





RUFINA: DISCOVERING THE MOST VERTICAL SANGIOVESE IN THE TUSCAN CHIANTI UNIVERSE

Chianti is a composite mosaic, made of areas and subzones and of different disciplinary areas for quality and specificity. The denomination

Rufina is one of the parts of this land puzzle historically suited to the wine that in Sangiovese find the most capable grape to express territory.

The wines of Rufina are savoury, angular and with character, long-lived...

In one word? Vertical!

Words by Emiliano Gucci - Infographics by Alessandro Naldi

Rufina is the smallest and most autarchic of the Chianti sub-areas, its feet on the north-eastern borders of the city of Florence, its shoulders on the Tuscan-Romagna Apennines; about 850 hectares of vineyards up to 500 meters above sea level on limestone soils, rich in galestro and alberese, for a production of around 3.5 million bottles per year.

It is a suitable land, included in the famous Bando di Cosimo III Medici who in 1716 defined the boundaries and assumptions of the best wines, divided into the municipalities of Rufina, Dicomano, Londa, Pelago and Pontassieve, all united by a vibrant, fine and elegant Sangiovese grape. And by a handful of tenacious, proud producers, in love with their land and their work, guided by the light of stoic, historical figures

who, even in the most difficult years, never thought of giving up; let alone call into question the denomination with its specific features. That's what differentiates it in the Mare Magnum of Chianti, on the one hand the viaticum for the global market but on the other hand condemns the approval and price war. *«You live with Rufina or you die in Chianti», to quote Federico Giuntini at the head of Selvapiana, a pivotal winery for resilience and quality in Chianti Rufina, as well as long-time President of the relevant Consortium; «A strict and coercive vision of the territory, a strong thread linking vineyard and bottle—echoes Lamberto Frescobaldi from the nearby Castello di Nipozzano—Wine is made with grapes and grapes are made in the vineyard, this is the most revolutionary banality to find in the glass the qualities of our land, those that bring it out».*

CASTELLO DI NIPOZZANO

The **Frescobaldi** family has a thousand years of history interwoven with that of Tuscany, with legacies without borders: think of the poet Dino Frescobaldi who allowed his friend Dante Alighieri, in exile, to have back the first seven songs of the Divine Comedy; or the patronage of works such as the Santa Trinita bridge and the basilica of Santo Spirito in Florence. Six more wineries joined the wine trade in the XIV century with the Castiglioni estate, in Montespertoli. Over time composing the mosaic that shows today's Tuscan viticulture, expressing loyalty to the territories and high quality in the importance of numbers, elements which earned the label the title of Cellar of the Year by Vini d'Italia 2020. Reaching the **Castello di Nipozzano**, at the time still

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"without water wells", for the marriage of Angelo Frescobaldi and Leonia, sister of Vittorio Albizi, who from France had imported innovations and grape varieties like cabernet sauvignon, verdot and various pinot, with the noir that is still the strength of the nearby Tenuta di Pomino. Every season is good for reaching Nipozzano, all the more so today that the splendid 17th-century villa, located below the castle of the Mille, is surrounded by undulating vineyards manicured as gardens, and stylized cypress trees that tug at the heart.

«The wine of this area has always been considered valuable – says **Lamberto Frescobaldi**, who carries on the excellent work of his father Vittorio and uncles Ferdinando and Leonardo – however, a strong change occurred with the economic boom of the post-WWII

period, when the countryside was depopulated and the older peasants, who had landed in the city, demanded their good wine. This spawned a great impulse to bottle, and city retailers». Lamberto keeps the wine at the centre of his thoughts, of everyday life, of his continuous research: «The wine does not allow distractions, he wants to be the protagonist». When necessary, he's severe with himself and with history, in general and the history of his family: «It's clear that we got a little lost, between the 60s and the 90s, chasing demands and losing quality, with Sangiovese becoming the most cultivated variety in Italy in the noose of prices that were to remain low». But now the bar is set: «In recent decades we were able to invest heavily in excellence, and I speak of the human factor, of skills and abilities that expressed our best selves in our group. The results

prove it.» The iconic wine is Nipozzano, a classic Chianti Rufina with an excellent quality/price ratio, from which Nipozzano Vecchie Viti (Tre Bicchieri score for the Riserva 2016) is born, extremely elegant and balanced, «but also exuberant, vigorous, from a historic surviving vineyard to the replanting, that since 1990 has affected all the farm holdings». The legendary Montesodi, which ironically the Florentines had renamed "mountain of money", is instead the result of a vineyard around Casa Sodi and since 1974, in unsuspecting times, brought the pure Sangiovese di Rufina in the bottle: «Apparently more shy and introvert but in reality betraying great character and strength: in longevity it expresses itself as complex and enveloping, profound». A prototype of the most identifying Rufina which we'll talk about again soon. ►

1. The estate of the

Castello di Nipozzano of Frescobaldi, historic Tuscan wine family with over a thousand years of history behind it

In the opening, the ancient wine maturation room in the Selvapiana winery, in the municipality of Rufina

FOCUS ON THE EXPRESSIVE PARTICULARITIES OF THE TERROIR



Chianti Rufina, also here in Tuscany, has always been seen a bit like the younger cousin of the most "prestigious" Chianti Classico, and as a sort of older brother of Chiantis. The labels that this denomination offers, however, despite some excellent examples (such as Frascole and Selvapiana, Colognole and Castello del Trebbio with their Riserva, or like the remarkable old vintages of Montesodi di Frescobaldi), struggle to find space in both local and national wine lists. When I try to ask myself why this is, the answer I give myself is the following: beyond the organoleptic sensations – I think of wild and/or more marked balsamic tones – which differentiate the wines from other Chianti neighbours. I am under the impression that the same "suffix" Chianti doesn't benefit the Rufina wines to mark specificity, to really stand out from its "relatives". And this creates confusion both in retailers (wine bars and restaurants) and in consumers.

Probably, if I also have to try to find a territorial marketing strategy for Rufina, perhaps greater awareness by the part of some producers that we should invest more on the selection of vines and on the definition of production methods able to better express the territorial specificity of the area. And then – thinking also of the great teamwork that the winemakers express, for example, in Radda – maybe also the producers of Rufina should join forces in a more cohesive and decisive way so as to make the denomination Rufina emerge more strongly.

– **Walter Meccia**, head sommelier at Four Seasons in Florence

VINI D'ITALIA 2020
GUIDE:
THE 7 BEST
CHIANTI RUFINA



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA NIPOZZANO**
VECCHIE VITI Ris. '16 - FRESCOBALDI

FLORENCE - SOLD AT 23,50 EURO

IT HAS AN INTRIGUING AROMATIC SPECTRUM, WHERE NOTES OF SOIL AND LEATHER BLEND WITH FRESH NUANCES OF MEDITERRANEAN SCRUB AND CHERRY; THE PALATE IS FINE, ELEGANT, WELL BALANCED WITH A LONG AND FULL FINISH.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA Ris. '16 - FRASCOLE** - DICOMANO (FI)

FRASCOLE.IT - SOLD AT 15 EURO

CHIANTI RUFINA RISERVA '16 IS INVITING, MINERAL, HAS BODY AND BALANCE, BEAUTIFUL PERSISTENCE. RUFINA '17 BY FRASCOLE (DUE BICCHIERI SCORE) IS ALSO GOOD: BOASTS VEGETAL AND CHERRY TONES ON THE NOSE, THEN A BROAD, HARMONIOUS STRUCTURE OF SUBSTANCE.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA Ris. '15 - IL BALZO**

RUFINA (FI) - ILBALZO.IT - SOLD AT 17 EURO

WINE WITH ELEGANT NOTES OF WILD FLOWERS AND LIVE FRUIT, CHERRY THAT COMBINES WITH FRESH NOTES OF MEDITERRANEAN SCRUB. ON THE PALATE IT IS FLUID BUT WITH EVIDENT ACIDITY, INTEGRATED INTO THE BODY, WITH A PROLONGED FINISH.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA TEGOLAIA Ris. '16**

- TRAVIGNOLI - PELAGO (FI) - TRAVIGNOLI.COM

SOLD AT 14.50 EURO

A RISERVA WITH TERTIARY NOTES OF TOBACCO AND LEATHER WHICH THEN OPEN ON TONES OF RIPE CHERRY AND HINTS OF CLOVE. WELL DEFINED OPENING IN THE MOUTH, WHERE IT IS SOLID AND STRUCTURED; IT HAS WELL-ARTICULATED TANNINS, THE FINISH IS A CRESCENDO.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA VIGN.**

BUCERCHIALE Ris. '16 - SELVAPIANA

RUFINA (FI) - SELVAPIANA.IT - SOLD AT

20.20 EURO

COMPLEX BOUQUET, NOTES OF FUR AND LEATHER, THEN BITTER HINTS, FOLLOWED BY CLEAR TONES OF PLUM. IN THE MOUTH IT BOASTS PUSH, BEAUTIFUL ACID VERVE, INTEGRATED TANNINS AND A FULL FINISH. GREAT WINE.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA VIGN. QUONA**

Ris. '16 - I VERONI - PONTASSIEVE (FI)

IVERONI.IT - SOLD AT 25.00 EURO

THE WINE HAS A RIPE BOUQUET OF WILD BERRY JAM, THEN LIGHT SPICY NOTES, THEN HINTS OF AROMATIC HERBS. THE TASTE IS ENVELOPING, WITH CRUNCHY TANNINS, EXCELLENT DRINK AND A SAVOURY AND LONG FINISH.



❖ **CHIANTI RUFINA VILLA BOSSI Ris. '16 - GONDI-TENUTA BOSSI**

PONTASSIEVE (FI) - TENUATABOSS.COM

SOLD AT 16.80 EURO

APPLAUSE FOR ITS FRESH AND CLEAR BOUQUET, WITH CHERRY AND BLUEBERRY TONES WITH BALSAMIC NOTES; THE BODY IS SOLID BUT NOT IMPOSING, WITH FINE AND WELL INTEGRATED TANNINS. THE FINISH IS LONG AND TASTY.

STORIES

THE MEDIEVAL ROOTS OF SELVAPIANA

We move away a little to visit the other historical winery par excellence, in the town of the municipality of Rufina whose name it bears, **Selvapiana**, born in the Middle Ages as a watchtower before being transformed into a villa. The Florentine banker Michele Giuntini bought it in 1826, his descendant Francesco Giuntini then managed the estate since 1950, hiring Franco Masseti, farmer whom he shared a fraternal relationship, and adopting his children Silvia and Federico as worthy heirs to continue his work..

«Francesco is a luminary and has been an example for everyone – recalls **Federico Giuntini** – It's unimaginable how dramatic the agricultural crisis hit in the 1960s, the transition between sharecropping and direct management was difficult. It's not at all obvious that from bulk to bottled wine, from quanti-

2. A view of the Selvapiana vineyards, bordered by woods and scrub
3. The estate I Veroni of Lorenzo Mariani, in Pontassieve
4. The rows flanked by olive trees on the Frascole estate of Enrico Lippi and Elisa Santoni in Dicomano, towards Mugello: the winery takes its name from the hill on which it stands
5. The Lavacco Winery

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new cru now emerged from the Erchi estate, in the municipality of Pontassieve, which immediately set the high benchmark of the area, juicy and solemn already in the first 2016 version; «It will be part of the *Vigneto Unico* project, although perhaps this will not be the name, with the aim that each winery has its own Sangiovese as a testimony to Rufina's uniqueness».

I VERONI

Always in Pontassieve, we meet another person with vital enthusiasm, clear ideas in photographing the potential of the denomination but above all the importance of those who have held out in difficult times, including characters already mentioned above. «Nowadays it's difficult to understand what it meant to make quality viticulture here a few decades ago – says **Lorenzo Mariani** today head of **I Veroni** – The territory has the effigy of Chianti but not the strength of the Classico, nor does it have the same level of landscape nor marketing potential. It comes from years of bulk wine, of bottlers, downward pricing policies, and moreover it appears that not even the Florentines, at a stone's throw from here, come here too willingly». Inexplicable given the beauty of certain places. «For those belonging to my generation, who found themselves an agricultural property to abandon or relaunch, the encouragement of Vittorio Frescobaldi or Francesco Giuntini who urged us to stay put, bring value back to our countryside and our wine, was therefore crucial» recalls Lorenzo.

Lorenzo studied law, and still lives in Florence; but following the beacon of the great winemakers of Rufina he threw himself into the adventure of I Veroni «with all the vigour and presumption of the young, making mistakes but always starting over again, growing up, in a continuous struggle for change», including his mentality. "I've never seen a ►

ty to quality». Francesco was among the first to believe in a "wine of Rufina" that distanced itself from Chianti, Federico carries on the battle. «After leaving high school I was induced to enroll in Agriculture university, but it only lasted a year and a half: beautiful, a sort of sabbatical year that also coincided with community service, but then my life was always been here», among organically managed vineyards that still bear the names of the sharecropping era, and cellars among the oldest and most fascinating of Rufina, alongside the new airy structure inaugurated with the 2005 vintage.

«1978 marked the encounter between Francesco and winemaker Franco Bernabei, who in addition to technical knowledge possessed innate talent for Sangiovese. And a year later Luigi Veronelli's push contributed to the birth of the *Bucurchiale*». A "flagship wine" and among

the first single variety to force the disciplinary of Chianti Rufina: from a 12-hectare parcel that best expresses the characteristics of the area.

«Limiting errors, major cleaning for decanting and careful passages, but it's in the vineyard that the bulk of the work is carried out, and where the wine acquires its identity»: this is the motto of the work in the cellar. And in this perspective should the advice of Andrea Beconcini be mentioned. «We do not believe that Rufina should emerge because we are better or more exclusive than others – says Federico – we rather think Sangiovese speaks for itself. Here, it finds an elegant expression, combined with a drinkability that's facilitated by non-aggressive tannins and good acidity; in addition to a surprising longevity, the result of suitable terrains and an ideal microclimate, with an important temperature range».

From the 58 hectares of vineyards, a

10 TABLES CHOSEN BY WINEMAKERS

1 RISTORANTE DA SERGIO

DICOMANO (FI) - VIA MONTALORO, 1
055838075 - RISTORANTEDASERGIO.IT
«TYPICAL TUSCAN, ACTUALLY FROM MUGELLO,
WARM AND FAMILIAR, ALWAYS SERVING
HOMEMADE PASTA».

2 TRATTORIA BAR BIBO

FIRENZUOLA (FI) LOC. TRAVERSA
VIA TRAVERSA, 454 - 055815231
@TRATTORIABARBIBO
«LARGE SELECTION OF LOCAL WINES AND MEAT,
MOSTLY GRILLED STEAKS».

3 LOCANDA L'ANTICA PORTA DI LEVANTE

VICCHIO (FI) - P.ZZA VITTORIO VENETO, 4
055844050 - ANTICAPORTADILEVANTE.IT
«MODERN, WELCOMING, THE MENU CHANGES
EVERY MONTH, REINTERPRETS TRADITION AND
SOURCING EXCELLENT PRODUCTS».

4 TOSCANI DA SEMPRE

PONTASSIEVE (FI) - VIA FRATELLI MONZECCHI,
13 - 0558392952 - TOSCANIDASEMPRE.IT
«RESTAURANT WITH STEFANO FRASSINETI'S
CUISINE, HOMEMADE PASTA FOLLOWED LOCAL
SPECIALTIES, AND ALWAYS RUFINA WINES ON THE
MENU».

5 LA BOTTEGA A ROSANO

RIGNANO SULL'ARNO (FI)
VIA PRIMO MAGGIO, 10 - 0558303013
BOTTEGAAROSANO.IT
«AN OLD-FASHIONED FOOD SHOP WITH
RESTAURANT. AS FAR AS THE WINES ONE COULD
SAY: THIS IS THE RUFINA WINE SHOP».

6 ARTEMIDE

PONTASSIEVE (FI) - FRAZ. MOLINO DEL PIANO
VIA DI GALIGA, 21 - 0558317240
@ARTEMIDERISTO
«VERY TUSCAN WITH LOTS OF WILD GAME,
INTERESTING WINE CELLAR FEATURING BEYOND
LOCAL».

7 AGRITURISMO RISTORANTE PODERE BELVEDERE

PONTASSIEVE - VIA SAN PIERO A STRADA, 23 -
3338693448 - PODEREBELVEDERETUSCANY.IT
«THE INSPIRATION OF CHEF EDOARDO TILLI FOR
AN ORIGINAL GOURMET CHOICE IN THE HEART OF
CHIANTI RUFINA».

8 PASSAGUAI

BORGO SAN LORENZO (FI)
P.ZZA G. GARIBALDI, 2 - 0558402137
PASSAGUAIBORGO.IT
«NEWISH SHOP WITH KITCHEN THAT ALSO SERVES
DELICIOUS APPETIZERS, CROSTINI, CHEESE AND
CHARCUTERIE BOARDS, AND EXCELLENT PASTA
DISHS, WITH LOCAL WINES».

9 OSTERIA VINANDRO

FIESOLE (FI) - P.ZZA MINO DA FIESOLE, 33
05559121 - @OSTERIAVINANDROFIESOLE
«QUIET, SIMPLE AND DELIGHTFUL, NOT TOURISTY
YET IN THE MAIN SQUARE IN FIESOLE. ON THE
MENU, ALWAYS BOILED MEATS AND LAMPREDOTTO
OFFAL».

10 VECCHIA OSTERIA DEL NACCHERO

FIRENZE - PIAZZA GAVINANA, 3R -
0556587058 - OSTERIADELNACCHERO.IT
«THE MAIN DISH IS THE "PRISONER'S SKILLET":
SERVED IN AN EARTHENWARE COCOTTE, IT'S A
MIXTURE OF TRIPE, LAMPREDOTTO AND BROCCOLI
WITH A SPICY PEPPER SAUCE»

STORIES



farmer make money," his parents would say to him, and his mother who sometimes perceives this farmhouse with its olive trees and its 20 hectares of vines as a nuisance, rather than a resource.

«It's been hard, and if the results are here it's because I owe a lot to my kids, to my team», a concept that is obviously very close to his heart: the first quote is for Paola De Blasi, production manager, and for Luca Innocenti who is in charge of the commercial aspect. «The mediation between their tasks, between those who produce and those who sell, is the synthesis of the wine that we can bring in the bottle, neither presumptuous nor pleasing, which, in parallel with the strengthening of the brand, can become even more daring and identifying».

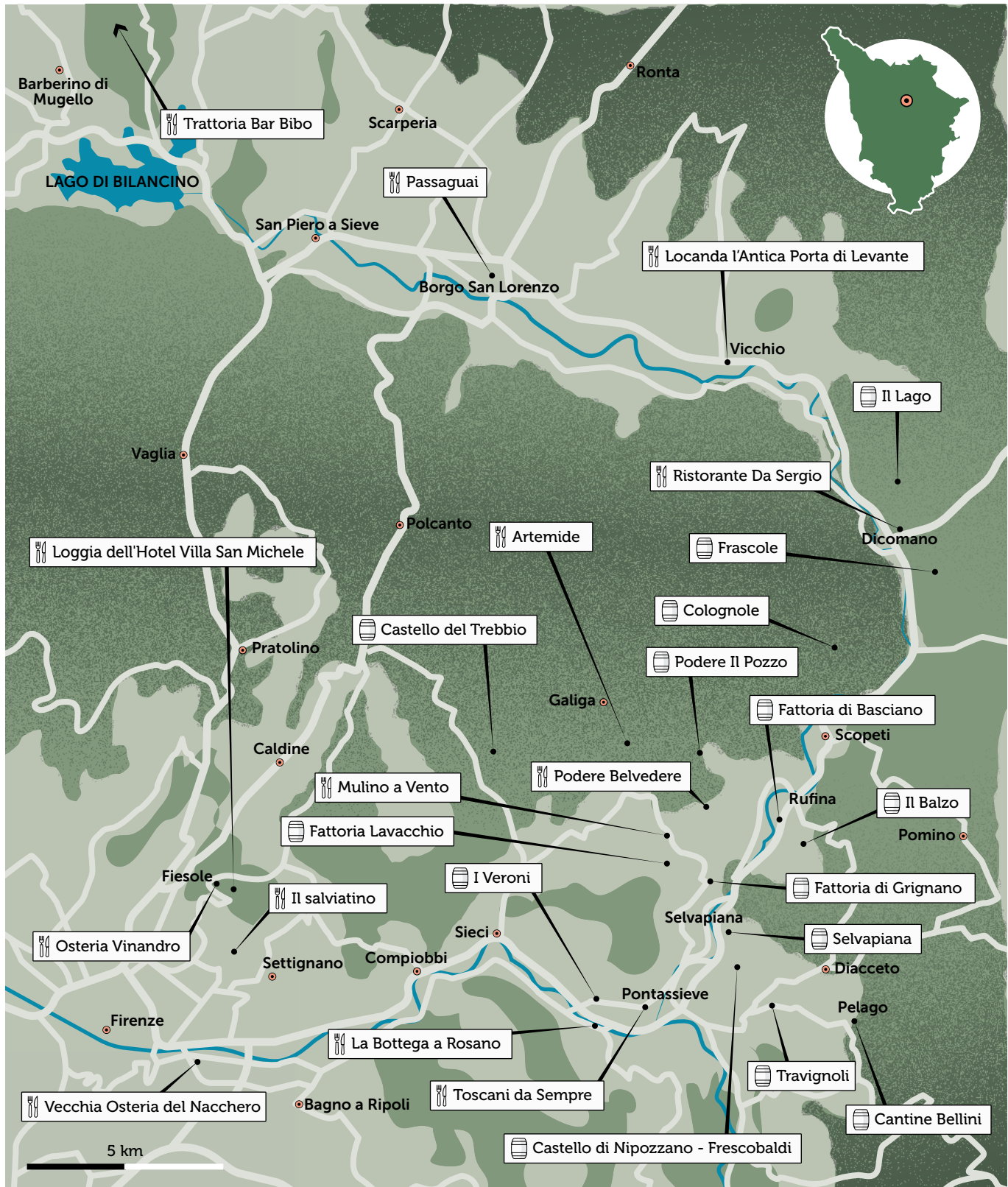
The transition to organic farming was "natural, shared", certified in 2013, the rooms smell of olden days (the first fermentation tanks were built by the noble Gatteschi family at the end of the 16th century) in a meticulously

cared for approach that instead tastes modern. The tradition is all contained in the Vin Santo Occhio di Pernice, bewitching from the first nose to the last drop, while the Veroni style is already strong in the Rufina Vigneto i Domi, classic and territorial, a typical blend of Chianti with colorino and canaiolo alongside the Sangiovese, which is the only protagonist in the Riserva Vigneto Quona. Wines that are appreciated immediately but improve over time: «Another peculiarity that unites Rufina. It's thanks to certain talents that we can team up and give a voice to our land, on our behalf, moreover it's unthinkable that the policy useful to a huge community like Chianti can represent a small and particular reality like this one».

FRASCOLE

After climbing up towards the Apennine ridge, towards Mugello, we meet one of the most eclectic and significant wineries of the area, built on the ►

WINE CELLARS AND RESTAURANTS CLOSE TO FLORENCE



6 LOCAL DISHES FOR 6 LABELS



Alessandro Corradossi, host and mastermind of Osteria Vinandro in Fiesole, offers pairings of six traditional Tuscan dishes with six labels of fine Rufina, including Vinsanto.

1

Legume soup
Chianti Rufina '17
Fattoria Selvapiana

2

Ribollita
Chianti Rufina '17
Podere Il Pozzo

3

Thyme scented rack of lamb
Chianti Rufina Ris. '13
Frascole

4

Fiorentina steak
Chianti Rufina Vigna Quona
Ris. '15
I Veroni

5

Florentine style tripe
Chianti Rufina i Domi 2016
I Veroni

6

Cantucci di Prato
Vinsanto del Chianti Rufina '01
Frascole

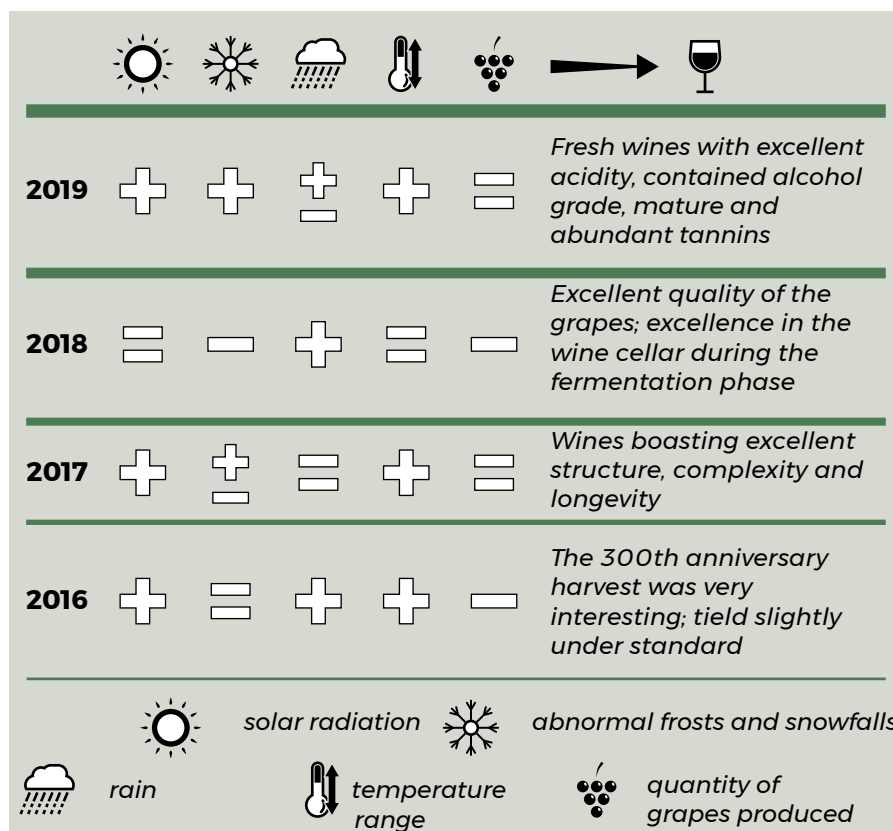
Frascole hill, from which it takes its name, located above the municipality of Dicomano. A cluster of medieval dwellings – where the Etruscans lived as well as the Romans – around which splendid olive groves and about 16 hectares of vineyards unfold, facing south west and divided into parcels some above 400 meter elevation.

«We were looking for a place to live together and to work on something that was our own. We immediately felt that Frascole was the right place. Here you feel the presence of the genius loci, in the respect of which to act, without distorting nature and things but rather taking advantage of the experiences of those who have already walked on and cultivated these lands». **Enrico Lippi and Elisa Santoni** found themselves – about thirty years ago, after collaborating with the family estate and their

commitment of fruit farming – united in starting the adventure of Frascole, now also a agriturismo farm. «We married each other as a couple but ideally also with our oenologist Federico Staderini, who was among the first to believe in the potential of the area». A collaboration that has never been interrupted, even if the meetings are less frequent now. There is, unwavering, his experience, his hand, even in the new path taken with Pinot Noir.

«But here there were already all the typical varieties of the area – say Elisa and Enrico – excellent clones of Sangiovese and a nice selection of Colorino. Our idea was not to make drastic changes, but to get what these grapes could offer here, in this land. To make a Rufina, even before a Chianti», and the theme of the native peculiarities is destined to always come back.

COMPARING THE LAST 4 HARVESTS





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However the era of jam-packed, concentrated and muscular wines came, for which the fine, elegant, almost ethereal Sangiovese of Frascole struggled to establish itself. «Yet we never forced the times, the nature, if anything we tried to make up for the mistakes,» says Elisa, while Enrico remembers that «coming back from the early Vinitaly events were anxietytic, impossible to hide».

Then the wind changed, while fortunately the breath of the north and the cool nights guaranteed by Monte Falterona, behind it, have never been missing, «it's not surprising that this was a sacred mountain already for the Etruscans». Diverse vintages and fermentations, also for the variety of the land, maximum attention in the cellar «where we fight given the small spaces». This is the first company in the area to work organically with certification

since 1999 and sensitivity for the social aspect, as in varied and somewhat bizarre humanity of Frascole. «It's natural for us to collaborate with those we meet along the way and have a desire or need to work with us».

Elisa's brother, Carlo Santoni, is also involved in the venture. After pausing his architect career was beguiled by the lure of the countryside and returned to farming.

In the excellent range of wines we find InAlbis, a white made from Trebbiano grapes also in the macerated version, Limine, pure merlot; and from 2016 the aforementioned Pinot noir. And we find the most vertical and mineral Rufina in the Frascole DOCG and in the Riserva, balanced and persistent, which doesn't fear comparison with time and with its Tuscan counterparts.

THE MOST INTERESTING REALITIES

The message is clear: if Rufina can emerge at higher levels, it will do so by investing in its typical features, starting from the excellent results obtained by the wineries that have invested so much, have grown and are growing in recent years. In addition to those investigated, we should at least talk about Castello del Trebbio, Colognole, Fattoria Lavacchio, Travignoli, il Balzo, Cantine Bellini, Fattoria di Basciano, Fattoria di Grignano, Lago. Encouraging team potential and widespread attention to the environment also emerge from the wealth of words collected. As well as the desire to affirm an identity in spite of the Chianti universe, perhaps too generic, now that the market also seems to have understood the importance of unrepeatability and recognizability of each individual territory. ❖