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laissez le vin de se faire--let the wine make itself



ten or twelve moons ago i met a sorcerer who told us the ways. we're tubes, he announced. cosmic tubes—superhighways for energy—to channel from the earth, through our bodies, and out to the universe. the energy we put out becomes the energy we live in. our reality is a reflection of our vision. to quote the navajo, we walk in beauty.

while inspiration can strike anywhere, and can come from anyone, many moons will come and go before a person is likely to encounter a spiritual guide in the flesh. so filled with love and energy that the beauty they walk in actually reshapes not only what you too are walking in, but how you feel at your core. their presence makes you feel different. they say things in a way that makes everything so simple, everything so harmonious.

when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

last weekend her and i were invited to attend a dinner featuring the wines of slovenian biodynamic farmer/vintner aleš kristancic. over the years many writers have used many words to capture his philosophy and techniques: biodynamic, natural, organic, traditional, unique—and some probably less flattering: crazy, or weird. but aleš uses only one word: wine. he makes wine in the way he knows how.



every form of holistically managed agriculture regards the forest as the earth's great example of efficiently balanced diversity and productivity. aleš, and others, including myself, goes through great effort to replicate as many aspects of natural biodiversity as possible in their farming practices. the bounty of life in the forest--below the ground, decomposing on the ground, living above the ground—the diversity creates the balance. natural farming methods strive for this balance through imitation. conventional agriculture stifles this balance through chemicals.

eggs which are laid by healthy hens on fresh pasture—these should be called eggs. a label such as "pasture raised", or "organic"—these labels should be implied. eggs should be eggs. eggs which are laid by sick chickens in sick boxes in sick factories, however, should not have the ability to masquerade themselves as "eggs". aleš suggests that maybe they'd be better labeled as: "not eggs". or perhaps they could come up with a new word altogether. but the drugs, and chemicals, and filth, and illness, and external consequences of factory farming is all extraneous to the concept of "eggs". anyone who reads regularly will recall my post on the differences between real eggs and store bought eggs, and anyone who eats them, knows without me telling them.

and aleš, well, as he puts it, he doesn't sell "not eggs". he sells eggs. movia wines, the vineyard of his family for over three centuries, are produced completely naturally. grown with tender love and devoted attention. aleš recognizes each vine by its strengths and weaknesses, it's personality, it's place of meaning. does it receive the most sun or the

least? how much moisture does it get? will it be wine or will it be sediment? each particle has its' role.

his bottles are buried into the ground as opposed to celled traditionally. in his words, there is no cellar greater than the earth. buried in the soil, the sediment in the wine is more closely connected to the earth's gravitational pull, creating more activity inside the bottle. he adds no sulphites, there is no fining, and no filtration. his wines are alive, in earth's truest sense.



on the geopolitical map, movia estate was divided down the center between slovenia and italy after the world wars. it straddles the borderland, splitting it's vines down the middle, with its' estate resting in slovenia—and hence its' nationality. but the shifting shapes of countries is of little interest to aleš and his grapes, with much bigger words filling their lexicon: planet, universe, the moon, the stars.

on the italian side, the vineyard is in the famed collio appellation, and on the slovenian side, in their precious brda appellation. old growth oaks, rolling hills, multi generational villages, and some of the finest wines on the planet make up this region. families will bid and vie and angle for specific hilltops and ridgelines for over a hundred years before finding the right moment to seize an opportunity. in aleš' case, his family took ownership of the land after a wedding.

personally, over the course of the last year or two, we have become increasingly more devoted to naturally produced wines. presently, it is the only type of wine we imbibe. without forming a true definition, the wines i speak of tend to be: holistically farmed and

managed, with an integration of plants and animals, hand harvested, and feature little to no interruption from the winemaker. the wines are not filtered, or fined, or pressed—other than under the weight of their own selves. skins and seeds and leaves all season the wine throughout the process. slowly, and naturally, the wine expresses itself over the course of many seasons and moons. one of aleš' best wines, puro, was self described as having no winemaker at all.

as i alluded to with my introductory claim of how rare a true wizard is, it's not often that someone speaks and i find myself writing down not only the highlights—not the dates, nor the factoids—but i find myself transforming into a full fledged court stenographer. full transcript—shorthand—constant scribble. each sentence and quip and historical talking point in that moment seems to teeter between 9.5 and 10 on my brain's must write this downscale. and oftentimes, the result is twenty or thirty frantic pages in my moleskin which will inspire me on an untold amount of future read backs. inspirational thought bombs, and for this, i have aleš to thank.



hearing aleš' stories, and drinking his wines, to the backdrop of james beard nominated cuisine in a james beard nominated wine cellar, was, as our host sam, proprietor of blackberry farm, predicted at the onset of the meal, one of the more special epicurean events of our lives.

within a second of meeting me aleš was certain we had met. and a second later he guessed it unprompted--aspen, co--where my mother lives. and an hour later we also recognized that we had both **attended last year's terra madre conference** in torino, italia. me, as a delegate representing the united states, and he, as one of the founding voices in the movement, dating back to the beginning with **carlo petrini**. within ninety seconds of meeting him, we had made plans to visit, and received invitation to his family retreat—an island off croatia—where, in his words, "i will rise early, catch fish for my woman, and make love and passion like a man." he said it with a swiftness that made me feel certain i was but one of many who received such an invite. but what he surely couldn't have known, is that we will come.

her, on the other hand, he was sure they had never met. according to aleš, "had they met, he would recall the exact moment and place where he first witnessed such beauty" (cue: kiss on the hand). with a wink, and a kiss on her cheek, he smiled at us both--his hands on each of our shoulders--and said, "wow, i am so happy to touch you!"

and with that, we were friends.

and for those of you who are still with me, here is a bonus behind the scenes video shot from the dinner to give you a better sense of aleš' personality. he is describing to us the process of making his sparkling wine. the natural yeasts and sediments of the wine would cloud and tarnish the wine experience unless there was a way to make the sediment leave the bottle before the rest of the wine. aleš invented a special tool and a unique method for opening his sparkling wine, expunging the thick yeasts, and pouring a clean and delicious product. he ices the bottles upside down, causing the sediment to concentrate at the cork. he then removes the cork upside down and underneath water, eliminating the waste, and preserving the wine.

the backstory of the "luggage" comment, is that he had just arrived from slovenia, but none of his things came with--including, the unique tool he needed. at the finale of our meal, it arrived from the airport.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc6Gn57N7L4&feature=player_embedded