



Collio

FINE WINES AND FOODS
FROM ITALY'S NORTH-EAST

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Wine

Bressan Mastri Vinai

Fulvio Bressan turns up to meet me driving an enormous cross-country vehicle. He is wearing camouflage gear, a steel-wire bracelet and a big smile. 'The Bressans have been making wine here since 1726,' he says as he points out over the plains of Isonzo towards the Collio hills. 'We found a reference to it in the old documents stored in the church at Farra d'Isonzo, along with the birth and marriage certificates. This was part of Austria before the First World War.'

Fulvio's grandfather, Luigi, had been the cellarmaster at Tenuta Villanova, and his father, Nereo, was one of the founders of the Collio. 'He invested in land when everyone else was selling it off, and kept a fine butcher's shop in Gorizia to support the winemaking here when wine was a less lucrative activity. He was the one that really turned this into a viable wine estate, inspired, as were many people here in the Collio, by Count Attems,' says Fulvio. Unusually for the period, Nereo planted native grapes Pignolo and Schiopettino rather than Chardonnay or Merlot, and trained them to Guyot instead of the more common bulk-producing Casarsa system.

Nereo is a great character and he and his wife, Paolina, still help Fulvio and his lovely wife, Jelena, to hand-bottle the wines and tend to the vineyards. He increased the seven hectares he inherited to 17; Fulvio has bought eight more for a total of 25; they are divided between the Collio and Isonzo areas though, by choice, none of his wines are labelled Collio DOC. 'Nature repays you for what you put into it with your experience, head and heart,' says Nereo.

'We have always opted to make less wine but of higher quality,' says Fulvio, whose annual output is now around 65,000 bottles. 'Initially my father was not very pleased when I decided to make wine after studying psychology at university, but now he is delighted as it has kept us all together.' Fulvio also studied in Bordeaux, taking classes with master œnologists like Yves Glories and Jacques Blouin. 'I loved the "simplicity" of these hugely influential vigneroni who remain humble men of the earth,' he says. 'In Bordeaux I understood what great wines could be, I was almost jealous of the wines I tasted there, they were so good. Jealous of French experience and know-how that could result in wines like those.' Glories imparted the idea that you need to dream and imagine the wine you want to make, something that is only possible on a small, non-industrial scale. 'I'm after the soul of my wines and of my terroirs, their elegance, finesse and *tipicità*,' Fulvio explains.



Bressan wine in crate

Fulvio's first vineyard was planted to Schioppettino, as was the first vineyard planted for his delightful small son, Emanuele. Fulvio concentrates on autochthonous varieties, and allows them to age as in Bordeaux, *sur lie*. 'Nereo was terrified when I started doing this, as it was then a rare practise in Friuli,' says Fulvio. 'He asked me every day for three months if I knew what I was doing! When he tasted the results after the wines' long slow ageing, he too was convinced.' The Bressan's respect for the grapes allows for no pesticides or weedkillers in the vineyards and for wild yeasts in the fermentation. The grapes are de-stalked and lightly crushed, not pressed, before being placed in large, open-topped barrels to ferment and macerate. This method applies to both red and white wines. 'My Verduzzo is so rich it's like a red wine dressed in white wine's clothing,' he laughs. All of Bressan's wines undergo the malolactic fermentation to increase their complexity. 'I love wines that evolve,' he says. When serving his red wines, as with the Pignolo, Pinot Nero and Schioppettino, it's best to open them early and let them breathe before drinking.