

# Movia – Since 1820

By Toni Gomišček

The road winds below the slopes of the Brda hills. It clings to them as if afraid of the plain and yet does not want to ascend. I try to concentrate on my driving, but on its own, my gaze wanders among the carefully tended vineyards, dances over the silhouettes of Medana's houses over which reigns the bell tower of the Church of Mary's Assumption, and jumps to the peaks of the Julian Alps shining white in the background. Then it is caught by an imposing brick-coloured building, the home of the Kristančič family. Every time I drive past, it seems larger. And indeed it is, since this wine-growing farm in Ceglo, a village close to the Slovene-Italian border, has experienced such a steep rise in recent years that the house, the wine cellar, the office spaces, and everything else that belongs to it have had to be constantly changed, augmented, finished ...

Aleš and Mirko Kristančič's trademark is taken from the Movia family, whose successors they are. "Since 1820" appears on the label: in that

year there was a confirmation in Medana, and the Bishop of Gorizia was so pleased with the wine the Movia farm provided for the Mass that he expressly mentioned it in the church diary. Like all other residents of Brda at that time, the farm was involved in growing vegetables and fruit, and their stable too was always full. Unlike many others who were yearly tenants (*koloni*) on the estates of nobles and church rulers, the Movias had always been free farmers (*svojaki*), and always planned and marketed their produce themselves. This sense of freedom was so deeply rooted that even after World War II during the most brutal attempts at the socialist transformation of agriculture, they did not bow under the pressure to join a cooperative, preferring to remain their own masters.

They did this in spite of the fact that as a result they lost a number of the advantages they would have had as cooperative members. "At that time, our main income came from fruit," remembers Mirko, who was the first to buy a used car and



Sunk in vineyard - the Movia farm

use it to take peaches to Ljubljana and other marketplaces. Even today, his eyes shine when he remembers his first big sale: the business manager of the Clinical Center selected Mirko's peaches, had them delivered to the storehouse, and paid cash for everything on the spot. In that period, such things did not happen often!

**A**t that time, the brothers Mirko and Neto Kristančič were running the Movia farm. The money earned by selling fruit they soon began to use for modernizing and expanding the vineyards. Slovene wine experts, and with them the wider public, began only slowly to discover and appreciate the quality of dry wines, which were always less valued than the semi-dry and semi-sweet wines of Štajerska, and the innkeepers in central Slovenia preferred to serve the Cviček of Dolenjska. In spite of this, Mirko and Neto were certain that the time of Brda wines would come again. They knew that they were good winegrowers and foresaw it would be wine that would establish the fame of their farm. Initially, they offered open table wines, but some sample bottlings in the 1960's and 1970's still today tell us that they were on the right path from the very start. In order for the farm's wine-growing orientation to experience the final breakthrough, a youthful impetus was needed, and this was provided by Aleš, Mirko's son, primarily regarding cellarage and marketing practices. Local skills augmented by experience abroad, the desire for success, and a readiness to work hard represented an explosive mixture that could not be stopped. Mirko, who at the time had been left much too soon without the help of his brother Neto, knew that Aleš would go elsewhere if he was not allowed to try new ideas and directions and decided to risk giving him some wines "to do with as he wished."

"At that time, our operation was oriented toward the production of full but predominantly young wines that were placed on the market in the year following the vintage, while I was interested in maturing wines longer as well. I knew our vineyards and I knew which ones were ready for that step. One cannot expect young vines to produce grapes for serious and harmonious wines since they are similar to young boys in puberty: they are just bursting with the desire to prove themselves as soon as possible and to get into a glass as soon as possible. On the other hand, from older vineyards we get calm and patient wines that know in themselves that several years of maturing in wooden barrels will only further strengthen their body and prolong their life. We must follow these laws of nature, and if we do not overburden the vines, we will achieve the point where they give us the basis for really great



wines," Aleš likes to reason. With considerable self-confidence, he named the two main trumps from the Movia cellar exactly in this manner: *Veliko belo* ("Great White") and *Veliko rdeče* ("Great Red").

**T**he entire range of wines from the cellar of Aleš and Mirko Kristančič is certainly quite varied, and there is almost no dish under the sun

*The Kristančič Dynasty*

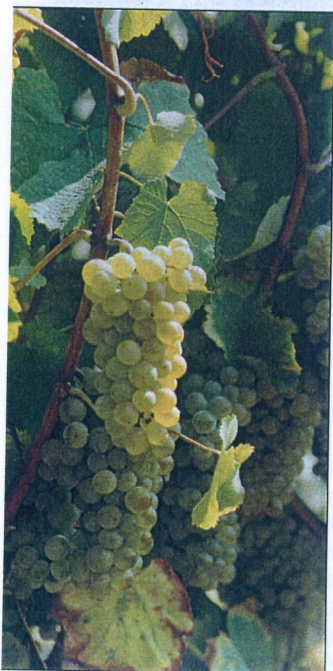
for which it is not possible to find a suitable Movia wine. Each year they offer more than 100,000 bottles to the market, following two fundamental orientations. In the line of the light *Vila Marija* label we find annual wines from younger vineyards that finish their cellarage schooling in stainless steel tanks (the white wines) or cement barrels (the reds); while in the black *Movia* label line are the wines that have lain for a year or two or more in small oak barrels called "barriques." Aleš is an advocate of long maturing in wood

who puts numerous wines on the market only four or five years after their vintage. This is not something that either the legislation or local custom requires of him but his personal desire that his wines leave the cellar only when in his opinion they have reached the beginning period of their highest quality, which then can last for many years.

**B**etween these two lines, a third has recently appeared, devoted to especially emphasizing some exceptional wine-growing locations. In a way, Aleš has transcended Slovenia's legislation on wine-growing, which possibly sometime in the future will finally determine where in our country exceptional *grand cru* and *premier cru* wines are produced, and has given wines from vineyards that the local wine-growers have long known are the best sites not only a first name but a last name—his *Furlanski Tokaj* ("Friulian Tokay"), for example, is also called *Gredič*, while a wine made from three Pinots and Chardonnay varieties from the Turno vineyard has only the simple and plain name *Turno*. He schools these wines for years in large oak barrels called "*batoni*" in the Brda dialect in which he prepares "assemblage" wines from various barriques. "I observed that wines from various barrels do not much like to be mixed, and it is most stressful for them to be transferred into a stainless steel tank. Everything is so new, different, and foreign to them. Each one keeps to itself, and if the tank had corners, each would certainly hide in its own corner. However, if we put them into a baton, which is essentially only a very large barrique, they still feel at home, except that now their living space has suddenly expanded. They run around curiously inspecting the interior and the walls, and simply mix by themselves." Aleš can convince us with an explanation that contains more psychology and sociology than oenology, but the oenologists would agree with him without hesitation since they all know that wines need quite some time to begin glowing with their original quality after being decanted into a new container or after being bottled. Obviously, some time must indeed elapse before they get used to their new clothes!

**T**he courtyard of the Movia farm is rarely lonely. The cellar attracts numerous wine lovers, and in the exceptionally beautifully furnished degustation room, Aleš's wife Vesna also prepares luncheons and dinners for closed groups of visitors. It is best to take the time and abandon oneself to the slow exploration of seasonal menus accompanied, naturally, by wines from

Aleš and Vesna Kristančič



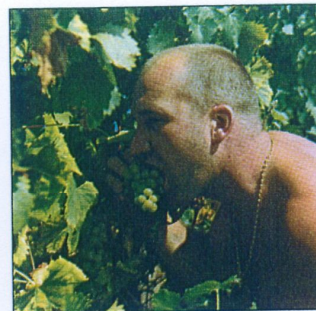
and shuns the decanting through which many producers try to accelerate the maturing of their wines. "As the wine settles, we must leave it in peace, and as long as it is on the lees, we need not fear for its health. The lees are like the umbilical cord, providing nourishment and protection for the wine. With decanting, we remove that protection from the wine, and then we have to prepare it for its independent path with the addition of sulphur. Through long maturing on the lees in oak barrels, our wines get so much stronger that such additions can be minimal. Thus the wines are not only better but also healthier. Another thing also occurs during the longer maturing in wood: the tannins, which initially can be very aggressive, calm down during the continuous slow oxidation. The biggest mistake many wine-growers make is that they bottle the wine from the barriques too soon. They rely on the tannins softening in the bottle, which, however, does not happen. If we bottle the 'wooden' wine, it will be undrinkable for decades or it will only be appreciated by those who look for woody flavours in their wine," observes Aleš,

the home cellar. We are in the home of the governor of the Slovene branch of the International Slow Food Movement, and loyalty to the local culinary tradition is compulsory here. "Slow Food took root in Slovenia five years ago at a time we were intensively emphasizing our European character and bowing to the demand that we must conform to European standards and world tastes. However, my friends from the Italian Slow Food branch, where the movement was born, approached me because they were interested in the different nature of my wines and asked me about our *gostilnas* where Slovene recipes were given priority. For them, we were interesting for our own specialties and not because our cooks were capable of preparing exactly identical dishes as those available at Maxim's in Paris. They tried the horseradish sauce, pumpkinseed oil aspic, *žlikrofi*, *žganci*, *gibanica*, and *štruklji* and urged us to respect this tradition, to foster and assert it at home, and to appear with it without shame before the world as well. I had felt the same all along myself, which is why I was happy to accept the offer to organize the Slow Food movement in Slovenia. We must not give up the old dishes, the old breeds, or the old varieties. They are a part of the tradition left to us by previous generations and they are part of our identity, of our being here throughout centuries," philosophizes Aleš, and in practice this loyalty to tradition is demonstrated by Rebula, which has a special place among the wines in the palette of wines from the Movia cellar.

"Rebula is ours, truly ours, and only ours. 'Ours,' of course, does not mean solely from our village or from Brda, because the borders today are run somewhat strangely and illogically. From the wine-growing point of view, our area belongs to the Italian Collio, partly to Colli orientali del Friuli as well, and partly to the low hills above the Vipava Valley. Here Rebula has always been at home and has always given us good wine. It could be said to have been the shapeliest maiden in the village, the one everyone sought out and wanted to dance with, to touch, and to love. New varieties that were brought from France after the devastation caused by the wine louse at the end of the last century dazzled us with their cosmopolitan attitude and dandyism to the point that we simply forgot Rebula and disowned it. The years of sloppy selection, when quantity counted more than quality, ultimately finished Rebula. Fortunately, in our vineyards we still have the true golden Brda Rebula, which we offer on the market as a variety wine in the Movia line, and at the same time, it has a significant proportion in our *Veliko belo*. And, of course, it is also excellent for the preparation of a special wine from dried grapes. This, too, has been an old tradition in Brda, which we have

revived with *Izbrani plodovi* ('Selected Yield')," Aleš explains his attitude toward the autochthonous Rebula.

**T**here is another variety that has gotten under Aleš's skin as well: the Modri Pinot ("Blue Pinot"). "Modri Pinot is not just a wine, it is a virus," Aleš rationalizes his obsession with this French variety. "It is as untamable as a wild colt:



you think you have it in your grasp but it escapes you. It is full of tricks and confronts you with ever-new riddles. However, as soon as you solve one of them, you are so happy that you somehow embrace it and remain its forever. I think I have cracked quite a few nuts, and this is truly a wine capable of giving exceptional satisfaction," he continues, silently scheming how to solve the next secret of Modri Pinot. He devotes some of it to the preparation of sparkling wine according to a classical procedure; some of it is in *Turno*, and most of it is in the serious garb of the black Movia line, which is perhaps the one that suits it most.

Aleš Kristančič hastens to add, however, that all the wines are his children and he loves all of them equally. A special glow ignites in his eyes when he speaks of Rebula, Tokaj, Beli Pinot, Sivi Pinot, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, *Izbrani plodovi*, and the other "children" of the large Movia family, but his eyes begin glowing in another quite special way when his small daughter Ela and his small son Lan come running to him; however, that is already another story ...

*Aleš Kristančič: "It's delicious. The Vintage time has arrived."*