



ALOIS LAGEDER

1823

IN 2012, WE WILL BE ENTERING THE AGE OF AQUARIUS, A TIME FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT. THE REVOLUTIONS STARTS IN THE VINEYARD: HERE WE HAVE SOME GOOD EXAMPLES FROM ALL OVER ITALY.

THE NEW WINE ERA

by Marco Sabellico

RUDOLPH STEINER, FATHER OF ANTHROPOSOLOGY AND BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE, BELIEVED THAT HUMAN HISTORY WAS A SEQUENCE OF EPOCHS (LASTING SOME 2160 YEARS), DIVIDED ACCORDING TO ASTROLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY. AFTER TAURUS, ARIES AND PISCES, WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF ENTERING THE AGE OF AQUARIUS: A PERIOD OF SUSTAINABILITY AND OF SEEKING AN ENVIRONMENTAL-FRIENDLY LIFESTYLE. STARTING WITH GRAPEVINES.

“Since I was a boy, I have always enjoyed listening to old people talking about the moon’s phases and the countryside. I grew up eating vegetables from the garden, grown by my mother using Biodynamic methods. So things just came naturally...” says Alois Lageder, one of the most important names in Italian wine production. We might call him one of the pioneers of a different environmental approach to wine-growing. Already in the mid-1990s, when it came to building the new wine making facilities in Magré, he was looking at the concept of sustainability.

“I had a great design, which for the time was also quite attentive to energy savings as well as focusing on using local materials,” says Alois, “but when I talked to a friend, Hans Glauber, founder of the Alto Adige Ecoinstitute, we looked at it a little more, and for me this was an eye-opener.” The design was totally overhauled, looking at sustainable energy and carbon dioxide production. Alois understands that wine is not just a product, it has to express a form of spirituality. Grapevines and vinification go hand in hand and all this can’t disregard social values and or ignore the wellbeing of the people working at the winery, of animals, or biodiversity and energy levels... A holistic way of looking at things, then, one where wine carries a message...

Today Lageder himself is president of the Ecoinstitute, a body that looks to bring together ecology, economics and social aspects into solid projects and cultural activities and to raise awareness about environmental themes. The new winery was completed in 1995 and it is still a reference point for bio-architecture today. It is an underground tower, 17 metres deep, which has no visual impact on the landscape of Magré. Here, the grapes are processed using the force of gravity, without the need for pumps;



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air is conditioned by re-circulating the air cooled in underground pipes and power comes from the geothermic heat pumps and photovoltaic panels on the modern roofing, all of which covers some 70% of the company's needs. The rest comes from the electricity grid and neither gas nor liquid fuel is used.

"What interests me is for us to be part of a natural cycle that creates wellbeing without damaging the environment," Alois continues, "we need to work the soil using natural methods, transforming our product without wasting water or energy. We need to create working conditions that provide serenity and a sense of wellbeing to those who work here. This all has an effect on the wine and those who drink it also need to have this element of choice as well as the intrinsic quality. As far as power is concerned, we are currently working with the municipal authority of Magré on a project for a biomass plant, where we will be able to cater for our remaining power needs, "cleanly". We will contribute with our vineyard and cellar refuses and that way, we will be creating eco-friendly energy for other people, using our organic waste."

Sustainability is the result of lots of small choices made in every area of the company. At Alois Lageder, they are looking at bringing back horse power, since horses are cheaper and safer than tractors and also don't compact the soil, but they leave it to breathe. The fertiliser from horses and from the sheep that regularly come to graze among the vines, provide the necessary elements. Naturally. When you talk to Alois, he explains that even on energy levels, animals interact well with the vines on account of their astral nature. We are free to believe it or not. But when he says that his glass bottles have gone from 650 grams to 450, which means that for of a production of one and a half million bottles, he has used 300 tons less glass in a year. And that means that he has used less raw materials and a lot less fuel for transport. Packaging is in brown cardboard to avoid using pollutant colouring and coloured labels only use natural inks. In the buildings you will find only wood, lime and stone – cement is used only where strictly necessary – and very few iron girders in the ceilings, just to inhibit magnetic fields; electrical systems are not installed in a ring circuit for the same reason and they don't create electrosmog.

There are also works of art around, thanks to a special agreement with a gallery in Milan. And a programme of classical and contemporary music concerts to be held throughout the year. This company is a workplace but at the same time, a place that, for Alois Lageder has to produce positive energy: for the wine, for those who work there, for those who visit. As beautiful as the charming vineyards, where you will find only wooden poles to support the vines and where they are working to achieve carbon footprint certification or, in other words, how much carbon dioxide has been consumed and made by the company over the course of the year.

We are really at the dawn of a new era. There is a great deal of awareness about these new themes and many companies in Italy are seeking this route. Winemakers such as Alois Lageder and Barone Pizzini in



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Franciacorta – great examples of bioarchitecture and low impact on the environment – will increasingly be the norm in Italian wine growing. And the large and small producers alike will see things on this wavelength, so it won't be possible to mention them all. We can name a couple, such as the Terra Moretti group, of which Bellavista is the parent company, and which with Tuscan producer Petra, has started a project for environmental and also ethical sustainability, which will be repeated in other companies in the group. Here it is possible to see a cutting-edge photovoltaic, floating on the irrigation lake, with the panels that follow the sun during the day.

In Sicily, the SoStain project, which was started up by two well-known names, Tasca d'Almerita and Planeta, has been developed in conjunction with the universities of Milan and Piacenza. This project monitors land management, water consumption and recycling, power resource management, employee relations and impact on local communities. It is a project that continues to evolve and is open to membership by other growers.

Italy's wine industry wants a new look and to integrate sustainability with ethics and economics. This is why Gambero Rosso is organising an important convention, a day on which to look at these themes, to understand and lay the foundations for a new Italian wine industry. We'll let you know.

In the meantime, progress is being made with standards for voluntary environmental certification. On this subject, we can point to the ISO 14000 measures, which cover a series of international standards on the environmental management of organisations (not just in agriculture, of course). The ISO 14001 standard (translated by the Italian National Certification Body – UNI – as UNI EN ISO 14001:2004) is a certifiable standard through which, an accredited certifying body will provide conformity certification to those working within specific rules. ISO 14001 certification is not obligatory, but a voluntary choice of the company/organisation that decides to set up, implement, maintain and improve its own environmental management system. 14001 certification does not certify a company's low impact on the environment; what it means is that a company is using a management system that will systematically lower its environmental impact. It is not product certification; it certifies a company's attitude.

The difference between a "green" company and a conventional one is increasingly linked to these factors rather than to old or new winemaking practices. It doesn't matter if your wine is made in a jug using wild yeasts if at the end of the year, you have produced a bigger carbon footprint than your neighbour is what the more intelligent, environmentally aware consumer seems to be saying.

"These are really difficult calculations and we are at the start of this type of environmental awareness," says Professor Leonardo Valenti, winegrowing lecturer at the University of Milan. "Once, we used to look at



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pesticides, at pollutants; now we make far more sophisticated calculations. English-speaking countries have developed the Carbon Footprint Index, following the problems with the hole in the ozone layer, especially in Australia and South Africa. But every country has its own calculation coefficients, according to climate, to the presence of nuclear power plants, etc. So my idea and that of my research group, the SATA, was to develop an Italian index, and the Ita.Ca – the Italian Carbon Calculator – was born. It serves to assess the environmental impact of a farm. It tells you how much CO₂ is produced in a year so as to be able to take action. It is a sort of HACCP, a self-assessment method that is similar to those used in the food industry. We have been trying it out with success at a series of farms in Lombardy but not only there. And alongside this tool, we have created the GEA, a system to assess agronomic efficiency that tells you whether you are working rationally and efficiently on the land and without any useless treatments. This leads farms to undertake to improve the environment, to work more efficiently and to offer healthier produce. And all this is a great boost to marketing and communication.”

In short, climate changes exist; the world’s climate is changing, ocean currents are changing, and by working to reduce emissions, we can slow down or redimension the problem. By reaching a stable plateau, we can sustainably develop resources, compatibly with the planet’s population. But, in brief, the problem is capturing the carbon dioxide we produce and “blocking” it stably. There is no doubt about the best system for this: trees, woods.

“Every hectare of woodland absorbs, in a lasting manner, about 5 tons of CO₂ every year, transforming it into wood. Every company should compensate for its carbon footprint by maintaining and looking after a wood,” concludes the professor.

“There is a fact that is kept quiet,” says Emilio Rotolo, owner of the Friuli company, Volpe Pasini, “and it’s this: wine growing is one of the productive activities with the highest impact on the environment.” This may seem difficult to believe after looking at his estate and the beautiful vineyards on the eastern hillsides of Friuli, where everything smells good and natural. “No one tells you that by fermenting alcohol, we add thousands of tons of CO₂ to the environment,” continues Rotolo, “so a wine grower needs to do more than others to compensate. We need to work in all areas, from bottles to renewable sources of energy. But our main means should be woodland.”

So, Volpe Pasini, 52 hectares of vineyards and some 400,000 bottles a year, also maintains 33 hectares (to be increased) of woods nearby. “A well-looked-after wood,” adds Rotolo, “absorbs four times more carbon dioxide than an uncultivated one. And in our area, the running costs are about 700 euros per hectare a year, which we partly recover with a state contribution of 220 euros. But aside from that, well-kept woods are



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now part of our company image.”

The subject of sustainability is increasingly present in the south, as in the north. “In Puglia, growing has moved towards the flatter and more fertile areas,” says Francesco Liantonio, owner of Torrevento, Castel del Monte, “and our challenge was to re-establish a farming economy in the Alta Murgia rural park, where crops are basically vines, olives and almonds.” Francesco has left behind a promising university career to follow his true vocation: farming. His business studies have been essential, though. It is around the imposing bulk of Castel del Monte, which overlooks the land for kilometres around, that Francesco has gradually built up the old family property, planting vineyards and dedicating himself to re-launching the native variety of local grape, *nero di Troia*. His Castel del Monte Rosso Vigna Pedale, made solely with *nero di Troia* grapes, continues to win awards from guides and reviews and is now a classic on Puglia’s winemaking scene. But Francesco has done more than create a wine-growing company, “We have tried to restore an income from farming to the 1500 families in the area, who now live, work and maintain the ecosystem in the park. People are no longer emigrating.” And this brings in another element: social impact, employee wellbeing, economic effects on the area. Ethical principles. Four hundred hectares of vineyard, owned or leased, certified organic production, even if this is not stated on all of the labels produced (some 2.5 million bottles per year, successfully exported the world over). Alongside this, there is farm tourism, a restaurant, a hotel facility, organic grain, a pasta factory, a stable with over 40 horses, breeding of all sorts of farm animal and even birds of prey – a homage to Frederick II.

“A wine-grower can’t just think of quality as an end in itself,” says Edi Clementin, CEO of Jermann in Friuli, “Here, we are committed to bringing back tradition using innovative technologies. And we work towards low environmental impact with our energy sources (geothermic and photovoltaics). We work some of the vines biodynamically (such as Vigna Trus in Ruttars) and others organically. We follow a code of ethics when it comes to staff management and we undertake to guarantee worker safety. If you care about quality, then you look after the environment and respect people.”

“Sustainability needs to be environmental, economic and ethical,” says Marco Caprai, wine-grower from Montefalco, “You can’t have an environment without an economy. You need to be able to survive in the marketplace and do so with low impact, recycling waste and giving something back to the community, managing staff as well as possible. You can’t be a hippy, a ‘naturalist’, if – as often occurs – you don’t pay your employees enough or they aren’t on the payroll. Or if you waste water and fuel. That’s too easy...” At Montefalco Caprai, with six other growers, Adanti, Antano, Antonelli, Scacciadiavoli, Perticaia and Tabarrini, they are implementing the Montefalco 2015 – The New Green Revolution project. Inspired by other



regulations in force, such as those of the Californian Winegrowers Alliance and their Program, these companies have put in place a series of practices for measuring environmental impact – with the help of the SATA - ranging from vine management to staff relations and air quality, which help each company to improve and to be more efficient.

“If you think that just by rationalising the use of tractors in 120 hectares of my estate during 2010, I saved 6000 litres of diesel fuel. And with my new spray recovery nozzles, we have cut down on treatment products by 60%.” For Caprai and the others in the group, sustainability doesn’t stop at the gates to their vineyards: the whole area needs to be involved and committed, not just the individual growers. And all this will reflect on the image of the wine and the area. “To get certain results, you need staff of a certain level, trained and kept up to date. The age of the consultant oenologist who comes to the winery every couple of months is over. It’s the team that needs to be strong.”

So, was Rudolph Steiner right, then? Is this really the beginning of the Age of Aquarius?