

What a line up.

Zýmē

It was getting close to Vinitaly at this point so I am eternally grateful to Zýmē, Celestino and of course Elena for showing me round at this busy time. Zýmē was totally different to many of the other wineries I'd passed through. As soon as I walked through the door I felt this sense of Zýmē being the crucible of the wineries I'd been to, it was new, exciting and different.

The name Zýmē, from Greek, means "yeast" and yeast is an indispensable element in the world of oenology. There is also a symbolic meaning, since it conjures up the concept of naturalness, a fundamental value in Celestino Gaspari's professional and existential journey. There is lots of symbolism at Zýmē. The winery logo represents a grapevine leaf in which is centred a pentagon, symbol of the five basic elements that combine to yield wine: man-vine-earth-sun-water. The pentagon appears throughout the magnificent winery, from the shape of the building to the storage of the wine, everything has been thought through thoroughly to reflect Gaspari's vision.

From my understanding, a lot of what Celestino is doing is with ecosustainability in mind. His heart is not in but with Valpolicella and he will hold onto the history of the grapes and the wine for as long as he can make possible but somehow, that comes hand in hand with experimentation. It's a risk and it's paying off. As Elena guided me around the futuristic winery that like Celestino, is working conjointly with nature, I asked her what her favourite wine was and she said she'd tell me after I had tried everything...but we'll get to that bit later.

This winery has sprung from the earth and mother nature has given back. As the team carried out the excavations, they found a karstic cavern, which gathers both rainwater and underground water. This, in unison with a huge natural sandstone wall provides the perfect environment for the barrel room.

But then, where the wine making happens you see science. A temperature controlled steel tank stands in defiance amongst the natural stone, a frost glinting at its base as it cools the fermentation process. Alongside this is an advanced bit of kit used to press grapes, more delicate than any other technique for maximum precision. Even the hand rail leading up to this level is used as a pump, it's a complete work of art.

Elena and I make our way to the top level in the lift, designed like a bottle opener it works using leverage, the floor even looks like a cork. We go to a room where the view looks out onto the vines, I can't wait to try these unique wines.

Zýmē Tasting Notes

We started with Zýmē's Spumante, the Metodo Classico 2013. I haven't mentioned much sparkling and this is the first for me to review. This wine is 100% Pinot Noir. First fermentation with yeast and cane sugar, then it follows the traditional Champagne method. Four years of maturation and Zýmē produce 5,000 bottles a year. It's a clean lemon in colour with soft effervescence. Really clean and elegant, citrus notes, biscuity and a refreshing acidity. white flowers and honey on the nose, a slightly creamy taste. 2013 was a very sunny year so it's a great vintage.

The second wine, From Black to White, a 2017 vintage is a very interesting wine. Celestino (it just feels wrong to refer to him as Gaspari and I have no idea why) discovered an albino Rondinella while out checking his vines so he decided to try and see if he could grow more vines from this Rondinella bianca. He was successful and so manages to produce this wine from 60% Rondinella Bianca, 15% Gold Traminer, 15% Kerner and 10%

Incrocio Manzoni. It's very aromatic on the nose, for me that is the Traminer but it could be the Rondinella too I'm not sure. It's very fruit and refreshing, savoury and dry on the finish. Great acidity, a very well levelled wine. This is made in concrete vats, it's a quick easy process then it undergoes six to seven years of aging. There is a fancy glass cork in this wine which I found interesting and that helps to save body in the wine, it can age well.

Next up was the playful label of Valpolicella Reverie 2017. Quite a bubblegummy scent on the nose, lots of cherry and candy like. This wine is the four traditional grapes, Corvin, Corvinese, Rondinella and Oseleta. It's very fruit, lovely bit of spice. I've actually written in my notes 'cherry and spice and all things nice' a great table wine that would easily pair with lots of dishes. They make 20,000 bottles and Elena says it's a great summer wine and can be served chilled.

Valpolicella Classico Superiore 2016 was of the same variety but using the Ripasso method where the wine comes into contact with the Amarone skins. Aged for three years in wood, this was still quite young, maybe needs time then it would be quite a different wine. Exciting potential, very complex.

602020 was the next wine, Celestino's take on a typical Bordeaux blend. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Cabernet Franc and 20% Merlot. These vines grow on the very East side of Vicenza on the volcanic soils and the Merlot is dried for 30-40 days prior to pressing. Bordeaux style in every way but smoother tannins, fruity, sharp which makes it perfect for meat. Thirst quenching but leaves you thirsty for more. I think this would pair perfectly with game, a fantastic shooting season wine,

And now for my favourite, by chance also Elena's favourite and I wonder what you'd think? Oseleta 2011, 100% the indigenous Oseleta grape that is rapidly going out of fashion. If I could only fill my cellar with this I'd be so happy, it really blew me away for something, can I say simple? Celestino is saving Veneto's historical heritage but it comes at a price. You need three kilos of the grape for one bottle but for all that hard work you get the true expression of the genetics of the grape. The rich acidity and grape skin make big tannins, this wine could age for a long time. On the nose it is pure powerful aromatic vanilla, red fruits, strawberry and minerality. It's just gorgeous to drink, so smooth. They only make 8000 bottles. Delicious.

We have a mistake of a wine next, Kairos, which means opportunity. First produced by experiment in 2002 with a minimum of 15 grape varieties. 10% white and 90% red traditional and local grapes. When this all started as quite a risk, they made 2000 bottles but now, 20,000 are produced because the blend has charmed everyone's socks off. Very drinkable, a rich bouquet, to drink with or without food. Fruity, pleasant sweetness to it, naughty and interesting story to this wine which makes it such a relief that it's delicious.

Amarone from 2013 next, an incredibly smooth offering, like velvet. Smell and taste mirror each other rather than surprise. Clean wine, can taste the grapes almost individually. Lots of character.

A treat to try the Amarone Classico from 2006 next, more of a sweet wine fermentation process then nine years aging. Tastes fresh and sweet but still has the well-balanced finish. Only made from the best vintages and the best quality. Very fresh and clean, delicious. An Amarone I could somehow drink every night...

And finally, 2009 Harlequin. Celestino is the only person to harvest for this wine. I almost didn't feel worthy of drinking it. What a fantastic assemblage of the minimum 15 grapes. Wonderful complexity, a glimpse into the mind of not only the winemaker Celestino but the artist, the performer, the risk taker. Slightly woody on the nose, blood red, young even though it has been aging for 20 years. No words can describe the elegance, very dry finish. Personal wine to Celestino's personal view of wine. 3500 bottles made. I should also mention the label as it made me quite emotional once I understood it.

Taken from the artist Angelo Peretti's preface in Celestino Gaspari's book *Natural*

Alchemy, that he so kindly gave to me that day:

“You must call it Arlecchino,” or something similar, I said. Although the mask-character originates from Bergamo, when I think of Venetian theatre and Goldoni, the first character that comes to mind is Arlecchino, the servant of two masters, Arlechin with his wooden spoon, blind in one eye and deaf in one ear. We talked again a few days later and the name was changed to Harlequin, easier to understand around the world. [...]

The circle came back to the beginning here: the wine was named harlequin. The label was the natural outcome of this. I sketched an idea: a white base with a hint of text, with the mask of Harlequin in the background, a drop of wine recalling the tearful search for food and love, a stain reminding us of greedy meals of macaroni. Later on, those macaroni came to be called gnocchi and are enjoyed in Verona during the carnival period, itself a metaphor of human comedy. Just as this wine is. [...]

I am intrigued by other people’s memories, not mine. I personally hold on to the philosophy of carpe diem, the fleeting moment lived in the most intense way possible. Life is made of moments, all fundamental, all indispensable. This is equally true for wine: you will never find another bottle exactly like the one you just drank because today is already different, and tomorrow will be more so, in progressive evolution.’