



SCARBOLO

Summer solstice 2024: It's raining, man!

Drafting the first words of this episode, I typed this 🙄 emoji. A bitter smirk appeared as I thought about how “casually” it reflected the spirit of us Friulian winegrowers this past Spring. Patience and a sense of acceptance.

It's 9pm on Monday, June 10th and the trip back home, driving through the fields surrounding Lauzacco, recalls more of an imaginary trip through the rice fields surrounding Vercelli, with ample and brownish marshes on the horizon. The sky, akin to missile batteries, rumbles all round, and the lightnings, betraying dusk, reveals this majestic example of Mother Nature's voluptuousness. The cat has suddenly appeared from around the corner – suspiciously dry – and we can finally call it a day.

Yesterday we've had 34 mm of rain and we count more than 350 since the season's beginning. I would like to pause on the magnitude of this number for a second. This 2024, Friuli, a historical contender to the throne of Europe's wettest region, was poured roughly double the seasonal rainfall average of the past 30 years. With a dry first month of Spring, showers concentrated on the busiest month in the vineyards. Thankfully, while episodes like the one mentioned above (often less dramatic) have been the *fil rouge* of the season now coming to an end, we were spared from hail and frosts. Nevertheless, we can't but think back to 2023's wretched conditions.

This year, though, we came ready. I can safely say that Valter's timing of anti-downy mildew treatments was flawless. The (alas) 11 ministrations (to this day), three of which with sweet orange essential oil to limit the use of copper, gifted us with damage-free leaves and clusters. This being said, we worked through the rest of the operations with an unpleasant sense of urgency and pressure. Although never meaningfully late, we were always in pursuit, trying to keep up with the tight vegetative growth. I do admit that, with fewer vineyards to tend to, our slower pace was also due to the fussiness I felt we could operate with, especially the green pruning, but I am proud to say that the quality of the work was pristine like never before.

As you might recall, our soils, clayey, flat, and with few stones, are prone to compaction and stagnation. This year more than ever, cover crops showed their golden touch: despite a partial failure of the turf's germination (again, blame the weather), essences that succeeded were a key instrument in subtracting what would have otherwise been excess water to the vines and in aiding water filtration to the subsoil (with love, taproots). Folding without chopping meant a longer stem life, which could in return grow and absorb even more water. Hence, no rice fields at Scarbolo, (ahem, besides a small southern portion of the Viotto vineyard where, in the coming weeks, we will dig a canal that will end up supplying the third and upcoming pond of the estate). And how can we forget the other perks, such as:



1. the tremendous root competition generating in the topsoil, forcing vines to push their own deeper in the ground (“arming” themselves for drier periods).
2. its mulching effect when folded and chopped, safeguarding humidity underground.
3. the stable meadows risen from last year’s seeds, now a sanctuary for pollinators [a digression: another fatal consequence of this year’s rains was the poor harvest for the abovementioned insects: to get a sense, pollen runoff resulted in an average of 1,5kg of honey per hive, compared to an historical average of 25kg. The preservation of these areas now that days are finally drier and warmer (I am writing this paragraph on June 19th) is proving to be a manna for bees and other insects].

Put all together, and it’s easy to understand the reason why we firmly believe in leveraging the instruments Nature gifts us with: as simple to prepare as they are complex and holistic in their results.

The immense build-up of water supplies in the past weeks, combined with these warmer and sunnier days, has put a boost to the vines (whose vegetative growth is 10 days ahead of last year). With fruit setting, water now in the soil is beginning to find its way on to the berries, providing the raw good for meaningful potential acids. These will have to be preserved in case of upcoming droughts, and hence the ball is now on our court (with vegetative management). No matter what, the starting point is a good one.

Before we wrap this up, I would like to share some thoughts that have been on my mind for quite some time but only sprouted during Spring pruning. Although the accuracy of this work was positive, with healthy phytosanitary effects (reduced canopy bundling), the strictness with which we worked resulted in an even greater vegetative development (more water to fewer shoots). The result, then, cannot be considered a win-win. On the contrary, as time goes by I am more and more convinced that in agronomy, and in life in general, cases with net positive results are often merely a pipe dream. Although polarizations and absolutes seem to be more and more often a simplifying and salvific shelter, I instead believe that life is more of a net zero sum game, in which every perceived “victory” is counterbalanced by a fatidic counterweight. Now, this is obviously not an absolute, but, with an often-endless number of variables to weigh, finding simple, sharp-clean solutions to the choices made, especially the more complex ones, is unrealistic. And, looking at the mirror, this might be precisely when the artistic side of a winegrower unfolds: scenarios are infinite, every vintage, in every terroir, and what one considers “right” remains relative. The character of a product tended to, from beginning to end, by one person can’t but reflect at best the character of said person, their vision of the world, their values, and their imperfections too (which I believe to be one of the pivotal variables defining the uniqueness of each one of us). It’s not rare that, without hesitation, I make some choices following my “heart”, conscious that, in tough situations, relying on one’s own anchors (values, ideas, beliefs) gives strength and warms the heart. Let’s bring this to reality with an example: there is no single research (statistically relevant and peer reviewed) cementing the superiority of canopy folding over trimming (while the



higher costs of the former are indeed undeniable). Yet, in doubt (and we are still running trials, but the wild vintage climate variations make the results still poorly reliable for now), and with some theories to support, what aids me in standing my ground with the choice of folding is the belief that Nature does not need human's obsessiveness for control to sustain itself in harmony. Just as the cover crops demonstrate. All may be in balance. This cornerstone, however naïf, reflects my person and is distilled in the grapes I grow for the wines we make, hence fully mirroring who we are.

Talk to you again in September, with updates on the development of the grapes and the first, exciting harvest notes.

"A man who works with his hands is a laborer; a man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman; but a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist."

Louis Nizer

Mandi,

Mattia, Lara, Valter, Maria Grazia, Bujar, Shkelzen, Ziri, Shazan, e Annalisa