

FORTRESS IN THE WOODS

Massimo Ferragamo's Castiglion del Bosco estate has a winemaker from Maremma, who's a Sangiovese fan, says GERRIE LIM

HER HAIR IS freshly cut, a striking change from the long curls that dominated her style, but it's scarcely an explanation why owner Massimo Ferragamo, youngest son of the Ferragamo clan, chose Cecilia Leoneschi as his winemaker after acquiring his estate in 2003. In the Ferragamo family, women always played an important role, and his own mother brought up six children after her husband died; to say the least, Ferragamo has great admiration for women for their strength.

Outside wine, Leoneschi is fond of cooking, fitness and animals, particularly dogs. She owns an English Setter and, at the winery, adopted two mongrels amusingly named Jazz and Rock, which she takes into the fields each day. The estate is Castiglion del Bosco, in northwest Montalcino, an area famous for its Brunellos. The name derives from the walled village (castiglion) surrounded by woods (bosco), the domain of boars and pheasants, in the Val d'Orcia.

Also well-known for its Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, Castiglion del Bosco boasts 62 hectares of vineyards divided into two areas — Gauggiole and Capanna, respectively responsible for the easy-drinking Rosso di Montalcino and the harder, denser Brunello. The latter comprises the single vineyards of Campo del Drago and Zodiac. There is also an area outside Tuscany called Tenuta Prima Pietra in Riparbella on the coast, the highest elevation at 450m, from which comes 27 hectares of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Ferragamo also buys Chardonnay from a producer 100km from Montalcino to serve as aperitivo at his Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco luxury hotel.

Like a growing number of producers in the appellation who have created special cuvees in recent years specifically for the Asian market, Castiglion del Bosco has the Zodiac. Five vintages have been produced: A Brunello Riserva in 2006, a Brunello in 2009, two Brunellos in 2010 (a Cru and a Riserva) and the latest, a Riserva 2011 called Zodiac Dog with label art by Li Fu Yuan, released in a limited edition of 488 magnums. It's this wine that we share, as she tells me of her history and her unwavering dedication to Ferragamo's vision that extends his branding beyond the world of shoes, belts and bags to the fifth largest producer of Brunello in Italy.

FROM TOP: SANGIOVESE IS THE ONLY PERMITTED GRAPE IN BRUNELLO DI MONTALCINO; THE ZODIAC DOG RISERVA 2011; OPPOSITE PAGE: CECILIA LEONESCHI

YOU MADE A WINE CALLED THE ZODIAC. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

It was Massimo's idea. He wanted a wine that would represent the skill of the winemaker; something very elegant. The new release is the 2011 Riserva, Zodiac Dog, which we waited till the right time to harvest in October, and the quantity is very limited. The vineyard is very small and it's located very high; the exposure faces south, the wine has richness and complexity but is also finer, because we do one extra season in wood — 36 months in French oak followed by six months in concrete tanks. There are 488 numbered bottles, in magnum, because of the price and also because the oxygen inside keeps the wine longer. We don't want to do a lot because it's not about marketing; we do this to showcase and express an elegant style.

HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM YOUR OTHER WINES? IT'S NEAR CAPANNA?

Yes, Capanna, where we produce all our Brunellos, is nearby. We have two areas; one is where we produce our Campo del Drago and the other, Zodiac. For Campo del Drago, we have more sunlight time and this is very important for the ripening, it's big and complex. Zodiac is very delicate with a very round and long finish but Campo del Drago is bigger and more tannic. The colour is also deeper. Zodiac represents the more traditional Sangiovese.

AND WHAT ABOUT GAUGGIOLE?

That's our other area. Capanna faces south (while Gauggiole faces north), with a lower altitude of about 300m above sea level. Both are near Siena. Gauggiole has a different kind of soil, which produces young and fresh wine, the Rosso di Montalcino. We



planned it this way because the microclimate is very different and we are lucky in that we can grow grapes in two different areas. Our grapes change a lot depending on the soil and the most important work is to decide which expression works best for which soil. We have different vineyards for different wines, but we have one single vineyard that we use only for our Rosso di Montalcino, because the soil and the terroir are more suitable for a young interpretation of the Sangiovese. We also have another vineyard for our Brunello. Within the Brunello vineyard, there are different plots with different soils, expositions and altitudes that can give us different expressions of Brunello.

WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU GOT THE MESSAGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENT SANGIOVESE?

Well, I understood the style we were going for, and year by year I started to understand the soil, which is very rocky, and gives the wine an incredible finesse. There's more finesse but less complexity and less "body" — like a single-vineyard Zodiac — in the mouth and in the finish. You can taste wine from different Brunellos but it's not easy to detect the sensations. Last night, for example, we had three different Brunellos and you can detect the sweet and floral sensations and how that differs from the tight and herbal aromas. This Zodiac is more delicate and more acidic compared to other Brunellos but it has a longer finish — it stays in the mouth, which is important. The 2011 is a



particularly balanced vintage. My favourite is the 2010, which has the right amount of colour and tannin, but the 2011 is good because of the long finish. It's important to think of the wine as something that changes in 10 or 20 years.

YOU WERE A YOUNG WINEMAKER WHEN YOU WERE ENTRUSTED WITH THE ESTATE. HOW DID YOU COME TO MASSIMO'S ATTENTION?

I don't know (laughs). I started at Castiglioni del Bosco in 2003, and prior to that worked in another region in Tuscany.

I am originally from Maremma, where I worked with my father before moving to Montepulciano and then to Montalcino, always trying my hand at different types of Sangiovese. My father was not a winemaker but he loved wine and I had been surrounded by wine since I was a child. While I actually wanted to be a veterinarian, I moved towards wine by first working in a lab, where I tested wine. I eventually moved here because I wanted to familiarise myself with the Sangiovese from this area.



ARE YOU THE ONLY WINEMAKER ON THE ESTATE?

I also have a consultant winemaker Giuseppe Caviola, whose work is to compare our wines with those of other wineries and focus on the style of the wine that the vineyard can give us. He started with us in 2014. We've always had a consultant because I think it's very important to compare. I taste a lot of wine and would already have a feel for the quality of the harvest but he can tell me things from his experience regarding other regions, and what the vineyard can give us — but ultimately I am responsible.

HOW ABOUT PRIMA PIETRA IN RIPARBELLA, WHICH THE ESTATE

ALSO OWNS?

That's a 10-hectare estate facing the Tyrrhenian Sea, in the Super Tuscan region. We plant Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. It has a good elevation (450m) with a big difference in temperatures between night and day, which is perfect for the ripening of grapes. In general, Cabernet Sauvignon harvests at the same time as Sangiovese, from the beginning till middle of October. As I'm also in charge of that vineyard, I visit quite often. The wine world differs from region to region, and I want to discover as much as I can.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

In places that grow Sangiovese, we have strict laws in vinification and ageing, but in Riparbella, we have Indicazione Geografica Tipica (IGT) wines that meet another set of laws and I am intrigued by that. Massimo has a

passion to discover and change — he wants the tradition and history of Castiglioni del Bosco and also innovation in our wines. It's like how he also wants innovation in his [fashion] company.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF PEOPLE DOING SANGIOVESE ELSEWHERE, SUCH AS IN AUSTRALIA?

Not bad, but not the same. I am from the coast, so I know Sangiovese doesn't grow as well there! (Laughs) The Australian wines can age for maybe five years. For us, Sangiovese only gets better with age, up to 10-20 years. For our wines, they are different when they are young. You only discover how good they really are much, much later. **E**