

# Winews

A proposito  
di vino

Year 1 • Number 1  
Spring 2000

## Why a newsletter?

Obviously to help us communicate and get in touch with you, the importers, distributors, journalists and consumers, which otherwise we would probably not manage to do as often as we would like.

This was the most direct way we could think of to reach and communicate with you.

The first edition, which you are now reading, will be published at the same time as the VINITALY 2000 fair, in Italian, English and German, and subsequently in Danish.

The second edition is planned for the beginning of November, and will tell you about the harvest that will have finished.

10,000 copies will be published of each of the four editions.

How will we fill these four pages? We have so much to tell you about ourselves and what goes on here in Scansano, that we certainly won't be short of ideas.

Obviously the theme throughout the newsletter will be wine.

But because we know that wine is history, culture and friendship, we can also happily talk about a beautiful beach (which doesn't have much to do with wine), or a beautiful woman (which has a little more to do with wine) rather than a plate of *bucatini all'amatriciana* with *pecorino romano* cheese, instead of parmesan (which have a lot more to do with wine).

We hope that reading our newsletter will increase your interest in our production and in the Maremma area. Enjoy!

Erik Banti

## My dear American journalist

An open letter to the journalist Matt Kramer in response to his article in the *Wine Spectator* of 30<sup>th</sup> November

My dear Mr. Kramer, I hope you will give the familiar tone but I enjoyed your criticism of our desire to make a *bella figura*, to look good.

I am sure you know Italy and Italians well, perhaps you are a little less familiar with our history, but don't worry: I was born here, and I too have some difficulty remembering all that has happened in our peninsula over the last three thousand years or so.

The appellations of today's Italian wines are comparatively recent.

When the wines of Bordeaux were being classified, Italy was still divided into small city states mostly owned by foreign powers or the Vatican.

If you happen to read the publications of the early 1960s listing the estates which at the time bottled their own wine, you will be surprised to see that there were only a few dozen of these.

In those days the farms produced the grapes and it was the traders, in the far-off nerve centres of wine production, who bottled the wine. My family owned the most beautiful estate in Montepulciano, Fattoria La Braccessa, and sold all the production to, I believe, Antinori. Only a small part was kept in the cellars and bottled, which I sold to the "in" restaurants in Rome, with or without paternal consent, thus earning the

necessary *argent de poche*.

In the 1960s Italy was becoming an industrial power, the countryside was abandoned and farms were being bought off for a crust of bread, either by the farmer who for years concealed the company income from a *padrone* too busy with city affairs to notice, or by the *nouveaux riches* who thought that buying a castle with a long history and hectares of land made them aristocrats.

So, Mr Kramer, how can you pos-

sibly compare us to the various Meursaults you mention in your article, when our oldest DOC wines are just 35 years old?

In fact, traditionally if you made red wine in Montepulciano it was Nobile wine, if you were in Greve it was Chianti, and so on for the whole of Italy - very simple.

In the last ten years there has been a truly unbelievable development, to the extent that in Montalci-

*continued* ➔

## Stop press

When I was just about to send the articles in this first edition to press, I received some news which deserved to be included with proper emphasis.

The March edition of the well-known German magazine *Der Feinschmecker* includes a test of 118 "SuperTuscan" wines, which contain at least 51% Sangiovese grapes.

The sensational result was:  
1<sup>st</sup> ERIK BANTI - ANNOPRIMO 1997  
3<sup>rd</sup> ERIK BANTI - CIABATTA 1997

The test confirms the 90 points awarded to ANNOPRIMO by the

*continued* ➔



# A vineyard at Poggio Maestrino

In the last two years several large wine-growing groups have set their sights on the Maremma area. The increasingly impressive-sounding "newcomers" like Mazzei, Biondi Santi, Frescobaldi and even Mondavi, have the press talking about their purchases in this region, like a rediscovered earthly paradise of Tuscan wine-growing.

There are various reasons why these "wine lords" have moved into Maremma: a much smaller investment is required compared to other areas

from first page

(My dear american journalist)

do you see more cars with Swiss or Milanese licence plates, than local ones, and Chianti has become known as "Chiantishire".

Wine specifications are decided by bureaucrats working on the fifth floor of Roman *palazzi*, whose entire experience of farming consists in recognising the change of seasons when their wives put cherries on the table instead of oranges.

Wine-growing is a real business today: nothing is left to chance. If a producer wants to make a new wine using Syrah grapes he won't think twice: he'll invent a new I.G.T. and that's all there is to it.

But what can he call the new wine? A name researched by expensive copywriters or invented by friends during a snack in the cellars of the newly-acquired property.

If this puzzles you, imagine how confusing it is for the consumer. Today expensive wines are "designer" wines as much as any other top of the range product and their success is often directly linked to their high price.

Here's a last anecdote for you: a Japanese gentleman took his client to dinner to celebrate a successful deal. He wanted to make a *bella figura*, but didn't know what wine to choose, so he chose the most expensive and dined his guest with - Chateaux d'Yquem!

Business is business, after all. Forgive me. Your health, and my best regards.

Erik Banti

of Tuscany, the climate is excellent and the superb grapes have for some time been lending a generous hand to the Chianti and Brunello wines.

But let's talk about us, and our Poggio Maestrino.

For some time Mimmo had been disappearing for days like a bloodhound on the scent, and reporting back to us at the cellar with tales of a beautiful 5 hectare piece of flat land, unfortunately too small for us; another of 215 hectares with woods, ponds and a view of the Argentario, even more beautiful but too large for us; or a farmstead of 25 hectares with farmhouse, vines and olive trees, splendid but too expensive for us.

One day, the cousin of Mimmo's sister's husband told us of a property for sale just outside Montiano, with

few vines, and a small olive grove (but no houses, ponds or woods) and wonderful land: it was love at first sight!

In the last few days we have finished bedding out the first 12 hectares with Sangiovese only; for those who are interested, the rootstocks are 1103 pause and the clones, 4 in total, were selected for their individual characteristics: body, ageing, colour, etc.. There are 4000 cuttings per hectare.

Another 4/5 hectares will be bedded by the end of the year, again favouring Sangiovese, with a small part reserved for Merlot, given the excellent results we have obtained from the combination of these two grapes.

Erik Banti



(Stop press)

Wine Spectator, while CIABATTA, "only" awarded 86 points, was from the 1996 vintage which in Maremma did not yield spectacular results (November '99 edition).

Limited space prevents me from listing the numerous other reviews our wines have received in the most prestigious wine magazines and columns of important European daily papers.

We were a little disappointed with the poor review from *Il Gambero Rosso* - *sed nemo profeta in patria*.

I would like to thank everyone working for the company, without whom these results would not have been possible, and top of the list is Mimmo, our capable supervisor of work in the vineyard and cellars.

Erik Banti

Traditionally the third page of Italian newspapers is devoted to cultural matters.

It is usually boring, and only read on a long train journey when you have read all the rest of the newspaper including the death announcements. . . .

We would like to dedicate this page of our wine news to interesting figures in (and out of) the wine sector; who can use the space to tell us their experiences, interesting facts and anecdotes about the world of wine. I asked my friend Jan Erik Svensson, a brilliant Danish lawyer, to write about his "Italian adventure" in this first edition.

Jan Erik and his family are the supreme example of foreigners who fell in love with Italy, only exceeded by Byron, Goethe and a few others. They are real leaders of opinion and eager promoters of our country: they eat, drink and dress Italian, they spend their holidays in Italy (they have even bought a house here) and this is all fine - except that their cars are also Italian. . . .

Tak, Jan Erik, skål med dig!



# Bella Italia

by Jan-Erik Svensson

For many years we spent our summers in the South of France: in those days it was something one just “had to do” and the atmosphere along the Riviera was exciting for young people like us: casinos, beaches, smart cars and sparkling, bejewelled, sun-tanned people.

Although we were close to the French-Italian border we never crossed it, mainly because the coastal motorway stopped abruptly on the Italian side.

But Rome was something else; we went there in the autumn and eagerly explored the ancient ruins. For us Italy was Rome, with a return flight.

People change with age and not always for the worse. We began to feel that something was missing on the Cote d’Azur: it was empty and meaningless and culturally uninspiring. For us, that “something” existed in Rome, so surely we might find it in other parts of Italy as well?

We took a chance and rented an apartment at an *agriturismo* in Tuscany, in the Maremma area near Grosseto. The quality could have

been better and the mosquitoes were a real pest. But the rest - what a revelation!

We visited every village in the area, large and small. We explored the Etruscan tombs despite protests from the children, who preferred to go to the beach.

Our “wine guru” in Denmark, Carl Merolli, advised us to visit Erik Banti, an Italian/Dane living in Montemerano, who produced wine and also ran a restaurant. The idea appealed so off we went to Montemerano.

It was a beautiful little town, like something out of a travel guide, resting on a sunny hill-top surrounded by yellow fields and olive groves.

We passed through the village gate and up the main street, small and sleepy, its silence broken by a couple of people talking animatedly. As we passed them, my wife said of one of the men: “I think that’s him; he looks like an Italian/Dane”. But we did not dare to ask.

Later we discovered that Erik was the very man my wife had pointed out in the street. How she could see it is still a mystery to me.

We saw his wine cellar, which in those days was really small, and we ate at the restaurant. It was wonderful! We began talking about Denmark, Italy, food and wine - the latter strictly Italian - and a warm friendship grew between us as the hours passed.

Erik recommended other wine producers for us to visit on our travels and so we ventured out of Tuscany to Umbria, to visit an excellent producer of spumante.

The landscape was beautiful: more forests, less tourists, a little wilder than Tuscany. We were very taken by this region and we also saw a beautifully located ruin in need of a loving hand. We quickly agreed that if we ever had a holiday house, this should be it. We returned a couple of times and started to investigate who owned the house and whether it might be for sale.

This small peaceful house in the country turned out to be a hornet’s

nest of complications: a bankrupt company, the owner in jail in Switzerland, international criminals, fights in the courts and, now and then, police combing the area.

We withdrew gracefully, but we were now set on the idea of a house in the area.

We stayed at an *agriturismo* close by and began asking anyone who would listen if they knew of houses or ruins for sale.

Suddenly one day, almost without realizing, we were on a piece of land immersed in nature, 400 meters above the Tiber, a southerly slope with olive and oak trees and the most beautiful view in the world, over valleys and mountains. It could not have been better.

The only problem was - there was no house.

We then decided to embark on a more daring venture than climbing Mount Everest: building a house in Italy.

Our knowledge of Italian had improved, but not enough to negotiate in the local dialect.

But one evening we threw ourselves into negotiations with the seller, who brought his English-speaking sons along - neither of whom actually spoke a word. However we had a feeling that our tall, blonde daughter might be a contributing factor in the swift and easy conclusion of our business.

We wrote down the essential figures in my wife’s small handbag notebook, and shook hands on the deal. It later turned out, however, that there were many other just as “essential” figures.

We learned something else from the notary: late one evening, in a house slightly damaged by earthquakes and without heating, our documents were finalised, while I was speaking on my mobile phone to my colleague in Rome. The problems were solved and payment was made the Italian way, in cash. In those days the highest denomination on the notes was L. 100.000, and I felt like a gangster in a thriller movie. I just

needed a hat and dark glasses.

The building work started 4 months late, but what a job!

Red stones from our own land, the most beautiful chestnut wood for the beams, handmade tiles between the rafters and on the floor. Workers with an incredible eye for detail and pride in their work.

The results were wonderful! The house was just what we wanted.

Naturally there were many amusing anecdotes along the way.

Like the time my wife went to Italy ahead of me to await the removal van from Denmark, and found that it had to stop 2 kilometres from the house, because the road was too narrow and it couldn’t go on. Everything was unloaded into the middle of the road and then *arrivederci!* Beds, chairs, packing cases, everything. After a while a van passed by, stopped, asked if we needed help and then loaded everything and took it all down to the house. Italian kindness!

Or the time our cheerful, traditional surveyor came to us and informed us that there was a big problem.

We feared the worst, but no! He simply did not want to put a TV aerial on the roof of an Umbrian country house. Astonished, we burst out laughing and explained that we were never going to have a television in our house.

He just shook his head, and still finds it hard to believe today that we can survive without a TV.

The one worker who made a mess of things was our plumber. Whatever he touched fell apart.

He mixed up the hot and cold pipes and we only realised when we filled the new swimming pool - with boiling water! Our laundry wall had to be pulled down to repair the fault.

However, it is beautiful in Umbria and we look forward to spending many years with Erik and Laura, not only talking about wine and food.

And who knows - maybe one day I will provide Erik with some competition. □



# Our wines

## MORELLINO DI SCANSANO DOC 1998



**GRAPES:** 85% Sangiovese, 15% Grenache, Canaiolo and Malvasia in equal quantities.

A very hot, dry summer with showers at the end of August favoured ripening of the grapes, and harvesting began on 13<sup>th</sup> September. The must fermented for 12 days on the skins and was bottled in June 1999 after careful racking and filtering.

The results of tests carried out at bottling are: alcohol 12.48, dry extract 30.5, total acidity 5.31, pH 3.64.

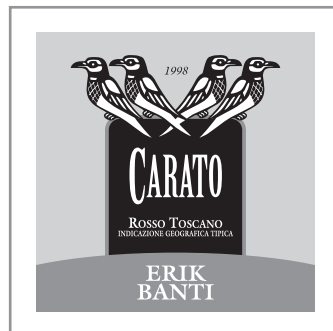
**DEVELOPMENT:** The wine should be drunk young and can be aged for 4 or 5 years.

## MORELLINO DI SCANSANO DOC 1999

Thanks to a hotter than average summer the grapes were already ripe at the end of August and the harvest began on 6<sup>th</sup> September. Fermentation on the skins lasted 14 days and the wine is currently maturing in steel vats after thorough racking and an even more careful selection of must than in previous years.

The alcohol content of around 12.5 x vol., good consistency and aroma and improved selection lead us to expect this Morellino to be of a very high quality. The Morellino 1999 will be bottled around June 2000.

## CARATO I.G.TOSCANA 1998



**GRAPES:** 85% Sangiovese, 15% Grenache, Canaiolo and Malvasia in equal quantities.

A very hot, dry summer with showers at the end of August favoured ripening of the grapes, and harvesting began on 18<sup>th</sup> September. The must fermented for

13 days on the skins and after extensive racking was placed in 225l. *carati*, casks made of Slavonian (80%) and American (20%) oak, 50% new, from May until October 1999.

The results of tests carried out at bottling in November 1999 were: alcohol 12.47, dry extract 28.8, total acidity 5.84, volatile acids 0.70, pH 3.47.

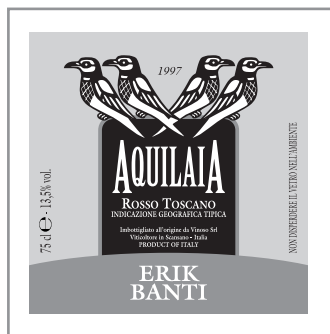
**DEVELOPMENT:** The wine should be drunk young and will reach its peak of maturity in 2000, but it can be aged for another 5 or 6 years.

## CARATO 1999

Thanks to a hotter than average summer the grapes were already ripe at the end of August and the harvest began on 6<sup>th</sup> September. Fermentation on the skins lasted 14 days and after thorough cutting and racking the wine has been maturing in Slavonian and American oak casks since early February 2000. We expect to bottle it at the end of October.

**NOTES ON CARATO:** 1999 was Carato's fourth harvest, and we have increased production from the original 18,000 bottles to today's 80,000, where we have had to stop due to lack of space for maturing. The company is counting on Carato in the future, thanks to its excellent price-quality ratio. If we can build the necessary extensions (requested in March 1998) we should be able to achieve the production of 250,000 bottles.

## AQUILAIA I.G.TOSCANA 1997



**GRAPES:** 75% Sangiovese, 25% Grenache. A dry hot summer with a little rain only at the end of September: on October 13<sup>th</sup> we began the harvest of very ripe grapes and fermentation on the skins lasted 14 days. After racking it was placed in 225l. *carati* barriques of French oak from Allier and Nevers, 35% new, from May 1998 to May 1999.

The results of tests carried out at bottling in June 1999 were: alcohol 13.74, dry extract 30.5, total acidity 5.89, volatile acids 0.72, pH 3.33.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Thanks to the special harvesting conditions, Aquilaia 1997 is expected to be able to age for a good 10 years.

## AQUILAIA 1998

At the moment of writing we are not yet sure when the Aquilaia 1998 will be bottled, although this is certainly not a

negative reflection on the quality, which has been continually monitored and is actually of a very high standard. The wine is still maturing in French barriques of the same origin as above, 50% new with MT+ toast.

The wine has been included in the new list but we do not expect it to be available before May.

## CIABATTA I.G.TOSCANA 1997



**GRAPES:** 100% Sangiovese.

A dry hot summer with a little rain only at the end of September: the harvest began on October 2nd and fermentation on the skins lasted 15 days. After thorough racking it was placed in 225-1000l. Slavonian oak barrels from September 1998 to October 1999.

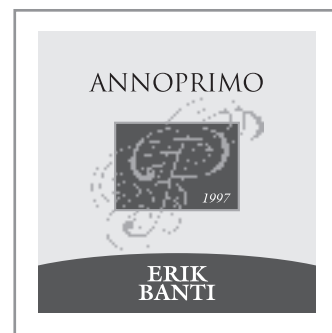
The results of tests carried out at bottling in November 1999 were: alcohol 13.69, dry extract 30.5, total acidity 6.20, volatile acids 0.72, pH 3.37.

**DEVELOPMENT:** This vintage will be at its best in 2001, but can easily be aged for another 8 years or more.

## CIABATTA 1998

The wine is maturing in barrels which have mostly been replaced. Its body and consistency lead us to believe that when it has matured this Ciabatta will maintain its usual high standard of quality.

## ANNOPRIMO I.G.TOSCANA 1997



**GRAPES:** 95% large Sangiovese, 5% Merlot.

A dry hot summer with a little rain only at the end of September: the harvest began on October 5<sup>th</sup> and fermentation on the skins lasted 15 days, the varieties of grape separated. The wines were only put together after racking and placed in 225l. barriques from Allier, Nevers, and Tronçais, 100% new, from May 1998 to June 1999.

The results of tests carried out at bottling in June 1999 were: alcohol 13.97, dry extract 34.20, total acidity 5.32, volatile acids 0.75, pH n.a.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Thanks to a favourable year, Annoprimo should be a long-lived wine able to achieve ageing of more than 10 years. This was our initial impression but a new wine is always unpredictable: we'll have to wait and see.

## ANNOSCONDO 1998

What was only a pleasant impression with the Annoprimo turned out to be far beyond all our expectations. The Annoscondo has been maturing in barriques since June 1999 and we have the same favourable impression. Every year has its own characteristics, however, so this wine, like the youngest child, has even more of our love.

To our readers,

We have reached the end of our first journey!

We welcome your comments, critiques or suggestions to make the next edition even better.

Our address is:

Erik Banti

Az. Agr. Vinoso Srl - Loc. Fosso dei Molini - 58054 Scansano (GR) - Italy

Tel. +390564508006

Fax +390564508019

E-mail: [erikbanti@ftbcc.it](mailto:erikbanti@ftbcc.it)

## Acknowledgments:

My heartfelt thanks everyone who has helped and contributed (even unknowingly) in the adventure of preparing the first edition of *wineus - a proposito di vino*:

Laura and the office staff Serena and Monya, Giuseppe Romanazzi ([romanazzi@nexus.it](mailto:romanazzi@nexus.it)) who edited the graphics and has produced our labels since 1982; Christina Dubbers ([cclubber@tin.it](mailto:cclubber@tin.it)) for the German texts; Ailsa Wood ([awood@tin.it](mailto:awood@tin.it)) for the English texts; Paolo del Bufalo ([lapagina@tin.it](mailto:lapagina@tin.it)) who printed the magazine and Carlo Merolli ([info@carlomeroilli.dk](mailto:info@carlomeroilli.dk)) who, alone, will have the hard task of coordinating the Danish edition.