Cesconi, Blauwal NV Trento

12 Apr 2012 by Walter Speller

About €25

Cesconi's evocatively named new metodo classico Blauwal (blue whale) from Trentino had me wondering for a moment what blue whales have to do with this mountainous region, but it certainly is a pretty label that stands out. According to Roberto Cesconi, it was designed by Elisabetta Foradori's late husband Rainer Zierock. More importantly, what is under the Diam composite cork is even better. It is only the second of Cesconi's forays into the TrentoDOC territory and one executed with great skill.

TrentoDOC, as reported here, is the denomination for a bottle-fermented sparkling wine from Trentino, produced according to regulations as strict as those of its obvious prototype champagne, with the same grape varieties and obligatory period of ageing on the lees but with one crucial difference: yield. And it is yield that has become a thorn in the flesh of the artisan producers of TrentoDOC. At the moment the rules permit a ridiculous 150 quintals per hectare, which translates into 105 hl/ha. But luckily the alpine vineyards farmed by most TrentoDOC producers don't allow anything like such a copious yield.

Discussions of late in Trentino centre on the fact that the image of the region is not as clear-cut as others, notably its northerly neighbour, Alto Adige, aka South Tyrol or Südtirol. A clue you can find in Trentino's vineyards: most are occupied by foreign intruders, with Chardonnay taking prime spot, followed by Pinot Grigio. Although these grapes have dwelt for almost 100 years in this region, they are hardly trump cards in international markets filled to the brim with these varieties - where boredom inevitably has to set in with both consumers and wine critics. Not to mention the ever lower prices these wines fetch.

Trentino didn't want to wait for the demise of its markets and has set up a marketing committee to find a solution. One of the committee's ideas is to spearhead the region's national and international marketing with TrentoDOC. And it is easy to see why: the name doesn't immediately draw the attention to the international varieties used to produce this wine. And although the lion's share of TrentoDOC production can actually be assigned to one producer, Ferrari (5 million bottles), who seems rather reluctant to become the international TrentoDOC locomotive, there is also a host of small and medium producers putting some pretty impressive stuff under the TrentoDOC name on the market. Unlike the market leader, they normally do not have the financial reserves to keep back several vintages in order to create a multi-vintage blend. They therefore tend to release NV wines, which in actual fact are vintage wines which often get much longer ageing on the lees than prescribed by the denomination rules. This provides great quality at astonishingly reasonable prices to the consumer.

So it's no wonder that Roberto Cesconi recently, in the local daily *Quotidiano Adige,* openly criticised the high yields in an effort to draw the attention to the fact that now under the TrentoDOC many different qualities can be found - from the superb to very mediocre, but all with the denomination's seal of approval.

For TrentoDOC to become the region's credible quality flagship, yields need to go down. Cesconi has requested a meeting with Fabio Piccoli, one of the designers of the marketing plan for TrentoDOC. On that occasion Cesconi wants to ask Piccoli for a change in the rules in favour of lower yields.

But Cesconi is no fool when he says the majority of what makes up TrentoDOC are the large co-ops, or Cantine Sociale, and hence there will never be enough support for such a quality-enhancing amendment to the regulations. This is why he is thinking out loud to stop labelling his Blauwal in the future under the DOC.

The grapes for Blauwal were harvested in the commune of Pressando from a vineyard at 300 metres. It is a 100% Chardonnay, which was fermented in old barriques where it also underwent malolactic fermentation. During the first few weeks after the alcoholic fermentation was completed, the lees were stirred regularly and the wine kept on the fine lees for at least six months.

The Blauwal NV is a blend of two vintages: 2006 which delivers the sappy acidity; and 2007 which provides the richness of fruit. It stayed on the lees in bottle for 24 months and the result suggests white chocolate, mandarin, orange and lemon

peel on the nose. The oak treatment is undeniable and pretty ambitious, and it is certainly not a shy wine with 13% alcohol, but it is very hedonistic and complex at the same time with great length. Its richness is offset by a good dose of lemony acidity and lively, assertive mousse, all of which all suggest that Blauwal could easily stand up with food.

Roberti mentioned to me that they want to increase the 24-month lees ageing to 48 months (and that for 'just' a NV metodo classico!) as he himself thought the wine was a little 'crude'. It will be interesting to see what Blauwal no 3 will be like, but until then Blauwal no 2 still has some life ahead of it - at least another five years.

Unfortunately this wine seems to available only in Italy for the moment, but it is quite widely stocked there by retailers who include the following:

Eno Club, Milano
Mamaf , Varese
Antica Enoteca Guidi - Novara
Enoteca Mascareta - Venezia
Enoteca Vito Chirico - Somma Lombardo (VA)
L'Enoteca Distribuzione - Verona
Enoteca L'Enologo Assetato - Casalborgone (TO)
Enoteca Arlotti - Rimini
L'Enoteca Neri - Ravenna
Enoteca Carmenere - Lancenigo (TV)