

fine lees

**Social
sustainability**
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*The unfiltered
wine report*

Issue 11

Welcome to the first Fine Lees of 2022! With Plan B restrictions lifted and the summer months ahead of us, it finally feels like the industry is returning to some state of normality.

But of course, what would the wine world be if 'normality' didn't bring with it a new host of challenges to overcome?

Climate change is still wreaking havoc on growers across the globe, as we find when we speak to many of the producers featured in this edition. Closer to home, the UK's hospitality industry is racked with staffing issues and supply considerations, in the aftermath of both the pandemic and Brexit.

But that's not to say it's all doom and gloom; in fact, far from it. Catching up with producers from Lebanon, South Africa, New Zealand and Argentina, **CHRISTINA RASMUSSEN** find that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, positive steps towards sustainability are still being taken. From Fairtrade certifications, educational programmes, and regenerative methods of agriculture, it would appear that nothing's standing still in the march towards a better future.

On home soil, **CLINTON CAWOOD** finds that – despite the challenges facing the hospitality industry – many are finding cause for celebration. With customers still flooding to venues and spending more as they do, many sommeliers and managers are optimistic about the future of hospitality – and are learning to roll with the punches when it comes to staffing and supply chain issues.

That optimism is carrying over to producers who've found weather to be their biggest challenge of the past few years. **ELONA HESSELING** catches up with some of the worst affected in Chablis, where hail, spring snow and black frost have reduced yields by up to 80%. Despite all this, she finds that the 2021 vintage may be one of the best yet.

Finally, **GERGELY BARSZ SZABO** looks to the future, exploring a producer that ticks all the 'alternative sparkling' boxes that consumers are looking for. He delves into the story behind Ferrari Trento, pioneer of traditional method sparkling in Italy, and finds that a century of craftsmanship and innovation has led to something very special indeed.

We hope you enjoy the issue – wishing you all a bright and happy 2022!

Cheers,

ELISA DE LUCA



Having spent most summers as a child trekking through Italian vineyards, **ELISA**'s love of wine started at a young age. After a few stints working in pubs across the UK, she realised she could try far more samples working in a wine company, and landed at Bibendum two years ago. She now spends her days looking after digital marketing, writing articles, running the company social media channels, and tasting lots (and lots) of wine.

SOCIAL *sustainability*

Written by CHRISTINA RASMUSSEN
Designed by SHANNON MAYHEW



**LESSENING OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINTS
— AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS COMPANIES
— HAS REACHED CRITICAL URGENCY.**

Yet in addition to discussing carbon capture, we must also address social sustainability. Without providing adequate long-term support and care for employees and communities, the environmental pillar of sustainability will collapse.

Social sustainability should be at the core of every winery's values, but it is particularly urgent in developing countries — where poverty and the lack of basic human rights are major issues — as well as in countries that are suffering from political instability.

LEBANESE *labour crisis*

In Lebanon, **DOMAINE WARDY** is located in Zahle, in the heart of the Beqaa Valley. In 2017, the winery underwent acquisition rounds, but remains in the same family.

NOW OWNED BY FOUR WARDY SIBLINGS, THEIR FIRST GOAL WAS TO MAKE THE BUSINESS MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY.

First, they installed solar panels in the winery and in their vineyard.

Khalil Wardy explains, “Lebanon suffers from constant power shortages, forcing businesses and homes to rely heavily on generators. Solar power is a much cleaner source of energy, and it was an easy decision to make. Then, a wastewater treatment plant followed.”

The Covid pandemic has been particularly difficult for Lebanon. Traditionally, fruit and vegetable growers depended on seasonal labourers travelling from Syria. The border is only an hour’s drive from the Beqaa Valley, so workers crossed over in the morning and went home at night. As wages are much higher in Lebanon than in Syria, this was very appealing. *Unfortunately, when the pandemic hit, the border shut, and so the Lebanese people had to rely on local workers, of which there are few.*

“
HARVESTING WAGES SKYROCKETED, AND SOME PEOPLE CHOSE NOT TO HARVEST... WAGES FOR HARVESTING WERE HIGHER THAN THE PRICE OF THE FRUIT. IT WAS A VERY SAD SIGHT TO SEE APPLES SIMPLY LEFT TO FALL AND ROT ON THE GROUND BECAUSE GROWERS COULD NOT AFFORD TO HARVEST THEM. SOME PEOPLE MADE THE EXTREME DECISION OF UPROOTING THEIR VINEYARDS OR ORCHARDS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT THE SITUATION IS ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE
”



CREATING CERTAINTY

Despite this, the Wardys are determined to remain positive. *They are encouraging people who own land (especially high-elevation plots on the slopes of the Beqaa Valley) to plant vineyards:*

“WE ARE OFFERING OUR KNOW-HOW, BUYING THEIR VINE CUTTINGS, AND GUARANTEEING TO BUY THEIR CROPS OVER LONG-TERM PERIODS. WE’VE ALREADY PLANTED THREE VINEYARDS AND ARE IN NEGOTIATIONS TO PLANT THREE MORE IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS.”

In doing so, they ensure employment and a steady income to owners and their families. They are also working towards circular economy practices; part of the grape pomace is used in the horse feed at the family’s Arabian horse stud, and the other part is mixed with horse manure to produce fertiliser. *They are also considering planting barley as cover crops between the vines, which doubles up as excellent horse feed.*



Cultural Representation

Another crucial factor surrounding social sustainability is cultural representation.

Globally, wine marketing has often focused on European traditions and design.

*This is seen in Lebanon, which remains influenced by its French colonial past.**

After their acquisition, Domaine Wardy teamed up with renowned designer Tarek Atrissi. Khalil says, “We wanted to think outside the box and create something unique. It was a huge risk as our new designs are unlike any wine labels on the market. We wanted the labels to mean something.”

THE DESIGNS INCORPORATE TRADITIONAL LEBANESE MOSAICS, AND VINE TENDRILS SPELL ‘WARDY’ VERTICALLY IN ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY.

They have been hugely successful, with some bottles becoming collectors’ items. They are beautiful and unique, and they reclaim traditional Lebanese culture.

*For anybody wishing to learn more about Lebanon, wine writer Farrah Berrou has published in-depth cultural analysis and research on the intricacies of these historical and present relationships in the brilliant Aanab magazine.

EDUCATION *and* UPLIFTMENT

At **STELLENRUST** winery, in South Africa's Stellenbosch, Tertius Boshoff also underlines the importance of representation. Through their efforts in providing education to the Black community, several previously disadvantaged Black people have achieved tertiary education, at marketing, IT and administrative levels, and now work at the winery and in the tasting room. In addition, other young Black adults are pursuing tertiary education in medicine, nursing, teaching and cooking.

“IT’S ALL ABOUT EDUCATION AND UPLIFTMENT. USUALLY, IF YOU WALK INTO A TASTING ROOM, YOU FIND A WHITE PERSON. SO, IT’S WONDERFUL TO BE ABLE TO SEE THIS HAPPENING, AND TO BE A PART OF THEIR PRIDE. THERE IS SUCH A STRONG EMOTIONAL COMPONENT, AS THESE ARE PEOPLE WE KNOW, WHO HAVE LIVED WITH US... IT’S A COMMUNITY.”

THIS CHANGE DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. AFTER APARTHEID, THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT LAUNCHED THE BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT SCHEME (BEE), WHEREBY THEY ENCOURAGED BUSINESSES TO SUPPORT, UPLIFT, EDUCATE AND GIVE BACK TO BLACK PEOPLE.

Stellenrust launched their BEE scheme in 2003, giving their farm workers their own properties, and making 72 men and women majority shareholders in 100 out of the farm's 400 hectares. In total, this covers families of 250 people.

Tertius says, “My father said they have spent their whole lives working for us, yet they had never really reaped the rewards. We wanted to give back to them what they have given to us.”



Sustainable Success

It has been a long road to launch the BEE project successfully and sustainably, and he highlights that similar projects by other companies sometimes fail.

“A neighbouring property has old vine Cabernet and Cinsault, but it’s become a grazing field. That’s an example of when BEE projects don’t work — if they aren’t properly managed. The government hasn’t put money into sustainable leadership or education to ensure proper growth.”

Hence, management and structure has always been at the centre of their BEE project, so it is viable in the long run. *In addition, they decided to certify with Fairtrade.* This has been a way for them to further give back to their community while continuing to develop their BEE project.

ALL OF THE MONEY RAISED THROUGH FAIRTRADE GOES DIRECTLY TO THE WORKERS’ COMMITTEE, AND THEY DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH THE MONEY. A LARGE PART OF THIS REVOLVES AROUND EDUCATION.

“We’ve set up a computer room for secondary school children, and a school bus takes the kids to school every day. We also opened a creche — some of our female workers are taught through the Pebbles Project (a charity which works to support the lives of disadvantaged children and families from agricultural communities) how to run it. It’s great to see that. Before, kids would go to secondary school and that would have been the first time they saw a school. Now, they are also looked after at preschool.”



Pebbles Project



FROM THE *bottom up*



Carolyn Martin, of **CREATION WINES** in the Hemel-en-Aarde, contacted the **Pebbles Project** when she realised how dire the situation was for the children of the farmworkers in her area.

“ON A DIFFICULT WINTER’S DAY, I SAW KIDS WHO WEREN’T VERY WELL-DRESSED WALKING ALONG THE ROAD. I WENT TO THE LOCAL FARM SCHOOL, WHICH WAS VERY DILAPIDATED WITH CROWDED CLASSROOMS. WE DECIDED THAT WE WOULD TRY TO SET UP A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE SCHOOL, TO MAKE SURE KIDS HAD AFTER SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND TO PROVIDE PROPER TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE.”

She explains that although the government set up the schools, it had been a catch-22 situation, as there was no funding to bring the children living in rural areas to school. For unemployed single mothers, it was simply impossible to pay for transport. Through fundraising and working with the Pebbles Project, however, this has all changed.

When the government closed the local school, the Pebbles Project took it over, and there are now 148 children enrolled — from babies to high school students. *Every child has access to transport, a full educational programme, and a full healthcare program.*

SHE SAYS, “IT HAS CHANGED THEIR TRAJECTORY COMPLETELY. BEFORE, THE KIDS HAD SUCH A LACK OF CONFIDENCE AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM. NOW, THEY’RE CONFIDENT AND AMBITIOUS. THEY REALLY STAND A GREAT CHANCE; IT’S NOW POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO GO TO UNIVERSITY.”



FULL CIRCLE *sustainable*

There is also a strong environmental focus; they built a communal garden, and teach the children about various aspects of nature and biodiversity, even teaching them how to manage snakes instead of harming them.

CREATION IS ALSO HOME TO THE FIRST VIRUS-FREE MOTHER BLOCK PLANTED POST-1994. IT SUPPLIES THE SOUTH AFRICAN WINE INDUSTRY WITH HEALTHY CUTTINGS, ENSURING LONGEVITY OF VINEYARDS.

They are also carrying out in-depth research on cover crops to preserve native species and improve biodiversity. They currently have a list of 90 indigenous plants that could be of potential interest, working alongside geologists, local botanists and professors from Stellenbosch University.

JOURNEY'S END, in Stellenbosch, has been awarded the WWF Conservation Champion status, through their efforts to set aside 22 hectares of their land for conservation. They work to replant indigenous flora – in particular the critically endangered Swartland Shale Renosterveld – and ensure their water supply is well managed and recycled. Owl boxes on the farm are home to eagle owls (natural rodent controllers), Egyptian geese keep the insect population in check, and over 40 beehives have been set up. They were also the second winery in South Africa to convert entirely to solar energy in 2014, and they have already achieved carbon negative status.

They are also certified Fairtrade.

TO HAVE FURTHER IMPACT, THEY LAUNCHED THE JOURNEY'S END FOUNDATION IN 2020. MONEY HAS GONE TOWARDS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR LOCAL SCHOOL HALL, AND THE RUNNING AND MANAGEMENT OF 10 SOUP KITCHENS THROUGHOUT THE HELDERBERG REGION.

Their goal had been to serve 500,000 meals in a year, but they managed to double this, serving one million meals between October 2020 to October 2021. They also set up a creche, and sponsor Beat the Bully, a campaign that implements ways to pre-empt and stop bullying in schools.



GROWING *for* GOOD



At **SPIER WINE FARM**, in Stellenbosch, *the focus lies with organic farming*. Marina Kaiser, International Brand Manager, summarises their philosophy beautifully with, “Making organic wines is in keeping with Spier’s ethically, environmentally, and socially-conscious farming philosophy — in which we harness the goodness of nature in ways that are kind to the earth.”

IN 2020, THEY SET UP THEIR GROWING FOR GOOD INITIATIVE. MEGAN MCCARTY, THE SPIER FOOD GARDENER, AND LONWABO MFENGUZA, A GRADUATE OF THE BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA, TEACH MEMBERS OF DISADVANTAGED LOCAL COMMUNITIES HOW TO GROW FRUIT, HERBS AND VEGETABLES USING ECO-FRIENDLY AND REGENERATIVE METHODS.

THROUGH TRAINING AND SEED DONATIONS THEY HAVE ALREADY ENABLED 11 DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES TO START THEIR OWN THRIVING FOOD GARDENS.

Megan says, “Our food garden is a healthy working environment and offers surplus to share with employees, their families and local communities, ensuring that the team is strong and happy. *They have all really blossomed, learning and growing so much over the past year.* There’s a beautiful sense of both peace and productivity here. I’m lucky to work with such a great team, full of laughter and enthusiasm.”



Knowledge is power



In Mendoza, Argentina, **CATENA ZAPATA** has been studying biodiversity, microbial populations in the soil, as well as cover crops. **Laura Catena** says, “We are studying which cover crops are ideal for the Argentinian ecosystem, and to provide nutrients for our vines without creating too much work and taking away precious water. It is very complex, and it requires a great volume of well-controlled studies.”

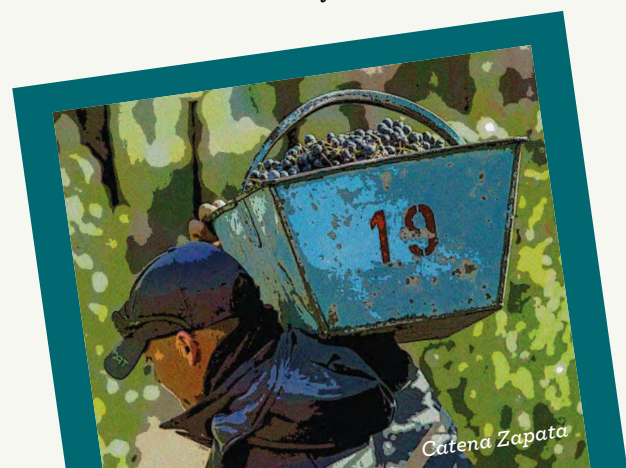
They have a staff member starting a PhD in water management, which Laura emphasises is their current most critical issue surrounding climate change. *She explains that education lies at the core of the Catena winery’s ethos:*


“WE PLACE GREAT EMPHASIS ON THE CONTINUOUS TRAINING OF OUR STAFF, SUPPORTING ANYBODY INTERESTED IN PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES, EVEN SPONSORING SEVERAL PHDS AT THE CATENA INSTITUTE. SUPPORTING EDUCATION AND UPWARD MOBILITY IS PART OF OUR CULTURE.”

To encourage local young people to consider pursuing a career in the countryside, they also have a programme for high school student vineyard internships.

“ WE’VE HAD INCREDIBLE SUCCESS WITH THIS, RECRUITING NEW EMPLOYEES, AND SOME OF THESE STUDENTS HAVE EVEN DECIDED TO PURSUE CAREERS IN WINEMAKING AND VINEYARD MANAGEMENT. ”

They also provide housing for many of their employees (a total of 64 houses) and run summer schools to allow parents to work during the harvest time. Through this, they have been able to increase the participation of women workers by 20%.





AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

OTRONIA'S vineyards are located in the most southerly segment of Argentina, in Patagonia.

IN 2012, ALEJANDRO BULGHERONI STARTED THIS NEW CHAPTER, FOCUSING ON ORGANIC VITICULTURE TO PRESERVE THE LAND AND PRODUCE HIGH-QUALITY WINE.

Gustavo Crespo, Managing Director of Blends Wine Estates UK, says, "In 2019, we began to select flowers to plant in the rows of our Alto Agrelo vineyard. Today, in block 50, we have planted more than 18 species of flowers, identified with QR codes, selected to coexist in a sustainable way with the management of the vineyard. They also allow us to study (together with the Faculty of Ciencias Agrarias and the INTA) *the interactions of the different insects that are attracted by the flowers, and the benefits on the vines.*"

THEY ARE ALSO FAIRTRADE CERTIFIED. THROUGH THIS, THEY ARE SUPPLYING THREE SCHOOLS WITH MATERIALS (E.G. BLACKBOARDS, FURNITURE, PRINTERS AND SPORTS MATERIALS), AS WELL AS REPAIRING TOILETS AND CHANGING ROOMS FOR A SCHOOL OF 85 CHILDREN.

A *positive* WAY OF *life*

In Gisborne, New Zealand, **MILLTON** winery *is known for being the oldest organic and biodynamic wine estate in the country.*

They were one of the founding members of the Renaissance des Appellations biodynamic group, and are also one of the Family of 12 New Zealand wineries. Over time, James highlights that now half of those Family of 12 have converted to achieve organic certification – things are moving in the right direction.

Biodynamic certification is occasionally criticised due to its Eurocentric approach, as the plants recommended for biodynamic preparations are those traditionally found in Europe. In addition to a long journey of working to better understand Mother Nature (and hence to make their own decisions regarding preparations),

JAMES ALSO EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL INDIGENOUS MAORI POPULATION, SOME OF WHOM WORK AT MILLTON.

HE SAYS, “I’M PROUD TO HAVE MAORI PEOPLE WORKING HERE, FROM SUSTAINABLE, TO FINANCIAL, TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS. AND THE MOST IMPORTANT IS CULTURAL; WE HAVE CULTURE IN ABUNDANCE; YOU CAN FEEL THE HEARTBEAT. FROM THE MAORI PEOPLE WE HAVE LEARNT ABOUT NATIVE PLANTS THAT ARE TRADITIONALLY USED FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING; TEAS FOR OURSELVES, BUT ALSO FOR PLANTS AND ANIMALS. THERE IS SO MUCH TO LEARN FROM THEM, AND FROM THEIR CONNECTION TO THE LAND.”

James emphasises that the biodynamic way of life is ultimately about positivity: “In modern agriculture, we’re supposed to be spending a lot of time fighting disease. Many people say, Oh it must be so difficult, there’s so much disease. Very few people ask, What pleasure do you get? Or, What opportunities are there? It’s all about positive energy. If we embrace love and share it with the people around us... we should be imbued with mindfulness for one another.”

It’s a statement that can only result in a long moment of contemplation.

IN FRANCE, THERE IS A WONDERFUL ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT CALLED LES COLIBRIS, WHICH HAS A SIMPLE YET INCREDIBLY POWERFUL NOTION: EVERY INDIVIDUAL TAKES ACTION WHERE THEY CAN.

It reminds us of James’ stance, and the power that the individual possesses when we turn to positive thinking.



CHRISTINA RASMUSSEN is a wine writer, photographer, co-founder of online wine platform, LITTLEWINE, and amateur winemaker. She has a particular passion for covering winemakers and farmers working towards environmental and social change. She was runner-up in the 2021 edition of Jancis Robinson’s wine writing competition. When not found writing about wine, she is likely tending her own baby vineyard in Oxfordshire, propagating houseplants or photographing wildlife.





the state of Hospitality

Written by Clinton Cawood

Designed by Camille Poyer

The last couple of years have been a rollercoaster for the hospitality industry. There's no overestimating the impact of Covid-19, bringing a series of lockdowns, reopenings, and ever-changing restrictions starting in March 2020. Since then, there have been tough times, moments for cautious optimism, and perhaps the occasional cause for celebration.

A number of challenges undoubtedly remain as we enter a new year. Staffing remains one of the trickiest issues in the industry, along with supply considerations.

**BUT THERE ARE
OPPORTUNITIES
OUT THERE TOO.**

We spoke to a number of On Trade figures from various parts of the industry to get their take on the state of UK hospitality.

Laure Patry



Executive Head Sommelier, The Social Company

In spite of the specific challenges that recent times have presented, Patry reports a sense of celebration in the air. In addition to the Bordeaux and Burgundy she sells as part of a classic wine list, customers have been ordering a significant amount of festive fizz. “We are selling quite a lot of Champagne and sparkling wine, as I think people associate it with celebration,” she says. **“People are celebrating much more, as the previous year we were all closed for the Christmas period.”**



“Having our jobs back and being busy is the best thing for us”

A SENSE OF CELEBRATION IN THE AIR

But that comes with its own challenges, not least ensuring that the right wines are available, and managing the associated admin. “Stock for certain wines is difficult,” says Patry. “We have to move on and replace them, but it’s not the easiest time of the year, as we are so busy in the restaurants and therefore don’t get much office time.”

Then there’s the not-so-small issue of ensuring that there is enough staff to serve these celebratory wines to customers. **“I think we are all experiencing staffing issues due to Covid, and then Brexit doesn’t help either,”** she says. Ultimately, Patry is optimistic. “Having our jobs back and being busy is the best thing for us,” she says.



Heath Ball



Managing Director and Founder, The Frisco Group

‘YOU KNOW WHAT, LET’S HAVE THAT £40 BOTTLE INSTEAD OF A £20 BOTTLE.’

“There are a lot of challenges,” admits Ball. “I think you’ve got to just roll with the punches and be quite dynamic about it. You could just put your head in your hands, but there are opportunities too.”

He continues: “If you get it right and give people an experience – if you can capture that, and give them a good offer, I think there’s an opportunity to make money. People are saying, ‘You know what, let’s have that £40 bottle instead of a £20 bottle.’ When we were coming out of lockdown we had a lot of people doing £200 per head. I think there are a lot of people thinking ‘I’ve had a horrible year, so let’s drink well.’ So you’ve got to give people the opportunity to spend.”

This positive outlook extends to Ball’s take on the shortage of staff across the industry. “I’m really fortunate that I have a strong team across my venues. It’s about looking after them well, paying them well, giving them proper staff food, etc. But I’m hearing horror stories about venues that have nobody at the moment. It’s really coming home to roost – for too long operators haven’t been treating staff right.”

When he does find new members of staff, there are further considerations. “If you can get

young people that want to work, then it’s about investment. And it’s hard when you’re training all the time while being really busy across multiple sites. I’d hate to be opening loads of sites right now. That would be a real challenge.”

Ball avoided some supply issues over the festive period by not having set menus at his venues. “I wrote a daily Christmas menu instead because we didn’t know what the supply chain would be doing. But customers could pre-order things like côte de boeuf, lobster and whole goose. I think you’ve got to have it for them.”

Supply remains a consideration across the board, he says. “For basic stuff, it’s a daily hassle – we’re seeing it with everyone. You’ve got to be quick on your feet, and can’t get upset with suppliers. It’s frustrating, but it is what it is.”

While maintaining a positive outlook, Ball is realistic. “It’ll be interesting this year when the rent moratorium ends and people are negotiating with landlords. There are definitely interesting times ahead. You have to focus, and try to give people a good experience.”

“So you’ve got to give people the opportunity to spend.”



“Guests have a great appetite for going out and having a good time at the moment, and I’m grateful for that,” says Seibel. “The biggest challenge is making sure you have what they want.”

The changeable and unpredictable nature of stock shortages make this particularly tricky. “It really puts a spanner in the works. It was straws a few weeks ago – straws of all things – and sometimes it’s the bread supplier. The difficulty is that it’s never the same thing,” she says.

This comes with logistical considerations too. “Everyone in London struggles for space. You don’t want to have big stock of anything, but at the same time you feel like you have to buy a little bit more in case there’s a longer wait next time. It gets a little cramped,” she says. “I’ve become very good at hiding things, and we’re utilising whatever storage we have.”

Fortunately, Seibel hasn’t experienced significant shortages of the essentials. “If bread runs out, worst case you can go to a bakery. But if wine and coffee were running out that would be an issue!” she says. “We’ve had

some issues with certain wines, but as we’re a smaller operation it’s easy to change the wine list.”

The shortage that everyone’s talking about, of course, is staff. “There is probably a handful of places that are lucky enough to not be feeling the brunt of that,” says Seibel.

“Everyone is happy to have guests coming through the door, but it’s about making sure you give the right service.”

On the whole, customers are spending more. **“It’s been a steady upward trend. People want to have**

better things, a slightly better bottle, some fun things they wouldn’t find in a grocery store…” says Seibel. “They’re definitely looking upwards, wondering about the cheeses, the charcuterie and the wines.”

“IF WINE AND COFFEE WERE RUNNING OUT THAT WOULD BE AN ISSUE!”

“it’s about making sure you give the right service.”



Erik Simonics



Group Head Sommelier, The Birley Clubs

“Wine training courses have become more of a standard now rather than an employee benefit.”

There’s no denying that it’s been a tough time for hospitality recently, as Simonics confirms. “The industry was hit hard, which forced many great restaurants into reducing their operating hours or even full closures,” he begins. Supply has been an issue too. “Daily sommelier tools like glassware, decanters and ice buckets are all running out on the market and therefore very difficult to replace,” he confirms.

And that’s not to mention sourcing the primary sommelier tool – wine. “There’s a shortage across all styles and price levels, with Champagne being the most difficult to source at the moment.” These shortages, he believes, are being caused in part by “increased demand for fine Champagne and iconic wines such as Sassicaia. Private collectors are spending more on fine wine, causing shortages on the market.” There’s a plus side to this trend in restaurants, however. **“It’s had a positive impact on average spend as people tend to spend more on fine wine,”** he says.

Like much of the industry, the most significant issue for Simonics at the moment is finding enough staff. “I think it goes without saying that staffing is currently the biggest challenge in the hospitality industry,” he says.

There are upsides to this, however. “Due to the staff shortage in the hospitality sector, businesses have started to attract the younger generation, and are investing in their training and education,” he says. **“Staff retention has also become a great focus and businesses are doing their best to keep it as high as possible.”**

Similarly, Simonics sees the silver lining in the overall situation. “The challenges have had some positive impact, one of them being that businesses across the country are finally recognising the importance of sommeliers and the profitability of wine programmes for them to survive the current conditions,” he says. **“They have started to increase wages for sommeliers, and wine training courses have become more of a standard now rather than an employee benefit.”**



The staffing crisis faced by the hospitality industry overshadows any other for Arcangeli. “It’s the only problem we have,” he says. **“We have customers spending well, we have business, but we can’t assure the same quality at the moment.”**

The crisis is the result of multiple factors, he explains.

“It’s because of Covid, as well as Brexit. Many people went back to their home countries. There are lots that want to come to the UK to work, but aren’t able to now. People have also realised that hospitality is very difficult.

“Throughout Covid many would have realised that a good life balance is important, and are now maybe doing something else, like working in the trade. Maybe a job that pays less money but is less stressful, with a better life balance.”

When he does find staff, the issue is one of education. **“It’s not only related to the number of people we**

need, but also their knowledge and expertise. If you can’t find the right people you have to train them – it’s the only way to survive at the moment, but there’s time involved in that too.”

Arcangeli is all too aware of the many implications of being short-staffed. “For us it means working

many hours, and the level of quality in terms of delivery of service isn’t the same because we don’t have the time. I’m the wine director, but most of the time I need to work on the floor because we don’t have staff.”

THERE ARE MANY POSITIONS OPEN IN LONDON AT THE MOMENT FOR SOMMELIERS, AND HEAD SOMMELIERS

The upside is an abundance of opportunities for those looking to work in hospitality. **“There are many positions open in London at the moment for sommeliers, and head sommeliers, for example, and they’ve increased the salaries, so maybe the roles are becoming more attractive.”**



Clinton has been writing about drinks since landing in the UK in 2006 from his native South Africa, where he’d already put in some time on both sides of the bar. He now covers all aspects of the industry for a number of publications, with a particular interest in the on-trade, as well as spirits and cocktails. He’s partial to all things agave, and dependent on good coffee.



fighting
frost

written by *Elona Hesseling*

with

designed by *Silvia Ruga*

fire



To say that 2021 was a tough year for Chablis would be putting it mildly.

Spring snow.

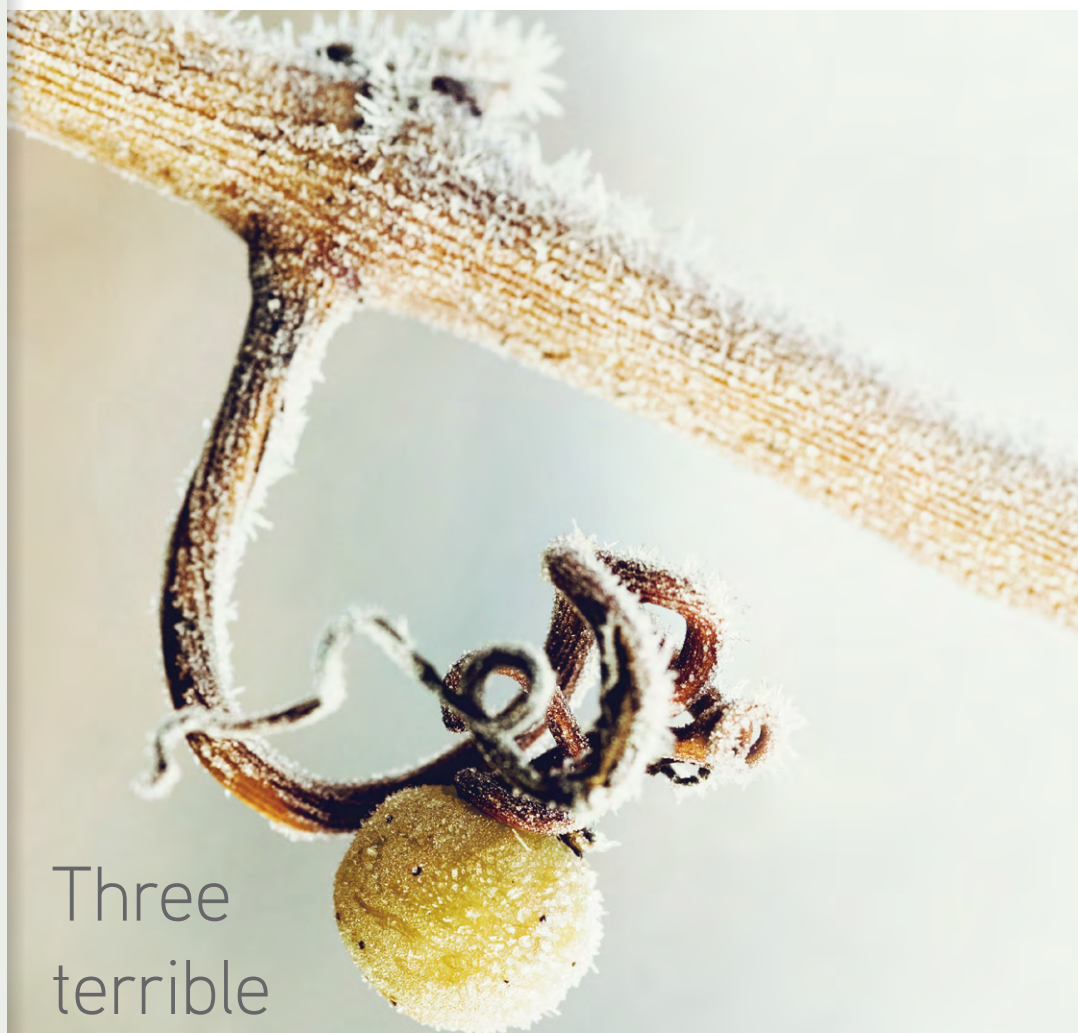
Black frost.

Mildew.

Oidium.

Hail.

It sounds like the makings of a true tragedy. And it was – with some producers reporting losses of up to 80%. But this isn't anything new, with the continued impact of climate change becoming ever more violently visible.



Three terrible nights

It's no secret that the 2021 harvest in Chablis was fraught with challenges – but most deadly were the “**three terrible nights**” of frost in April, explains Olivier Masmondet, export director for La Chablisienne. “This was even more devastating because of how well the growing season was progressing until that point,” he says. “It was mild and warm until early April. But this meant that budburst happened earlier, rendering the buds totally exposed to what followed.”

So, what happened on these three haunting nights? Bibendum buyer for France, Robert Mathias, explains:

“On **MONDAY THE 5TH** (of April 2021), Chablis had rain in the afternoon, putting moisture on the buds. That night, temperatures plummeted to -8°C.

TUESDAY THE 6TH saw the worst of snow showers and temperatures reaching -6°C. This lasted until Wednesday morning, when the bright sun grilled the icy buds, turning them black and destroying them in the process.

WEDNESDAY THE 7TH saw more frosts in the evening, damaging most of the remaining buds.”

The good fight

To try and protect at least some of their Premier and Grand Cru vineyards, wine-growers lit 'bougies' (or candles) in the vineyards to create heat and air movement, helping prevent frost pockets from forming. But even with these candles, there is a limit, and Olivier explains that when temperatures reach $-7/-8^{\circ}\text{C}$, nothing can protect the vines.

But what else could be done?

So, they lit their candles and fought the frost for 12 whole nights. Sadly, at around €3,000 per hectare per night, these candles cannot be used in every single vineyard (of

which La Chablisienne manages 12,000ha!), so hard decisions had to be made to save the very best. Olivier says, "We managed to protect many of our Grand Cru vineyards, where losses were about 40%, while losses across the rest of our vineyards amounted to nearly 80%."


Vincent Dampf of Domaine Jean Defaix, which manages 30ha of vines in the region (16 in AOC Chablis and 14 in 1er Cru vineyards), explains that Chablis has gotten used to having to protect against frost.

"We get two types of frost – winter frost, where the

temperatures plummet everywhere to around -7°C , and spring frost, where the temperatures drop slowly, mainly affecting lower lying areas," he explains. *"In Chablis, we are used to fighting spring frost and all our systems are geared towards this, which is why the damage was so severe when we experienced the winter type of frost in April."*

Aside from using candles to protect their vines – which is very labour intensive, as they need to be lit one by one and only burn for about 8 hours – they also utilise sprinklers to protect against





usual spring frosts. “For this, we spray water on the vines all night, which then freezes on the buds at 0°C, creating an armour for the buds against the early morning frost,” Vincent says. “However, this technique is very expensive, and requires a lot of systems and big reserves of water.”

“**There are also two new protection systems on the market.** One uses **BIG FANS** to mix the air, which can help gain up to 1°C,” he says. “This is again very expensive, amounting to around €20,000 for one fan, which only covers around 2ha. The other option,

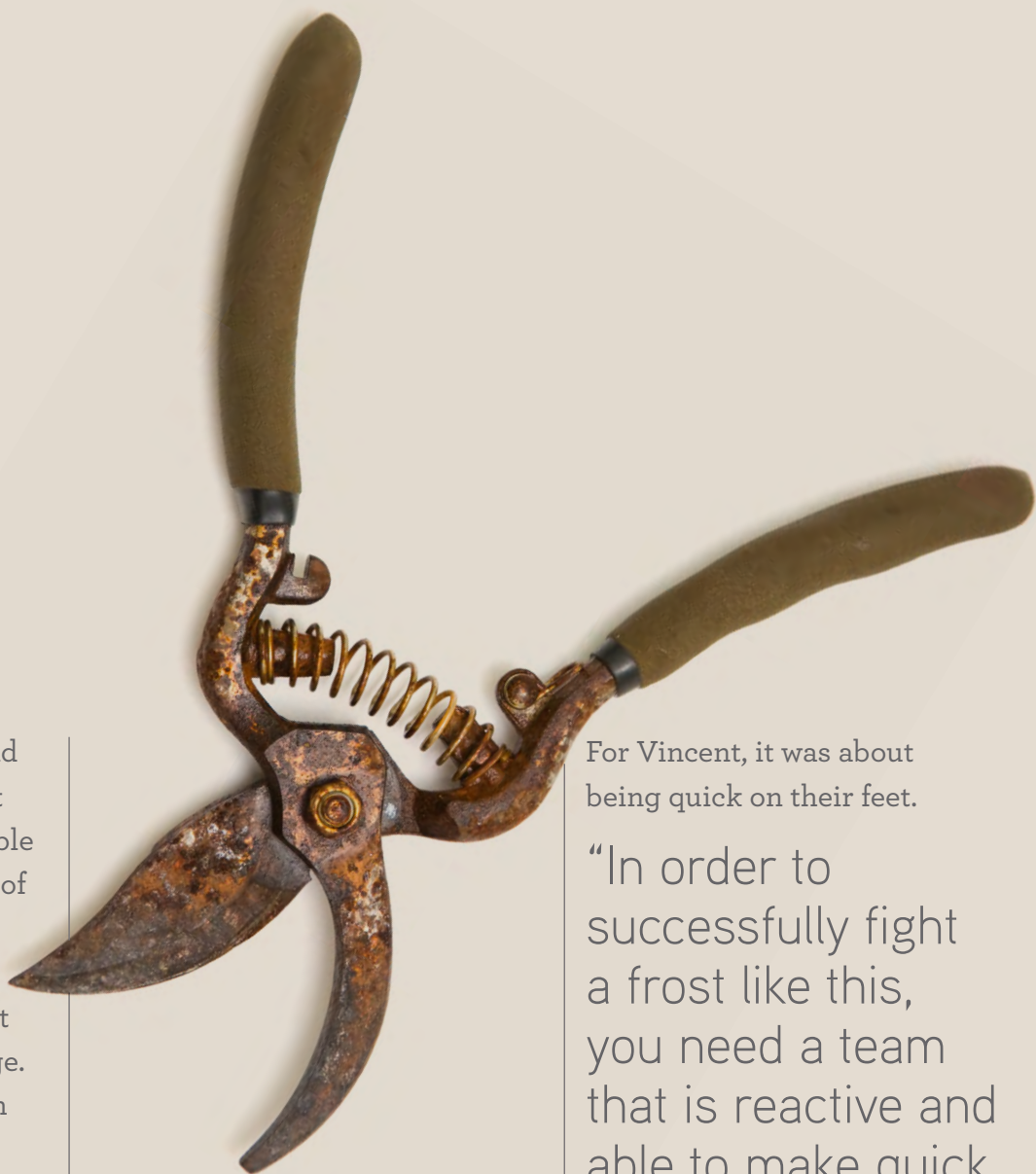
which has more potential, is using a special **ELECTRIC CABLE** on the training wire. This cable increases in temperature and warms the air around it. It is very efficient, even at -7°C, but it needs a lot of power and access to electricity. It’s also expensive, at €30,000 per hectare for just the wire, although it can last for up to 20 years.” Since this April frost, Vincent explains that many domaines have decided to invest in these electric cables, especially in Grand Crus areas, and the installations are currently taking place.

During this April frost, Domaine Jean Defaix managed to protect 1ha with candles and 2ha with sprinklers, so they had to be selective – and according to Vincent, you could really see the difference it made during harvest. In the end, their volumes were down around 50%, with the yields varying massively between protected (50 to 60 hl/ha) and unprotected (7 to 20 hl/ha) vineyards.

A 'people' vintage

One of La Chablisienne's Grand Crus that was spared the brunt of devastation was the inimitable **CHATEAU GRENOUILLES**. One of the rarest Chablis Grand Crus, it forms an unbroken plot of 7.2ha, exposed on a South-West slope and facing Chablis village. This plot comprises a selection of small parcels of old vines, with the majority owned by La Chablisienne since 2003.

Saving vineyards like Grenouilles was just one of the decisions the La Chablisienne team had to make, in a harvest that became all about human intervention and people; incredible people like vineyard manager Christophe Lecomte and winemaker Vincent Bartement, who has been at La Chablisienne for 12 years. Olivier says,



“In a ‘normal’ year, it is easy to make good wine – the wine makes itself; but in a year like 2021, it is more about the people and making the right decisions at the right time.”

For Vincent, it was about being quick on their feet.

“In order to successfully fight a frost like this, you need a team that is reactive and able to make quick decisions. We had to harvest quickly and make difficult decisions to get the best out of it.”

A changing climate

While Vincent admits that Chablis is used to having to fight frost, it is not usual to have this severe combination of bad factors. "THE CLIMATE IS DEFINITELY CHANGING – WE ARE GETTING MORE FROST, MADE EVEN WORSE BY HIGHER TEMPERATURES EARLIER IN THE YEAR, MAKING THE VINES MORE SENSITIVE TO DAMAGE."

Olivier agrees, noting that they have seen a clear change since the 1990s. "It used to be difficult to reach good ripeness in Chablis, but since around 1995/96, we've seen things turn," he explains.

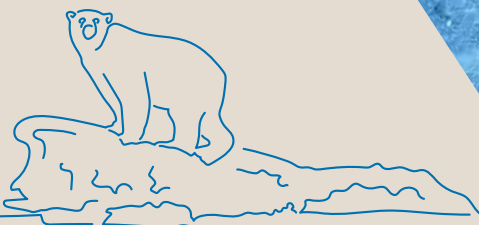
"While it's now easier to get full ripeness, climate change is affecting production levels and resulting in less water availability."

"Vines usually rest between November and February, but milder winters have meant that they don't rest enough – which in turn can affect the volume and quality of grapes, as well as the longevity of the vines themselves. YOU DON'T SEE AS MANY OLD VINES IN THE AREA AS YOU USED TO," he says.

Another factor impacting subsequent volumes is the vine's 'memory'. Olivier explains that vines affected by conditions like frost and hail, keep that in their memory bank. "The next year they will usually overproduce to compensate, while for the following two years, volumes will be lower than normal again."

"I am very worried about global warming," Olivier says. "Everything is becoming more violent and extreme, with more widespread devastation.

Everyone in Chablis knows – the years ahead will be difficult."



FOLLOWING THE APRIL FROSTS, THE REGION ALSO EXPERIENCED MILDEW AND OIDIUM INFECTIONS DUE TO HIGH FREQUENCY OF RAIN, AS WELL AS LOCALISED HAILSTORMS.

So, what does this mean for all the Chablis drinkers this side of the Channel?

There's no denying the 2021 harvest from Chablis (and a lot of French and other European countries), will be severely short. An estimated 22 million hl of potential production has been lost in Europe due to the late spring frost and other unfavourable conditions, like hail and drought. **Volumes in France are down 29% from 2020, and are 25% below the five-year average.**

"This poor harvest follows a succession of low volumes since 2016, which affects availability in the market – at all price levels," Olivier says. "At La Chablisienne, we have a bit of inventory to help buffer the effects, but all Burgundy and Chablis producers will have to increase their prices this year; we have no choice.

*We sometimes forget that at its core, wine is an agricultural product, and we are extremely influenced by the weather. **The 2021 vintage will be sparse – that's just the simple reality.***

Vincent agrees that with half the crop, you cannot maintain the same price levels. "Every domaine will be managing it differently, but there won't be enough wine for the next year," he says.

It's not all doom and gloom, however. "It's a really expressive harvest," Vincent explains. "We're quite happy with the quality of that which was left to pick. The pH levels are good, meaning good ageing potential for the 2021 wines."

Olivier agrees that the quality is looking very promising, with the mild growing season resulting in clean, pure musts with less fruit, more floral aromas and razor sharp minerality. There just won't be a lot of it to go around.

"At the end of the day, we are all partners in this and we want to maintain our presence in the UK market," Olivier says.

"All we need is just a little bit of love. And a good harvest in 2022!"



Born into the world of wine, **Elona** grew up on a wine farm in South Africa. After graduating from the University of Stellenbosch with a degree in Viticulture and Oenology, she completed a couple of harvests before joining South Africa's producer-focused magazine WineLand as a journalist. A move to London meant a new adventure and Elona now heads up Bibendum's brand communications.



Bubbles
with attitude

FERRARI

TRENTO

A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and yellow striped tie, wearing a dark hat, stands on a mountain peak. He is holding a glass of sparkling wine. The background is a golden, hazy sky with clouds and mountains.

TRENTINO'S FIZZ INDUSTRY

**EXISTS THANKS TO
MOSTLY ONE PIONEER:**

Giulio Ferrari

**One visionary's adventures
through high altitude vineyards,
draft-dodging, walled in cellars,
awards and denominations.**

It is rare to trace a whole wine region back to just one founder. In case of the Trento DOC - one of Italy's two classic method regions - it happened exactly like that. Despite the fact that the wine region was officially born some 30 years after its founder passed away, Trento DOC can be traced back to none other than *Giulio Ferrari*.



The valley of the Adige is an exciting in-between land. It is the area of South-Tyrol, a blend of Italy and Austria.

This region, with both Italian and German-speaking populations, changed hands after the First World War. What once was part of Austria-Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, became Italy.

Thanks to a moving border, and a mixed population, the area has always been an exciting blend of both worlds.

It is enough to take a short stroll in the centre of the area capital Trento, which would look and feel like a medieval Germanic Alpine town, if it weren't for the unmistakably Italian renaissance murals on the buildings...

Such a frontier melting pot is more allowing of experimentation and entrepreneurship – as we'll see in Giulio Ferrari's case.

A TRUE MELTING POT

Born into a family of wealthy land owners in 1879, Giulio's focus was agriculture from early on and his family was involved in all sorts of farming.

Winemaking was one of their activities, but in the Having mountainous area of the Adige Valley, with agricultural lands up to 1,000 metres of elevation, you have to make a living with a whole mix of crops.

Giulio graduated from the agriculture institute of St Michelle dell Adige in 1897. The school, with a very strong viticultural focus, was one of the Habsburg Empire's top winemaking academies. To further his viticultural and winemaking knowledge, he went to study in Montpellier, and Geisenheim – the strongholds of French and German viticulture.

He concluded his studies at house Pierlot, in Epernay, where he learned everything possible of the Methode Champenois. With a short winemaking detour in Tunisia, he returned home. He brought a number of clippings from Burgundy, the Rhine and Champagne, and got to work.

REACH FOR THE Stars

Giulio's revolutionary idea was to start using the altitude to his benefit in winemaking. Trentino's land is a mountain terrain with vineyards planted up to 1,000m above sea level.

Thanks to the altitude and the right orientation, the vineyards benefit from sunshine and massive differences between day and nighttime temperatures. Basically using altitude, instead of latitude, he could replicate a number of wine regions' conditions within the small area that is Trentino.

He returned with Chardonnay, Cabernet and Pinot clippings from his travels and started propagating it in the area. By 1902 he was producing 'Burgundy' wines in his family's Calceranica cellar - a first in the Habsburg monarchy. He also started metodo classico production - keeping the number of bottles to no more than a few thousand each year. His Champagne Maximum Sec G. Ferrari was a maverick product in the Habsburg empire - no one thought that it was possible to produce sparkling wine of that quality outside the Champagne region. Despite his success in fizz production, he kept the volume strategically low.

WINE AND WAR

A couple of years later phylloxera finally hit the Trentino area - Ferrari's nursery was crucial in the effort of replanting on pest proof American rootstocks. During this time of replanting, he also managed to propagate Chardonnay further in the region.

During the First World War, he escaped to Italy to avoid being drafted in the Austro-Hungarian army. He worked for the Italian Army instead, securing wine supplies for the troops from the south of the country. After the war he returned to his native Trentino - now part of the Kingdom of Italy - and he picked up perfecting his sparkling wine production.

With the border moved, he found himself in the middle of a whole new market - fundamentally different from the Central European one he was used to. Despite the massive competition he managed to increase the fame of his sparkling wines. He achieved a Diplome de Grad Prix from Paris for his sparkling wine - an award that was never given to sparkling wine from outside the Champagne area.

THE LUNELLI story

Despite the demand he never increased production of his meticulously made fizz.

Albeit small in volume he was always very conscious of selling his products to the top, most refined clientele. Between the two world wars he started working more and more intensely with a young wine trader from Trento - Bruno Lunelli.

They started developing a business together, but the Second World War messed things up. To prevent looting - and to keep the wines safe - Giulio had to wall in the entrance of his cellar in 1943. When the war was over and he could get back to his wines, he was amazed how the 1938-1939 vintages benefitted from the extra ageing.

A new category was born: Ferrari Riserva.

Giulio was getting old, and without a direct heir he had to think of succession. He sold the business to Bruno Lunelli, with more than 11,000 bottles of stock still in the cellar. Lunelli increased the annual production from 2,000 to 20,000 and started building the brand both nationally and internationally. Giulio stayed around with the know-how. By the time he passed away in 1965, Ferrari was a well-established sparkling wine business. It is still in the ownership of the Lunelli family.



A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Giulio's sparkling wines were marketed as Champagne Maximum Sec G. Ferrari. However, in 1947 the use of the Champagne term was prohibited in international trade treaties with France. The Ferrari wines were classified as Methode Classis Spumante.

Finally, Trentino metodo classico sparkling wines got their own category in 1993. The ministerial decree created the Trento D.O.C. denomination – sparkling wines made of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grown in Trentino above 200m elevation above sea level. In 2007 the term 'Trentodoc' became a protected trademark used by the local wineries, a name for Trentino's fizz industry, founded by Giulio Ferrari a hundred years ago.



Originally a sommelier – and a journalist in a previous life – Gergely spent years at Gordon Ramsay Group, after a year's detour at Sager and Wilde. As a side project G makes wine in his native Hungary, a dry Furmint from Tokaj to be precise.

Follow him @gergelywine

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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