

PORTOVINO

IL SASSO VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO SUPERIORE

From Verona, walk up Negrar's valley until you reach a 'Rock' of Limestone – this is Il Sasso (sasso is 'rock' in Italian). It's here that the grape varieties Corvina, Corvinone, and Rondinella grow deep into the terraced limestone in search of water. Soon enough, the interaction of roots, water and limestone¹ soils will bring a palpable tension to the bottled wines. And, as we'll see below, Il Sasso's young owner Stefano Bellamoli focuses on preserving this tension. He tracks and knows the terracing here (soil, sun exposition, water retention, grape variety) like the back of his hand, because he has it in his notebook; he eschews wood (and its spice) in favour of unlined cement diamonds and ceramic eggs. All of this is done with the backdrop of an exacting viticulture that also happens to be certified organic. This is Valpolicella for minimalists.

Valpolicella Superiore: Cherry Pit Complexity

His next wine, the Valpolicella Superiore isn't, excuse the bad translation, 'superior' to the 'classico' – just different. The Superiore uses older vines from less exposed terraces, and is picked a bit later. Fermentation and élevage get changed from stainless steel in the 'Classico' to unlined diamond-shaped³ cement tanks in the 'Superiore.' Stefano explains further:

Hand-harvested...coferment of all the varieties...this wine uses the best – perfectly ripened – grapes of the vineyard that ripen later from the terraces with east facing expositions. Partial destemming and whole cluster fermentations. When completely dry, we let the must macerate for a month. No passito is added, as is custom in area, for easy muscle. Soft pressing and aging for at least 12 months in the cement diamonds. No filtration.

What results is the telltale Il Sasso tension, combined here with undulating layers of cherry and bitter cherry pit, including the punchy floral-acidic Marsca and the darkly colored sweet-and-sour Amarena. Vibrant and medium-bodied; a good match for those first days of autumn when you reach for a light sweater. With a few years in bottle, the wine continues to become more complex without losing precision. For lovers of slightly aged red wines (say 2 - 5 years), it's a must try.



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REGION: Veneto **GROWING AREA:** Valpolicella Classico

FARMING: certified organic (ICEA # E1967)

VINEYARD ALTITUDE: 300 m / 980 ft

SOILS: yellow limestone, seashell fossils

VARIETIES: 50% Corvina, 30% Corvinone, 20% Rondinella

VINE AGE: 13 years old **VINE TRAINING:** guyot

HARVEST DATE: end of September

YEASTS: native (spontaneous fermentation) **FERMENTATION & ÉLEVAGE:** manual harvest in small boxes and pied de cuvee to start the fermentation process using only native yeasts. All grapes are co-fermented as by the local tradition: 75% are destemmed grapes and 25% is whole cluster grape. Fermentation takes place in cement. The grapes from the stainless steel go in the cement tanks for 1 month of maceration. Élevage of 12 months in natural/ pure diamond shape cement container, and additional 6 months in the bottle. No filtration and gravity natural decant

SULPHUR: 33 mg/L total SO2 added at bottling **ALCOHOL:** 13% **ANNUAL PRODUCTION:** 800 cases