



The hazelnut trees at Cascina Langa. The property's name is translated as "farmhouse of the Langhe", the wine-growing region of Piedmont, Italy.

Farmland in Piedmont

FOLLOWING THE SILVIA GRASSO and Renato Corino winery visits detailed in the last article, we went to the outstanding Bovio Restaurant in La Morra. The fog was still lingering over the Langhe countryside and the view was made even more memorable due to the floor to ceiling windows. As a reminder, the Nebbiolo grape is named for the Italian word for fog—nebbia—due to the opaque tint of the Nebbiolo's skin. As we gazed over the beautiful countryside, it was still lightly covered at midday by the fog. This is typical of the weather this time of year, and the fog burns off by late morning or mid-afternoon revealing the beautiful hills of Langhe. We had several divine courses, but I will highlight only two wines.

I am a huge fan of one of Piemonte's rarest white wines made from the Timorasso grape. A successful industrialist friend of mine from Turino makes my favorite. Perhaps the wine is so good because Franco Martinetti is also one of Italy's most noted gourmands. We had the Franco Martinetti Martin 2012, which is a breathtaking wine, particularly

when served with appetizers in such a setting. We followed this course with a risotto made with truffles which was served with another rare wine, Pelaverga by Bel Colle.

As the air cleared and the scenery became more

obviously beautiful, we became more delirious. We had tagliatelle with white truffles served with a Bovio Barolo Arborina 2006 which paired beautifully. As if we needed more to eat, the braised beef short ribs made a quick disappearing act when paired with a 2011 vintage of the Bovio Arborina Barolo.

After a quick dessert we left La Morra for Costigliole d'Asti to meet with a trifulace (truffle searcher). For those who have not had the experience, I would not attempt to dignify the extraordinary smell/taste sensation which comes from having the white truffle shaved very thinly over a plate of tagliatelle or risotto. Natives of Piemonte often contend the best experience of all is to have the truffle over fresh eggs. Because these gems are extraordinarily expensive (\$4,000 per pound), thankfully there is a small handheld shaving device which cuts the truffle at the cellular level. This enhances the aromatics and taste and makes it more affordable, also.

Although I have had the pleasure of dining in many if not most of the world's greatest restaurants over the past 25 years, my greatest culinary memory is a day I spent in Piemonte about 20 years ago when I had tartufi bianchi three ways, on eggs for breakfast, on tagliatelle for lunch, and on risotto for dinner. May I live long enough to have this experience again.

We arrived at the truffle hunter's farm and soon departed with one of his dogs on the hunt. We climbed up the ridge of a nearby foothill, all trying to keep up with the dog and owner. Within five minutes, the dog hit gold and started digging. After removing 3-5 inches of earth, the dog stopped,



Bob Schramm of Virginia leads the group to the Ristorante Bovio.



A dog locates truffles in the ground. Inset: A white truffle (below) and black truffle are found.



and the owner knelt and brushed some remaining dirt away to expose a walnut-sized white truffle. Over the next 30 minutes, the routine played itself out 8-10 times so that we had a nice bounty at the end.

We walked back to the farm where the farmer's wife prepared a plate of appetizers with fruit from our hunt. We accompanied these treasures with ample wine and thought about how fortunate we were to be able to have this total experience.

Although we had a very fine dinner en route to our hotel at the restaurant San Marco in Canelli, I would like to close this article with a recap of another agricultural visit.

Cascina Langa is a stunningly beautiful location with views of the Alps, as well as surrounding vineyards. In addition, it is famous for large farms of hazelnut trees. After a memorable walk through these trees, we went inside the visitor's facility to experience some local products. We were treated to several different local wines which complimented these appetizers. The hazelnuts were extremely flavorful by themselves or as a 'butter' on local bread. Several types of estate grown olives were served along with their prized salami and Silvia's sheep tuma (cheese). For dessert, we enjoyed several sweets made from the hazelnuts. Although we did not stay here overnight, there are rooms to rent which based on testimonies on the internet lead some people to make this an annual retreat. Consider me as one who would love to return. A vôte santé! U

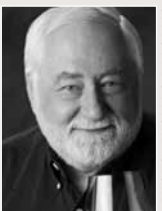


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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