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INSIDE WINE

LAGUNA NEL BICCHIERE

Did you know that there are vineyards in Venice?

Hard to believe isn't it? However, since ancient times there has been production of wines in the Venetian lagoons. Behind a doorway of a convent, another world exists

From the 13c wine has been produced in the Camaldolese, Franciscan, Capuchin and Carmelite convents and monasteries.

Still today there are numerous traces in the local toponymy in places like San Francesco della Vigna, calle della Malvasia, calle della Vida, riva del Vin, calle dei Botteri, le Vignole.

In 1993 a local figure, Prof. Flavio Franceschet, was the first to rediscover the ancient vineyard garden of San Francesco della Vigna and he gained permission to take his students from the Calvi Middle School there.

Flavio Franceschet was a much loved man. He studied as an Architect, but then started teaching at the local schools. He was involved in local politics and was the kind of man who knew how to get the best out of people.

He was the force behind the Festa of San Giovanni alla Bragora, and he arranged for clothes made by women prisoners to be shown in a fashion show, and loved showing the children how sundials worked at the equinox and solstice.

“He was capable of getting people to work together for positive causes”

When he died, prematurely in his early 70's, there was an outpouring of grief. He was buried on Isola St Michele - the cemetery island, made up of two islands, connected in the days of Napoleon. On the right is the cemetery and on the left, unbeknownst to most, is a door leading to the vineyard.....

Flavio was passionate about showing his students the process of wine making. Instead of lessons in the classroom he would take them out to stomp the grapes and taste the grape juice!

For fun, they started to produce a saline wine, Calvino. *(Salinity is a tasting descriptor and a frequent extension of the term “minerality.” Both can refer to how our palate perceives the pH of the wine.)*

From this first experiment, restaurant owners, sommeliers and winemakers collaborated together to form “Laguna nel Bicchiere - Le vigne ritrovate” (Lagoon in glass - The Rediscovered Vineyards).

This association aims to discover the forgotten traditions and recipes, passing these onto the younger generations.

In retirement Prof. Franceschet found that he wasn't ready to sit and do nothing, and so, with restaurateurs, Mauro Lorenzon, Cesare Benelli and others, they developed the idea of promoting the tasting of lagoon wines on the Feast of San Giovanni alla Bragora (the summer solstice). This event has been repeated since 2008, and the Association offers their wines for tasting during the event, which is called Festa della Bragora and is held for 4 days around the 21st June, the summer solstice.

The vines of San Michele have changed over the years, but they have never had any chemicals added

The Vineyards

The centre of the association's project are the cellars, vineyard and herb garden of the novices, which are inside the old abandoned Franciscan Monastery on San Michele in Isola. The vines here don't grow in the traditional straight lines, they grow in what is called a “Frasca”, overhanging arched vines that provide shade where the Brothers and Priests of the monastery walked, reading their “Breviary”. The wine was used for Mass (and obviously to drink!).

The vines of San Michele have changed over the years, but they have never had any chemicals added. Because of this they are of great importance and interest to the Universities and a specialist from Padua recently confirmed that one of the vines was over 70 years old. It is smaller than would be expected for a vine of this age, but this is due to the salt in the ground.

The work of the Association extends out to other vineyards of Sant'Elena, Giudecca, Malamocco and Vignole where grapes are harvested from ancient, restored rows.

At the beginning, the Association didn't have their own means of production, so went in search of the wines of the past and in addition to San Francesco and Sant'Elena they discovered four other wine producing convents: San Michele in isola (The Order of Friars Minor), Carmelitani Scalzi alla stazione (The Discalced (barefoot) Carmelite Monks near Santa Lucia Station), Clarisse on Giudecca (Sisters of Clarisse on Guidecca Island), Carmelitane Scalze in Cannaregio (The Discalced (barefoot) Carmelite Sisters in Cannaregio).

During their research they met Vio Gastone and his wife Dariella, owners of the oldest dorona vineyards in Sant'Erasmo and producers of excellent saline wine and they still collaborate with them now.



Prof. Franceschet wrote in his memoirs:-

"Looking for the Casanova Salso wine at Hotel Cipriani in the zone of Zitelle on Giudecca we discovered the first abandoned vineyards. Immediately afterwards the Franciscans of San Michele informed us that they were about to leave the convent, abandoning the vegetable garden, vineyards and cellar."

Here was the opportunity that defined our purpose: to recover the vineyards, safeguard a tradition and protect an original and almost unknown landscape and to reveal the hidden city-countryside relationship of Venice.

It was necessary to transform ourselves into a non-profit cultural association, with a statute, tax code and registration in the municipal register.

This has allowed us to be recognized by various public and private organisations who, contacted directly and through extensive correspondence, have allowed us to manage the vineyard at Zitelle (I.R.E and Cipriani) and the vineyard and the cellar in San Michele (Veritas S.p.A and the Municipality of Venice)."

Now we had the vineyards and the cellar of the Camaldolese, but there was a lack of equipment, volunteers and above all the experts to guide our activities.

This is where the fourth musketeer appears, the organic winemaker, Gian Antonio Posocco from Cappella Maggiore; a winemaker and a promoter of natural wines who was swallowed up as the future 'deus ex machina' for the winery. He was followed two years later by Gigi da Fregona known as 'Miracol', a whimsical winemaker, acrobat, juggler, balancer, fire eater, poet and, above all emeritus taster and then by Simone Salin from Mestre who, with his experience as a cellarman and restaurateur, completed the team working in the vineyards and in the cellar.

Gigi da Fregona known as 'Miracol', a whimsical winemaker, acrobat, juggler, balancer, fire eater, poet and, above all emeritus taster.

The wines are not named after the grapes, but after the location where they are grown. They are made of different varieties of grape and have a distinctive, unusual taste. The hills around Venice provide "normal" growing conditions, but the Venetians had to improvise to be able to make their own wine.



TASTING NOTES



The soil type has a base of mainly river silt and sand built up over thousands of years, with sea levels changing continuously.

The inhabitants have added compost as everything was recycled on the island and richer soil for vegetable gardens etc.

The wines aren't registered as of specific origin. They are a mixture of various grapes that we found already together side by side in the vineyards.

There are no added sulphites. Spontaneous fermentation with yeasts from the grape skins and the wine cellar atmosphere!

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“I’ve documented personally that fermentation begins 24 hours after crushing when the weather is warm. If the harvest, especially of the reds was done later and the weather cooler, it takes longer but is always spontaneous.” **says Colleen Mccann from the Association.** *“The traditional varieties of the lagoon islands and surrounding area. Whites :- Malvasia, dorona, glera (which is prosecco out of the doc area), Garganega, bianchetta, trebbiano and verduzzo. Reds:- cabernet, merlot, carmenere.”*”





School groups and teachers are amongst those that help with the harvest and then the grapes are taken by boat to San Michele, where they are individually cleaned and pressed by foot, destemmed by hand and their juices are then poured into the vats.

Fermentation begins immediately, without any addition of yeasts or additives. It does not get more natural than this. Then they have to go three times a day to "push down the crust" for 5-7 days until the specialists say it can be drained off into the wooden kegs to mature for almost a year. Production has continuously improved over time and the connoisseurs are sitting up and taking notice.

The Association is passionate about teaching people about this ancient art and tradition and has many education programmes with local schools and colleges.

They are now turning their attention to olive trees, which are numerous on the islands and in the city, resulting in the production of an "extra virgin olive oil from the lagoon". The olive trees are "adopted" by the schoolchildren and olives treated in salamonia (brine) as well as crushed for oil.

"LAGUNA NEL BICCHIERE" IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION AND AS SUCH, CANNOT CHARGE FOR THEIR WINE. THEY PROMOTE THE IDEA OF COMING TO WORK WITH THEM RATHER THAN MAKING A PROFIT.

They give the wine to local festas and celebrations to promote the Association.
To taste it for yourself you will have to travel to Venice and meet with the Association
- it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it!!!

TO FIND OUT MORE, GO TO
[HTTPS://WWW.LAGUNANELBICCHIERE.IT/](https://www.lagunanelbicchiere.it/)
