

# ITALIAN TREASURES

TO HIM, WINE IS NO ORDINARY BEVERAGE – IT’S AN INTEGRAL PART OF HIS DIET. DECADES AFTER HIS FIRST TASTE, WINEMAKER SEBASTIANO ROSA LETS **JASSMYN GOH** IN ON WHAT IT IS ABOUT THE PRODUCT THAT CONTINUES TO CAPTIVATE AND FASCINATE.

PHOTO AA KRESNA

**N**ot many of us develop a taste for wine at a young age. Even if you have access to it, it still takes quite some time to train and refine one’s palate. Sebastiano Rosa had quite the headstart – wine has been a big part of his life since he was eight.

Originally from Rome, Rosa has always stayed in touch with the Italian countryside and, even as a young boy, was constantly exposed to vineyards and wine – especially after his mother married Nicolo Rocchetta, the owner of Tenuta San Guido in Bolgheri, Tuscany which produces Sassicaia, one of Italy’s leading red wines.

## AN EARLY START

“I was living in Rome but very often living in Bolgheri,” recalled Rosa. “And so I grew up with Sassicaia. When all the kids were going out at night when I was 14 or 15, I was going into the cellar and working.”

He added that he has stayed in the wine industry all this time simply because it is his passion; he never doubted what he wanted to study or do as a career. He went to California after school and studied oenology and agriculture there, and received his doctorate in agricultural science in Florence.

He said: “I had a fantastic experience in California and met some very interesting people. Every day was a lesson, and every day I would think, the product is so fascinating.

“It is a product that comes from nature and each wine is very distinct – it’s not like growing strawberries or apples or spinach. It is something very unique,” he observed.

The different flavours of wine are very dependent on the type of soil and weather. As co-winemaker of Tenuta San Guido, Rosa says that when the winery in Tuscany was being established, many people thought it was crazy to plant in the coastal area due to moisture in the ground and salinity from the sea.

“Coastal areas were not considered great areas to produce wine as the thought was that the moisture and salt from the sea would not be good for the wine,” Rosa explained. “But this was completely wrong and it was discovered that this microclimate was perfectly suited to making great wines,” he said, adding that the terrain was complimented with fairly mild winters with no fear of frost, early springs and summers that are not too hot.

Apart from the Tuscan winery, Rosa also looks after the sales and marketing of Agricola Punica, a joint venture he started in 2002 between Sardinian winery Cantina di Santadi, Tenuta San Guido and oenologist Giacomo Tachis. The winery produces Carignano based wines in Southern Sardinia. With his background in winemaking, Rosa also oversees the blending and helps make decisions with the senior winemakers.

## A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Though Rosa mainly focuses on his Sardinia winery, he promotes both companies when he presents them overseas. He may be a seasoned globetrotter, but his first Indonesian experience was just last month when he promoted his wines through their local distributor Dimatique International.

“We’re always looking for new great markets and I think that the old markets are saturated. We are also tired of selling wine to people who think they know everything. Like in Italy and other markets, people are not willing to learn and instead, they want to teach you and it’s difficult. Currently, we have this great opportunity to sell wine here in Indonesia,” he said.

Rosa has been selling wine to connoisseurs in the archipelago for three years and started out when Jacopo Fusaia, a managing partner for Moody Consulting under the International Fine Wines Merchants, suggested the market as a potential option, at a time when it was occupied mostly by French and Australian wines and almost nothing else. They felt this to be unacceptable; their belief was that Italy produces some of the best wines in the world.

Since then, they have seen a great change sweep the market, mainly through consumption by young people and the availability of wine in bars, clubs and restaurants. By far, they have also found that red wine is the most popular wine for Indonesians.

Rosa also added that Indonesian food, especially dishes containing red and game meats, goes very well with his wines – but he was quick to warn that anything too spicy would kill the intricacies in the tittle.

This year’s harvest, he continued, has been good. “For Sardinia, it has been probably the best vintage in the last 10 years since we’ve started making wine there with low production, good concentration and quality. In the case of Bolgheri, there has been a 30 per cent lower-



“

**TRAVELLING AND SHOWING THE WINES IS AS GOOD AS MAKING THEM. IT'S CULTURE THAT YOU CAN CARRY IN A BOTTLE. YOU'RE BRINGING PEOPLE SOMETHING THAT SHOWS THE COUNTRY, REGION AND VILLAGE THAT YOU COME FROM.**

than-usual production but it's extremely good and constant as it was an extremely hot summer. Nowadays there aren't many clouds or much rain and sometimes too much sun and heat but for sure, it is a very strong vintage.”

Sassicaia is available in 80 countries and lately, Asia has been a very important market for it. Tenuto San Guido's two other labels, Guidalberto and Le Difese, along with Sassicaia, are all made out of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Agricola Punica presents a different challenge, Rosa notes, because they are making wine in a region that has no real traditions. “We feel like we are pioneers because we believe that there needs to be a change and a need for something different.

“When we decided to invest in something new, it was clear for us that Sardinia would be the hot new region to make wine. That was 10 years ago and we have great success,” he said.

Agricola Punica's wines, Barrua and Montessu, are made from Carignano, which is what Rosa calls a local grape: originally from Spain, it moved to France before being found in the southern part of Sardinia.

Rosa's wine is characterised by finesse and great drinkability. “There

is not one factor that overwhelms the other, they're not too oaky and not too alcoholic. We try not to make the tone too harsh, and we try to make wines with great balance and drinkability.”

Next up for him: another Sardinia winery, the building of a new cellar and entrances into new markets – he travels between four and six months in a year to promote his wares, and also consults in California's Napa Valley.

“Travelling and showing the wines is as good as making them,” he said. “It's culture that you can carry in a bottle. You're bringing people something that shows the country, region and village that you come from. I don't see any other products that have this. This is what really fascinates me.” ♡