

THE HUMANS OF WINE VOICES*

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My name is Giovanni Fiorentino and I was born fifty years ago in Paternopoli, in the Campania region. I studied and I graduated in Rome in law and I worked several years as a consultant for the public administration. I dealt with local development and industry. I have always been passionate about wine. My parents were farmers and we lived and grew up in the country in a house in the middle of old vineyards. My mother, in particular, has always made wine at home and me and my two brothers and my sister grew up with the desire to make a new cellar one day. My mother produced Aglianico wine and white wine "Coda di Volpe" and sold to a few loyal customers in demijohns of wine. My father lived for a long time in the United States, in Chelsea - Boston, where his father (my grandfather Luigi) also lived for several years.

Where are you based?

In Paternopoli, in Campania region, just one hour from Naples. Here, eight years ago in 2012, I decided to realize my dream and that of my brothers and sister: I then set up a farming company together with my brothers and sister and I built a cellar next to the house where we were born on the piece of land that my grandfather Luigi bought when he came back from Chelsea.

What is your job in the wine industry?

I'm the Legal Representative of the family company. All the brothers and sisters have put together the lands and our resources to do something we loved. We now have six hectares of vineyards and produce only Aglianico red wine from our vineyards. But I also planted a new vineyard of "Coda di Volpe" to have in the future also a white wine (the same white wine made by my mother!), always from native vines. I bottled for the first time in 2016 (vintage 2012) and for the second time in 2017 (vintage 2013). The quantities of bottles are small at the moment, only 3 thousand of bottles for each wine. However, over time the quantities will increase. I called my first wine "Celsi" (the way italoamerican people called Chelsea) in honour of my grandfather Luigi. My desire is to make a wine that tells my story, that of the family, of my land. My dream is to bring a wine made with love and passion to Italy and the world. I would like a kind and elegant wine that respects the vintages and the roots, the territory. I believe in technique, knowledge and innovation and, in my small way, I try to be innovative in my choices. For me, innovation is the best way to preserve roots and tradition.

What is your perception of the wine business during the Covid-19 emergency?

I believe that the pandemic has changed our perception in general, about life and relationships. The wine is a link in an important chain, it is a product that has a non-secondary symbolic value. The wine business during this period, as we know, was conditioned by the lockdown, by the closure of traditional product sales channels and thus the point of observation on this sector has changed rapidly. An entire system has stopped and we have all found ourselves faced with the need to rethink and reinvent our work: the emergency has created a void, and that void must now be filled.



How do you think this emergency is going to change the world of wine?

We cannot hide that even before the emergency there were great difficulties for the wineries, in particular for small one like mine. A saturated market, a massive offer, super competitive prices, delays in payments that had become the norm, a big difficulty in telling one's work and emerging, to find a space. I want to think that despite the load of pain and suffering that the pandemic has generated, there may also be a window to change things that were not right before. Above all, I believe that the way people perceive themselves and others has changed. We see it every day. All this is not a momentary storm, but it is something that is destined to leave a trace within us. I can't predict what will happen, I can say what I hope will happen. So, I think that this emergency can also change the approach to wine, it can increase the ability of small cellars to be a reference for the authenticity and care of the product, it can encourage the construction of healthier commercial relationships, it can put small producers in a position to feel main actors of the reconstruction of the large agri-food production community.

What has already changed in your job?

The way of communicating has certainly changed, from two points of view. The first is given by the tool, by the network. Today the use of the Internet is constant and has been in some way "absorbed" by people and is no longer something secondary or even unrelated to work. The crisis has pushed us onto the net and it is there that we begin to find a new way of working with others. The second point is the need to learn to communicate, which is almost like learning a new language. I mean, in short, that today the crisis and the quarantine have put in front of us, even as small wine companies, the obligation to learn a new language and to use it to reach the others. I am not saying that before this did not exist and was not done, I am only saying that today all this is a much more important character than a few months ago. Sometimes things change suddenly. Furthermore, I speak from my experience, private customers have become much more important than before in my business. These months of lockdown have generated the possibility for me to expand the sphere of direct sales to the private sector and to build a new network of relationships with many people that today I can try to build loyalty, also using the network.



What do you think are the main challenges for the wine business in this moment?

Right now for the world of wine the main challenge is to inspire trust and communicate authenticity. I believe that people look for credible references and reliable productions, like after a sort of trauma. Not only in the world of wine. If I were a decision maker in the world of wine, I would try to support the effort of small producers with more conviction: the crisis shows that one cannot leave out of consideration a territory, a house, a family. Small producers are the family of wine and cannot be the weak link in the supply chain.

What do you think could be done to overcome them?

To do what I think, I believe that serious reflection and a change in agricultural aid policy should be launched. Today, sometimes not useful resources are provided, and at the same time the supports that are needed are not given. In short, I would try to overturn the observation point and draw a lesson from the crisis: the network of people, of small companies, is the place from which to start again and if you do not support this network of companies there is no solid future. They are, in the economy of a nation, like the roots of a tree.

What are your activities on social media?

I use almost all social media and try to be quite present and responsive. I don't demonize social media, they are important tools and today they offer a great opportunity for exchange, knowledge, relationship, community creation. It is true that we have a problem of "digital illiteracy", and this is evident. But nevertheless this must not be the pretext to say that social media is not a good way to reach your community, support your message and transmit your values.

How is the promotion of wine going to change?

For what I said before, I believe that the promotion of wine is destined to change and to favor a return to the territories, even to the new and lesser known ones. The use of technologies and social media will have to help the territories to emerge and the promotion will have to deal with a changed world, I don't know if for better or for worse, but certainly different from the past. If we really want to repeat that "crisis" is also a synonym of "opportunity", then I believe that those who work in promoting wine today have a very important task, which is to work on creating opportunities together with producers, being able to read the new paths in a world that has lost or changed the fixed points it had until the day before yesterday. As an old song said, all together we must find the sunrise in the sunset light.