

# Slovenian “Bubbly”



Aleš Kristančič - Movia and his Puro

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The world wine market knew red Bordeaux wines, sweet Porto wines and white Malvasija wines much earlier than the sparkling champagnes which only started to build in fame in the nineteenth century. The innovation of champagne sparked interest among Slovenian wine makers. That is how Anton Kleinošek from Radgona came to set off to France to pick up some experience and after returning home, in the domestic family company for trading with wines, started to prepare the sparkling wine which was presented for the first time in 1852 and was immediately sold out, as reported with enthusiasm in the then *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (Agricultural and Artisan News). In that year, which is justifiably considered as the beginning of sparkling wine production in the territory of today's Slovenia, as many as 20 million bottles were produced in the Champagne region.

At that time, sparkling wines were no longer considered as the *vin du diable*, the devil's wine, nevertheless, they were still considered as the devil's card. And yet, it was for these cards, that the Radgona Wine-Cellar supposedly came into the possession of the Swiss immigrant, Clotar Bouvier, who proved himself to be a good manager. The company: *Sekt und Weinkellerer Bouvier* expanded and achieved awards for their wines at all the biggest fairs of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. They restored and increased their vineyards which, precisely at that time, were attacked by the wine-phylloxera, and after WWI became the Yugoslavian “Royal Court Supplier”. Immediately after the end of WWII, in June 1945, the new Yugoslavian authority nationalised their properties and the wine-cellar, and after numerous organisational upheavals, the company Radgonske gorice, d.d. was created, which, with pride and justifiably so, maintains the longest tradition of sparkling wine production on the territory of today's Slovenia.

The attempts to effervesce the wine were obviously not limited only to the Štajerska region. In small quantities, sparkling wines were produced in all wine-growing regions: in the Koper region, the champagne cellar was built in the second half of the nineteenth century by the French themselves!

I really love opening bottles, especially bottles of sparkling wine. I devote every proper care to opening them slowly; as slowly as possible. I like it best if there isn't a sound in the room. . All senses are focused on that moment when the “pssss” sound will be heard, when the magic spirit will escape from the bottle, that spirit which skilful winemakers have captured with their diligent work and have preserved captured for every single wine lover. There is so much of this spirit that the bubbles will continue to delight us in the glass for some further time, to tickle our tongue and invigorate the soul and body.

In 1905, Eugène Charmat complemented the patent by the Italian oenologist, Federic Martignonni, which enabled a faster and cheaper method of production of sparkling wines. *Méthode Champenoise* or the traditional method dictates a re-fermentation of the wine, to which a solution of sugar and yeast has been added, to take place in the bottle, while the Martinotti system uses autoclaves in which the same process takes place in bulk steel vessels and it is much easier to control. The comparison of both systems has shown that the second one even has an advantage in regard to the preparation of sparkling wines from aromatic varieties while the traditional method is not amenable to the preparation of sparkling wines in which the richness of the body and aromas evolving from several years' contact with the yeast, actually lees, is highly appraised. This characteristic feature of the bread crust is obviously only wished for if we do not wish to highlight the primary aromas which are possessed by *Muscato* or *Traminer* or *Glera* which has been elevated to the podium of world success by the sparkling wine *Prosecco*.

Slovenian wine producers use both methods today. Large cellars usually have autoclaves but the preparation of traditional sparkling wines is a challenge to them too, while smaller cellars, due to the lack of suitable equipment, opt for the traditional method. Recently, when the demand for “fizz” has been on the increase, more and more smaller wine producers have turned to the practice established abroad, that the wine is processed in large wine cellars.

## PURE PURO

In addition to the established methods, Slovenians may be praised for yet another one, developed by the wine maker from the Brda region, Aleš Kristančič - Movia. He calls it *Puro*, pure, but it could equally be labelled a “dry thoroughbred” because it is an extremely dry wine and because the method may be described as pre-traditional.

“*Puro* was born from my contemplations on how we could make Brda sparkling wines from mature grapes. If we want to initiate a

second fermentation process in the bottle, 24 g of sugar must be added to every litre of wine. After the fermentation, the sugar raises the alcohol level by approximately 1.5 percent and the released carbon dioxide creates a pressure of 6 bars. In the Champagne region, at the end of summer or even in October sugar levels are achieved which correspond to those that our grapes have in the summer. That is why many wine producers hurry with the harvest or else the sparkling wines would have too much alcohol. However, by doing this they forego many of the great characteristics of the grapes which only develop right in the final weeks of their maturing. When I remembered that in olden times the old wine was invigorated with the new must which the wine makers simply poured into the barrel, it occurred to me that I might put such a mixture into the bottles where, in the enclosed environment,

Bottle opening in the water



the carbon dioxide would be captured and the alcohol level would not increase. Numerous tests followed since it was not enough to determine the correct ratio between the wine and the must but it was also necessary to suitably prepare the fungi from the must for the shock with the alcoholic environment which might lead to their premature death. The next decision was that I would not add expedition liquor, which, in addition to sugar, usually also contains sulphites which substitutes the protective role carried out by the lees. I actually made a decision that I would not go through the process of dégorgement of the bottles at all. That obviously raised a series of questions on how to serve the wine properly." This is how Aleš Kristančič revived his memories of the first steps made.

All of this was easier said than done. It was necessary to improve many things, starting with the determination of the appropriate age difference between the base wine and the must. Today, at Movia, as the base for Puro sparkling wine, they use four-year old wine, of the Rebula and Chardonnay variety for the whites and Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Rebula for Puro Rosé. The next challenge was how to persuade the clients that Puro is "pure" wine although it is opaque in the glass. "The bub-

bles which were released immediately when I removed the cork were obviously raised by the lees. This is not at all bad since the lees are also good, and this was accepted by the "Purists" as I call the lovers of my sparkling wine. But the lees cover up a significant part of the gentle wine flower which is why later I started to apply an "upside-down" storage of the wine so that the lees is accumulated near the cork which is removed in a vessel with water. Of course, some wine runs off into the container but when the technique is once mastered the loss is negligible. We are rewarded with the aroma that is released with this and which is otherwise only the delight of the cellar men when disgorging the wine", laughs Aleš, who does not forget to mention that the Purists of the first generation accepted a new producer's trial with some difficulty. Well, he later improved the opening of the bottles under water and also developed a special tool so as to avoid having the hands made wet but, for us, he nevertheless opened the bottle in the old way, with one hand in the container.

#### FOR ALL DISHES

Several wine producers follow this pre-traditional method, and most of them take into

consideration the bio-dynamic methods in the vineyard and in the cellar. They are mainly attracted by the fact that the lees are natural protectors of the wine against oxidation which thus remains ready for long life in a natural way.

Sparkling wine is usually associated with toasts or for sipping in a relaxed way comfortably in the shade. The wine order usually places it at the beginning of the meal, therefore, with light snacks and oysters, and in Wimbledon, during the tennis tournaments, it is served with seductively red and mature strawberries. In the Champagne region, they will surely convince you that it may accompany all dishes, from vegetables to fish and meat. This holds true, only the preparation of dishes must be slightly adapted. For recipes of dishes which might be served without any embarrassment with a glass of vintage sparkling wine, we turned to Uroš Fakuč from the restaurant Dam of Kromberk, a member of the Slovenian section of young European master chefs.

He surprised us with a slightly different egg dish and a tuna fish in a black crust: simple, delicious and visually tempting.

Bon appetit and cheers!

### Tuna in a dark crust

AS THE PICTURE IN THE FRAME

- 400 g of tuna file (3 cm wide, 2 cm thick and 20 cm long)
- 80g breadcrumbs
- cuttlefish ink
- flour
- 2 (egg) yolks
- lemon puree: potatoes, lemon juice
- salt flower
- extra virgin olive oil

#### PREPARATION

- Soak breadcrumbs in cuttlefish ink and dry them in the oven. When dry, crush them to the size of groats (in a coffee-grinder or by a rolling pin between two sheets of baking paper).
- Cook the potatoes, make puree and add lemon juice.
- Bread the tuna fillet in the flour, whipped egg yolks and black breadcrumbs.
- Heat a little of extra virgin olive oil in a pan and saute the fillets on all sides. It should not be on an individual side for more than a minute so that the fillet remains rose-coloured in the middle. Before serving cut into thick slices and sprinkle with the salt flower.
- Serve with potato lemon puree. The plate maybe decorated with the cuttlefish ink.

**HINT:** Gentle tastes require very dry sparkling wine of a medium full body and mild flower.



### Eggs in wholegrain crust

CLASSICS: ON PUREE WITH TRUFFLE

- 4 (egg) yolks
- 50g of wholegrain breadcrumbs
- 200 g potatoes
- milk (or cream), a knob of butter
- truffle
- a slice of Karst prosciutto
- black salt (or also salt flower)
- frying oil

#### PREPARATION

- Put half of the breadcrumbs on the plate, lay the yolks carefully on them so that they do not touch each other, and cover with the remaining bread crumbs. Put into the refrigerator for 4 hours.
- Dry the slice of the prosciutto in an oven heated to 100 °C, then beat it between two sheets of baking paper.
- Cook the peeled potatoes in the boiling water, strain them and mash them. Add a little bit of milk and butter and grated truffle. Process all together with a hand blender.
- Put eggs into the hot oil; you need sufficient so that the eggs swim in it. Fry for 30 to 40 seconds. The yolks must remain liquid in the middle!
- Put bits of prosciutto on the puree, lay the fried yolks in the middle and sprinkle with black salt.
- You may also serve it in a glass.

#### RIGHT BOTTLE FOR THE RIGHT WINE

The world of sparkling wines is full of legends. Numerous bottles in which this special wine is prepared are named after famous persons. The technology is summarised according to the official version of the Comité Champagne:

- Quart (0,20 l)
- Demie (0,375 l)
- Medium or Pinte (0,50 l)
- Bouteille (0,75 l)
- Magnum (1,5 l)
- Jeroboam (3 l)
- Rehoboam (4,5 l)
- Salmanasar (9 l)
- Balthazar (12 l)
- Nabuchadnezzar (15 l)
- Solomon (18 l)
- Sovereign (26,25 l)
- Primat (27 l)
- Melchizedek or Midas (30 l)

The second fermentation for the preparation of sparkling wines according to the traditional method usually takes place in the normal bottle and Magnum, while the already prepared wines are decanted into the larger and smaller volumes. The weight of the full Primat is 65 kg, which means that the empty bottle weight is 38 kilograms. The production of such a bottle is extremely complicated since it must sustain the weight and the pressure of the wine in it. Of course, these are only rare quantities, made for special occasions. In our picture you can see Bouteille (0,75 L), Magnum (1,5 L) and Jeroboam (3 L).

