

“THIS IS WINE!”

ALEŠ KRISTANČIČ - THE WINE MAKER

by Gregor Šket

photography Bor Dobrin, arhiv Movia

I could proclaim him an entrepreneur, winemaker ... But he calls himself a farmer, being fully aware of all the negative connotations of the word. But to be a farmer like him is to be a huge heap of positive attitude, simple logic, common sense, cordiality, love for the soil and toil, toil, toil ... One of the first things one notices on Aleš are his robust hands. You think about how many grapes these fingers have caressed already. But these strong hands only exert their true meaning when he opens his mouth. When he starts talking about wine, his face emits a very special radiance. He could talk about wine to infinity and beyond. A mix of rural common sense, knowledge and skills spontaneously creates thoughts we could easily label as poetry.

This was also noticed by Italian caterers, who drove to the village of Cegla in the Goriška Brda region from the south of Italy. Even Alberto di Girolamo, the legendary sommelier, who also catered for Queen Elizabeth of England and Winston Churchill, asked him if he was an actor. His performance is literally a stage show. But he is not an actor; this is what he is like.

Aleš Kristančič is a natural guy. He does not act, does not pretend. He does his job with passion and commitment. His self-confidence is built on genuine foundations. If you are good at what you do there is nothing wrong in being aware of that. And he is. That he is playing in the top league was told to him by others as well. The most distinguished wine experts placed him amongst the dozen of the world's top wine creators. His wines are adored by the most prestigious chefs on the planet, including Lidia Bastianich, Alain Ducasse and Gaston Blumenthal. The Wine & Spirits magazine proclaimed Movia a winery of the year in 2010. He keeps searching and looking for new solutions. The results of his achievements include the Lunar and Puro wines. The first is produced completely naturally, employing the moon and its cycles. And Puro is a sparkling wine turned upside down. You have to open it with a special opener so that the residue empties into water.

When Aleš Kristančič starts on the topic of wine, his eyes literally come to light. "Wine's a very complex thing. At the same time it's essentially a very simple and sociable thing. It's more of the spirit than of the body. Wine is basically picked grapes, full stop. But sadly more than 99% of wine isn't like that. You don't have to be a huge expert. You have to be alive and let your emotions carry you. And then you produce more saliva. Like a salivating animal. Saliva also

never runs out when making love."

He knows that wine was not thought of by people, only found by us in nature. And that is why it holds a completely unique place. Of course only if it remains as it was envisaged at the beginning – natural. Several thousand years ago humans were not able to easily get to wine. They did not have the means to repair their unruly behaviour to nature. They did not buy their lives in a bag, adding as necessary if they destroyed something. Wine is co-created by fungi and bacteria. Without their invisible work it would remain juice forever. Wine begins only when the animal and plant parts join. "Wine really is fantastic. Its mission is to keep reminding us that we are here to enjoy and not the other way round. But pleasure also requires work. Wine moreover only fulfils its mission if it doesn't leave a dumping ground behind. I often get asked how I realised all these things. I keep repeating that I inherited them. It has been like that in our family for a long time. That's how my father, grandfather, great-grandfather ... thought like.

But I admit that in my younger years I was in conflict with myself. As a kid I was thinking why the hell do I have to work on Sundays when I would rather be at a game. But grapevine knows no Sundays or holidays. Certain things have to be done at a specific time, you can't leave them for tomorrow. In nature you have to work with feeling. If you are smart and perceptive you can also use the forces of the universe. They can help you, but can also be on the opposing side. Farmers have known how to do that for a long time. They didn't think why produce was better during certain lunar periods. They took that for fact and respected it."

He did not get the answers he sought at the agricultural college. He felt that his father's musings about the moon, nature and harmony were much more logical and sincere. But he also wanted to see how the really great masters do things. He talked his father into calling his friend Pietro Pittaro, an Italian professor who knew Movia from the times of his grandfathers, and tell him: "Pietro, our Aleš would like to have a peek at the world of winemaking!" That is when Pittaro used the bonus he had for only the best of his students. He sent Aleš to Château Pétrus and Romanée-Conti. There he began by sweeping the cellar, but it slowly emerged that he knows a bit more than that and something might become of him. At the end he was given a green card, meaning that he could drop by whenever he wanted. He did not tell them that he was only there to get the knowledge he was so far denied.



His father and Aleš often stood on opposing banks. The father's principal guideline was to be the first in the vineyard in the morning and the last at home at night. For him being good did not mean going to bed with the chickens, but rather being able to work all day, party all night and work all day the next day. He naturally expected the same from his son. But that was not always the easiest thing to do for a young lad. This plus and minus, fire and water, happiness and hatred, war and peace have been intertwined throughout Aleš's life. But when the topic turned to wine, the father and son forgot all what was said and buried all the hatchets. Then they always spoke with one voice. Wine was their highest aim that nothing could take down.

"Our approaches are not quite as fundamentally different as it may seem at first glance. We both understand very well the period in which we live and create. But we are both aware of our tradition, mission and our advantages. And not just the two of us, my grandfather, my great-grandfather ... too. "My father got the most out of the circumstances in which he lived. His life achievement is preserving the tradition of winemaking at Movia. Because he wanted to remain a winemaker at any cost, meaning his end product would be his own wine and not grapes that are then mixed with those of others, he never joined a cooperative. You can imagine the problems we had because of that under the previous regime. Here, right on the border, it was even more obvious that those living on the other side only a few hundred metres away had everything while we faced immense struggles. And my father knew exactly what to do to keep the Movia tradition alive in those strange circumstances. When I think back now about some of the things he had done that I as a teenager found incomprehensible, I completely understand him. I understand that he had no time to deal with some of our eminent customers, who came from far away to buy our wine. I know why he left important Italian customers and went for a night of drinking with the village chief police officer. He must have had a pretty thick skin to have survived all that. You see, we only got our telephone line in 1991. Everything else we needed we got through secret channels. If we wanted better corks, we bought them in Italy and smuggled them to Yugoslavia. If we wanted to buy a tractor, we had to buy two more for those who could otherwise prevent us from getting on with our work. And I know thousands of similar stories. Before my father, my grandfather experienced similar problems with the fascists. We really must have loved our wine immensely and believed in it to have been ready to make such risky decisions."

But Aleš was the Kristančič who made Movia into an international success story and thereby opened a path to the world to numerous other winemakers from the Goriška Brda region. He told his father as a teenager: "Papa, our wine will be drunk by presidents!" He had just the right mixture of charisma, audacity and youthful courage to make some seemingly heedless choices that later turned out to be the right ones. He discovered where his true clients gather and drove without a driving licence to government protocol buildings in Podvin, Grad Otočec, Vila Bled, Vila Podrožnik, Brdo pri Kranju and sold the wine at ten times the price. They cursed at him in the beginning but a week later started calling him, asking for more and more ...

Whenever something went wrong and his father despaired, Aleš consoled him by saying: "Papa, don't care about them. We will sell our wine to America!" America held a symbolic importance for him, similarly as it did for all those immigrants from Sicily. It meant a hope, a new world ... He then happened to meet a Slovenian living in Cleveland and talked him into selling Movia wines. The acquaintance was ecstatic and immediately took him to Slovenian clubs in that city. "I realised in the first club that this is not it. On the way back I stopped in New York, bought a guide to the best restaurants and went from door to door. So it happened that I knocked on the door of Felidia, owned by Lidia Bastianich, which was then renowned as probably the best restaurant in Manhattan. When I told the "wine manager" who I am and where I come from, he responded: "Wait, are you the Movia boy?" It emerged that Ms Lidia comes from our neck of the woods and had asked my father five times to sell wine to her – but he didn't take her seriously."

But the American story actually began in Italy. Aleš says that he is one of those who happen to be at the right place at the right time. In his case it was because of Carlo Petrini, who founded the Slow Food movement in Italy in the second half of the 80s. Petrini joined forces with several likeminded people from different parts of Europe. But he was looking for someone from the Eastern bloc. And this is how he discovered Aleš Kristančič, who suddenly saw doors open to the highest culinary circles. Petrini also set up a meeting with one of Italy's largest winemakers and distributors Angelo Gaja. Because Aleš was slightly late due to a traffic jam on the highway to Verona, Gaja treated him coldly. He did not like that some Yugoslavian was late. "And then I ran into my acquaintance Mauro Lorenzone, owner of a well-known winery in Venice, who took me to the other side of the fairgrounds where a right party was taking place already. On the stage was a guy who looked vaguely like coming from the circus. He was wearing one red and one green shoe and an unbuttoned shirt. This was Luca Gargano, a legendary liquor merchant, who even supplies exotic drinks to Alain Ducasse. We gave him a sample of our Pinot Grigio. He made a gulp and asked 'Is this really Pinot Grigio, did it spend time in wooden barrels?' I replied 'Yes, for two years and a half!' When he heard that he loudly proclaimed 'Where is this wine from, this is my wine!' At that moment Gaja, about whom I've completely forgotten in all the hubbub, entered the tent as well. I made an entirely instinctive decision not to cooperate with him but rather with Gargano. I told Gaja 'Maybe I'm just making the biggest mistake, but my heart has made the call. With all respect to you, I found out that you can only be the agent for your own wines. Your attitude towards me already completely extinguished my passion, will and pleasure the first time we met.'" Carlo Petrini even wrote this story in the first publication of his movement. Since then Movia wines received awards from all over the world. The winery is visited by distinguished guests who taste the wine with respect. Even the Wine Spectator magazine ran a six-page article on Movia. But Aleš keeps his feet firmly on the ground: "I see it as a great success. Of course we are pleased by that. But this is not our mission. We just create wine ..."

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MOVIA

Movia is not merely a designation for the wines and the winery that lies on the border between Slovenia and Italy. Movia is a way of life in all of its grandeur, natural purity and owner's honesty. Movia signifies eternity and above-high quality standards that wine lovers seek all over the world. From easy-going classics through a range of mature wines with excellent ageing potential to eccentrics that you cannot find anywhere else in the world. Movia is a family farm located in Ceglo and includes 54 acres of numerous prime winegrowing locations straddling the border between Slovenia and Italy. On the global wine market today MOVIA stands for wines that excite with its specific character and exceptional elegance. These wines contain traces of the most noble viticulture and winemaking tradition that often surpass the boundaries of generally accepted and valid oenological practices. The first step towards getting to know MOVIA wines is the Vila Marija trademark, a range of young and fresh wines from youthful vineyards. The next step contains wines from select loca-

tions (Turno, Gredič), which in turn lead to the winery's main trademark – the MOVIA wines with its black label. We give enough time to these wines to reach full maturity right here in our cellar, so they reach the market several years after the grapes for them have been picked. The range is supplemented by the Puro sparkling wine which sets new milestones in the making and range of such wines. In short: we revived pre-classical procedures that leave out the use of sugar for continuous fermentation of wine in the bottle and gave the consumer the pleasure otherwise only felt by winemakers when disgorging the wine. Old procedures and new takes on wine are even more pronounced with Lunar, which is, the same as Puro, created without adding sulphite. Movia wines are made with the utmost respect for nature, without oenological procedures or filtration. They require suitable keeping, meaning an appropriate cellar. Our product range is topped off with Esenca, wine made from dried grapes, a line of products based on grapes and a selection of homemade grape marc spirits.

// Si

“To je vino”

Lahko bi razglašal, da je podjetnik, vinogradnik ... A sam zase pravi, da je kmet. Zavedajo se vseh negativnih prizvokov te besede. A biti kmet kot je on je ena sama pozitivnost, preprosta logika, zdrava pamet, prisrčnost, ljubezen do zemlje in delo, delo, delo ... Ena izmed prvih stvari, ki jih opaziš na njemu, so robustne roke. Pomisliš, koliko grozdnih jagod so že božali ti prsti. In te močne roke dobijo svoj pravi pomen, šele ko odpre usta. Ko začne govoriti o vinu, njegov obraz preplavi nek prav poseben žar. O vinu bi lahko razpredal do neskončnosti, do večnosti. Kombinacija zdrave kmečke pameti, vedenja in znanja spontano ustvarja misli, ki bi jim z lahkoto rekli poezija.

To so opazili tudi italijanski gostinci, ki so se v Ceglo v Goriških Brdih pripeljali z juga Italije. Celo Alberto di Girolamo, legendarni sommelier, ki je stregel celo angleški kraljici Elizabeti in tudi Winstonu Churchill, je vprašal, če je igralec. Njegov nastop je takorekoč igralska predstava. Pa sploh ne igra, takšen pač je.

Aleš Kristančič je naraven tip. Nič ne igra, nič se ne pretvarja. Svoje delo opravlja strastno in predano. Njegova samozavest ima realne temelje. Če si v nečem dober, seveda ni nič narobe, če se tega zavešaš. In on se. Da je v najvišji ligi, so mu povedali tudi drugi. Najbolj natančni vinski kritiki so ga uvrstili med dvanajst najvplivnejših vinarjev na svetu. Njegova vina obožujejo najslavnejši kuharji našega planeta, ko so Lidia Bastianich, Alain Ducasse, Gaston Blumenthal. Revija Wine & Spirit je lani Movio razglasila za vinarno leta ...

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