

On the island of Mazzorbo, in front of the celebrated floating city, a truly special wine is produced at Tenuta Venissa. Here, traditions live anew, thanks to a family of winemakers

by *Alessandra Piubello*

Above, the special bottle used for Venissa: the label is a leaf of pure gold with a different shape every year, engraved and applied by hand. The precious numbered bottles are tempered in the kilns of Moretti glass makers in Murano. An exclusive and rare wine, it is sold en primeur. Adjoining page, Mazzorbo, one of the islands of Venice, immersed in the tranquility of the lagoon.

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The gold of Venice is in the glass

Paolo Spagnoli

Nevio Poz

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Dorona messengers with slender legs and long pink necks, flamingos, which in mystical symbology indicate the passage from darkness to light, have returned to the Venice Lagoon to plunge us into the rarefied dimension of dreams. Because skimming over the waters of the lagoon, dodging sandbanks and breathing the salty air immersed in silence, is pure magic. A prelude to the encounter with an enchanted place beyond time. Our destination is the island of Mazzorbo, the Venissa estate. The last walled vineyard in the northern lagoon. Crossing the threshold of this microcosm tunes you to spiritual and ancestral wavelengths. It is no coincidence that it once resounded with the chants and prayers of Benedictines in the monastery and the faithful in the eleventh-century church that was later destroyed, as testified by the thirteenth-century bell tower. In its shade there is a vineyard, kitchen gardens, and some fruit trees surrounded by medieval walls, rebuilt in the 1700s. A hectare of vines bearing golden grapes, Uva d'Oro; otherwise known as Dorona, the favourite of the Venetian doges. It has returned to splendour, despite having risked being forgotten forever.

We hear its story from Gianluca Bisol, general manager of the winery Bisol Desiderio e figli in Valdobbiadene, with centuries of winemaking tradition in prosecco and the prestigious Cartizze. "By chance, I found a specimen twelve years ago in a garden in Torcello, the island in front of Mazzorbo and, my curiosity piqued, I began researching this native variety, which was all but extinct", recounts Gianluca, "then I recovered some individuals from ancient lagoon vines that had miraculously remained alive through the centuries. I had some micro-vinifications performed: a surprise. We planted the first vines in 2004 and completed the estate three years later.



Dorona, the Doges' favourite grape

With the 2010 harvest, under the supervision of Desiderio, my brother, Bisol oenologist and expert on white wine, and the famous winemaker Roberto Cipresso, an exceptional expert on red, we created Oro Liquido di Venezia." It seems that this variety, probably related to Greco, Garganega and Grecanico, arrived here in the wake of commercial exchanges with Constantinople. Caressed by the wind from the Istria coast, the vineyard flourishes in the distinctive lagoon environment, garnering unique characteristics from it. Phylloxera has never reached here and there are no parasites. Over time, from being an ecotype, Dorona has become a variety, resistant to the salty soils. It grows in sandy earth, rich in silt and clay, fertilized only with earthworm humus, and according to the latest research carried out, it has extraordinary vitality. Seeing it submerged by the high water in winter is an unparalleled spectacle. Venissa was the only name that could be given to this creation of ancient history: it refers to a quotation of the poet

from the hills of Treviso, the last bard of Venice, Andrea Zanzotto, friend of the Bisols, "Venissia, Venissa, Venussia".

The Bisols pay homage to three legends of the Serenissima: wine, gold and glass. The label is a costly leaf of pure gold, with a different shape every year, chiselled by the current descendent of the ancient Berta Battiloro family and then applied by hand. The valuable numbered bottles are annealed in the furnaces of the historic glassmaker Carlo Moretti in Murano. Exclusive and rare wine for collecting, sold to enthusiasts the world over in en primeur. Some gustatory-olfactory snapshots: honey, golden delicious apples and spices; savoury, salty and iodized; structured, mellow and round. Admiring the warm, golden notes of this nectar in the glass, gliding and gurgling and subdued by a masterpiece of craftsmanship, one can only toast the intuition of Gianluca Bisol, a son of the soil of Venice and eager to valorize his origins. Venissa instituting itself in an authentic project to

Above, the dining hall: the renovation works respected the lagoon's construction techniques, and the decor is both period and modern. Top of page, from left, engraving the special bottle and the golden hue of Venissa wine. Adjoining page, Bisol Cartizze, one of the finest crus among the Valdobbiadene DOCG Superiore Proseccos: the glass bears the Venissa logo, an old pen.



Hospitality and dining par excellence

re-evaluate the territory, to safeguard the landscape, and reclaim the environment and the social and agri-food traditions. In this heavenly hortus conclusus, cultivate their kitchen gardens (“castraure” are particularly esteemed; these are the first fruits of the artichoke plant, as well as wild garlic, herbs, and aubergines). Of the two hectares dotted with different varieties of fruit trees, one section is given over to the fish market, with the classic lagoon fish (mullet, eels and moeche; that is, soft-shell crabs). The philosophical concept envisages that the beauties of this enchanted corner of the world be enjoyed and shared: entrance is free, children come to visit and tend a part of the garden, guided by the elders of the place (having said that, the property is public, conceded to the Bisols until 2026). To make a stay in Venissa memorable, some other important details must be in place: firstly, the territorial and seasonal cuisine of Antonia Klugmann, authentic and visceral, based on natural ingredients and research into accom-

plished balance in tastes, created using the classic products of the estate. Booking one of the six brightly coloured rooms in the hostel, with a view over the vines, the lagoon and Burano, is another way of contributing towards making the days at Mazzorbo unique. And to think that Mazzorbo, of old known as Maiurbium (from Magna urbs, chief town) is a mere half hour from Venice by water bus. But we have not finished relating the other opportunities that make the voyage so special: the cultural and tourist heritage of the jewel of the lagoon. It is a trip down memory lane into the local civilization. Native Venice, in fact, first emerged in this archipelago of nature, colours, flavours and art. Islands that live again through works by George Sand, Henry James and Ernest Hemingway. Mazzorbo reached its greatest splendour in the 10th century and was then eclipsed by the great Venice, becoming a rustic island destined to farming activities but also a resort for upper class Venetians. Immersed in the tranquillity of

the lagoon, it offers a solitary and discreet landscape. Whereas the vegetation is lush and untamed on nearby Mazzorbetto, which can only be reached by boat, Mazzorbo has a few simple coloured houses and the fourteenth-century convent church of Santa Caterina (which houses the oldest bell in the lagoon), one of the final remains of the ancient Maiurbium full of monasteries, churches and aristocratic villas. Burano, a lively island of fishermen, with boats moored along shores and canals, preserves its historical and cultural identity intact. The town is a veritable explosion of colours: all the walls, laneways and buildings are brightly painted in various hues. Not far away lies Torcello. The impression of being on a ghost island makes way for the awareness of being in a surreal place as we arrive at the grassy churchyard surrounded by the red bricks of the basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, the oldest in the lagoon, flanked by its baptistery, the martyrium of Santa Fosca, the bell tower and the Palaces of the Council and the Archive.

The contrast between the sophisticated magnificence of the Byzantine architecture and the slowly and constantly advancing nature accentuates even more the sensation of wandering through an island-museum, both an icon and the custodian of its ancient splendour. Enchanting marbles and Byzantine mosaics adorn the floors and walls of the interior of the basilica; it is thrilling to venture into the uncultivated backwaters, where you stroll almost entirely on paved quays, before ascending the bell tower: the ideal place from which to take in the landscape of the lagoon in all its fascinating complexity. 🍷

Venissa Ristorante Ostello

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Top, clockwise from right, Gianluca Bisol, general manager of the family business, commissioned the project to renovate Tenuta Venissa; Burano Room in the Ostello: the rooms are all different and are named after the islands of the Venice Northern Lagoon Park; the exterior of the restaurant. Adjoining page, bunches of Dorona grapes on a canal in Burano, one of the islands of Venice.

