



INSPIRED

SILVIO JERMANN WINES FROM FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA.

STORY BY PAUL ROSS

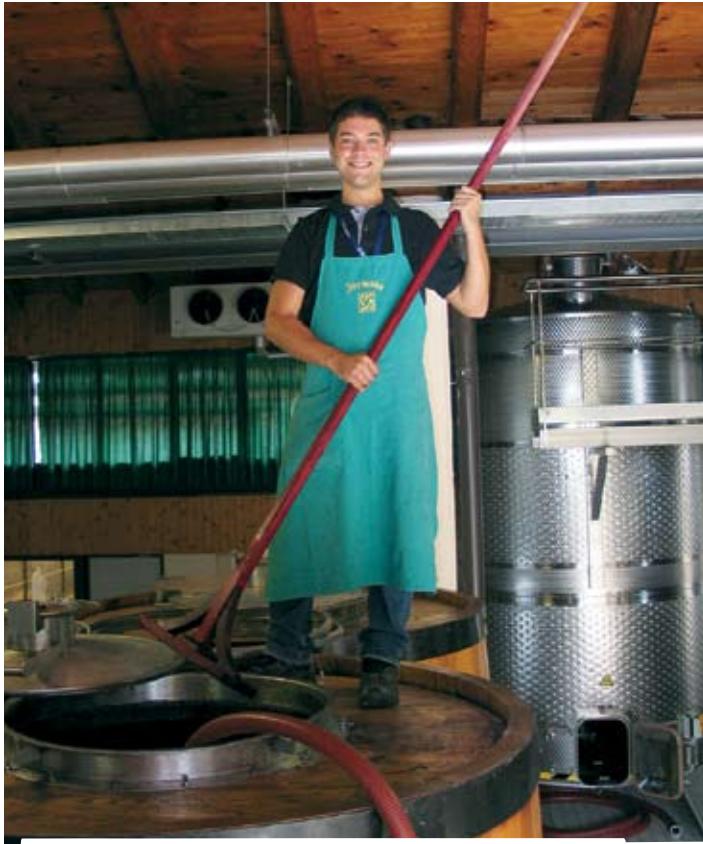
Silvio Jermann strides into the tasting room and says, “This is for you,” handing me a glass of cloudy juice. “Tell me which juice is this. Which taste?” he asks. Then, “This is fresh juice from Sauvignon Blanc, and for me it’s exactly apricots and peach, the first time in years that I feel peaches and apricot.” There is a quiet intensity and excitement in Jermann’s eyes. The grape harvest has begun at Jermann, a winery in Italy’s cool northeastern region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and it looks to be one of the best in recent years. Jermann oversees a 25-per-cent volume increase over the 700,000 bottles produced by Vinnaioli Jermann in 2005. Pinot Grigio was the first varietal to be harvested at the estate vineyards in Isonzo, while Chardonnay was the first grape to be harvested at the vineyards in Collio.

Jermann’s philosophy is to give the wine a chance to make itself naturally without too much human intervention, so that what is placed in the bottle represents as natural an expression of the vineyard as possible. “The beautiful, most difficult and joyful thing is to understand what is happening [in the vineyard] and to

bring this in the bottle to the consumer. We are not in an industry where we have to produce the wine the same each year. We have to produce the emotions of that harvest.” Jermann says he likes to work alone “just doing my ideas”. He has an almost mystical view of wine. “I need tranquility when I try to discover the feelings that wines can give,” he adds.

While Pinot Grigio is Friuli’s shining star, the most exciting thing about the region is the diversity of varieties grown, many of which are indigenous, such as Friulano and the northeast marvel Ribolla Gialla. Located in northeastern Italy on the Slovenian border, Friuli has a cool climate, ideal for white-grape varieties. Winemakers in North America now look to Italy for inspiration. Admittedly, they like the diverse grape varieties; but what they really like is Italian flair. While freshness and crisp acidity are hallmarks of Friuli, the experimental bent of many producers has produced blends, known as Super Whites, that emulate a richer style. Silvio Jermann is an iconoclast who started it all with his iconic Vintage Tunina, an inspired blend of indigenous and international varieties in 1975. The legendary late pioneer Mario Schiopetto imagined a revolution using cold fermentation techniques to create a modern style of wine, but it is Jermann whose ideas have shaped the industry. His studies at Conegliano and Istituto Agrario San Michele all’Adige were followed by a sabbatical in Canada (he remains friends with Donald Ziraldo, co-founder of Inniskillin), after which he returned to transform the Italian wine industry. Driving ambition prompted this independent-minded grandson of Austro-Hungarian sharecroppers to win over his conservative winemaking family and lead the modern wine industry forward.

NUVO



Angelo Jermann, Silvio's son, at the Villanova di Farra winery.



Above: Winemaker Silvio Jermann.
Opening page: Jermann vineyards.

Son Angelo Jermann is the next generation in the Jermann winemaking tradition. This is the young winemaker's first vintage in terms of overseeing the harvest and production from the Villanova di Farra winery in Isonzo. I tasted through the wines of the estates—in Riedel glasses, of course. (Is it my imagination or did Franz Joseph I of Austria, Emperor of Austro-Hungary from 1848 to 1916, whose portrait hangs on the wall in the tasting room, just nod his head in approval at the stemware?) Just about every wine from this family-owned winery is outstanding. The wines show great purity of varietal expression and style. The Traminer has breathtaking intensity. The wines are packaged with brilliantly designed, artistic labels conceived by Silvio Jermann. Perfect for whetting the appetite for lunch at the Jermann family home.

In the afternoon we jump into the Volkswagen and drive a few kilometres, winding along blissfully twisting roads to Jermann's stunning new Ruttaris winery. A premium-quality wine area, the Collio was one of the first in Italy to be recognized, in 1968, as a DOC. On the south-facing slopes of the hill across from the winery looms the medieval outline of the 13th-century Castello di Trussio. *Servus meine liebe cella* reads the writing on the stone floor at the entrance to the winery's cellar. "I have tried to reproduce the features of a rural village of the 1800s or 1900s in the cellar, by choosing local materials such as stone and solid wood," says Jermann. He adds that the new winery was created not just to produce more wine, but also to make better, more individualized wines that show off the character of the territory and soil.

Capo Martino has distinguished itself as the name of one of Italy's best whites. Jermann has strived for a more international

style using *barriques*. Capo Martino, a blend of tocai with malvasia istriana, ribolla gialla and picolit, is fermented and aged 11 months in Slovenian oak. These indigenous grapes make for a unique, esoteric wine that took my taste buds to a different world of aromas and many layers of flavours.

The wonders of Silvio Jermann are not represented by world-class whites alone. Jermann wanted a new challenge and is adjusting to increased consumer interest in red wines and indigenous varietals. Take, for instance, an ancient, almost-forgotten red grape variety native to the Friuli region called pignollo, which is now being brought back to eminence by Jermann. Jermann is achieving renown for his rich and elegant Pignacolusse, an important red for the winery. Pignacolusse 2000 was awarded Tre Bicchieri (Three Glasses) in 2003, the highest ranking from Gambero Rosso, the Italian wine guide. Production is still on a very small scale, but the results suggest encouragingly high quality. Jermann sees the potential and is making the required commitment and resources. "We believe a lot in this variety. We are going to increase production and increase quality because this is the very best red variety we can grow in our region," says Angelo Jermann. Authenticity is the thing that consumers respond to most. They have become much more interested in local varietals, provided the wines are of the highest quality. Silvio Jermann adds with a smile, "When you taste this wine you can really understand the character of the Friulian people." Apart from their warmth and hospitality, Friulians evidently also have a dry wit.

Jermann's success as a serious, avant-garde wine producer becomes more apparent with each harvest. Let yourself be inspired by one of the greatest wines from Friuli. Enjoy a glass one cool summer evening and imagine yourself on the terraced hillsides of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in northern Italy. And yes, remind me how to say "bliss" in Italian once more? ♡