

ELISABETTA FORADORI

In strong contrast to the porn-star female ideal promoted during the Age of Berlusconi, some women rose to wine power. As if embodying the late, great Barolo master Baldo Cappellano's statement that the more there is fake the more the world needs real, these women spoke directly his observation. They provided magnificent role models. They differed from their counterparts in other countries by the fact that they also pruned and plowed, they were all in organics and worked in synchrony with nature. These vignaiolis were also friends. I observed them, drank with them and sometimes danced with them. In 2016 I visited them for the first time. One was Elisabetta Foradori.



Elisabetta talking clay pot wisdom. She gets hers from La Mancha, Spain.

The day started in solar, southern Etna. By 10pm a flight and a rental car later, I was lost, 2,400 feet high in the Dolomites at the far north of the country. To blame was a failed GPS and no cell signal. Finally there was Elisabetta Foradori, in a graceful kurta, standing at the top of the stairs of her ancestral home. I thought, there's Diana, the goddess of the moon and the hunt. A welcome vision.

Elisabetta Foradori has been an extraordinary figure in the wine world of Trentino since the mid-90s. That she had a serene charismatic beauty, almond-shaped dark eyes that always saw and listened, and a bird-like but strong physique, didn't hurt. But the truth was, looks and personality be damned, she proved to be an exquisite intermediary between ground and glass.

Famished, her soup was nourishing and warm, the vegetables all biodynamic as was her bread. Her antique kitchen a fairy tale. Myrtha Zierock, her daughter, burst with the future. Raindrops hit the window. The 2014 pinot grigio (which she made as a "fuck you" to her region awash in truly bad stuff from irrigated fruit) was delicious.

Talk flowed. An only child, Elisabetta was eleven when her father died. She took over the winery and the vines at twenty years of age. Her wines were solid, oak-influenced. I ignored them until 2007 when she showed up at VinNatur (the Italian fair shepherded by Angiolino Maule) and

eventually with the Louis/Dressner portfolio. Her wines had changed. So much so. They were vivacious, they no longer suffered from too much wood. The transformation was stunning. And while I initially wondered if she had been trend chasing, it didn't take long to realize her transformation was authentic. She had indeed been chasing something: the truth.

In 1999 she stopped working chemically and by 2002 she was biodynamic. She backed away from additives. She also started an experimental vineyard from seed, and yes, thank you, the vines are producing and thriving, though they produce very little. An early influence was the father of her first three children, the professor, Goetheist and guru-like, Rainer Zierock. Elisabetta was young, he was older. He was strong and visionary, she a star in the making. I could spin novels. Her first five years of marriage were intense: three children born, harvests and a house that started out with no running water. While the marriage soon ended, his influence lingered. Case in point, on the back label of her bottles is Zierock's Goethean quote, "The agrarian culture that respects the soil and its fertility generates a plant and a fruit which reflect the harmony between man and nature."



A beauty from the early morning walk in the rain before heading down to the winery.

In those formative years she also created a friendship with **Giusto Occhipinti** (Arianna's uncle). "It was Giusto who told me I was born to work with anfora." She gave it a try, experimenting with tinaja from Spain, until she transferred almost her entire production into them—except for her flagship teroldego. "The wines find their identity so much sooner in clay," she had told me at one tasting in France.

Our dinner was almost finished. The rain had stopped. "Would you like to taste Myrtha's father's wine? From time to time we open one of them up," she asked.

Zierock helped to establish the **Weingut Anstz Dolomytos Sacker**. And one of those wines, probably from 2007, two years before his death, sat outside on the windowsill. The taste seemed animated, as if made without sulfur. With no label, we were left guessing about the grapes inside. Most probably it was a field blend; gentle, shy, an appealing wallflower.

One of Zierock's most important early influences was to encourage Elisabetta to celebrate the indigenous. She became known for championing teroldego, becoming its anointed queen. She eventually started to work with the fast dying out nosiola and manzoni bianco. She brought new respect to pinot grigio.

I slept under the eaves of the house under a pile of down. In the morning, the rain still hung on, but Elisabetta's beloved Dolomites, visible from my window, rising from the mists, were jagged and glorious.



Irrigation pipes line the area, pumping up production and feeding industrial wines.

We drove down to the plain, towards the Foradori winery. All around us irrigation pipes threaded through the vines. The pipes were even in her limestone, silica and granitic porphyry Fontanasanta vineyard. As she only rents that vineyard, she is forbidden from ripping them out, even if never used. Looking upon them, she said with frustration, "We get 39 inches of rain a year."

With copious precipitation, irrigation was frivolous. There would be only one reason to press them into service and that would be to amp up the volume of production. In Trentino industrial quantities of more than 100-hectoliters per hectare is common. But every viticultural choice up there, she explained, from bud viticulture to fertilizing to the water, is about achieving quantity, "*Come farebbe allora la Sicilia?*" she said.

It is down in Campo Rotaliano where the Noce River flows to meet the Adige is Mezzolombardo that her teroldego vines grow. As we arrived to the winery, surrounded by vines, Elisabetta explained, "The Noce brings down mountainous soil. Like a soup." The soup's nuts are the alluvial gravels and sand. Teroldego, which makes up 80% of her 160,000 bottle production, loves that kind of soil. "Up on the limestone of Fontanasanta? Not so much."

We walked through the vines trellised on a mix of pergola and guyot, in the peaceful early spring rain. Her compost heap was prodigious. Chickens pecked and dogs ran around, happy in the mist. But we were drenched. Tasting called and we headed back in.

The newer part of the winery was devoted to two floors of clay vessels. Used to seeing them buried in Georgia, this was new to me, an expanse of them—around eighty—propped up in their supports, harnessed in like horses.



The vineyard that surrounds the Foradori winery in Mezzolombardo.

We tasted through her nosiolas, pinot grigios and the Sgarzon and Morei single-vineyard teroldegos. Like barrels, each anfora had its own personality. She warned though, "Even if they barely get more than 20ppm of sulfur, wines from anfora never recover from bottling."

I was privileged to taste many of the wines from the clay and will remember them like a dream; the details are lost, the emotional impact never leaves.

Outside in the courtyard, Elisabetta rolled a cigarette, a little apologetically, but not too much. There's a reason all the men and women flock to her, have crushes on her. An appealing woman who exudes a yoga serenity, but needs that imperfection, like that occasional smoke.

We were about to sit down to taste when, to our delight and surprise, Marc Ollivier and his wife Genevieve arrived from the Muscadet. They joined us in a vertical tasting of teroldegos and nosiolas. Her son Emilio, the next generation, joined us as well. He will work beside her splicing his



Elisabetta, Myrtha, Genevieve and Marc, as Pascaline and I were headed back to Verona.

vision with his mother's in compatible ways, except for one aspect, volatile acid. For now Elisabetta has the last say on that. "They call me Madame Volatility, I can't drink a wine without it." One could say the same thing about life.

Selected highlights from our tasting of the single-vineyard teroldegos and the nosiola. (Note: I made this visit with Madame Pascaline Lepeltier. The notes are a blend of both of our impressions. The prices for the anfora-raised wines range from \$30–\$55.)



2013 SGARZON The very cool year of 2013 with a harvest in late October, this was a very complex wine to me, and less complex to Pascaline. Go figure. There was quite a bit of volatility on the nose, with tomato-like acids and the scratch of soft tannins. But given the year's difficulty, quite enjoyable.

2013 MOREI Great bottle, delicate, savory, spot on, the best of the four at that moment, not disjointed. Very light reduction which disappeared fast. Potpourri, forest, juniper.

2014 SGARZON Pretty, but a little short—in a very wet vintage, the extra maceration brought length. There's some hawthorne and hop. The tannins are pretty yet fragile, could use a tad more stuffing but mannered for the vintage. No perceptible volatility even though there is some technically.

2014 MOREI Paradoxically, the more massive of the flight, dark forest, humus. Reduction and VA, and alcohol upfront. However, it is tasting fabulously. Very integrated. Elisabetta explained why this way: "Amphora can standardize if aged too long, yet, in a 'weaker' vintage, the skin and pips seem to bring balance and precision."

2011 TEROLDEGO This was another complicated vintage with too much VA initially (even for Elisabetta), but now the volatility is almost totally absorbed and barely perceptible.

A TRIO OF FONTANASANTA NOSIOLAS

Elisabetta has an especially soft spot for the nosiola that grows in Fontanasanta. "It's late ripening, low alcohol, neutral and can age for such a long time," she said. It used to make a sweet wine and would stay 6–7 years in small barrels. But Elisabetta shoes the grape off in its dry version.

2014 From old pergola-trained vines, this spent seven months in anfora. There's a superb tannic structure, white

tea, peony. There are lots of layers here for a "neutral" grape. Skin character is very subtle, and there's plenty of infused chamomile, marjoram and celery water. Slightly higher level of SO₂ here, at 30/40ppm.

2011 10.7% alcohol, this was floral, easy and highly digestible. It was low on everything from alcohol to flavor but a very gentle and lovely wine, like pure river water. A touch of honey and a nice high sharp ripe acid while nothing shrill about it.

2010 12.5% alcohol. The vintage, with a touch of herbal mint, is starting to develop and the tannins are crunchy, which gives this powerful wine a lift. ♡

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worry of that time has transformed into a terrific trio of sommeliers (Linda Milagros Violago and James Sligh) and a list that one could cross the ocean for, or at least hop on a subway. Here is a restaurant that reveres nature in its wine as much as in its food. This is rare. Right now there are about 1500 references and it will stretch to 2000. The list is packed with surprises from all over the world, even showcasing little known Pearl Morissette from Canada. The stretch of price points shames other restaurants for price gouging. \$9 gets you a glass of Domaine de la Paonnerie chenin or the house red, blended by Ms. Lepeltier at Mas Coutelou. \$28 gets you a glass of a Stéphane Othéguy Condrieu. The top red (\$26) goes to Tony Coturri's very first vintage, 1980 Cabernet. Aligoté with age? Sure. 2005 (Ponsot) or 2006 (Leroy) or 2010 (de Moor). Want to explore the variety aligoté? There's a list from 13 different producers.

While the list pays serious homage to natural burgundy, those scared off by the likes of Prieuré Roch will find satisfaction. After all, can you turn your nose up at Lafarge or Clos Des Lambrays? You'd expect this Angevine to bring an extraordinary depth to the Loire selections. Check. No matter what brings you in, you're there to drink. It won't take you long to realize that the team—Linda, James and Pascaline—has your back.

Verre de Terre

204 W. 14th St.
New York, NY 10011
212-620-4836

Rouge Tomate Chelsea

128 W. 18th St.
New York, NY 10011
646-395-3978 ♡

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VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE

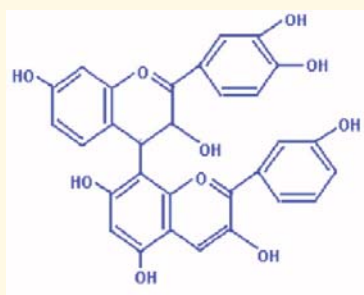
These give shape to a wine.

Different wines hit the mouth in a variety of ways. Some give you a very long finish, meaning the taste goes on for a long time. That's vertical and that's because they are more driven by acids. On the other hand, some seem to wash over your mouth. You might feel it across your tongue. That is horizontal. Horizontal are more alcohol-driven and fruit focused wines.

ACID STRUCTURE

Where the zing hits in your mouth, on the top, near the tip of the tongue, in the back of your mouth, making it water.

Think of comparing a fruit at different stages of ripeness. Think under-ripe raspberries—they have a violent, aggressive green kind of acidity. But when ripe, the acid has an intensity and yet it does not burn. Unripe acidity? Think of an apple a month from harvest.



An example of a tannin.

TANNIC STRUCTURE

Think of the raspiness in tea or coffee. Tannins can come from a non-wine ingredient, such as wood. In a natural wine, they will only come from the grape skins,

stems and seeds. The tannins can be harsh and green or grippy, dry, wet, fat and even chalky. Sometimes I use the word needle-like, because they feel like a narrow line, like a skeleton. Sometimes the sensation is just a mouthful of broad tannin that goes all over the place.

DRY EXTRACT

The first time I heard this term I wanted to run from the wine biz. But, think of this technical off-putting term this way: water.

Take a drink of filtered water. Then compare that with the taste of a mineral-laden bottled spring water. In the mineral water you'll feel a touch of celery salt, something rusty or coppery, some briny characteristics, some grit. Now go to a good muscadet, the elixir-like wine from the western Loire. This is our kind of mineral water. You should pick up the same sensations and aromatics.

Now, for a grown-up science experiment: Leave a couple of drops of wine in your glass overnight and look at the bottom the next morning. You'll see a white film from the evaporation. It seems to be an extract of the wine itself. Is it grainy to the touch? Is it salty to the taste? Think back to the water, to the Muscadet.

That's it. Class over. Now, go back to just drinking for fun. ☺

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I do hope you enjoy it. Looking forward to your feedback.

—Alice

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