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Grandi Marchi – Italy’s Best Producers Discuss Their Work

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Food & Drink

I write about wine (and sometimes food) from around the world.

Vineyards of Mastroberardino, Campania PHOTO COURTESY ISTITUTO GRANDI MARCHI

The *Istituto Grandi Marchi* is an association of 19 wine producers representing the length and breadth of Italy. Founded in 2004, the group is made up of family-owned wineries that have several things in common, including being among the finest estates of their particular region, with each being considered an innovator, and committed to a continued focus on education. Among the members are Mastroberardino from Campania, Pio Cesare (Piedmont), Donnafugata (Sicily), Ca’ del Bosco (Lombardia) and Masi (Veneto). The complete list can be found at [this](#) page of the association’s website.

We recently interviewed several members to learn their thoughts on a number of issues, ranging from their own wines to climate change, to how they are reacting to the current coronavirus crisis. Below are a few of their responses.



José and Antonio Rallo, proprietors, Donnafugata, Sicily PHOTO BY FABIO GAMBIAN

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Antonio Rallo, Donnafugata, Sicily

As Sicily is an island, has the coronavrirus situation been less serious or challenging for Donnafugata and other Sicilian producers? What changes have their been in your routine? What would you tell customers that want to purchase your wines? Rallo explains.

We are having less problems working in the vineyards and cellars compared to the north of Italy; therefore we can proceed with almost all our productive activities. However, the impact of the virus has affected us as well as other produers from the rest of Italy in terms of sales.

Donnafugata has adopted from the beginning all the measures indicated by the Italian Government, so those of us who usually work in the office are working from home right now. Nevertheless, as an agricultural activity we luckily can go on with the core activities on-site. This means that most of the activities in the cellar continue with the due care and safety measures as well as all work in our vineyards. Whether in the vineyards, cellars, office or at home, we are committed to ensuring our clients essential services and elaborating new ideas for now and the near future in order to start best whenever it will be possible.

I’d tell our customers to stay home and enjoy our wines that way. There is no reason to worry about our wines as there is no possibility for the virus to get into the wine.



Pio Boffa, proprietor, Pio Cesare, Alba PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

Pio Boffa, Pio Cesare, Alba, Piedmont

Our cellars are still open, but our business is suffering heavily. Being that our sales are mostly to on premise accounts throughout the entire world, we suffer a lot from the shutdown of restaurants, bars and clubs in Italy and abroad.

We are lucky that Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera and Nebbiolo are ageing really well and their quality improve with the ageing. Therefore we do not have to rush to sell all our stocks, at least under their quality point of view. We are working quite intensively in our 75 hectares in Barolo and Barbaresco - this is a very busy moment, because the vines has finally start to vegetate and we must be following their heavy needs. We are very lucky to have a great team of people who have been working with our family for a long number of years and they are all very keen in their working responsibilities even during such a dangerous and risky period.

The new generation of our family - my daughter Federica and my nephew Cesare - are very busy to be on social media to keep the name of Pio Cesare and our wines under the radar for our friends in the world. We are very confident that once this peak moment will be gone, the markets will start opening again, and the great high quality and image of the fantastic 2016 vintage of Barolo and Barbaresco we are releasing now will be extremely helpful and the best tool and vehicle to boost the sales of our wines in the different markets. Fortunately Barolo and Barbaresco are niche wines, produced in small quantities and have a lot of fans, friends and collectors around the world who will be keen and happy to start buying them again.

We do not believe we will change our strategies as far as sales and marketing, once everything will be finished and the world will start living again a sort of a normal life. I repeat, our production is not so big, the wines we make in Barolo and Barbaresco have many fans and we truly believe it won't be that hard to restart. Obviously it won't be a big boost - it will take some time, we will have to be patient, we should help and assist our friends and customers around the world whose businesses were closed for such a long time. We will have to start traveling again extensively to meet as many of our partners as

possible to know from them how we might be helpful. We will use many more samples than usual to refresh the memories of our consumers on the high quality of this fantastic 2016 vintage - throughout a world, we will go back working as usual.



Maurizio Zanella, Ca' del Bosco, Franciacorta, Lombardy, PHOTO BY NICOLA UGHI

Maurizio Zanella, founder and chairman, Ca' del Bosco, Erbusco, Franciacorta, Lombardy

Zanella speaks about Franciacorta in general – along with the inevitable comparison to Champagne – and about his specific products, along with the issue of climate change.

The comparison between Franciacorta and Champagne is not properly correct because we are talking about two different type of wine: they have in common only the method. However, Champagne has more than 300 years of history and Franciacorta only 50. But in our 50 years we have reached very high quality levels thanks to the disciplinary which regulates the production and guarantees a constant quality.

The efforts of the wineries and the Consortium Franciacorta (for example we cultivate almost 70% of the entire surface of the vineyards organically) allowed us to get great results in wine tastings compared to other appellations.

Our Vintage Collection and Annamaria Clementi cuvées are the final result of a very long and meticulous maturation process: minimum 5 years for the former and minimum 9 years on the lees for the latter; both are perfect for different moments. People can enjoy them also after several years if they are perfectly preserved.

Actually, today climate change is not a real problem. But for the future we must control it carefully. For this reason, in the last few years, we decided to get high-altitude vineyards (the vineyards with the highest altitude in all Franciacorta), so we are able to delay bud break, as well as the harvest: with the global warming this is an opportunity to always reach the correct balance of sugar and acidity in our grapes. Secondly, Franciacorta has authorized from the 2017 vintage the use - up to a maximum of 10% - of an

autochthonous grape variety: Erbatmat, which has among its main characteristics a marked acidity and minerality.



Piero Mastroberardino and family PHOTO COURTESY ISTITUTO GRANDI MARCHI

Piero Mastroberardino, proprietor, Mastroberardino, Atripalda, Campania and current president of *Istituto Grandi Marchi*

Mastroberardino, current president of Istituto Grandi Marchi, talks about how the association's members are dealing with the coronavirus situation in their promotional work. He also offers his thoughts on the role of the Grandi Marchi over the past several years.

The Grandi Marchi producers usually discuss various topics regarding production, marketing and sales among themselves, exchanging information and experiences. This has become even more important since the emergence of Covid 19 in Italy and around the world.

This situation has severely hit both the restaurant sales and the tourism industry, both of which are extremely important for the sales of our wines, making it crucial to address our efforts into finding new business models to implement. Among them we are considering the possibility to enhance the online presence of the group.

The Grandi Marchi group has led an important role in education and promotion of Italian wines on international markets: from 2004 to 2019 it has organized more than 400 international events, with the presence of thousands of people including importers, distributors, sommeliers, media, wine educators and wine students. The aim has been to bring the value of our Italian wine business model based on a strong link to the terroir, direct involvement of the families in the wineries, tradition and innovation and strong cultural heritage.

Although we are unable to travel right now we cannot stop all this: we are reorganizing our activities using modern communication technology. Obviously we miss, as the entire world does, the opportunity of getting together, sharing personally the spirit

of conviviality which characterizes the wine world. I sincerely hope we will be able to find this again soon.

The domestic market is suffering a lot due to the lockdown concerning restaurant business, which is the main channel for premium wines. We have been enhancing e-commerce, taking advantage of social media, and some retail distribution in order to give our customers the opportunity to stay in touch with us, to have news about the wines releases and so on, but it is not enough to cover the stop of the restaurants side. On the contrary, on the international side the situation is better, as many partners of ours, due to the longer supply chain, are confirming their purchases and shipments in order to be ready for the market at the re-opening.

We are trying to give our support to the social environment around us, because of the big economic crisis that has been generated by the lockdown. We are working at a program of support to the families in economic troubles in my area, providing food and for Easter we also donated some wines to help them to better face the current situation. Another program of support is dedicated to health system, made of donations of protection devices to the hospital, as there has been a problem in provisioning them to the different health departments.

To learn more about the Istituto Grandi Marchi, see their [website](#).


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I am a Chicago-based wine writer, educator and photographer, with 39 years of experience in the wine industry. For the past 20 years, I have been a freelancer, writing... **Read More**

