



**Masi Seminar - Vinitaly 2001**

**THE WINES OF VERONA  
QUALITY, ORIGINALITY AND BIOLOGICAL TECHNOLOGY**

*Gruppo Tecnico Masi*

Introduced by Dr. Sandro Boscaini  
Presented by Dr. Lanfranco Paronetto  
Experimental wines for tasting

## INTRODUCTION

*By Sandro Boscaini*

Increasingly, wine represents a hedonistic and cultural product rather than a mere foodstuff. At the same time, the New World is staking a claim for itself in various markets with some very tempting offers, both in terms of quality and of marketing. These are the two paradigms for the world wine scene and the two themes on which the producers of the traditional wine-producing areas of Europe have to concentrate in order to elaborate coherent and efficient strategies.

We can rise to this challenge if – aware of our historical and traditional values and of the unique nature of our products – we European producers are able to satisfy the cultural expectations of new consumers whilst, at the same time, making products with a high level of quality, which also offer good value for money and which are backed up by efficient marketing.

The key to achieving this goal is to give each product a technical and cultural identity and thus highlight the factors that make it truly original. This identity involves numerous factors: particularly historical/cultural ones, which relate to the area from which it comes, and technical/traditional ones, which have to do with the specific (and sometimes ancient) varieties and the distinctive techniques used in its production. It becomes abundantly clear that tradition is indispensable as a support for originality. On the other hand, it is technology that can render traditional values enjoyable.

Tradition means not only the past, but also what remains valid from the past in spite of the passing of time. It is a complex group of ever-present and very deep values that live on in spite of the obsolescence of certain processes, so that they can be brought up to date and highlighted by new technical advancements.

From this point of view, Verona is a unique laboratory, a real textbook case. In its territory are present all those values that are evocative of an ancient, noble and deep-rooted culture. In its vineyard, one still finds singular (and in some ways rather exotic) vines, which have been in the area for centuries (the principal ones being Corvina and Garganega). Ancient methods of producing wine from dried grapes are still maintained as representing a real tradition that is worth upholding. In such context the danger of ignoring such singular factors, in order to give an “international style”, is a grave one.

The avoidance of this peril consists in underlining the particular characteristics of our grapes and of our wines. To this end, it is particularly the use of biological technologies that seems to give the most satisfactory results.

This year, the Masi Technical Group, which has been working on highlighting the unique nature of viticulture and enology in the Venetian region for many years now, has decided to dwell upon the contributions made by biological technologies to the originality of the product and to the highlighting of its characteristics.

Experiments of great interest have stemmed from this approach, particularly if the results are compared to those from simple winemaking techniques that are in common use in the zone. The Masi Technical Group's contribution is intended as a broad-based one from a conceptual point of view and as a specific one, from a technical point of view with regard to the Veronese wine production sector in particular.

Masi also conveys this message at Vinitaly 2001 through the works of the artist in stained glass from Venice, Albano Poli. In two of the windows of our cellar at Gargagnago, he has interpreted the mysteries of the growth of the vine and of fermentation with all the emotional intensity and powerful imager that these two themes inspire.

# THE WINES OF VERONA QUALITY, ORIGINALITY AND BIOLOGICAL TECHNOLOGY

*By Lanfranco Paronetto*

## **The Wines of Verona: A Heritage of Originality well worth Preserving**

The Veronese wine production scene is a very rich and decidedly singular one. That around Verona is, in fact, a particularly suitable area for sustaining high-quality viticulture. It is an historic area that has succeeded in preserving, over the course of the centuries, the peculiarities and unique characteristics of its wines.

The basic factors underlying the Veronese wine sector may be summarised in a few fundamental points:

### A very rich ampelographical heritage.

The principal grape varieties of the zones around Verona are Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara for red wines, and Garganega, Trebbiano di Soave and Durella for whites. These are all “indigenous” (i.e. strictly local) varieties which, at least so far, have not been widely planted in any other area apart from the one around Verona. These cultivars are not well known because, aside from the limited vineyard area devoted to them, they are rarely actually mentioned by name. People have, naturally, heard of wines such as Valpolicella and Bardolino, but no one knows (or indeed generally offers) a wine called – and made from – Corvina, which, besides, could not be DOC.

There are also certain other red varieties that give greater interest and future potential to our wines. These are deemed “secondary” because they are not very widespread, but they are also indigenous and offer important characteristics for improving and giving greater individuality to the quality of Veronese wines. These include Oseleta, Rossignola, Dindarella and Forsellina.

### A particularly favourable *terroir*

The soil of our area is of varying geo-pedological origin (moraine, volcanic, alluvial), and results from the activity of the sea, of volcanoes and of glaciers and, more recently, that of man. Man has, indeed, been instrumental in preserving the soil’s capacity for supporting the cultivation of the vine, by encouraging and sometimes slowly modifying certain natural balances.

The climatic conditions of the area, which are generally temperate and mild, with an adequate amount of sunshine and average rainfall of around 850 mm per

year, offer a favourable situation for the vines, ideal for the gradual and well-balanced ripening of the fruit.

#### Attractively uncompromising, direct and immediately appealing wines

Veronese wines are very “user-friendly”. They are not especially demanding or massively structured, but are instead mellow and appealing, displaying some of those fundamental characteristics that coincide with what is today referred to as an “international style”.

Both the white wines and the reds of Verona are able to offer a broad range of variations with constantly increasing levels of quality. For example, starting with young, tangy and fruity wines, one can go on to more full-bodied products aged either in the more modern small casks or in the more traditional large *botti*. Then, indeed, one can reach peaks of rare excellence with certain single-vineyard selections of Amarone.

This then is, in brief, the present situation of Veronese wines: a situation that is, generally speaking, a positive one. Indeed, all in all, even the debates about the true typical style of the wines, about the advisability of blending with non-indigenous grape varieties (while still respecting the various DOC regulations), about the correctness of using barriques and about the possibilities offered by the partial drying of grapes for Reciotos and Amarones (such as the use of the ancient *refermentation* technique which, incidentally, has never been officially codified), only go to underline the richness and versatility of Veronese wines. These are very original wines indeed.

#### **Veronese wines: some problems to discuss**

Though they have developed over the centuries with great originality and in a particularly suitable environment, the characteristics of Veronese wines must face up to the realities of today’s marketplace.

It is true that, at times in the past, the success of Verona’s wines has led to attempts at plagiarism and their straightforward, immediate style was also sometimes interpreted with gross negligence, thus causing serious damage to the image of these wines. However, one must also recognise that there has been a reaction by producers (or at least the more forward-thinking ones) who have started to give greater thought to the quality factors for wines in the Province of Verona.

There remains, however, a series of problems that have not yet been approached with the necessary decisiveness or at least not with the promptness that is appropriate to the fast pace of today’s events.

Here are a few examples:

#### Vineyards that are not yet geared towards producing grapes with “potential”.

In spite of the fact that there has been an undeniable rash of new projects and some very interesting results in the last ten years, in general there has been no great and obvious change in the traditional vineyards of Verona. The yield per hectare remains high, with plantings that rarely exceed 2,500 vines per hectare.

The tradition in the Verona area of semi-drying the grapes seems sometimes to push into the background the need to produce grapes with real winemaking “potential”: if one really wants to make a more richly structured wine, one can rely on the semi-dried grapes to do the trick. However, this does not take into account the fact that creaming off the best grapes for *appassimento* quite naturally leads to a lowering of the overall quality of the grapes destined for the production of the “normal” wines.

Another possible way of obviating the need for real high-quality fruit is that of adding the percentages of non-traditional grape varieties (such as cabernet and chardonnay) allowed by the various DOC production regulations, or even blending with well-structured wines from other zones, when allowed. The outcome, though, in any case, is that in the vineyards of the Verona area change is taking place at a very low rate.

#### Vinification techniques are still rather lacking in precision and some winemaking practices are rather slipshod.

I certainly do not intend here to highlight the shortcomings of Veronese winemakers (which are not substantially different to those of enologists in other parts of Italy). Rather, I wish to stress that they are indeed trying to obtain better quality, but without a well-defined aim to act as a point of reference, and without carrying out a global analysis of the actual potential for such improvement (the availability of grapes suitable for expressing the desired characteristics, or the availability of the necessary equipment and of qualified personnel, capable of applying the required technology).

Usually a brief maceration is carried out, finishing the fermentation off quickly after de-vatting and eliminating the lees early so as to preserve a certain freshness and an immediate, fruity appeal in the wine.

Sometimes, on the other hand, winemakers rely on some new-fangled, state-of-the-art piece of machinery for vinifying the grapes, or else they set great store on certain operations that are generally recognized as being valid for obtaining particular results. These might include, for example, a long maceration in order to extract more colour, the use of selected yeasts to highlight certain typical varietal characteristics and barrique-ageing to give a richer, more well-defined flavour to the wine. We shall deal with this subject in slightly greater depth below.

#### Scarce attention to Research and Development

This factor is obviously linked to the preceding point, and a rather “chicken and egg”-like situation exists: are there no clear aims and objectives because there is no Research and Development, or is there no Research and Development because there are no clear goals?

The real truth of the matter is, however, that there cannot be any real progress if there is no serious experimentation which can give complete information, both in terms of

the results that can effectively be achieved and of the way of obtaining that result - and how much it will cost to do so.

We must acknowledge that progress in this particular area is difficult and problematical, and that it depends on the efforts of each individual winery, rather than on a hypothetical institutional organisation among producers. It is an arduous path that each producer jealously carves out for himself and himself alone, and one that most people only decide to embark upon if they are really forced to do so by the requirements of a difficult marketplace that has to be confronted in an adequate manner, and with which, besides, one finds little help in coming to terms.

### Scarce aptitude for marketing

I do not wish to enter into the merits of a very debatable area in which the success of any strategy can only be judged retrospectively. I merely wish to underline certain factors that have to do with production techniques.

If, in the Verona area, one finds a respectable concentration of sizeable commercial companies, one must also recognise a general propensity toward selling large volumes at low cost rather than aiming to produce wines of particularly high quality. Striving to keep prices keen invariably implies “dilution” of the wine’s characteristics and a loss of clearly-defined quality...as well as scarce resources for communication. It is true that, in the last few years, there has been greater attention towards the quality of the wines, but one is still aware of producers’ yielding to the temptation of seeking remedies in external factors – which might be cabernet or chardonnay, or something else – rather than laying emphasis on the characteristics that make their zone unique. Today, defining the product lies at the basis of any marketing operation. Moreover, it is an important basis because it is on this that the whole communication strategy (i.e. everything that we want the consumer to know about our wine) has to be constructed.

### **Traditional vinification of the Veronese grape varieties**

In considering the traditional vinification of Veronese wines, we are referring here especially to the vinification of red wines even if at least part of our observations are equally valid for the whites.

The fairly high yields of our grape varieties, the tendency to pick before the grapes have reached full phenolic ripeness and a widespread goal of making wines that are essentially perfumed and pleasantly fresh and fruity: none of these factors have allowed for great technological developments. For this reason, traditional vinification remains simple and straightforward and has not undergone any substantial changes.

The technological process for this type of vinification is shown in fig. 1 and can be commented upon as follows:

- Addition to the pressed grapes of a fairly significant dose of sulphur dioxide in order to combat those micro-organisms that are most damaging for the wine. Even though one has noted a gradual reduction of the amount used of this product, it is advisable not to run too many risks in such situations and so there is a limit to how much the dose of sulphur dioxide can be reduced.
- A brief maceration (5-6 days): such a short maceration does not allow for a significant extraction of tannins, which would give rise to a wine of really good structure. Besides, with grapes such as those that we have hypothesised above, it is better not to have too long a period of skin contact: one risks making a wine that is rather astringent, bitter, and with accentuated vegetal notes.
- De-vatting and finishing off the fermentation in another 3-5 days. This is a technique that, to some extent, combines the vinification methods for red and for white wines. After de-vatting, finishing off the fermentation without skin contact makes the yeasts produce, among other things amylic esters, substances that give wine strong fruity aromas which, while being pleasant, can also mask the wine's true varietal characteristics.
- The wine in its unfinished state often needs to have its insufficient alcohol level remedied by adding concentrated must and thus undergoing a second fermentation. Usually this practice brings out the fruity character of the wine even more.
- Rackings and the final addition of sulphur dioxide bring the fermentation to its end. In traditional vinification, the malolactic fermentation is generally ignored, partly because producers do not really know what it does, and partly because preserving a wine's acidity corresponds to the belief (still, unfortunately, held by many producers) that this will give such wines greater potential for keeping and evolution.
- Over time, too, great faith has been placed in enological "cures" that can make a wine "turn out right" and give it those characteristics that are deemed suitable for giving it market appeal.
- The final result is that of fairly light, immediately appealing wines with a "nervy", fresh, tangy and acidulous style, as well as a bouquet of flowers and fruits, but with scarce varietal characteristics.

### **Vinification with "biological techniques"**

There has been much talk in recent years about biological technology, but the debate has not always been an informed one. The biological techniques to which we refer are a series of operations that are capable of bringing out the full potential of the grapes by means of controlling the natural biological phenomena for which vinification is the ideal environment. But why does one in fact need to change to biological technology?

The first, and fundamental, reason lies in our attempt to re-appropriate for ourselves the “natural style” of a product which always seems to vary, sustained by various trends and market forces, between being an “artisan/minimalist” product or the result of state-of-the-art winemaking technology on an industrial scale. It is important to emphasise quite strongly that human intervention is indispensable in winemaking, but also that this should be limited to understanding, and having some degree of control over, those phenomena that take place naturally in the grape and in the must that then becomes wine.

In this regard, one can maintain that with biological technology, too, one is going back to placing the greatest emphasis on the grape itself as the fundamental raw material for making high quality wines.

The second reason derives from an awareness that the wealth of phenomena that comes into play is greater than what we actually need, and well-reasoned choices are therefore required as to what steps are most suitable in order to produce the desired results; The parameters in action are in fact both numerous and complex, and different linkages between them can give rise to what may be very different results. This imposes a mental discipline on the enologist which, in general, he is not used to: in a sense, it means the very reverse of his “usual” *modus operandi*, trying to “program” the quality desired (and therefore also giving order to the operations required for this to happen) rather than “curing” a wine made according to certain standardised techniques.

Indeed, biological technology, rather than being merely another form of technology requires, first and foremost, a different sort of mental approach. It calls for one to define a paradigm of quality and then identify the actual operational techniques required to succeed in obtaining that objective.

The technological process for this type of vinification is shown in fig. 2. Its most significant points are as follows:

- To start with a raw material – the grapes – which have real potential that is waiting to be expressed. This means that they must have a high concentration of substances that, either in themselves or if subsequently transformed, can constitute a richer basis so as to give a wine that is more concentrated and has greater individual personality than usual.
- To aim to release this “potential” into the must through the use of appropriate enzymes or by means of a fairly long period of maceration. The use of enzymes is fully justified by the fact that they modify the kinetics of the release of certain compounds that are of fundamental importance for the quality of the wine, such as the grapes’ colour, tannins and polysaccharides.
- A fairly long maceration period is necessary for this release to be completed more effectively, as well as to favour the combining of the above-mentioned substances in order, eventually, to obtain a more full-bodied and more rounded wine.

- Fermentation with selected yeasts is possible in those cases when the grapes have been picked in good conditions of hygiene; that is, when the grapes' indigenous microbial flora has not been allowed to develop and have an effect on the must. In this case it is also possible to use decidedly limited doses of sulphur dioxide, with consequent advantages of a technical nature, apart from the obvious ones in terms of hygiene and health. Selected yeasts can be chosen on the basis of certain technological needs as well as because of the quality profile that they can confer on the wine.
- In this case, too, the malolactic fermentation is not only usual but is actually rendered necessary by the need to make the wine softer, less aggressive and more well-structured and complex. Favourable progress of the malolactic fermentation is made more likely and is indeed induced by the addition of specific selected bacteria.

If one re-evaluates and studies in depth that take place during vinification, biological technology reveals itself to be increasingly suitable for controlling them. The resulting wine is well made and true to type. It therefore reflects the characteristics of the grapes themselves and, at the same time, is particularly interesting for the development of the wine's quality aspects in general as well as those linked more particularly to the type of wine and to the "style" that one intends to offer.

## **Conclusions**

The paths to be followed in order for there to be progress in the quality of Veronese wines can be identified as an improvement in the quality of the grapes themselves and as vinification of the fruit with greater respect for its inherent characteristics.

This all involves, on the one hand, keeping one's basic knowledge constantly up to date, and, on the other hand, re-working that knowledge so as to be able to apply actual winemaking practices that are not too complicated, logical from a technical point of view, and economically viable.

Nothing can be improvised, however, and every aspect has to be carefully weighed up before becoming company policy, with all that that entails in financial terms and in terms of the quality of the actual wine.

One cannot do without experimentation, therefore, and seeing whether these new ideas also offer positive results in practice, or indeed if methods used in other places can also be successful in the context of Veronese winemaking. Research increases the possibility of finding new answers and, in any case, experimentation always increases the experience of the people involved.

This is what the Masi Technical Group has now been working on for a number of years, offering some of its results to the attention of a group of people who, in a certain sense, play the role of the final consumer and whose opinion we consider to be extremely valuable.

In conclusion, Veronese wine may be considered as a sort of pendulum oscillating between a situation of “indifferent anonymity” in the case of large-volume wines to one of “rare excellence” in the production of an absolutely original wine, with unique characteristics deriving from the great and ancient tradition of drying the grapes.

In our opinion, this oscillation is a bit too wide at present, and one has to reduce the swinging of the pendulum to encompass product sectors that are more clearly defined. This process has to be carried out by growing better-quality grapes and transforming them into wines that are more in line with present-day needs: in this regard, biological technology fits the bill perfectly!

The great tradition of Veronese winemaking can, and must, rediscover its originality!

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**Gruppo Tecnico Masi**

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**SEMINARIO MASI – VINITALY 2001**  
**“VINI DI VERONA: ORIGINALITA’ E TECNOLOGIE BIOLOGICHE”**  
**DATI DEI VINI IN ASSAGGIO**

	<i>RONDINELLA 1</i>	<i>RONDINELLA 2</i>	<i>CORVINA 1</i>	<i>CORVINA 2</i>	<i>OSELETA</i>
<i>Data di pigiatura/ Pressing date</i>	19/10/00	19/10/00	25/10/00	25/10/00	30/10/00
<i>Giorni di macerazione/ Maceration days</i>	6	15	10	18	22
<i>Lieviti/Yeast</i>	indigenous	Strain D254	indigenous	Strain D254	Strain BM45
<i>Batteri malolattici/ Malolactic Bacteria</i>	no	Strain EQ.54	no	Strain EQ.54	Strain EQ.54
<i>Alcool/ Alcohol % Vol</i>	12.50	12.50	12.20	12.20	12.50
<i>Acidità totale/ Total acidity g/l</i>	5.00	4.70	5.50	5.00	5.80
<i>pH</i>	3.30	3.40	3.30	3.36	3.45
<i>An. Solforosa libera/ Free sulphur dioxide mg/l</i>	25	30	22	26	24
<i>An. Solforosa totale/ Total sulphur dioxide mg/l</i>	100	102	96	98	102
<i>Zuccheri riduttori/ Reducer sugars g/l</i>	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	5.0
<i>Acidità volatile/ Volatile acidity g/l</i>	0.29	0.30	0.27	0.30	0.27
<i>Estratto secco dedotti gli zuccheri/ Dry extract without sugars g/l</i>	20.70	22.90	21.70	23.90	32.10
<i>Acido malico/ malic acid g/l</i>	1.80	0.10	1.75	0.08	0.10

Analisi del 25.03.2001

**NOTE D'ASSAGGIO/  
TASTING NOTES:**

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