

Ask Sabrina Tedeschi about her family's history in Valpolicella and she goes into a pensive mood. It's not easy to pinpoint an exact beginning in the Tedeschi timeline. Old documents sketchily reveal that her ancestors were involved in winemaking since 1630. But it wasn't until 1824 that her family's role in Valpolicella started to come into focus: Nicolò Tedeschi, her great great-grandfather, bought some vineyards, and sowed the seeds for the business that would shape Tedeschi winery, located in Pedemonte, Valpolicella; a wine region in Verona.

Amicable and polite, the 44-year-old Italian listens intently to your questions before giving measured responses in English, emphasising her vowels; a phonetic rub-off from her native language. "If you start from 1630, then I am more than a fifth generation winemaker," she says. "Today, my siblings and I have seven children. And we don't know if they want to carry on the family business; they are still very young. But first of all, they must have the passion."

Whether or not her children will follow her footsteps will be something for her to ponder. For now, Sabrina and her siblings run the winery: her brother, Riccardo, handles wine production and exports, while her sister, Antonietta, oversees domestic sales and administration. Sabrina, who holds a degree in Food Technology from the Agronomic University in Milan, assists Riccardo in production, and takes charge of marketing. There was never any doubt she'd join the family business (her schoolteacher had once reminded her, metaphorically, that she was born in fermentation tanks), given her constant exposure to the wine universe from young. She reveals that Riccardo works closely with the family patriarch, Renzo Tedeschi, who guides his children in viticulture.

Sabrina credits her father for introducing the

winery to other markets. Her grandparents sold their wines only at an *osteria* (a wine bar), serving the local community. But Renzo decided to export the wines to other countries in the region, such as the U.K. and Germany. Today, Tedeschi winery owns 99 hectares of vineyards across Valpolicella, which, fronted by Lake Garda in the west, and fringed by the Monti Lessini hills in the north, offers a cool climate. As a DOC, Valpolicella produces reds made mainly from Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes. The Valpolicella Classico Superiore, a delicate red, and Amarone, a dry wine made from dried grapes, are the winery's signatures. The latter has seen a sharp rise in popularity in Valpolicella over the past few years, and was accorded DOCG status this year—a move which Sabrina thinks is overdue. She counts Amarone as "probably the most important wine in our range".

Perhaps the most distinctive parcel in Tedeschi winery's portfolio is Monte Olmi in the commune of San Pietro in Cariano, where the winery is located: the vineyard, purchased by Lorenzo Tedeschi, Sabrina's great-grandfather, in 1918, is planted with vines on terraces fortified by *marogne* (stone walls). Its steep slope allows water from heavy rainfall to be drained away easily, while the clay composition of the soil retains water during dry conditions.

Steady expansion is on the cards for Tedeschi—in the last six years, they have planted 32 hectares of new vineyards. But Sabrina maintains that they still see themselves as a medium-size producer. "We produce about half a million bottles per year," she says. "There are others in Valpolicella who make more than that."

Singapore was one of her stops on her Asian 'tour' to promote her wines. She breaks into a nervous laughter when she tells you that she'd be flying off to Malaysia the next day—and her shipment of wines

Sabrina Tedeschi was once teased by a schoolteacher that she was born in fermentation tanks. The Italian, who hails from a long lineage of vintners, tells Lin Weiwen more about her passion for the family business.

Grape generations



would only arrive in Kuala Lumpur a few days later. "We have started selling our wines in Thailand and Hong Kong. Our biggest Asian market is Japan, which we approached more than 20 years ago. Asia is an important segment for us," she adds. "I'm so busy nowadays; I hardly have any free time. And if I do have it, I spend it with my family, especially my two daughters (12 and 7 years old). They need me."



"We always want to make a wine where *people can recognise the land it comes from.*"

Have you introduced any new technology in the winery over the last five years?

We have a new drying facility that controls the temperature and humidity during the drying process, and also reduces the chances of the grapes developing fungi. This is important for our Amarone and Recioto wines' grapes, which are dried for up to four months (to concentrate their sugars) after we harvest them at the end of September. This facility also allows us to keep more of the natural characteristics of the grapes, and remain true to the expression of their terroir. We always want to make a wine where people can recognise the land it comes from.

What kind of oak barrels do you use to age your wines?

We age them in Slavonian oak barrels, which range from 1,000 to 5,000 litres. If you age them in Bordeaux-style barrique barrels (225 litres), you'd get a strong oaky taste, and that's not what we want.

Has the rise in the popularity of Amarone brought any changes to winemaking in Valpolicella?

Yes, there were more wineries selecting more quality grapes for their Amarone than for other Valpolicella wines, resulting in lesser grapes for the latter, and compromising their quality. But the *Consorzio per la Tutela dei Vini Valpolicella*, a wine-monitoring association in our region, noticed this, and decided to reduce the amount of grapes a winery can harvest for Amarone. In the past, we could select 70 percent per hectare of grapes for Amarone production. Today, we have to stick to 50 percent. I think this is good, so vintners won't forget to take pride in classic Valpolicella wines. >

In 2006, Tedeschi winery purchased 84 hectares of new land in Valpolicella.

Tell us more about this new addition.

That purchase was an investment for my family's future. In Valpolicella, there isn't a lot of land for sale. After many years, we found this plot of land that showed very good potential. We did some analyses on it—the soil was calcareous with a presence of lime—and we even talked to the people who live in the area to gather more information. The land includes 53 hectares of forest, 30 hectares of vineyards and two hectares of olive trees. We are now producing outstanding olive oil, and so we are very happy. This year, we are looking forward to our first harvest from 11 hectares of vineyards, which we have planted with local varieties like Corvina and Rondinella. There is also what we think is a building of monastic origin on a hilltop.

What needs to be done for Valpolicella wines to win over more consumers in the Asian market?

I think Valpolicella, as an appellation, can be quite confusing for some drinkers—you have different kinds of wines under the label of Valpolicella, such as our Amarone della Valpolicella Classico, and the Capitel San Rocco Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso (where a part of Valpolicella Classico is mixed with Amarone's marc, prolonging its fermentation and creating a fuller bodied wine). So we need to educate consumers on the offerings of Valpolicella, which is what I do.

Have there been years when you produced no vintages?

Yes, in 2002. We had a bad storm in Italy, which really affected the grapes' health. We tasted the wine, and decided it wasn't the quality we expected from our winery. So we did not bottle the wine—we sold it off in bulk to negociants. It was a very difficult decision to make, but it was necessary. e

grape picks

CAPITEL TENDA SOAVE CLASSICO 2008

Grape variety: Garganega

Taste: Clean, citrusy, with a touch of honeydew, and a slightly round finish. \$56

VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO SUPERIORE 2007

Grape variety: 30 percent Corvina, 30 percent Corvinone, 30 Rondinella, 10 percent Molinara, Rossignola, Oseleta, Negrara, Dindarella

Taste: Notes of cherries, raisins and dates make way for a harmonious, balanced flavour. Slightly light in finish. \$54

CAPITEL SAN ROCCO VALPOLICELLA SUPERIORE RIPASSO 2007

Grape variety: 30 percent Corvina, 30 percent Corvinone, 30 percent Rondinella, 10 percent Rossignola, Oseleta, Negrara, Dindarella

Taste: Immediate notes of rose and blackcurrant, slightly spicy, plump and very round on the palate. An aromatic wine that would age well. Give it another six years. \$72



AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO 2005

Grape variety: 30 percent Corvina, 30 percent Corvinone, 30 percent Rondinella, 10 percent Rossignola, Oseleta, Negrara, Dindarella

Taste: Burst of raspberries on the nose, bold, round structure, with lots of berries. A rather dry finish which lingers in the mouth. Age for eight to nine years for a finer wine. \$128

CAPITEL MONTE OLMI AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO 2005

Grape variety: 30 percent Corvina, 30 percent Corvinone, 30 percent Rondinella, 10 percent Oseleta, Negrara, Dindarella, Croatina, Forselina

Taste: Scents of raspberry, cherry and rose, round and mellow on the palate, with a very good finish. \$210

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