THE SOURCE

Giacomo Baraldo Tuscany, Italy



There is no better environment for an artistic, free-thinking, well-trained and technically astute enologist and vignaiolo than the countryside where Giacomo Baraldo started his Tuscan wine adventure in his hometown of San Casciano dei Bagni, the small, gorgeous and historic Tuscan village famous for its thermal baths along with some recently discovered ancient artifacts that are rewriting history. Influenced by his past, supported by his family, yet beholden to nothing and no one, he thinks freely and acts on intuition guided by his near decade of widely varied experiences in wineries from Bordeaux and Burgundy, to Patagonia and New Zealand (where he also has a small ongoing wine project). In his early thirties, he settled back home in San Casciano dei Bagni to craft wine on unknown, high-altitude terroirs. His wines are thoughtful, exploratory, generous-butmeasured and diverse, from Chardonnay planted on a rocky limestone slope below cliffs using massale selections from the Côte d'Or gathered from friendly vignerons he met in his years working and training in Burgundy. His Grechetto orange wine was reborn in the field from vines below the main square of San Casciano dei Bagni, and his Sangiovese single-site wines must be highlighted, as they are his true muse, the inspiration that guides his work to unlock the potential of Monte Cetona, a solitary limestone mountain with a complex geology halfway between Rome and Florence in the Provincia di Siena. This rugged and strong but intellectually refined statue of a man challenges the

belief that Europe's great terroirs are all already documented. Monte Cetona has no known vinous history, though when you taste Giacomo's wines, you can't help but wonder, as he does, how this hill was missed.

Il Risveglio di Giacomo

Giacomo grew up in a family centered around hospitality, and he worked in the family restaurant as soon as he was old enough to be useful, and still does when needed. Ristorante Daniela is a fabulous place, started by his parents, Silvestro and Daniela, in the late 90s and driven by soulful and delicious food from recipes passed down through the generations from his great grandmother to his grandmother, Bruna (1928), who's still the boss and a regular at each service. The meals are wonderful and soulful regional food, and they have a stellar *carta di vini* curated by Giacomo, rich on Tuscan wines (necessary) but deep in his favorites as well, Champagne, Burgundy and Piemonte, among others from all corners of Europe. They also have a wine bar called Bar Centrale (started by his great-grandmother almost a hundred years ago), and Sette Querce, a hotel they opened in the 90s, now managed by his younger brother, Alessandro. With Giacomo now making world-class wines, why leave? Once in San Casciano dei Bagni, it's hard to drive away.



In 1997, on his eighteenth birthday, Giacomo's father popped bottles of 2000 Conterno Fantino Barolo 'Sori Ginestra' and 1997 Sassicaia, in magnum. "I had no idea what I was drinking as I was still new to wine in a way being still so young, but the explosion of aromas and flavors from those wines that I didn't even really grasp at the time marked the beginning of my passion for wine and vines," Giacomo explained. Set into motion by that encounter with Bacchus, his journey began at the University of Agrarian Sciences in Perugia where he received degrees in oenology and viticulture. After graduation, he went on a world tour that wound up with his last few years working in Burgundy, at Domaine de Montille. It's from our connection with Alex Götze from Wasenhaus, the former *chef de culture* of de Montille, that brought us to Giacomo. It was also from there that he made

the final decision to go home and focus on what he began to slowly develop, starting in 2009 with the plantation of il Bossolo, one of his Sangiovese vineyards. 2012 was his first vintage and everything was sold through the restaurant and wine bar.



Giacomo Meditations: Fined though not filtered

We're so compelled to include Giacomo's raw and candid responses to questions about the relationship between his wines (and wine in general) to us, human beings, that we've made only slight edits to the responses he wrote, in English, a language he speaks and writes very well.

Nature and wine

My knowhow on vinification and grape growing from my university studies and experiences with other growers abroad have brought me to a very direct and practical approach to wine; perhaps I could say that it's secular in some sense. Though wine comes from nature, it doesn't exist in nature. It's human beings who plant vines, harvest its fruit at the optimal ripeness and transform them into wine and preserve them in that slow state of evolution. Like iron to steel, it's us, using nature's alchemy to transform this passing fruit into something almost infinite and so thrilling. We cannot forget that the natural evolution of the grape is to disperse its seeds to reproduce itself, not to make wine. It is human beings who make wine, not nature.

We know that a fine terroir and ripe grapes alone are not enough to make a great wine. In my opinion, humility, patience, and curiosity are needed, a desire to learn and self-critique. Then you need technique, inspiration, creativity, the right touch learned from the uncountable amount of other things only acquired by doing. I like to put the words creativity, uniqueness and artisanal, what you call "handcrafted," next to my wines. I consider myself an artisan who uses raw material, knowledge, passion and tools to transform and make a product that has a soul, a story, a reflection of this place I live, every single vintage, my personality in some way; to channel a sort of exchange (even in my absence) of enjoyment and communion.

On his evolution

I feel I really started to know and understand deeply about wine and winegrowing outside of Tuscany, and I have no direct influence here from any growers. I think after my second vintage in Margaux and the first in Burgundy, working with the French, I understood that the soil could make the difference even in my unknown region. Then, of course all the experiences I made around the world helped me a lot, in terms of techniques and perceptions and sensibility. I think that when you travel and work with so many people and cultures and regions around the world (Italy included) you always take something with you, their tricks, ideas and inspirations. Then going forward with your own path and style you adapt what is useful and important. What I learned in Patagonia, Burgundy, Bordeaux and New Zealand I always have in my pocket. I like many producers here in Tuscany, most of all people who work with new ideas, new waves of innovations and mainly with higher altitude vineyards, like Radda and Gaiole, but also Montalcino and other interesting producers, even in unknown regions.

On vineyard culture

I really believe, and many people don't know—or don't want to know and understand—that agriculture is the human activity that implies growing plant species, a technique that alters natural factors of plant production, with the goal of increasing the quality and/or quantity of its crops. From this assumption we need to realize that all agricultural species farmed today are not natural, and that the agricultural landscape we admire (here in Tuscany but also in many places) and which triggers emotions of unity with nature in many of us, is actually extremely artificial—man-made.

Nature is so wonderful thanks to the work of human beings throughout the centuries. That said, my viticulture is not natural, not organic, nor biodynamic and not even conventional. My way of working is artisanal, and my mindset comes from my professional experiences, my field observations and university studies. I fondly believe that tradition and innovation are the driving force of progress, which implies the inevitable future and the change that comes with it; change comes from curiosity, and curiosity is among life's vital forces—the energy that allows us to advance and improve. I do my best to respect nature, the environment, and our surrounding ecosystem. I find this to be the most important thing to do, not only in agriculture but in any human activity.

Regarding certifying bodies for agricultural practices, I don't believe in, and I don't like that way of work. Why should I pay someone to check if what I'm doing is congruent to *his* thoughts, his expectations? During my work experiences abroad, I chose wineries also because they were (and still are) certified and true practitioners of organic and biodynamic culture, but after seven vintages following their thoughts and practices, my idea has not changed. I'm even more convinced of my own way to work: knowledge, intuition, heart and hands.



The Vineyards

Every vineyard in Giacomo's stable is around Monte Cetona, located almost precisely between Roma and Firenze, relatively equidistant by air between Orvieto to the south, and Montalcino and Montepulciano to the north, with the sea 60 to 70 km away. The vineyards Pozzone and Caccialupi are on the east face, in the Val di Chiana, where they take morning sun, but never witness the full glory of a Tuscan sunset. On the western side in the Val d'Orcia, il Bossolo, and the adjacent recently planted vineyards for Chardonnay and Grechetto, one can see the sun off on the horizon as it drops below the hills.

Uplifted by the tectonic movement of the African and Eurasian plates, and more recently (about 11 million years ago) the Adriatic plate that continues to subduct under the Apennine Mountains, Monte Cetona's rock formations can generally be divided in two, according to their age. The older ones date as far back as the Mesozoic (between 250 to 65 million years ago) and form the higher half of the Monte Cetona. Here, there is a greater calcareous composition from the Jurassic and Cenozoic periods—think similar limestone areas in Burgundy and the Loire Valley, respectively. These limestones were deposited before the Apennine uplifted. Before the uplift it was a shallow and warm sea that collected an uncountable amount of tiny calcareous skeletons deposited together with clastic sediments. One of these formations present in Giacomo's vineyards (i.e. *Caccialupi*) has

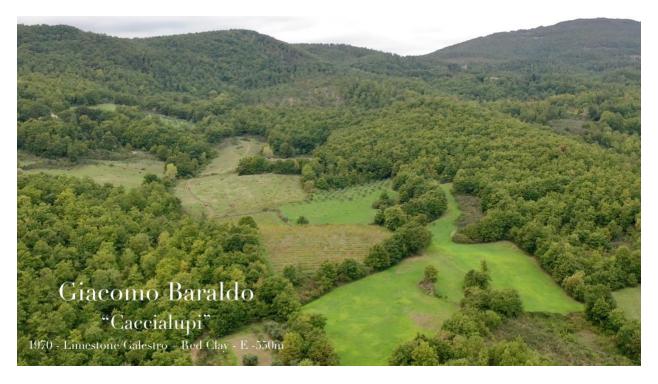
special interest: the Sillano-S. Fiora formation, formed by claystones and calcareous mudstones. It is related to the Ligurian Domain, therefore it shares similarities to some appellations in Piedmont's Casale Monferrato Formation, like the wine regions of Alto Monferrato d'Acqui, Ovada and Gavi. On the other hand, more recent deposits from the Pliocene surround Monte Cetona. Monte Cetona and other Tuscan mountains once formed an archipelago about four million years ago. The rapid rise of the sea level after the Messinian Salinity Crisis (read more) produced Pliocene deposits mostly formed by the accumulation of the terrestrial sands and clays that eroded from this archipelago which also included some marine organisms. Giacomo's vineyards from both valleys, Val di Chiana and Val d'Orcia, are mainly formed by these recent Pliocene deposits. However, some of them have a different bedrock origin as *Caccialupi* (Sangiovese cru) and the upper part of *Affacciatoio* (Chardonnay and Grechetto sites) which are formed by Mesozoic calcareous sediments. Much of the limestone rock found in the lower altitude vineyards are scree—rock from further up on the mountain that made its way down.



Giacomo is a true believer in the influence of soil and rock composition on wine (not only on a granular level, but also down to the mineral composition), and the extensive geologic history of his land that holds the same limestone bedrock characteristics found in places already noted, like France's Côte d'Or, Chablis and Loire Valley (to name a only few), but also in much of Spain's most glorified wine regions, including Rioja, as well as many other Italian limestone spots in Langhe, Monferrato, Tuscany, Abruzzo, etc, is why he believes that Monte Cetona has massive untapped potential. It simply hasn't been seriously explored in modern times, nor had it been for hundreds if not thousands of years before today. Instead, it's been famous since antiquity for thermal hot springs that produce 5.5 million liters a day, the third highest output in all of mainland Europe. Why

didn't the Romans and Etruscans want local wines for the festivity and healing at the springs? This remains a mystery to Giacomo, but he's doing the research to arrive at hypotheses. Giacomo was the first to plant a vineyard with the idea of commercial winegrowing that he knows of, and that first effort was in 2009, with il Bossolo.

As of 2023, Giacomo works six hectares of vines; half are rented (though he does all the work alone, except at harvest) and the other half he owns. Though not included on the label, Pozzone vineyard is inside the greater Chianti appellation. All his wines are bottled as IGT which gives him the freedom to crop as he wants and needs to, and the average vine count per hectare is between 3000 (old vines) to 4500. The vineyards he rents and now farms himself were in very good condition, although they weren't tilled and or otherwise well maintained. During a three-year period, he reworked them back to health, rebuilding and decompacting the soils while adding humus and more organic substances.



Plowing depends on the season, the weather, and each specific site. Giacomo always plows a few weeks after the harvest and then again in the spring, though the timing always depends on the vegetative growth (not of the vine) inside the vineyards. There are few problems with vine disease and fungus, perhaps partially due to the extremely polycultural setting with so few vineyards, and the strong winds of the higher altitude keeps things drier and aired out. He's obliged to use only 3-5 vineyard treatments or copper and/or sulfur each season (other viticultural regions can reach to around 12), with Caccialupi (high altitude, east facing, surrounded by forest) always on the lower end. Giacomo often calls the owner of Caccialupi a genius for his selection of location for this little vineyard, which is deep inside the owner's absolutely massive property of forest and pastureland.

Harvest is made by both taste and analysis. Acidity and pH are more important to him than the sugar level because he likes to preserve the acidic tension and freshness of fruit and floral notes.

Between the Sangiovese sites, Pozzone is the first off the vine, Bossolo one or two weeks later and then four weeks after Pozzone is Caccialupi, though of course this timing can vary.

Red Wines

Giacomo usually picks Sangiovese early in the morning to bring in cold fruit. When whole bunches are employed in the mix, they go to the bottom of the tank, followed by the destemmed grapes (not crushed but rather whole berries) on top of the 1-2-ton steel tanks and plastic vats. At the beginning he lets the fruit cold soak for a few days (depending on the season), then the first two days are extracted with pigéage by foot one time each day, followed by hand twice per day (sometimes more) until pressing. Each vintage asks something different in the non-temperature controlled spontaneous fermentations and maceration with times ranging from 25-32 days—on the longer side with the older vines, if it's right for the vintage. Stem inclusions for the Sangiovese crus are typically 25% for il Pozzone and 20% for il Bossolo and Caccialupi.

The three crus are aged in old French oak barrels of 228l-500l, though he buys one or two new barrels (though used already one or two times) each vintage to swap out faulty ones that aren't working well anymore. There's no racking for the first year, then two to three to clarify just before bottling, and all are unfined and unfiltered. Bossolo has been aged for 12 months in wood up until the 2021 vintage (which switched to 18 months) and Pozzone and Caccialupi age for 18 months. The pHs range between 3.40-3.60 and a TA range of 5.60-5.90. Total sulfite levels are around 50mg/L (50ppm). Alcohol content ranges between 12.5%-13.5%.



il Pozzone takes its name from the water well in the middle of the vineyard, located (here) in Piazze, with a small fraction in Cetona (the village), about 6 kms from San Casciano dei Bagni. This parcel was planted in 1975 with the higher part rich in silt and clay, while the lower part has more sand mixed with clay. There's not much rock though there are many small fragments of shells of Pliocene marine fossils (Megastomia conoidea) that are an important source of minerals. This 0.7ha parcel sits at an altitude of around 300-315m (according to Google Earth) and is exposed to the southeast. Half was planted in 1969, and the other half in 1975, with the former scheduled for replanting in 2024 with massale selections because it was not well trained by the previous owner. Pozzone is the most upfront of the three crus, perhaps due to its richer red and black fruit notes, fuller body and suppleness when compared to Giacomo's other Sangiovese crus. Its immediate joy and pleasure makes it perfect to be shared with even more people because out of the gates it's usually ready to go.



il Bossolo, planted in 2009, takes its name from the area just below the town's historical center (here), by the big thermal baths of "Bagno Grande" and "Bagno Bossolo," the former being where they continue to find archeological treasures. The soil is rich in clay from the lower Pliocene (5.2-3.5mya) and the physical structure of silt and clay is rich in the limestone of Monte Cetona. The 0.55ha parcel sits below the overlook in San Casciano dei Bagni at between 505-520m and faces northwest. It was Giacomo's first plantation (2009) and is composed of massale selections from four different biotypes. In the range of crus, this wine is perhaps the most delicate, though only in breadth. Red fruits and even citrus are often on display in this wine's youth. Its linear quality and subtler fruit and frame require a little time open to shift into the higher gears, at which time you'll find that they are indeed there.



Caccialupi is named after the spirit of wolves from many years ago (according to legend), a time when hunters illegally killed and hid the carcasses at the bottom of this hill. These vines planted in 1970 (here) are on a bedrock of galestro (claystones famous in Montalcino and many areas of Chianti Classico) and calcareous mudstones. The topsoil is also of calcareous origin, rich in karst limestone, derived from the collapse of rocks from Mount Cetona, which makes it highly structured, especially on the surface where outcroppings are visible in and around the vineyards. The higher section is formed by red (Pliocene) clay rich in iron, while the lower part has a much looser clay, rich in sandstone of clastic origin. Marlstones are also present below the first 70-80 cm of soil. The 0.8hectare parcel sits at 550m altitude, is exposed to the south and surrounded by forest and pasture on all sides. Caccialupi is perhaps the most dynamic of the crus. While il Pozzone is fruitier and rounder, il Bossolo more sleek, fine, and familiar in fruit and citrus qualities, Caccialupi finds a different robe of fruits, spring oranges, persimmon, wild raspberry, and Persian mulberry, framed with more savory, foresty notes and spice. The shallow topsoil and the direct contact of the roots with the bedrock seem to impart a greater sensation of minerality and salinity. Caccialupi likely stands as the top site (thus far) as far as breed is concerned, and also demonstrates the untapped potential of Cetona.

Giacomo's *0-0k Vineyard Ferment* is one of the most compelling winemaking concepts in the most recent years. Giacomo conducted his first experiment with vineyard fermentations in 2015 in New Zealand, then with il Bossolo in 2016. New Zealand is the first known place to actively explore this unique modern approach that keeps the grapes in the vineyard it was born for the entirety of the fermentation. While the grapes are processed in the cellar because of his preference to destem 60% of the fruit, they are immediately brought back to the vineyard for their nearly month-long fermentation and maceration. Once dry, they are taken back to the cellar for pressing and then aged and handled more or less the same as the other crus for 18 months in old barrles. The results are surprising, if not unbelievable, not only in taste, x-factor and the wine's figure and nuances, but it imparts a lower alcohol content when compared to the exact same grapes picked and processed

from the same parcels compared to those fermented in the cellar. Giacomo's experience is that there is a reduction of 0.4%-3.0% alcohol, while a well-known New Zealand grower has regularly experienced the same. This level of change in alcohol is astounding and hard to fully accept. With the 2019 il Bossolo and 2019 0-0k (the same fruit pick and block as il Bossolo 2019), the alcohol separation is 13.0% compared to 12.3%. In 2020 all the grapes for this experiment were again from il Bossolo (12.8% versus 12.4%); 2021 Pozzone was included, and in 2022 Caccialupi at 13.25% compared to 12.0%, Bossolo 13.3% to 12.9%, and Pozzone 12.8% to 12.25%. As of 2020, Giacomo is making half the quantities in the cellar and vineyard. In 2016, the Bossolo vineyard ferment was 3% less than the vat fermented in the cellar. Those numbers are encouraging in the face of a wine world chock-full of higher alcohol.



Giacomo explains, "In my vineyard-ferment wines there is more finesse and complexity, and different nuances depending on each season's weather. Usually fermentations are always quite cold, even if the fermenter is sitting outside, and at night temperatures bring it down a little bit, so I think you could extract a more deep and intense profile during the fermentation, with different aromas and tannins. One thing to note is that I've never had so far, a fermentation that stops (2016-2022) or leaves some grams of sugar residual at the end, even when the temperature is pretty cold for a red; when I press there is never more than two grams residual sugar. It's incredible. I think I'm the only crazy guy still fermenting in the vineyard in Europe, but I hope that someone else will start soon somewhere so we could have more exchange and opportunity to share our experiences with different grapes and territory."

Giacomo's "Super Tuscan" red is the starting wine in his range, though for many Tuscan producers it's their priciest wine. He explains that *Bossolotto* is the little brother name of Bossolo. ("Otto"

added to the end of an Italian word is often applied as a term of endearment that connotes smallness). It's also a Tuscan slang used to describe an honest and direct glass of wine. The Sangiovese portion of this blend comes from three different rented parcels from 15 to 70 years old. The other half of the wine is Merlot. It goes through fermentation and maceration for 25-30 days with 5% stems, followed by a year in very old French oak barrels (youngest 5 years), and six months in steel before bottling.

Whites Wines

As already demonstrated in the range of reds with the vineyard ferments, Giacomo likes to play with wine. When we first spoke about his non-DOC/DOCG Sangiovese wines and the US market's top non-Italian restaurant wine lists, we knew that procuring an audience would already be difficult; there are quite a few producers who make spectacular non-DOC/DOCG wines but most continue to struggle to find their place. Of course, there are others who have a cult following that makes it easy for them to sell out without a problem, but that status takes years if not decades to achieve. Then he added that he had some experimental non-DOC/DOCG white wines, an even more difficult category coming out of Italy. With skepticism on high alert, the range of whites gave quite a shock. With his work all over the globe, capped with some years of training in Burgundy, it shouldn't have been surprising that they're all very good and very different from one another.



What's not to love about a wine name that means "awakening" in Italian? The first vintage of *Risveglio* was 2021. Giacomo explains, "I wanted to make a wine really close to our traditions here and with the local varieties. People who continue to make white wines from the area for self-consumption in the old traditional way often did it with some skin contact (usually three to four days

and sometimes even up to seven), and after pressing let it finish fermentation without skins. On one hand I didn't want to push too much with maceration as I do with my Grechetto orange wine (*il Pergola*), and on the other hand I wanted a fresher wine to be released in spring like the local garage winemakers always did. So the union of some traditions and many ideas I have in my mind resulted in Risveglio. It's not a banal wine, nor an explosion of flowers and fermentation aromas but something with its own character, structure and depth, with crisp acidity but also with complex texture. It's meant to start to be drunk after a few months, but Risveglio can also age well thanks to the old vines from where it comes."

The equal blend of Trebbiano and Malvasia comes from sections in Caccialupi and Pozzone, and two small, rented parcels, a young vineyard (2015) at 600m on galestro bedrock and topsoil facing north and another planted in the 1950s on sandy soils at 300m. The skin maceration is around three days and the natural fermentation lasts for about 6-7 weeks in old barrels. It goes through malolactic fermentation and bâtonnage is sometimes used if it is sluggish to finish. It spends six months in old barrels (6-8 years old) and two in steel before bottling. It's fined with bentonite and lightly filtered (3 micron). The total SO2 level is around 60-70mg/L and the pH ranges from 3.30-3.40 with TA around 6.50. The alcohol is usually around 12.5%.



l'Affacciatoio takes its name from the Italian verb, affacciarsi, which means to look out of a window, or over a wall. Or in this case, over a cliff, a limestone ridge of Monte Cetona with a series of bluffs overlooking Giacomo's Chardonnay and Grechetto vineyards. This slightly amphitheater-shaped formation runs north to south and faces west—a ridiculously delicious sunset location.

Giacomo wisely chose this location to plant his 0.9ha Chardonnay vineyard. A tour via Google Earth (here) reveals a strikingly similar setting to Burgundy in that the vineyard is planted inside a combe (as are many of the Côte d'Or's great vineyards) that flushed a lot of limestone rock debris (aka scree) down into the valley below with a lot of it just at the mouth of the opening that established a perfect bedrock and topsoil for this variety at 585-605m. It looks like Côte d'Or soil, but not in a Côte d'Or setting, except the surrounding limestone bluffs, like the inside of the comb of Chambolle-Musigny; it's all alone on this hillside without another vineyard in sight. The topsoil is redder than the neighboring parcel of Grechetto, due to a higher content of manganese and iron—the latter being well-known to bring more structure and body to a wine. Equally wise, he selected the Chardonnay genetic material from friendly growers in Corton-Charlemagne, Saint-Aubin and Puligny-Montrachet. The result? You can imagine with his years of work in Burgundy, the limestone and clay topsoil, the high altitude (about 300m higher than Côte d'Or white wine vineyards), and the massale selections from the promised land, that though this is a long way from Burgundy, this vinous transplant is a convincing argument that Giacomo is on to something.

Naturally fermented in and raised only in older French oak barrels (purchased from friends in Burgundy, minimum 5 years old) for one year with the full solids of the pressing (no *débourbage*), it's racked into steel where it clarifies over another eight months before bottling. The pH hovers around 3.30, TA 6.50 or more, and the total SO2 is around 60-70mg/L. Alcohol is around 12.5%.



Finally we arrive at *il Pergola*, Giacomo's orange wine, or as they like to say in Italian, *vini macerati*. The massale selection used for the 2018 planting of these Grechetto vines comes from three 70-year-old vines just below the main square of San Casciano dei Bagni. They're planted next to the Chardonnay vines on white topsoil (the Chardonnay is more red topsoil) at 585-605m, facing west (as seen here).

Giacomo says that Grechetto comes from the Greco family, and is found in Italy's Umbria, south Tuscany, north Lazio, and Marche. There are only two known Grechettos, but they're different varieties: Grechetto di Todi and Grechetto di Orvieto—the former having smaller cylindric compact bunches, the latter bigger, less compact bunches and more of a pyramid shape. Grechetto has a nice, strong, tough golden skin and gets ripe usually in the second half of September in San Casciano dei Bagni. It manages well in warmer seasons because it ripens slowly and because of its strong skin and naturally high resistance to disease. It can also attain a quality botrytis for sweeter wines.

The skin contact during fermentation of these completely destemmed grapes lasts four to five weeks in plastic bins prior to pressing. It goes through malolactic fermentation, coaxed by a little bâtonnage if needed. In the first years of production, it was raised partially in steel and 400l old French oak barrels and 450l steel drums (barrels) for one year. Future vintages will all be aged in wood to help the lees contribute more complexity with the help of the more porous vessel. After the initial aging period, the wines are racked together into steel for six more months, bottled and then released a year later. The pH ranges between 3.60-3.70, TA around 5.0, and total SO2 between 40-50mg/L. It's not fined or filtered. The alcohol is usually over 13%.



Giacomo describes il Pergola as a golden orange wine with a nice texture and tannin structure that softens after a few months in bottle, and develops pretty, yellow-pulp fruit aromas, hazelnut, almond, and Mediterranean spices.