Vintage 2010 - Gaja on Italy

13 Nov 2010 by Angelo Gaja

ITALY

The 2010 vintage in Italy will be remembered as among the least productive in terms of quantity and perhaps the most sparse. Overall quality is good, with scattered excellence here and there.

PIEDMONT

In the right amounts, sun and rain are what create quality in Piemontese wines, the Nebbiolo-derived wines of Barbaresco and Barolo among them.

The climatic progression of 2010 has been different from that of the previous 10 years. During the summer of 2003, there were eight exceptionally hot weeks. In 2010, there were only two. In 2010, it rained nearly three times as much as it did in 2003 and, as a result, the vines never suffered from hydric stress. From a climatic standpoint, it is as if we had travelled back in time: there are more than a few similarities with 1996 and 1982.

In 2010, hard work was necessary in the vineyards. The frequent spring rains made vineyard management more difficult than usual and the rainfall in late August and September was a cause of concern for grape growers who feared that the health of their fruit would be compromised. In Piedmont, winemakers were somewhat surprised to find that harvest ended with superior quality. In fact, the 2010 harvest will make for harmonious, balanced and elegant wines, endowed with bright, vibrant acidity and measured alcohol content.

As in the past, the Nebbiolo vineyards which received great care, with the best exposure and terroir, will be those achieving the most excellence in wines.

TUSCANY

Tuscany also experienced plentiful rainfall in 2010 and there were relatively few exceptionally hot weeks. The weather of another era has returned.

At Pieve Santa Restituta, Montalcino, things could not have gone better, due in part to a little bit of skill but also thanks to chance: we chose the best moments to work in the vineyards; the choice to green harvest on two different occasions delivered results that were more effective than in previous years, and we predicted the right time to begin the harvest. Our early (although not definitive) tastings of the recently vinified wine lead my staff and me to believe that we have created the best vintage of Brunello di Montalcino since 1994, the year we acquired Pieve Santa Restituta.

At Ca' Marcanda, the season began in Bolgheri with a mild winter and average rainfall. Then, from April until June, the rainfall was frequent and plentiful, so much so that it seemed as though we had returned to the bizarre vintages of another era. In the majority of vineyards, in the flatlands, the drainage of rainwater took place slowly, causing stagnation that made access difficult for mechanical farm tools when anti-parasitic treatments needed to be carried out. There was no lack of anxious moments and genuine concern.

A hot and dry July helped to make up for some of the delay that had been accumulated in vegetative development. It was during this period that we began to prune and drop fruit at Ca' Marcanda, a green harvest more severe than in years past. Our intervention was rewarded with quality in an otherwise climatically difficult year. The rain began to fall again every so often, from the end of August until the end of September. As a result, we had to harvest (by hand, as always) not just during the working week but on Saturdays and Sundays as well. It was a growing season marked by bizarre weather, just as it used to be in another time. We were surprised, however, by the quality of the vintage, excellent for no less than 80% of the harvest. Wines from the 2010 vintage will be lean, balanced, and with excellent acidity and aromatic character.