been the winemaker for Poderi Marcarini in La Morra where he produced some of the best Barolo's that I have ever tasted. Cogno's family has been making wine in the Langhe for four generations and in 1990 when his relationship with Marcarini ended, he bought a farm, restored the property, and added vineyards and a winery. Today, Elvio Cogno is very proud that his family's winemaking tradition continues with his daughter Nadia and her husband, winemaker Valter Fissore.



I have known Valter and Nadia for a number of years and this was not the first time I had been to the winery. Every time I come to visit, Valter is always trying to tell me or show me something new. This time he pointed to a fence that was just built and with a big smile on his face said, "I have finally found a good use for my barriques." It was a beautiful fence made from the staves of the barriques. He knew that this would make me happy.

We tasted a very interesting white wine, Langhe Bianco Anas- Cetta DOC 2009

It is made from Nascetta (autochthonous Novello Bianco). Valter said that this grape is of Mediterranean origin and might have originated in Sardinia. He believes that this is a white wine that can age. He opened a bottle of this wine the night before we came and it was ten years old and showing very little sign of age. He said that it has a mineral character but when it ages, it resembles Riesling! It was a very elegant wine with good fruit, a long finish and great aftertaste. He said that they first produced the wine in 1994 and there are records of it going back to the 19th Century, but he is one of the few that make it now. Interestingly, he said that the wine is aimed at a younger market!

The Nascetta vineyards are at 350 meters and the 4,000 vines per hectare are vertical trellised with Guyot pruning. Harvesting is at the end of September. The wine is vinified in 70% stainless steel and 30% in barriques. It is aged 6 months in stainless steel and 6 months in barriques and is 180 days on the lees. After 3 months of bottle age it is released. 10,000/12,000 bottles produced. \$30

The next wine we tasted was the Barbera d'Alba "Bricco dei Merli" DOC 2008. The vineyard is 300 meters above sea level and there are 4,500 vines per hectare. Harvest takes place from the end of September to the beginning of October. Fermentation is in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks with controlled automatic pump-over. The wine is aged in large Slovenian oak barrels and barriques. It remains on the lees for 60 days and in bottle for 6 months before it is released. This is a more "modern style" of wine, he said, but thankfully, I could not taste the wood and found the wine very nice. 10,000 bottles produced. \$30

However, when it comes to his Barolo, Valter is very traditional.

He said that the only problem in the past with using traditional methods was that the large barrels might have been "dirty" and had bacteria. He has two special machines to clean the botte grande. One cleans them with steam - 30 liters of steam per minute. After that it is treated with ultra violet rays. He said he was "traditional but clean". Once again he showed me something "new". Valter uses square stainless steel tanks because they take up less room.

Valter also worked for Marcarini. He said that in 1984 they harvested the Nebbiolo grapes on Nov 2nd. Now they harvest the grapes in the middle of October. However the last two harvests have been later than in previous years because it has been colder.

We tasted two vintages of the same wine from the barrel: the 2009 and the 2008 Barolo "Ravera" DOCG. Both wines are aged in 42 HL Slovenian oak barrels. The 2009 was very fruity and was just starting to show some Nebbiolo characteristics. I was not prepared for the 2008 because it had the aromas and flavors of Pinot Noir. Often I have heard it said that Nebbiolo and Pinot Noir are similar. This was the first time I tasted Nebbiolo that reminded me of Pinot Noir but it would not be the last. A few days later at the Giovanni Manzoni winery I tasted their 2008 Barolo from botte grande and again it reminded me of Pinot Noir. Walter said it was the vintage and aging in botte grande the aromas and flavors of this young wine were not masked. Never before had I tasted Nebbiolo from barrel or bottle that resembled Pinot Noir. Walter said that 2008 and 2009 were two very different vintages. In 2008 the winter was very cold and the wine has a higher pH. He said it would be a more elegant wine than the 2009. The 2005 is \$65

Barolo "Vigna Elena" DOCG 2005. This wine is made from 100% Rose a sub-variety of Nebbiolo. Walter said he was one of the few, if not the only one, to do a Barolo with 100% Rose. The vineyards are 380 feet above sea level and face southward. There are 4,000 vines per hectare. The vineyard is 1 hectare. The harvest is in October and the grapes are fermented in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks with automatic pump-over, a post fermentation maceration of 30 days and



submerged cap. The wine is aged for 36 months in 40HL Slovenian oak barrels. Valter said the he only uses native yeasts. On the lees for 60 days and 12 months bottle aging before it is released. Walter pointed out that this wine is only made in great vintages. He also said that in his microclimate, 2005 was an excellent year and it made a very traditional style Barolo. The wine had typical Nebbiolo aromas of roses, tobacco and a hint of liquorice. 5, 000 bottles produced. \$80

Barolo "Ravera" DOCG 2007. It is made from the Lampia and Michet, sub varieties of Nebbiolo. The Vineyard is 380 feet meter above sea level, with 4,000 vines per hectare and faces southward. Fermentation in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks with automatic pump over, maceration for 30 days with submerged cap and it is on the lees for 90 days. 24 months of aging in 25/30HL Slovenian oak barrels and six months in bottle before it is released. He called Ravera the most important Cru in Novello and went on to say that the mostly calcareous soil (classic blue clay) of this vineyard adds elegance and structure to the wine, making it ideal for aging. 15,000 bottles produced. \$70

The 2010 of the same wine would only spend 18 months in wood because of the character of the vintage. He said in 2010 he had to prune 40% of the grapes from the vines. It was a long very cold winter, with many cold days and less production. He felt the 2010 would have hard tannins. Then he went on to say something very interesting. In the case of 2010 it was up to the wine maker to produce a better wine. It would take all the skill of the producer to accomplish this.

He also felt that if there is a long maceration of 40 days it makes the tannins softer. He will only use botte grande for his Barolo. Barriques extract too much from the wood into the wine and he would not use them for Barolo.

Barolo "Bricco Pernice" DOCG 2006 100%. It is made from a sub-variety of Nebbiolo called Lampia. The vineyard is 300 meters above sea level with 5000 vines per hectare and faces southward. The grapes are from the finest vineyards in Novello, in the most historic part of the Ravera cru. Harvest is in October. Fermentation in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks with pumping over and 30 days maceration with submerged cap. It is aged for 24 months in large Slovenian oak barrels 25/30 HL. It remains on the lees for 90 days and spends and 12 months in bottle before it is released. This is a well structured and elegant Barolo. 9,000 bottles were produced. \$85

Visiting Cogno was in some ways like going back in time. The dedication and focus on producing Barolo that shows all the characteristics of the terroir, without adding extraneous flavors, reaffirmed for me that great honest Barolo will continue to be made.

Attention to cleanliness and the newer technologies used are all subservient to this focus on tradition and quality.

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