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# Italian Wine Producers - How They Are Dealing With Coronavirus

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Food &amp; Drink

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

Roberto Stucchi Prinetti, Badia a Coltibuono, Chianti Classico PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

The coronavirus situation has hit numerous countries around the globe. This is especially true in Italy, as the entire country is on lockdown as of last week; restaurants are closed, and people have been ordered to stay at home except to go to work or shop at a grocery store.

To understand how wine producers are dealing with this state of affairs, I interview several vintners from various regions in the country to learn how they are coping with the new realities of everyday life, which has greatly affected their businesses. While the comments reflect the gravity of their existence, there are also some very heartwarming reactions, so typical of the Italians, who remain confident that they will emerge stronger than ever.

"I am OK, everybody around is healthy but things are quite weird as you can imagine says Roberto Stucchi Prinetti at Badia a Coltibuono, a celebrated Chianti Classic producer. "We are now in full lockdown and pretty much stuck at home doing some teleworking, waiting in line to buy food (they only allow small numbers of people in a any time) and trying to get some walks or bike rides to at least move. If you get stopped outside you have to justify yourself. One is allowed to go out and about only for good reasons and being careful not to congregate with others."

Prinetti notes that "for the most part everybody is on board and is doing their best to avoid contact. This is Italy, so nothing is perfect, but I must say that it's working pretty well."

At Marchesi di Barolo in Piedmont, Valentina Abbona remarks, "I must admit that it all quite scary, we were caught off guard; first we were under the illusion that the situation would have improved quickly, then we faced with a real crisis." This crisis includes all bars and restaurants being closed, not a positive sign for a wine producer seeking sales. "They (bars and restaurants) represent nearly 50% of our business – a temporarily shut down," Abbona says.

Prinetti also comments on these accounts being shot down. This is a total catastrophe: all business has come to a stop, bars, restaurants and any and all consumption of food and wine out of the house is non-existent. "We are bracing for the economic impact which is already substantial," Prinetti replies, "but will certainly get worse once other countries start adopting the necessary measures that have been postponed until now. No tourists anywhere and now no flights."



Matteo Lunelli, Ferrari Trento PHOTO COURTESY FERRARI TRENTO

At Ferrari Trento, one of the most respected producers of *metodo classico* sparkling wine in Italy, coproprietor Matteo Lunelli explains the changes that have taken place “For the past two weeks, we have suffered a sharp decline in sales in the domestic market because of COVID-19 and we now expect a decrease in sales in most major markets at least for the first half of the year.

“On-premise sales are close to zero and we have to support restaurants and bars who facing a very difficult situation, ask for delay in payment terms, for example. At home, people can still enjoy themselves with a glass of wine but it is not a time for parties, aperitivo or toasting together...

“We have stopped all activities other than the absolutely necessary ones at the winery, and are adopting very tight security procedures for the little that has to be done. Financially it will be a major issue very soon.”

Unfortunately, too often in cases such as this, all sort of half-truths and mistruths emerge. Ilaria Petitto of Donnachiara in Campania, has already witnessed this. "Our fear is that in addition to the drop in sales due to the closure of restaurants in Italy, we



absolutely do not want that pass the message that it is risky to buy Italian wine for infection. This is absolutely fake news that must be strongly denied,” she urges. “Those who have tried to say this are ignorant and want to try to cloud the image of our wines around the world.”



Vineyards in Piedmont PHOTO ©TOM HYLAND

While all this is happening, vintners must attend to the springtime labors in their vineyards; this is necessary work that has the advantage of giving the producers something to take their minds off the crisis. “We are lucky, we live in the countryside remarks Daniela Rocca of the Albino Rocca winery in Barbaresco in the Piedmont region. “Spring is approaching and our vines need our care and work in the vineyard This is allowing us to stay outside and to enjoy the beauty of our region, trying not to think at the nightmare we are living.”

While these wine producers, along with their colleagues throughout the country face an incredibly difficult time at present - as well as the near future - they have managed to find a positive light at the end of the tunnel. Petitto wrote to me that last week she received big orders from her two importers in the United States; “I have to thank them because they are supporting me.”

Prunetti notes the lockdown has forced many to find new ways of working. “An interesting development has been finding out that you can be very productive in meetings by teleconference; actually in my experience in this week is that it works better to do it without video, it requires more concentration and allows for less distraction.”

Chiara Coffele at her family winery in Soave in the Veneto region thanks those customers that are supporting them. “We are grateful to all the customers that keep showing their trust in our work by placing orders and settling payments as requested

Lunelli sums up his outlook - and the outlook for many of his contemporaries - by stating, “This epidemic has strengthened the bonds of our team and of our community. I am proud to see so many Italians feeling a sense of unity and cohesiveness as they act with responsibility, love and determination to overcome this obstacle.

“Nothing is stronger than this feeling and the vision of a new tomorrow. If we keep this sense of unity and this positive energy as a country, I am confident that we will get out of this crisis stronger than before.

“I am sure that we will soon toast again and celebrate together the joy of life, which is part of the Italian lifestyle.”