

La Spinetta One Liter Club, for the real wine lover...



Warm spring days and mild nights...

After another one of those real winters that never seem to end, we are being spoilt with a beautiful spring. The fruit trees were in great flower and no rain has damaged flowering nor fruit growth so far. Lovers of Piedmont cherries can look forward to plenty of gorgeous cherries this year. The vineyards were a bit behind in their development, but with such a warm spring, an explosion in growth has brought the vines back on track. So far, so good. Let's enjoy the colors and smells of this wonderful time!

Bruno, Carlo and Giorgio Rivetti and the La Spinetta Team

A word from Giorgio



Finding our own way of defining quality...

I can't blame wine lovers for being confused, especially those whose main interest is not really Piedmont, but who now and then do want to enjoy a good or great Barolo or Barbaresco. The choice is ample, but so are the differences in price. Just by looking at a bottle of Barolo DOCG, one has no way of finding out why one wine costs 30 Euro and the other 100 Euro.

Help is needed, and sometimes a wine shop with educated staff can be of good assistance. The real question here is: why can Piedmont not offer a quality category system similar to the one in Burgundy? Something rather simple that relates to the vineyard exposure, age of vines, yields of production and vineyard work philosophy of the producer?

Also the serious top German producers have come up with their own categories. Perhaps it is time that the forward thinking producers in Piedmont do the same. I would be more than happy to call my Barolo Campe "top Cru" and my Barolo

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Garretti "Cru". Certainly there is a huge difference in the age of the vines and a smaller, yet important difference in yields. Together with these classifications we could also implement a set rules for "organic farming" that implies no herbicides and pesticides used in the vineyards. I believe guidelines like that will be of much more use to the sophisticated wine lover than studying a map with the names of the Cru vineyards in Barolo and Barbaresco. The more transparency we can give, the better a consumer will be able to understand the significant differences in quality and price. It's another project on a long list of projects that we need to tackle eventually.

Giorgio, the farmer

Mauro makes the bottles dance, speaking with Mauro Ferrero from Contratto winery in Canelli, Piedmont

The treasure of the Contratto winery in Canelli (Asti) are its meandering cellars, excavated deeply into the tuff limestone hill that overlooks the town, 32m underground. Here, cradled by steady natural coolness and humidity, lie the bottles of Contratto spumante slumbering towards maturation. Mauro Ferrero is the cellar master at Contratto. The slender man in his fifties speaks softly, but talking about his work, his eyes gleam with delight, and he always has another story to tell, and another secret to show in the long cellars that he knows like his pockets.

Mauro has been working for Contratto since 1978 when he began his apprenticeship as a champenista, a maker of sparkling wine. 'I was very young,' he recalls, 'un giovanissimo.' At the time, cellar work was all manual, and physically demanding, so it was mainly young men that were hired for the job. The work of a champenista includes the general work of cellar management, but also the skilled tasks of *rémuage* (riddling) and *dégorgement* (disgorgement), two crucial steps of making high-quality sparkling wine. With still wines, the work of the winemaker is done once the wine has been filled into the bottle and sealed with the cork. The rest is up to the wine



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itself, and top quality wines will of course continue to evolve in the bottle. But only time and nature can now influence their development. Sparkling wines have a different career: their special feature, the bubbles, are only created in the bottle, during a second fermentation process. This method of producing sparkling wine through a second fermentation process in the bottle is called the classic method, metodo classico.



Creating the second fermentation, then halting it at the right moment, freeing the wine (now under high pressure) from the sediment of yeast generated through the process and finally adjusting the wine for sweetness, taste and style before sealing it with its typical mushroom cork – these are the tasks that require the skilled hands of a master champenista. It took Mauro a few years to learn his trade – ‘devevo farmi le osse, I had to pay my dues’ he says, but at the young age of 20, he was left in charge of the vast underground cellars at Contratto as the old cellar master retired. These were the 1980s. The Contratto wines, with their century-old reputation, were highly sought-after in Italy, and even though the winery produced nearly 1,000,000 bottles, they still often could not satisfy the demand for its elegant spumante wines. Especially in the months before Christmas and the New Year celebrations: ‘We had to tell people who wanted 24 bottles that they could have only 12, or there wouldn’t have been enough for everybody,’ recalls Mauro. In peak times, he was disgorging over 2,000 bottles a day, all by hand. During the disgorgement procedure, also called *la volée*, the bottle is held neck-down against the chest

of the cellar master who uncorks the bottle into a small barrel, to catch the flying corks and the spillages. This requires a deft movement of pulling up the bottle neck a split second after it is opened, so that the cork with the sediment falls out, but not too much wine is lost in the process. ‘I used to wear out my aprons from holding so many bottles against my chest,’ Mauro smiles. ‘My mother had to sew patches cut from old jeans onto the front of my aprons, and I’d still wear them out.’

Working with sparkling wine will keep you busy in the cellar all through the year, Mauro says. May and June are the best months for the *prese di spuma*, the bottling of the base wine (of Pinot Nero and/or Chardonnay) with the addition of sugar and yeast to start the second

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fermentation. The bottles are lined up closely on shelves, where they will rest for at least 24 months, as is the house policy of Contratto (our G. Contratto Riserva is even allowed to mature for 48 months) – well beyond the Italian minimum legal requirement of 9 months. When it is time to remove the yeast and prepare the bottles for sale, they are placed in near-upright perforated racks, the pupitres. Initially the bottles lie almost horizontally, but over the course of the next days, they are twisted each day by a turn of 1/8 of a circle, as well as slightly tilted upwards, bottoms up. This spiral-form movement called riddling or *rémuage* allows the yeast to settle and collect in the bottle neck and cork, to be eventually removed by the disgorgement. With his years of practice, Mauro is able to work very fast at the pupitres, turning all 60 bottles within about 20 seconds. ‘When I’m not disturbed, I can easily do 6,000 bottles or more within an hour,’ he muses. ‘It is a meditative work really, alone in the silent cellars, with just the light clinking of the bottles.’ This, too, used to be harder work, because the bottles were not as smooth as they are now, and sometimes not as clean either, so the sediment would get caught at the glass. To move it along, the *rémueur* would have to tap the bottles lightly against the wood as he turned them, ‘make them dance,’ as Mauro calls it. This would of course slow the process down to about half the speed.

All bottles are marked at the bottom with a dab of paint or plaster, ‘nothing fancy at all,’ smiles Mauro. ‘Just a sign to help me see which ones I have turned already.’ It also allows the cellar master to see if any of the bottles have been moved, inadvertently or carelessly, by an assistant or a visitor. Moving the bottles without thought, and especially turning them neck-up will disturb the settlement again, and render the work of days useless within seconds: ‘Spumante bottles should always, always be held upside down, and handled carefully,’ Mauro scolds. But even though the occasional bottle will be lost in the first few weeks after the *prese di spuma*, exploding maybe because of a faulty bottle or crown cork, once the second fermentation is completed and the wine is only resting on its lees, it is quite safe around the long shelves. Except for the De Miranda Asti Spumante Metodo Classico, our Moscato vinified in the classic method – as the Moscato grapes naturally have a higher sugar content than other grapes, the fermentation never fully finishes, and if not interrupted would go on to produce more bubbles and more pressure within the bottle. ‘They are like rebellious teenagers, you must always keep an eye on them,’ Mauro chuckles. Once the right pressure point of the bubbles is reached, the fermentation of the Moscato spumante is stopped by lowering the temperature of the wine, either refrigerating it or using a very cool part of the cellar. This actually the old style of sparkling wine produced in the area – it was a work for the winter months, done outside in nearly freezing temperatures in the old days, to keep those rebellious bubbles under control.

De Miranda is quite recent rediscovery and addition to the Contratto portfolio, which had in recent years included more still red and white wines, but Mauro is convinced that ‘good quality dry spumante are among the finest wines in the world, and they will always have their place.’

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He expects the production of Contratto sparkling wines to increase from now on, under the new direction of La Spinetta, and says he will not be surprised to see it go up quickly to the numbers of their 1980s heyday. He is looking forward to see where the fresh input will take the winery, in which he himself has invested so much of his life. 'It is a wonderful work, and it takes love and passion to do it. Of course, family comes first,' he says. 'But sometimes my wife can be quite jealous of all the time I spend at the cellars. My work is my second love.'

New equipment in the winelover's arsenal



Navigating the world of wine is a thrilling pursuit that attracts many curious and passionate adventurers who enjoy exploring new regions in person or in a glass, making new discoveries, charting their progress and accumulating treasures. Now there are some new tools available for the winelover's toolbox: smartphone applications. The variety of these new software instruments has been multiplying, as ever more people are buying the newest generations of mobile phones and BlackBerries. Tech savvy people reckon that sales of smartphones will overtake PC sales by the end of 2011, and 'apps' are one of the ingenious features of these new gadgets. They allow the smartphone owner to configure his mobile device according to his own preferences by downloading and installing the software he is interested in, rather than being stuck with the inbuilt settings of the phone, or some minor variations of those. Also, thanks to advances in programming languages, the various functions and features of smartphones are capable to interact more intelligently and efficiently with each other, as

well as with computers and the internet. This has opened the doors for a myriad of different programs to choose from, for every imaginable purpose.

For wine enthusiasts, this can be very good news indeed. Essentially, what smartphones and the applications are good at is searching, registering, filtering and combining information, and the wine world is certainly characterised by a huge variety of information – about wineries, wines, food pairings, tasting notes, vintages, prices and much more. Not only that, but every passing year brings new vintages – and every bottle drunk more tasting notes! Having all this information up to date and available whenever and wherever you need it (such as at the wine store, in a restaurant or driving around a wine region) is a very attractive idea.

The variety of wine-related smartphone applications available already fall into seven basic categories: wine journals, where you can input your own information on wines and tasting experiences; wine glossaries or guides, providing background information on wines and

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wineries; wine-food pairing programs and electronic 'sommeliers' that make recommendations from a certain list; wine quizzes and games; wine searchers that link to shops and stockists; cellar management software; and winery directories, from individual producers or also wine regions for example.

Common features of wine-related applications are for example taking notes on tastings, linking information about producers and shops to GPS technology, reading reviews and recommendations by other users or experts, or establishing the peak drinking time of the wines on a wine list. Interesting synergies also arise from the teaming up with information about restaurant menus, or recipe books for the home cook.

Some of the software programs are more interactive whereas others simply provide information; some rely on 'crowdsourcing', incorporating a large number of amateur inputs, whereas others offer expert guidance, for example by the British wine writer Oz Clarke. The complexity and quality of wine-related applications ranges from the well-thought out and efficient to the baffling and dire, and there is something for every level of ambition and budget too. Not least, making all this information available and communicating electronically rather than on paper also helps business and customers to be more efficient and ecologically sustainable.

All things considered, a well-designed smartphone application can make life a little more efficient for its user, and the exploration of the world of wine a little more hassle-free and pleasant. Finding your way around the application store on the web however is a whole different matter.

One Liter Club events in 2011...

Hands-On Day May 2011

On May 7, La Spinetta once again welcomes some of our One Liter Club members for a La Spinetta Hands-On event, a day of working in the vineyards and cellar and getting to know the winery and the people behind the wines.

In the morning, we will work in our Barolo vineyards at Campe: in late spring/ the beginning of summer, as the vines begin to sprout with vigour, it is necessary to carefully trim the shoots and clear the vines of excessive leaf growth. This helps the plant to concentrate all its efforts into producing a few bunches of high-quality fruit, protected by a leaf canopy of just the right balance between warming sunshine and cooling shade.

Giorgio will also show us how he ploughs the ground between the



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rows of vines with the help of our Belgian workhorse Moro. Ploughing the ground loosens up the crumb and keeps the ground aerated and healthy while also cleaning the ground from weeds. We prefer to do this work in our most prestigious vineyards with the horse and plough, because they put a lot less weight and pressure on the ground, compared to working with a tractor.

When the sun shines hot in the afternoon, we will take our guests on a tour of the La Spinetta cellars at Castagnole Lanze, and of our new winery Contratto in Canelli with its historic cellars, offering a glimpse into this whole new adventure of sparkling wine production.

The day will be rounded off by a Piemontese dinner prepared by our own Giovanna with La Spinetta Piemontese wines.

We are looking forward to spending a day with our One Liter Club members! Another day of La Spinetta Hands-On is planned for **Saturday July 9th, 2011**. If you are interested in participating, or would like some further information, please write to anke@la-spinetta.com. Participation is free (although we ask for a refundable deposit in advance, to secure your place), and you will be our guests throughout the day.



Cooking Piemontese with Giovanna Rivetti

Giovanna Rivetti was born in 1947. She is our "vineyard manager" and our "in-house chef". She learned the work in the vineyard from her father and the work in the kitchen from her mother. Both parents taught Giovanna skills that until today are great assets to La Spinetta.

In each newsletter Giovanna shares one of her secret recipes with us. Today she is teaching us how to make a typical, yet very simple Piemontese antipasto that is all about the ingredients and does not require any actual "cooking": **carne cruda** (raw meat salad, also referred to as steak tartar).

You will need: 1kg of good quality raw beef/veal tartar, either knife-chopped or ground (in Piedmont we use veal from the Fassone race), 250ml extra virgin olive oil, 1 clove of garlic, salt, pepper and the juice of one lemon.



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A day before preparing the carne cruda, peel the clove of garlic and marinate it whole in 250ml of extra virgin olive oil.

It takes 5 – 10 minutes only to make carne cruda. Take the raw meat and place it in a large bowl. Using your hands or a spoon, mix the meat with the garlic-infused olive oil, pepper and salt. Blend well and work the flavors evenly through the meat. Add lemon juice and continue to mix, for about 5-10 minutes. Taste and add more salt and pepper if necessary (each batch of fresh meat may need different amounts of salt and pepper). In general, Carne Cruda alla Piemontese does not involve much seasoning as you do not want to cover the delicious taste of the Fassone meat. However, if you prefer some more spice and flavor, feel free to add chili, capers, egg yolk or onions.



Serve the carne cruda garnished with some salad leaves or shaved Parmiggiano cheese.

Carne Cruda goes very well with Barbera.

Buon appetito!

Auguri Italia!

From Bolzano to Palermo, from Naples to Venice, from Turin to Rome, it seems that every city in Italy has a via or piazza Garibaldi. Here in Piedmont, the first three streets of every town are most likely called Garibaldi, Vittorio Emanuele, or Cavour. These are the names of three men who played key roles in creating Italy as we know it today. This year, the country celebrates the 150th anniversary of the risorgimento, the project of Italian national unification, adding a new holiday on March 17 to its long list of special days in the calendar. The celebrations take on a particular importance in Piedmont: it was after all their king who was declared sovereign of the newly unified Italy in 1861.



Giuseppe Garibaldi was a military commander, who spent fourteen years in exile in South America after participating in a failed uprising in Piedmont in the 1830s. In 1860, he sailed with an army of one thousand men from Genoa to Marsala (Sicily). With his men, affectionally

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known as I mille, he succeeded in ousting the Bourbon king of Naples from Sicily and the South of the peninsula, as the troops of King Vittorio Emanuele II of Piedmont-Sardinia advanced from the North to join him outside of Rome. The campaign, which had grown out of several decades of Italian struggle for autonomy, enjoyed great popular support all over the country.



The unification effectively concluded 250 years of fragmentation and foreign domination under French, Austrian and Spanish rule, as well as of the dominion of the Pope over large parts of Central Italy (now Romagna, Umbria, Lazio and the Marche). Initially, Rome remained under the authority of the Church, and Turin became the first capital of the new nation. Rome finally fell to the Italian army on September 20, 1870 (which makes Via XX Settembre another popular street name around the country).

Of course, the king himself has been honoured with many streets and avenues in his name, as well as his Prime Minister the Count Cavour, another native of Turin and a crucial supporter of the unification project. In fact, our very own town of Grinzane Cavour, where the La Spinetta Barolo vineyards are located, paid homage to him by adopting his name in 1919. Not out of coincidence – before joining the parliament of Piedmont in 1849, the Count had been the mayor of the town for seventeen years.

The political unification of Italy was largely completed with the inclusion of Rome in 1870. Culturally, however, the unity of the Italian nation took considerably longer, and some say it has yet to be concluded. The regions and cities of Italy continue to be very different from each other, in customs, architecture, cuisine and landscape. Not to mention the many dialects that developed in towns separated from each other by the impassable mountains that run down the spine of the peninsula. The faces of Italy include wood-paneled houses and dark fir woods in the Dolomite region, salt drying in the hot sun on the coasts of Sicily, brick church steeples of Piedmontese hilltop villages before the white and blue ring of the Alps floating on the horizon, the narrow streets of Bologna with their shops spilling over with prosciutto and mortadella, the terraced vineyards of Liguria hanging precipitously over the blue sea, the ancient marble statues of Rome and Pompeii, and the gnarly olive trees dotting sunbaked fields of Tuscany.

While there have been some heavy-fisted attempts to achieve a national unity of the hearts and minds, such as under the rule of the fascists (1918-1945), other projects took what would today be termed a 'soft-power' approach. One of these was the work of Pellegrino Artusi (1820-1911), a silk merchant from Forlimpopoli in Emilia-Romagna who after his retirement set out to collect traditional recipes from all over the peninsula – from fruitcakes of Trieste to Sicilian maccheroni with sardines – which he published in



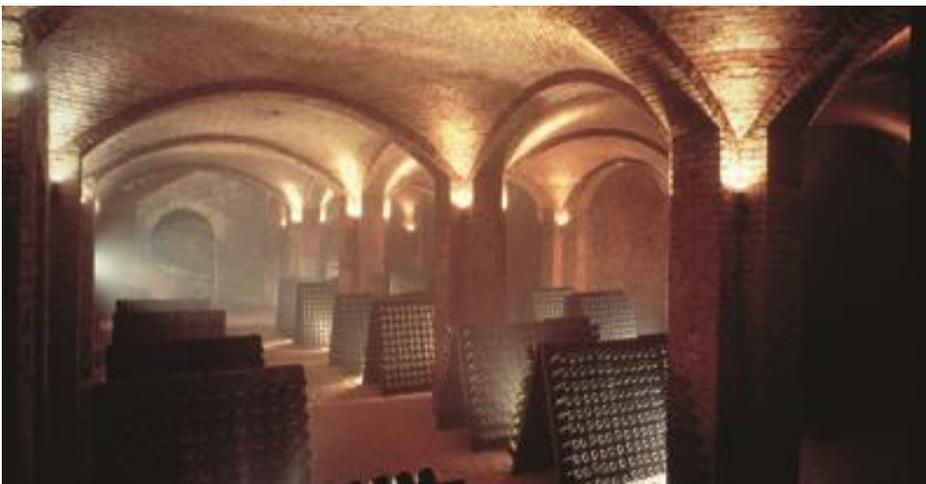
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1891 under the title *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene* (The Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well). Artusi had been a passionate supporter of the ideals of the *risorgimento* and saw his endeavour as a way to contribute to the recognition of the country of itself as a singular nation. Initially ridiculed by contemporary commentators, the book was instantly a popular success. It went through 14 editions and expansions in Artusi's lifetime alone, and has been continuously in print for the last 120 years. It now contains almost 800 recipes, and is a staple in every Italian household. English versions are also available from various publishers, for example Random House – and since 2009 there is even an Italian version of it available as an iPhone application!

Anything new at La Spinetta

What's new at La Spinetta? – A new member of the La Spinetta family



This spring, La Spinetta has been able to seize a wonderful opportunity: to take over Italy's oldest sparkling wine producer, the Contratto winery of Canelli, in the Asti region. With their love and respect for tradition and their passion for "bollicine" (sparkling wine), it was practically impossible for La Spinetta to pass

up on this extraordinary project.

Giorgio Rivetti has been actively consulting the winery Already for few years, helping to improve the quality of the sparkling wines at Contratto. Results from this collaboration – adding the La Spinetta expertise in wine growing and wine making to the rich potential of the Contratto operations – will show from the 2008 vintage onwards.

With a jewel of a cellar and the right team for production, marketing and sales at the La Spinetta and Contratto wineries, La Spinetta will certainly be able awake this sleeping beauty to give it new life in the national market and finally introduce the brand to the world.

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Contratto was founded in 1867 by Giuseppe Contratto. The winery is known as the oldest producer of sparkling wine in Italy. In fact, the "Metodo Classico" 1919 Contratto Extra Brut was the first vintage sparkling wine ever made in the country.



The Contratto winery is looking at a long, distinguished history. At the turn of the 20th century, its wines were leaving Canelli for destinations all over the world, and Contratto was personal supplier to the Vatican as well as the Italian Royal Family. Awards and medals from international exhibitions and contests of the time emphasize why the name of Contratto has long been synonymous with prestige and quality in the world of sparkling wine.

In 150 years of wine-making, Contratto went from producing Moscato and red wine to Spumante Metodo Classico, still white wines, as well vermouth, tonic and syrups.



For many generations the winery remained in the hands of the Contratto family. In 1993, after 126 years, it was sold to an investor. Carlo Bocchino, owner of a grappa distillery and lover of monumental real estate, undertook great efforts and investment to restore the historical cellars and the impressive representation and tasting rooms.

The historical cathedral cellars at Contratto are a real treasure for the winery, and among the finest of their kind. These huge underground cellars, covering more than 5,000 sqm, were built into the heart of the hill that protects the small town of Canelli, excavated from tuff limestone to a depth of

32 meters. The project took three years of manual work to finish. The cellars maintain a

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constant annual temperature of 13 degrees and sufficient natural humidity, an ideal environment for the slow and steady bottle maturation of fine wines.



wine-making, but, enhanced by modern knowledge and technology, moving ahead into a bright future.

Currently, Contratto buys "vino base spumante" (base wine for sparkling wine production) from wineries in Oltrepò Pavese. This is very common practice. Long-term plans are to invest in vineyards to grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in order to fully control fruit production and quality. Estate-grown fruit will be the base for Cru Spumante production. With sparkling wine made from its own fruit, Contratto's ultimate goal is to prove that Northern Italy has the soil and climate to make Spumante wines that rival the top sparkling wines of the world. Contratto therefore will return to its rich heritage of 150 years in