

Ruché

Opera Prima per il Fondatore

Opera Prima is the result of the desire of Luca Ferraris, a winegrower in Castagnole Monferrato, to dedicate to his grandfather Martino, who founded the winery, a memorable wine, one that the winery's many friends would find of inspiring quality even after many years of cellaring.

This wine brings to mind the great Pinot Noir-based wines of Burgundy. Luca's many trips to that particular wine area, in fact, convinced him that Pinot Noir and Ruché had points in common. He thus decided to undertake this adventure, with the assistance of his consultants, agronomist Daniele Eberle and oenologist Mario Redoglia, who guided him towards the realisation of his dream.

The first step was to find the perfect vineyard, with a hitherto unique conjunction of terroir, exposure, and mesoclimate that would be capable of yielding an outstanding wine. That vineyard was found in the commune of Castagnole Monferrato, on the southern hillslope of the ridge that runs from Castagnole towards Asti. The soils in that area are largely loose and chalk-rich, nutrient-poor soils in which the vine grows with only moderate vigour. The south-facing exposure allows the vines to capture solar radiation and to produce clusters with deeply-coloured, smallish berries that contain concentrated juice.

Identifying the right vineyard took place quite a time ago, in 2005, but the wait was for the right growing year, which came just two years after the legendary 2007. Painstaking vineyard management, the search for maximum expression of terroir and the highest concentration in the fruit, required, among other things, crop reduction and cluster-thinning, which lowered production to just 35 quintals of grapes per hectare. Then came an ultra-rigorous selection of the clusters, overseen during the picking by Luca and his agronomist, and finally a long, slow fermentation in large oak botti.

Once the fermentation was finished and the wine drawn off, Opera Prima matured 24 months in 500-litre, one-used oak tonneaux, so that the colour could stabilise and the tannins soften, but without any masking of the varietal character by aromas from the oak. Nothing was left to chance, not even the ageing location. That had to be the fascinating, ancient cellar cut into the tufo that has belonged for generations to the Ferraris family, where the temperature remains constant through all the seasons of the year.

Continuous tastings carried out by Luca and the oenologist allowed them to pinpoint the perfect moment to bottle this family jewel, as Luca loves to call it. The bottled wine was then given a further 12 months' ageing before release, the bottles resting on their sides in the dark and at cellar temperature, so that quality would truly be absolute, the fine fruit of laborious, painstaking efforts.

Opera Prima was selected as the name for this Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato precisely because the name communicates the fact that this is a new way to produce Ruché, a Ruché of the absolutely highest quality, dedicated to the most demanding palates.

The unique expertise of the producer in understanding the terroir and the Ruché grape has succeeded in making Opera Prima a unique and inimitable wine.

Comment on the analysis of the grapes at harvest

Technological ripeness: 25.5°Brix; pH3.4; total acidity 5.5g/L

Phenolic ripeness: Total flavonoids: 3300mg/L; potential anthocyanins: 900 mg/L; anthocyanin extractability: 30%; contribution of seeds to tannins: 80%

The Ruchè grape ripens medium-early (first ten days of September). It accumulates good levels of sugars, and in spite of its generally low acidity it maintains a healthy level of malic acid, which gives the wine crispness. The grape's chief characteristic is its rich concentration of polyphenols, expressed mainly as tannins, which build good structure into the wine. Depending on the growing season, controlling the maceration can effect a tannin extraction that is selective, and thus yields a balanced wine. The extraction data show that, at the moment of picking, the grapes were at a significant stage of ripeness and the notable tannin content in the seeds means that the largest proportion of the tannins was in fact contained in the seeds. Tasting of the grapes revealed that the seeds were quite ripe and thus permitted a lengthy maceration, for maximum extraction. Its terpenes make Ruchè a semi-aromatic grape, and they express themselves in Opera Prima as impressions of spice, geranium leaf, rose petals, and ripe fruit.

Comment on the wine analysis: Alcohol: 15.09 %; Total acidity: 5.30 g/L; Net dry extract: 30.4 g/L.

In colour, it is an intense ruby red, with prominent garnet highlights. In the bouquet, Ruchè's floral notes blend together with more evolved impressions of spice and of vanilla from the oak ageing, composing a nose of great intensity and complexity, smooth and particularly harmonious. It is firmly structured and very intense in the mouth, well balanced, and with silky, long-lingering tannins.

Ruchè di Castagnole Monferrato – Profile of the variety

The Ruchè grape is originally from the hills area of Castagnole Monferrato, to the northeast of Asti. Although specific documentation regarding this variety is lacking, it displays distinctive morphological traits and analytical characteristics, so distinctive as to set it apart from the other varieties of the area. Tradition reports the grape as present since ancient times in the Castagnole Monferrato area, and wines from it were consumed locally in historical commemorative events. Don Giacomo Cauda, the parish priest of the town, who died in 2008, was the one who recovered this indigenous grape, personally overseeing its cultivation and its vinification into a monovarietal wine. His efforts led other grapegrowers to put their faith too in Ruchè, until they won for it DOC status. The first description of the grape did not come until 1987, in conjunction with the official application for the DOC. This is a wine whose history is still untold, but one with sensory characteristics that are quite unusual compared to the other wines of Piedmont. Enza Cavallero, Piedmont wine historian, uses the characterisation "Magical and mysterious, therefore, but unforgettable" to describe the character of this wine.

Morphological traits of the variety

Bud: Glabrous apex, green, with edges tending to reddish

Adult leaf: Medium-small, 2- or 3-lobed, with light-green blade and pronounced teeth

Ripe cluster: Medium-large, cylindrical and elongated, sometimes with wings, and on average loose-berried

Berry: Medium-small, from spherical to short ellipsoid, heavy bloom on the skin, purplish blue-black, with slightly aromatic flavor.

Phenology

Budbreak: Second half of April

Flowering: First ten days in June

Veraison: Second ten days in August

Ripening of the grape: Medium early

Winemaking potential: Ruchè yields a distinctive wine, of a luminous ruby red and with an intense, lightly aromatic bouquet displaying rose petals, wild red berryfruit, and spices. The palate presents an interesting contrast, dry and crisp, with medium level of tannins.