

SHORTTAKE

# GOING FOR GOLD

Gold has been associated with Venice, one of Italy's great cities, for many centuries. Now wine from one of the world's rarest grape varieties, Dorona di Venezia or Gold of Venice, is attracting global attention since the restoration of one of only two vineyards on the 188 islands of Venice.

Gianluca Bisol, one of the main players in the world of Prosecco in the prestigious Valdobbiadene (VAHL-doh-BEE'AH-deh-neh) DOCG, discovered a dilapidated vineyard in 2002 on the island of Mazzorbo. Only 88 vines of Dorona di Venezia were still alive. The name comes from the Italian word for gold and is based on the way the wine glows in the glass. DNA investigation shows the variety was planted about 2,800 years ago.

In 1966, the worst floods in Venice's history devastated the area and many locals abandoned agriculture. High levels of salt contaminated the soil and people surrendered the idea even of growing vegetables. Yet the vines survived.

The Bisol family started restoring the estate in 2006. Today Tenuta Venissa's 0.8 hectares has 4,000 vines. From these, winemaker Roberto Cipresso makes about 4,000 bottles a year. Giovanni Moretti, a famous glassmaker, designed the half-litre bottles. These are hand made on the neighbouring island of Murano



Tenuta Venissa vineyard on the island of Mazzorbo in Venice. The tower is the only surviving part of the monastery that was built in the 1300s

and people tend to keep them as souvenirs because of their beauty. The label pays homage to the more than 300 goldsmiths who worked in Venice until the 1400s and is the work of Berta Battiloro, the last remaining goldsmith in Venice.

Gianluca Bisol's son Matteo is the owner of Tenuta Venissa. The first vintage was in 2010 and one piece of gold leaf adorns that label. Two pieces are on the 2011 label. Each year an extra piece will be added, Matteo Bisol

said. Wines are sold to high-end restaurants and a select clientele around the world. The latest vintage, 2012, was available *en primeur* until the end of October this year, with delivery by mid-December for Christmas. The *en primeur* price was € 480 for a case of six.

The free-run juice spends 20 to 30 days on grape skins, depending on the year. The 2011 vintage spent 24 days. This maceration gives the wine a distinct gold colour, reflecting the name of the grape. Matteo said the winemaker learned this from the locals, who have always macerated for a long time because it concentrated aromas and flavours. Maceration also gives the wine great ageing potential. In the mouth the wine tastes like a red wine with chewy tannins.

The island's soil is 50% sand with the rest a combination of limestone and clay. The *terroir* gives the wine a distinct salinity because, as Matteo Bisol noted, the soil retains salt from the sea. Salt is also present in the air because the vineyard is surrounded by the sea on three sides. Sea breezes and salt in the air keep the vineyard free of diseases, despite high levels of humidity in summer.

Tenuta Venissa has a one-Michelin star restaurant called Venissa, in the former stables of the monastery which was based on the island until the 1300s. Only the tower of the monastery remains. This year the restaurant has experimented with four chefs, one for each of the courses. Venissa received its Michelin star in 2012. It opens every day except Tuesday but will be closed from November 1 to January 31.

All food comes from the area. Pensioners from Burano, a neighboring island known for its lace and brightly-coloured cottages, look after Venissa's gardens and sell their produce to the restaurant. Fish comes from about 100 fishermen based on Burano. The wine list is predominately Italian and includes most of the best wines in the country, with a focus on older vintages. Many diners who try the gold wine



The *terroir* of Tenuta Venissa gives the wine a distinct salinity. The vineyard is surrounded by the sea on three sides

in the restaurant ask to be put on the list to purchase the wine.

A cheaper alternative to the 18-seat Venissa restaurant is the *osteria* on the property. It serves contemporary food and is open every day except Wednesday. If arriving by water at dusk, the light is wondrous. It is an exquisite way to be seduced slowly by the island's architecture, which offers a subtle form of extended historic foreplay. ♦

— Stephen Quinn

## HOW TO GET THERE



The vineyard is on the island of Mazzorbo. The nicest way to get there from Venice is to take the number 14 water-bus, or vaporetto, to Burano from the central stop of San Marco in Venice. From the Burano stop for the vaporetto, walk 200 metres to the restaurant through the vineyard. The journey from San Marco takes about 70 minutes and is very relaxing. A day-pass for the vaporetto costs 20 euros. A water taxi is faster but will be expensive at about 100 euros one way.

The estate has six rooms. Owner Matteo Bisol says November is the best month to visit Venice because the crowds are smaller and the weather is still great. It was about

18°C on the day of my visit and I ate in the sun, without a jacket. More information can be found at <http://venissa.it/>