



Broadening your sparkling wine repertoire with Veneto's Lessini Durello

Imagine promoting a small sparkling appellation from Veneto when all over the world bubbles from Veneto rhyme with Prosecco. Not an easy task. Despite this, the Lessini Durello appellation has been constantly growing since 1987 when it was created.

By Irene Graziotto

Photographs: Consorzio Tutela Vini Soave e Recioto di Soave, courtesy of the wineries

Interest in Durello has been increasing significantly of late but Durella – the native grape used for producing the wine – is not a recent finding. On the contrary, its origins are deeply rooted in Monti Lessini, the rolling hills between Vicenza and Verona. Evidence of Durella dates back to the 13th century and for a long time it was used as a complementary grape variety for the production of still wines, thanks to its high acidity which prevented unwanted fermentation at a time when refrigeration techniques did not exist.

A SMALL CONSORTIUM, WITH GREAT POTENTIAL

“Back in 1998 when the Consortium was created” recollects director Aldo Lorenzoni “only a small number of wineries produced Lessini Durello: Cantina dei Colli Vicentini, Cantina di Montecchia, Cantina di Monteforte, Cantina di Gambellara, Fongaro, Marcato, Cecchin”. Nowadays, over 30 wineries belong to the Consortium: there are 428 growers cultivating 366 and 107 hectares in Verona and Vicenza respectively and total production amounts to 1 million bottles. The rate of growth ranges from 15-20% every year and the estimated production potential is 4 million bottles. “It is not the number of hectares but the amount of wine bottled that is increasing. Basically, we have more grape growers that have become proper wine producers” explains Chiara Mattiello, in charge of marketing and communication at the Consortium. “Now, producers are fully aware of the specificity of this wine,” confirms chairman Alberto Marchisio, “but when the Lessini Durello appellation was established, our aim was simply to preserve the traditional cultivation of this grape and to safeguard the source of income it represented for local people”.



Bunches of the native variety Durella



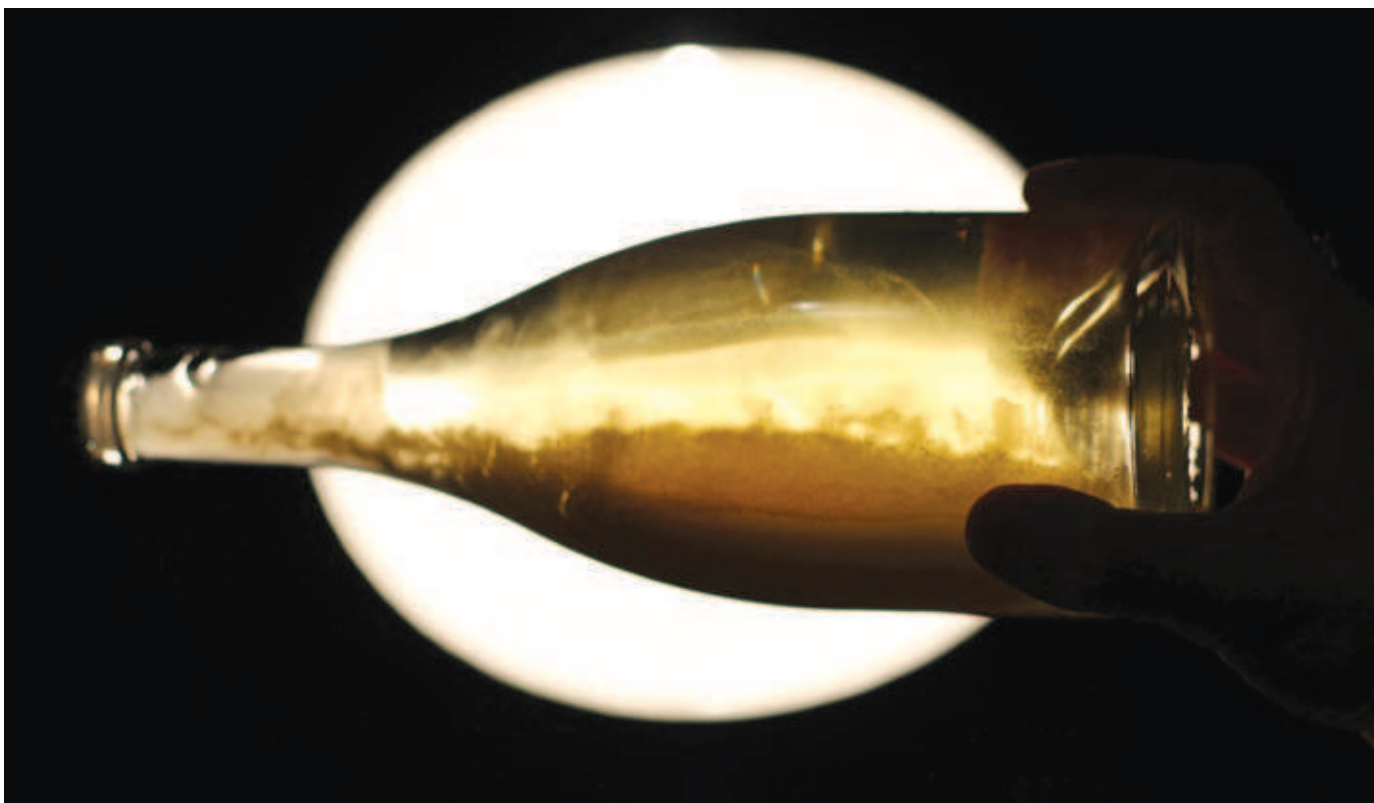
Alberto Marchisio, chairman of the Consorzio Tutela Vini Lessini Durello



Romeo and Juliet's Castle towering over Bellaguardia vineyards. In the background, Monti Lessini

FROM A SOURCE OF INCOME TO A TOP-END PRODUCT

Hillside vineyards, volcanic soil, manual work and limited production are a common template for Lessini Durello which has also benefited from other factors. "Increased temperatures, along with improved pruning techniques and lower yields lead to riper grapes" says Sandro Tasoniero, owner of Sandro de Bruno winery. But there is more. Many young people have invested in their homeland, thus bringing new blood to their family estates, such as Diletta Tonello of Tonello winery, Matteo Fongaro of Fongaro winery and Giulia Franchetto of Franchetto winery. Steps forward are also being made in terms of wine tourism, with the Volcanic Wine Park project and Val d'Alpone UNESCO candidacy.



Traditional method Lessini Durello sparkling wine at Gianni Tessari

A TWO-PRONGED APPELLATION

Lessini Durello Doc can refer to two very different products: a tank method sparkling wine and a traditional method sparkling wine, Metodo Classico, which has to age on the lees for at least 36 months – although many producers release it after 48 or even 60 months. “We are already working to fix this situation, heading towards gradual separation with distinct names” reveals chairman Alberto Marchisio. The tank method sparkling wines account for about 65% of production whereas Metodo Classico represents 34% and the still version – which is not included in the Doc and can only be referred to as Durello Veneto Igt – roughly 1%. Lessini Durello is much appreciated for its drinkability and fresh flavors (lime, mint, cut grass) whereas Lessini Durello Metodo Classico is elegant, with a creamy mousse, aromas of bread crust and a distinctive full flavor.

GIANNI TESSARI, COMBINING LESSINI DURELLO PAST AND FUTURE

Gianni Tessari, owner of the eponymous estate located in Roncà, Verona, had been working with Durella for a few years when he bought Marcato, one of the estates already producing traditional method sparkling wine in the 70s. He agrees that, in order to be fully appreciated, Durella should be aged for a long time. This is the reason why, despite bottling both sparkling versions, they classify the tank method as an Igt and not a Doc. "For me Lessini Durello is the traditional method aged for 60 months minimum. I do strongly believe in this variety because even after 120 months on the lees with secondary aromas fully developed, the typical flavors of Durella are still there". This makes Lessini Durello the perfect alternative to Champagne for inquisitive wine lovers. Nevertheless, the price point remains the biggest obstacle, since abroad consumers must be prepared to spend as much as for a Champagne for a product they do not know.



Gianni Tessari, founder of the Gianni Tessari estate