

From Belgium, father a collector, mother director of hotel school. Born 1961. By mid 70s you can get top Bordeaux Burgundy at reasonable prices. Didn't want to be in the wine trade at first, became a consultant and does fine wine trading. Went into wine because of love of nature, love of wine, attracted to the production side, buying and tasting didn't satisfy any more as passion grew. Decided to go to Etna by eliminating places for reasons: no Burgundy - monoculture, no Barolo - couldn't fine environment or complexity any more, interested in ungrafted vines which means I need to step away from limestone or clay so ended up with sandy structure and checking out geology - volcanoes thus Vesuvios and Etna etc a list of places to check out. In 2000 I went to Georgia Kalhitis - adventurous, back to the roots of winemaking. After that I went back Etna to visit a friend - Jule Schiopetti? and we had a bottle - a surprise, which was an Etna wine when we guessed Piemonte, etc. Next day I drove there. Driving through the valley, it was de ja vu to me like Georgia the environment - snow in the mountains, stone walls, old vines, love at first sight. I was talking to a grower winemaker there couldn't understand everything due to Sicilian accent but was told they harvest very late in October - putting bits of pieces together I decided it was the place.

Back and forth a few month I found a place and started my winery with an initial half a hectare, an old cellar where we took out the barrels and put in amphorae, without knowing much about logitics/mechanics of winemaking in December 2000. I started pruning the vineyard in 2001 with a person living above the cellar who taught how to prune. The idea was to produce wine not to set up a winery - that was the last thing planned, more like a hobby operation that grew out of hand and now. The half a hectare vines include a mix of pre-phylloxera vines, some old vines but grafted. The original vines died over time and were replaced with grafted wines, which was the standard procedure of the new period but really old vines in the plot. By logic all the flavors are on the skins so I want most skin contact I can get - so skin contact during the alcoholic fermentation and also malo fermentation. Clay vessels seemed logic then to me because I didn't want any extra taste going into the wine - which is liquid rock to me, no wood - perfect to me then. I found these vessels in Spain, smaller than the Georgian ones ~2000hL, at 400hL, fitted better for the size of the vineyard I had then. [LD: did Christy point you to those as he ended up using Spanish amphorae?] I drove the truck of amphorae to Jule's store and he did some testing with and I started with it. He liked it and he bought quite a lot. I continued using with the ones I had. The first batch of amphorae wines turned out very good - dense. The second batch arrived a year later was disappointing: they cost loss of a lot of liquid (evaporation, possibly oxidation) because the clay was not baked possibly at the right temperature or the clay was too coarse grained, so I lost wine. I did not use them for 3-4 years. During which I found out the foxy lining would give better results of wine, and I started using a second batch that arrived completely lined.

The idea of liquid rock - step back: the 1st two years I was much more anti-wine in that I started with the idea of producing wines that are not Australian fruit bomb, not a concentrated wood wine - more not this not that a bit more provocative concept more based on what I do not like more than what I would have liked but then I didn't know what I would like to achieve. Gradually 2001 were very evolved wines oxidized but not dead very alive but color completely changed from red/orange/brick color to completely black ash - literally became the black lava soil where it came from, literally visually liquid rock in a way. I still like those wines - edge, tension, good on a winter day still touch me give me a sense of place, but miss fruitiness and approachability or pleasurability. So I like to refer back to the first three years as intellectual wines. I gradually moved to search for a bit more fruit, not precision but a wine with a hedonist pleasure to drink with an identity of territory. Four years I was starting to understand what Etna wines meant to me: tannins, glycerin from the south, elegance, density, profoundness. It took time.

What you did not want in wine at the begining: no wood. Background: late 90s, classic tradition Barolo transformed into Bordeaux barriqued wines vanilla toasty oak which I loved, same with Dominique Lafon wines etc I didn't really like those wines dominated by density, marmalade like style with a lot of oak. 90s was more about having hugely concentrated wines going over the sense of place hard to drink for me understand where I was. I preferred wines of Henri Gouges's wines: difficult when young, beautiful aged. Loved Bruno Giacoso, Monfotino? the Brunate from Rinaldi. They gave me a sense of place, joy. Classic Bordeaux too as Bordeaux suffered from this change too starting late 80s. Most of Paulliac St Julien started to become Pomerol... My wine world started to get blurred in terms of sense of place. So I started wanting to make terrior wines but I made the same mistakes - instead of using too much oak I used too much oxygen. My wines started off over evolved. Now my wines are much more precise and the oxygen management is much better. I see that in even Bordeaux and Barolo the use of wood is much less so maybe the world is getting more sensible in a way. We started to produce wines more respected of the territory, less of the winemaker or ego oriented, more nature and space oriented.

Changes made to control oxygen to achieve precision: many small details accumulated to make a difference:

1. lids covered during **fermentation** (open with more oxygen exchange in the old days) now CO2 is more trapped in the vats giving better oxygen management/protection during fermentation which doesnt oxidize the cask of/or the wine

2. **racking** done in two phases shortly after pressing, first racking after pressing 3-4 days we leave wine to decant for the reds 7-10 days for the whites, which means **no gross lees** during elevage but only fine lees: gives cleaner reaction on the wines so the wines are more focused but still have enough nourishment during elevage
3. when racking or pumpovers we use a different technique to fill up the tubes first instead of using too much oxygen through pumping to push the wine through in some parts we use CO2 as pressure through the pump to get the wine through the hoses instead of pushing oxygen behind the wines
4. **bottling**: use argon gas, wine is pulled out of the tank into the bottle gradually filled over the argon like a blanket giving no difference between the first part of the bottling and the last part of the bottling
5. etc.

Expanded vineyard area: not a quest for reaching half a mil bottles etc. for me a measure of importance I started with zero I needed to build up a winery with seriousness in work where I could do selections which is hard with 0.5 hectare. In the second year I added 2.5 hectares. Parts of the vineyards the exposure is useful. Some parts don't make it to the top wine - you declassify into a second wine or a base wine so no senseless waste. Respect for the land: also produce from the land not destined for top wine. I needed more surface to make top wines and reduce my yields. Second I gradually noticed that Etna had a lot of different wines, and I wanted different expressions from different plots. Info came from local people who made home wine, as the techniques people make home wines are straightforward and simple it gives a good sense of place - how certain vineyards express themselves compared to other locations at different altitude. This brought me to certain sites that I liked more than others. Slow process. In 2003 and 2004, I had 3 hectares. In 2005 and 2006: 5 hectares. 2008-2009: 6.5 hectares. Then we grew exponential: last 3 years we went from 10-11, now 18 hectares. Now (2013) I need to stop for a moment to get everything aligned maintained well pruned, once its finished I still have the urge to acquire another vineyards, great locations not planted yet. [2020 at 24 hectares] 52 years old now realistically physically have ~20-25 harvests left. There will be land available for children for them to choose to plant or not but I will still acquire. Eventually we will end up ~30-35 hectares and up to our children to choose where/what to plant or even sell. Parents still alive and healthy.

Met wife? Aki visited me in 2006, after reading an article about my way of cultivating. I believed in the non tillage?? philosophy of Masanobu Fukuoka compared to constant tilling??? We stayed in touch and she came back and stayed because she's Japanese and Fukuoka is a Japanese farmer and philosopher. She read about my wines because my wines are well represented in Japan in that Japan was my first customer and overall, my biggest in the first years. Many of my first vintages are in Japan. There's more info about the history of my winemaking in Japan well represented. France is the biggest market today since 2 years ago. Analyze it in a different way: Paris 80% like NYC consumes/absorbs a lot of wines. But my wines are also in small shops in Beaune, Lyon, Marseilles, etc. Paris absorbs most of my wine also others' wines. Etna seems to have something for Parisians. The edge, the sense of territory, the tension in wine, make it a special wine for them. Etna is one thing in US. Etna has four known sites. Eastern site is known for white wines, close to sea, relatively humid so red wines like Nerello Mascallese does not always ripen perfectly. Great Etna wines today from eg Marc de Grazia from Terre Nere, Passopisciaro, Graci, Girolamo Russo, etc. we all are in the same northern valley partly by coincidence. I started in 2001 and Andrea Franchetti from Passopisciaro started in 2001. Neither us knew we were there but strangely both started in the Solicchiata area. Marco de Grazia in 2002 started close to Randazzo the area mainly in Caldiarra??. Giuseppe Russo he was in Passopisciaro and Alberto Graci settled also in Passopisciaro. All in the same area. Now we talk about Etna wines esp red wines we are talking about the northern valley which is like the Cote de Nuits of Etna all the top wines are from that area.

Locals taught you about pruning, how much local knowledge and how much your own discovery? Knowledge of vine growing the culture around planting a vineyard for the next generation is specific to Etna. Vineyards are not only for yourself but also the next generations. Tension, work ethic, sensitivity for vines are unbelievable otherwise I wouldn't be able to work with 100-year-old vines. My youngest vines are 50 years old my so called jeune vino. Work from generations ago. Pruning every time makes me humble and special. Little culture in ancient or old style winemaking. Also because the old style winemaking was based on short skin contact - asap push wine through the cellar then go back to vineyards. Attention in cellar was non existent. There was 48 hour skin contact, little attention to crushing. No destemming, not because people didn't want to but only rich people can afford a destemmer. Values of etna wines have been built up since we arrived - me, Andrea, Marco - the first three of us were the Renaissance of Etna, a special thing to be part of. All three had our own specific techniques in winemaking but all three contributed to putting Etna back on the map of great winemaking areas. We were able to do this because of what had been planted generations ago there. A beautiful symbiosis of the prior generations endowment of beautifully vineyards and us continuing the legacy.

Origin of Nerello Mascalleses, not 100% sure. Supposedly came from Greece over to Etna. Started at the port where most of the exchanges happened. NM came from Nerello + Mascalleses - the black varietal that had

been planted in Mascali: the highest village above Riposto Giarre where the harbor used to be to bring the bulk wine to different countries. So it was planted Mascali in the eastern side of the mountain from where it expanded to both the southern part of the mountain - Bioncatania? relatively high up - and the northern valley which was the last part planted due to lack of access as there were no roads 50-100 years ago. Roads were gradually built due to wine planting. In 70s, 80s partly because of phylloxera devastation, part of the vineyards on Etna remained and was not damaged so there was a boom of interest not because of Etna but it was one of the few places left with vines. So economy blossomed, which was lost in 80s. Bordeaux also suffered in the 80s the crisis and Etna went through the same crisis. Etna was never sold with a label: either blended into Piemonte wines or in wines from Burgundy even. Fascinating to see even in the old days Etna was appreciated by those places because of its similarity to Nebbiolo and Pinot Noir depending on vineyards - tannic driven eg in Solicchiata like Nebbiolo or Passopisciaro higher on the slopes more Pinot like - confirmed in the history where Etna wine was sold.

Aging potential: two examples - wines from Etna were not bottled so difficult to find such wines. There were few such wines but not sure if pure Nerello I think it was partly blended with Nero d'Ava from Pateno or Victoria area because a little too sweet. Vintage 1974. One bottle definitely Nerello M 1985 from Tenuta San di Mugo estate, used to be bottled in Burgundy bottle. I tasted with the family and it touched me. It was not a complex or profound wine but it has beautiful elegance to it, like an old Burgundy, not super concentrated, but aged superbly well. It gave me the idea that Nerello is age worthy and its up to us to prove it.

Nerello characters? Depends on the vintage. Nerello in Etna Valley is exposed to positive and negative influences from the southern area and all the positive and negative influences and characteristics from the northern area: hail blasts, cold winters, too hot summers. So the vintage differences on Etna are enormous - no other winemaking regions have such extreme vintage characteristics. If I take 2012 as an example: full phenolic ripeness, density, tannic structure close to Nebbiolo. 2010 light vintage, nearly no phenolic ripeness esp in high vineyards, extremely light and elegant wines like Bussia or Jura a red wine. The same vineyard having extreme difference in presenting itself. Those wines were made when you made the absolute stretch to pick late, clean out the berries within a month with patience and precision. Etna is the place the extremes touch each other - the reason why its intriguing. Every vintage is a challenge.

In the past there were more sediments now less. Sometimes you blend the different vintages... First generation vintages, highly evolved by choice of vinification, a lot of sediments, wines should be separated from sediments. Now in the natural community its a fashion to shake up a bottle and drink the sediments I'm too classic for it. Afterwards I drink the sediments because its nourishing and represents all the density of the wine. So we prefer to drink them separately. It's always been like that in Italy at home - an old Barolo the last glass I always prefer to drink the separated densest of the glass also less precise. In any case with my wine, I would not decant as decanting takes away the first slight whiff of very reductive flavors which I love - so I would suggest just like drinking an old Burgundy from the cellar, you pour an entire bottle into six glasses, separate the sediments, no decanting - in other words you decant the wine into the glasses, and that is a beautiful way to appreciate the wine. For new vintages bottled a bit earlier with less oxygen during the complete vinification elevage process, decant if less 2 years old, very slowly, not 2 hours before but just before drinking. Separate the sediments from the bottle if any and serve it to open a bit more, less for reduction but to give the wine more expansion as the last few vintages have been quite compact very concentrated thus I think they need a bit more oxygen to open up because they are more tannin driven less generous than my first generation wines. I am always cautious of decanting - not a fan but if my wines are young I'd decant otherwise I'd serve them in bigger glasses.

Farming: lay in buckwheat as you leave the land fallow for a few years. Buckwheat has this quality of giving energy to the land without taking energy away. There are certain herbs or beans that given nitrogen to the soil but nitrogen gives immediate boost of energy once its burnt it's hungry so negative drop-off: so first you have excessive energy then you go below level, which I'd rather not. So I give a little bit of extra energy - I grow buckwheat but not use it and it decomposes and we leave it like that for at least one year mostly likely two years before planting. In that way the soil doesn't get rich to drop off, the buckwheat decomposes and gives it back rather fast a minimum layer of organic material. Its something special, without oversugaring you land which afterwards will drop into a negative phase when the ideal requires more to get back over to the phase again. I don't want to drug my land I want to help it to get back on its own naturally. That's why Fukuoka's no intervention farming ideology rather than constant spraying even if it is biodynamic because I don't believe that land/vineyards/cultivation needs spraying every year - it's like living in a hospital, protected. So I like biodynamics as a cure not as a way of cultivating. That's why the Fukuoka approach is much more interesting and valuable - search for a healthy land, crop, ecosystem, a self sufficient sustainable without men's nourishment. That's the ultimate goal. Very difficult. I try to balance it out but in 2007 for example, one of my vineyards was nearly wiped out in a bushfire because the shepards set fire in the south to herd the sheep drove to ride off the summer period (because volcanic soil doesnt have much vegetation the shepards just assume the fire will disappear once the grass is gone, they don't care literally just set fire to let it grow again, it's a practice for centuries a tradition). If that gets out of hand you have grass in your vineyard which will catch fire

so many times we will through it to prevent a bushfire from burning the entire vineyard. We are working the land with a theoretical approach then there's the practical situation that has nothing to do with agriculture but now you are not gonna let your vineyard burnt down just for the sake of your philosophy. This is just one example where you have to compromise.

You sometimes use very little in the vineyard and none in the winery. Active volcanos are sources of sulphur on which you grow vines. Is there sulphur in the soil? No there is sulphur in the soil like a mine of sulphur. Like in Campania vineyards and below are sulphur mines and they have very different sulphuric characteristics. In our wines we have smokiness which could come from lava soil but has nothing to do with sulphur. The sulphur is in the air as there's always smoke fume in Etna since its active and erupts every month. It settles around the cone of Etna and taken away by the winds to different areas. We are in the northern valley and the winds here are much more west-east oriented thus we rarely get the fumes inside the valley which are usually taken up higher by warmth. The influence of sulphur in the air is negligible and the sulphur issue in the soil is non-existent as we have lava soil. If there were sulphur, it would be the burned ruins within the lava not the sulphur itself. There's lava ~1000 degrees Celsius, it's already evaporated.

Rose? I never planned for it. A simplistic one. I have a plot, a lease that contains Catarrato grapes destined for the whites, there's also Malvasia grape, which I don't really like as I don't aromatic grape in a dry white wine. The owner was pleased as I maintained his vines and his made out of vines of Malvasia his home wine with it and I took Catarrato, everyone was happy. Until 2007 when he came back to me to ask me to take Malvasia as well as he can't drink wine any more. A friend told me to make Rose, put some Nerello in it so I took a chance. If I were to make a Rose, it should be direct press I have my same philosophy. So I experimented with %% and came up with a formula. First vintage was a strike. A nice Rose with personality: smoky, fresh, vin de soif, simple, great summer wine.

Olive oil: part of the trilogy of cultivation in Mediterranean - wines olives and cereals. Three cultivations possible to combine: cereals are harvested in around August, then harvest grapes, make wine, then you harvest olives and make olive wines. Then you finish your cultivating year and start your winter world. You need cereals to live, your wines for selling, and olive oils to share with friends and to use in the kitchen.