

# The Man And The Mountain



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by Peter Winding

## THE INSTINCTIVE TOUCH

One day, when the local doctor went up to buy a couple of fuses, the electrician's wife asked him what she should do about her husband, who was getting too fat. "He should eat less", answered the doctor and, the same day, he sent a bill for a medical consultation. The bill was paid, but not forgotten. Many years later, the doctor's heat exchanger broke down.

The electrician came, looked it over and hit it on one side. It immediately began to work again. The doctor was delighted, opened one of his best bottles of whiskey, and they drank through the night. The next day he received a bill for the repair of the heat exchanger.

The doctor was furious and rushed up to the electrician's shop. "All your husband did was hit the thing. Then he drank my best whiskey. And now, he wants to get paid!" "It's not the fact that he hit the heat exchanger that you have to pay for", the electrician's wife answered, "but the fact that he knew *where* to hit it". The doctor accepted her answer and a tacit truce settled down over the little town. The electrician knew where to hit - he had what is called the instinctive touch. We come across it every once in a while, also in the world of wine, where new, delicious wines in all price ranges crop up, year after year.

Contrary to the development of most material things, the raw material of wine - the grapes - changes every year. Some years, they have to be picked earlier, some years a little later. And, at the same time, no one knows for sure what the weather will be like next week. Having capital, buying the best equipment for the fermentation cellar... it's not enough. You have to have a feeling for the raw material's changing quality. Experience combined with talent. Over the years, Bordeaux has gained the experience necessary to avoid drowning its wine in too much cask wood. But there have been many weak vintages and consumers have had to pay for bad production. If the fruit - the concentration - isn't there, the wine is never good if it has had too much new cask. There are many dusty skeletons in Danish wine cellars, bottles of fuggy vanilla-tainted wine that would be better off going down the sewer than down the throat.

The new, more expensive wines from Italy, especially Barbera and many of the new super-Rioja wines, suffer from overdoing, the phenomenon that is still plagued with growing pains. In France, until a few years ago, Burgundy steadfastly kept to the use of older casks, as did the Rhône. But now, along with the new great wines, some dreadful examples are hitting the market. Loire and

Alsace are still virginal, while an unbelievable number of the new, southern French wines are destroyed before they are bottled, either because of reckless treatment with oak or because of overripe grapes. The Australian wines are perfect examples, as are the prestige wines from Chile, while, on the other hand, there are many positive surprises from Argentina. "Cool" wines with eminent structure, fresh and yet mature fruit and a dose of oak that harmonises beautifully with the wine's fruit. More about them later in this issue.

"Wine is thought, love is thought", says Andrea Franchetti, an Italian who in a very few years has created one of the world's best wines. In other words, something spiritual, like "spiritus", which in Latin means the "soul". Wine with a quivering tension is never, like the new and yet familiar automobile prototypes, mass-produced, it changes from year to year.

This quivering tension can be found in all price ranges and among the cheapest wines, when they have been made by producers who have used their energy in the vineyard and haven't merely invested in wood casks. Erik Bantri's Morellino di Scansano's 2000 vintage (the month's best buy), is a splendid example.

It is easier to criticise that it is to actually create something, to actually do something. The sensory components of a wine are definitely not givens. Even for the best winemakers, surprises, positive and negative, lie in wait every year. But criticism leads to discussion and hence to reflection and thought. Niels Bohr had a horseshoe hanging over the door of his summer cottage. He certainly didn't believe in the talismanic superstition, but he had heard that it helped, even if you didn't believe in it. The same holds true for the electrician. He reacted impulsively, believed for a split second in his instincts, took a chance and hit the right place. The overbearing doctor was made to pay. One day, there comes an accounting, even for the most avaricious.

A delicious wine, expensive or not, is a bottle full of generosity. Character is something that dissolves easily in alcohol, the doctor's character underwent a change that night and he became generous... The next day, things had gone back to normal. When he died, his cellar was still full of wine and, with the help of a bit of manipulation from various advice givers, his fortune was left to people who already had enough money.

Rich and yet so poor, what greater retribution is there?

**Peter**

**Winding**

## THE MAN AND THE MOUNTAIN

Andrea Franchetti at Tenuta di Trinoro in Tuscany. His latest project is a vineyard in Sicily, where he is working with the two well-known Danish winemakers, Peter Vinding-Diers and Peter Sissack.

We have seen new super-wines, resurrected in record time from forgotten, classic regions. It suffices to think of Priorato, Ribera del Duero or Saint-Emilion. We have seen famous Californian, Italian and Spanish wine producers who, after experimenting for many years, have come out with new prestige wines, but this is the first time we meet a 30-year-old producer who, perched on an unknown mountain, is making a wine from very young vines that has completely unique aroma, taste and structure: Tenuta di Trinoro.

I first met Andrea Franchetti several years ago at Château Landiras, the home of Peter Vinning-Diers and his wife Susan. We had dinner together and, as always, it was delicious. And, of course, we drank great quantities of wine while Peter, like a general at the head of the table, entertained us with stories new and old from the great world of wine.

At Peter Vinding-Diers's table, people are judged and either found lacking or approved of. Here there has never been a golden mean. But, there was no doubt that the guest, Andrea Franchetti, was approved of. "You have to go down and visit him in a few years", said Peter, "he's a man who makes one of Italy's best wines". (At that point, not a single grape had yet been picked).

I looked at the man seated across from me. He was rather carelessly dressed, unshaven, a young man with a shy smile, wearing glasses so thick that eye contact was impossible. Not your typical salesman, boasting of his new ideas. But not one of the nouveaux riches either, prattling on about his success and his fortune. More like a vagabond who could be everything or nothing, but more than anything else, was himself.

The story and the meeting faded with time until, because of one of life's twisty turns, I suddenly found myself on his mountain, helping to get the 2000 vintage in. And so here they are, glimpses of Andrea Franchetti, for whom it is easier to produce and to create than it is to talk about it.

## DRANK THE CREAM AND FORGOT THE COFFEE

Andrea Franchetti grew up in a world full of history, art and wealth. His family was involved in communications and commerce, once ran all the horse-drawn transport before the railroad was built, and had a fleet based in Turkey that operated all over the Mediterranean. At one time, they had so much land that they could travel from Venice to Florence without leaving their own property. They were the Italian equivalent of the Rothschilds. One member of the family even married into the Austrian branch of the Rothschilds, an example of a customary occurrence among wealthy Jewish families.

His grandfather set up the Cortona ski resort and his father was Italian slalom champion several times. The family owned an old castle, Val Gardena, in the Italian South Tirol, where Andrea spent his summer holidays as a child, along with his younger brother and his American mother. The days were spent climbing in the mountains and with similar typical boyhood pursuits around the castle, which Andrea still owns. During the winter holidays, they went skiing, and both Andrea and his younger brother were for a time part of the Italian elite.

His father died when Andrea was 28, in a car accident in Ireland, where he was on the way to the sailboat he was intending to race across the Atlantic. The young man suddenly found himself having to run his own life, having to choose and, even more difficult, to know what to choose.

One has the feeling that Andrea Franchetti has done it all, that he has been all the way up and all the way down. He was part of the inner circle of the jet-set life in Rome and New York, where he knew Andy Warhol, and where he often felt lonelier than on one of his many hiking trips in the mountains. He lived a life in which money was no object and where, for long periods, he drank the cream and forgot the coffee. One day, in 1990, he turned his life around. He telephoned home to his wife and two sons in Rome and told them that he had found himself again, on a mountain covered with rocks in the midst of the magnificent Tuscan landscape. This is where he wanted to stay, where he wanted to live.

## **TWO YEARS.**

### **AND 2000 CUBIC METERS OF ROCKS**

A kind of rebirth, an enlightenment. Andrea Franchetti has no doubt that the first couple of years on the mountain are perhaps the happiest years in his life. Days, weeks, months - two years went by, moving rocks. Fourteen hours' hard physical work a day, along with two older men, locals who taught Andrea how to work. He says that if it hadn't been for them, he would never have begun. Every single day, no matter how freezing cold or how baking hot it was, they picked rocks.

Every day, the same regular routine, prying rocks out of the ground with picks, rocks weighing anywhere from 1 kilo to 100 kilos, then trundling them away and stacking them in a pile. Getting up with the sun, going to bed with the sun, after having eaten a simple meal of pasta, with home-grown bell peppers, bread, a little wine and lots of water. 2000 cubic meters of rocks was what it turned into - unbelievable. Enough to build a road with. Andrea got back in shape, and recovered his moral strength as well. The old men say, on the other hand, that it was one of the hardest things they ever did. The rocks were later dumped into a large trench, 400 meters long and 3-4 meters wide. The result of their work was that the entire slope was made less steep and, after two years, it was ready to receive the first grapevines.

### **A COMPLETELY NEW AND DIFFERENT WINE**

The peasants who used to live here had a polyculture which included the production of wine. They kept half for their own use and paid the other half to the landowner, who lived in town. It was a strong wine, 16% alcohol, a rosé, made with red and, for the most part, white grapes. The grapevines disappeared but the old people could still tell Andrea where they had been and where the best plots were. He followed their advice, making use of their hard-earned experience, combined with scientific knowledge.

For many years, Andrea Franchetti had worked as a wine importer in New York and he was familiar with Bordeaux, which he still considers to be the world's best grapevine. He was completely convinced that the grapes that had been selected over thousands of years and had become the Bordeaux vine were suitable for what he wanted to make. He could benefit from the work they had done in Bordeaux, from the experience they had gained. One particular wine was more impressive than all the others, Château Cheval Blanc, made principally from the Cabernet Franc grape. The choice thus naturally fell on this grape, which was completely unknown in Italy. After several trips to Bordeaux, the first two hectares of grapevines were planted in 1992, at a height of 600 meters up the slope, which was laid out by hand, as in Bordeaux, with 8,000 vines per hectare. It was a rich and proud winegrower who invited two experts from Bordeaux to come down to Tenuta di Trinoro. They didn't linger. They rushed straight back home, shocked, certain that the vines would not survive a single summer in the stony, poor soil. But they did survive, thanks to Andrea and the two old men who, day after day, watered them from watering cans and gave them the

sustenance they needed so that they didn't wither away. Today, that plot is the one that produces the best grapes.

## **STRUGGLING WITH THE LOCALS**

The first years were not only a struggle against the sun, against the dryness and the stony landscape. They were also a long fight against the local people. First Andrea's neighbour, who refused to allow him to use the road that led over the mountain to his property. Andrea did, finally, win the lawsuit. Later, he had to confront the local hunters, who were very unhappy with him having fenced in his vineyards, thus destroying the area that their ancestors had hunted in for generations. An electric fence was absolutely necessary in order to control the wild boars, badgers and porcupines, who otherwise would tunnel under the grapevines and destroy the roots.

Cabernet Franc is still the main grape at Tenuta di Trinoro, but Andrea has also planted Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot around the fermentation cellar in the very gravelly and stony soil down towards the valley. He thinks that, several thousand years ago, an avalanche pushed the soil and rocks down into the valley from the mountain. There is a tongue-shaped area that is completely different from the heavy, clay soil that is normal in the valley area. The deep layer of stone and gravel is good for the vine roots. Every little stone acts as an opening - a "space" in which the roots can grow. The area is also cooler because the cool mountain air descends and settles around the grapevines.

## **THE SECRET IS LOW PRODUCTION**

Here he stands, his hair sticking out in all directions, his fingernails bitten down and his hands covered with scratches, blood-red from the birth of the 2002 vintage. Vanity means nothing to him anymore, he has stopped seeking his reflection in his surroundings. On the other hand, life has taken on more and more meaning on the aesthetic level. He talks about this while he drinks his wine and eats his pasta, the latter prepared with garlic, spices, small red peppers and tomatoes from his own vegetable garden. And, oddly enough, with Chateau de Landiras as the house wine.

When there are celebrations, one of the black pigs, or a hen or a goat makes the sacrifice.

"People talk about 'terroir' - but that's because someone has made a decision and has planted one particular grape rather than another", says Andrea Franchetti.

"I don't believe that a wine is reflective of a place - rather, wine reflects the experience earned at that place. The place itself doesn't exist.

My philosophy is to make the best imaginable wine and not to follow prevailing fashions, like many are doing today with the soft, full-bodied and obliging wines. I wanted to make hard wines. My unconscious provided me with a vision of the wine I wanted to make - it should be very deep, very intense and very concentrated, with great length and, above all, concentration.

Every vintage has its own "life", but the secret is low production. With low production, you can make a great wine - whatever you think a great wine is. When I hold production down and only have five grape clusters on each vine, I know that what comes into the fermentation cellar is phenomenal, even if the grapes don't have the same character as the grapes harvested the year before. When you have planted properly, that is, many vines, close together and low down, then it just gets better year after year.

Winemaking today is largely a question of being careful not to make mistakes and of focusing on good procedures. Concentration isn't achieved in the fermentation cellar, but out in the field. The extraction is done in the winery, but if you have the concentration, you don't need to work with extraction. 85% of the wine's quality starts in the field".

## **WINE IS THOUGHT - LOVE IS THOUGHT**

Most places, the harvest is already in, but at Trinoro, they are still waiting. Every morning, the grapes are tasted. A walk through the vineyard not only gives an impression of the grapeskin and of the seeds' ripeness, but also of all the various taste nuances that change, meter for meter, and that later are expressed in the wine's great complexity. Finally, the harvest is begun and, at an even pace, the grapes are picked, following small curves that lead to the fermentation cellar. Here Andrea is waiting, where he does a taste test and makes the basic analyses before the clusters are removed.

Low production and late harvest not only result in grapes with very thick skins, full of anthocyanins, it also yields a very high alcohol content, up to 16%. Here, as in many other places in Italy, one has to fight against the sugar. The 2000 vintage is very special, because the very high temperatures partly blocked development during the summer. The sugar content is therefore relatively low, while the grapes' tannin and anthocyanins (pigments) are very high. The entire fermentation cellar has been set up so as to respect the small, individual plots. The fermentation tanks are therefore very small. Everything is done by hand.

When you have to check everything yourself, you have to think carefully. The wine is matured in 100% new casks and has plenty of fruit, helping it to resist the oak. The result in the bottle is a fragrant explosion of all of summer's ripe, red fruit, wrapped in complex, floral tones from the cask seasoning. The late picking gives the wine an incredibly soft but yet firm tannin. This is a wine that is structured, layer by layer with the surprises, nuances and depth that also characterise great works of sculpture.

"For me, wine is not pure nature, such as those of an ecological bent persist in maintaining, wine is thought - love is thought. If you are drawn to something, if you do it with pleasure, making wine, for example, then you will automatically be inventive without having to force anything. Making wine is a way of thinking, it's about knowing how to think and about being creative", says Andrea Franchetti.

*Peter Winding*

#### TENUTA DI TRINORO: A TASTING

☆☆☆

1995, Le Cupole di Trinoro, IGT

Slight, closed bouquet, raspberry, black currant, liquorice and chocolate. Elegant structure, medium body and medium-long aftertaste.

☆☆☆☆

1996, Tenuta di Trinoro

Complex, spicy bouquet with black currant, cherry, leather, liquorice. Elegant structure with marked tannin, dry and yet supple body with long aftertaste. A very classic wine, with great potential for development.

☆☆☆☆(☆)

1997, Tenuta di Trinoro

Elegant, feminine, complex bouquet, ripe cherry, raspberry, slightly buttermilky with fine cask nuances integrated with the wine's fruit. Elegant body with elegant structure, mature tannin and long aftertaste. A very harmonious wine, a long river.

☆☆☆☆

1998, Tenuta di Trinoro

Deep, dark berry bouquet, spicy, smoky tone from the cask, complex, with vanilla, liquorice and chocolate. Mature, concentrated fruit that covers the nuances from the cask. Big, velvety body with mature, marked tannin, strong structure and long, light, drying aftertaste in which the tannin is felt upfront in the mouth. Very masculine wine, hard to predict if the cask's character will become more subdued with time or become stronger.

☆☆☆☆(☆)

1999, Tenuta di Trinoro

Big, fat, smoked-bacon bouquet, slightly jammy, but nevertheless with nerve and distinct smoky tone from the cask, well integrated with the wine. Succulent taste, spicy with fat body, mature, marked tannin and long aftertaste. An unbelievably exciting wine with many layers.

Tenuta di Trinoro is an investment wine on the way up. From the 1999- to the 2000 vintage, the price has nearly doubled and continues to rise. The 2000 vintage tasted en primeur is the best Andrea Franchetti has yet achieved. The 2000 vintage is distributed by H.J. Hansen. Price: 1,725.00 DKr.

Second-growth wine, Tenuta di Trinoro, Le Cupole di Trinoro, costs 345.00 DKr. Le Cupole is distributed by Victoria Line, 66151625.