
Foreword

by *Tom Hyland**

Sandro Boscaini once told me that as a young man, when he was deciding on his career path, he thought that “the best job a person could have was making wine.”

Given his upbringing as a member of the sixth generation of a family that had been growing grapes and vinifying them for over 200 years, you would imagine that his role in the wine business was a foregone conclusion. Yet it was anything but that, as he recalls: “It was quite a fight with my father, who often said to me, ‘don’t do what I do. Don’t do it because it’s very difficult and we don’t have any satisfaction economically’. This was in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Veneto in general and the Valpolicella specifically had not made a name for themselves for high-end wines.”

Boscaini’s father wanted him to be a notary. He told his father that he would compromise, attending university in Milan, but to study economics. His father agreed, and Sandro began his studies, which also included the classics. Soon after, however, things changed, something wine lovers around the world today can be thankful for. “My father understood at a certain point that it would probably be good to involve me in the family concern and ride the new wave that came with the invention of the DOCs, or wine appellations from particular growing areas.”

Today Masi is one of the most successful and recognized wine companies in the world; their products are exported to 140 countries, and Boscaini is one of the legends of the Italian wine industry. He is known as “Mister Amarone” – the title of a book written by English journalist Kate Singleton – and it is a moniker that fits him like a glove. If anyone can be called “Mister Amarone” it’s clearly Sandro Boscaini.

Yet today’s reality goes well beyond the great red wine for which the area is famous. In more than five decades of involvement in the family winery,

* Freelance wine writer and photographer specialized in the wines of Italy, contributor to publications such as *Decanter*, *Wine Spectator*, *wine-searcher.com* and *Cephas Picture Library*.

Boscaini has directed the production of many other wines of note. Ripasso is one of them, introduced to the market in 1964 with the release of Campofiorin, and later refined with the special selection Brolo Campofiorin. While Valpolicella Classico has always remained the backbone of production at Masi, today the winery also produces other Veronese wines such as Bardolino, Soave, Lugana and has gradually moved outside the Valpolicella area, purchasing a large estate in Friuli, where local grapes like Pinot Grigio and Refosco are traditionally grown.

All of these endeavors have been a credit to Boscaini's leadership and vision. I've known him for more than twenty years, and I've always found him to be someone with great confidence. But one word cannot truly describe him; I'd also include thoughtful, reserved, determined and maybe most importantly, approachable and gracious.

Whenever I had to write an article about Masi or perhaps Valpolicella or Amarone in general, I knew I could contact the winery and be assured that Sandro would make himself available for an interview. It was during these sessions that I encountered a man with great pride not only in what he and his team had accomplished at Masi, but also in how Venetian wines had improved over the years and were now recognized as world-class products.

Sandro would always delight in telling me the positive attributes of his wines, especially when it came to Amarone. He remembers the early days at Masi, which was a new project he envisaged while working for his father back in 1972. At that time, he notes, most of the examples of Amarone on the market were not appealing, lacking in shape and direction. Part of the problem, he believed, was that the wines were oxidized and displayed the effects of Botrytis; he was determined to make cleaner, more focused offerings of Amarone.

"My father said, 'you don't need to make Amarone different, just make it better,'" Boscaini recalls, so he set out to do both, and he has succeeded brilliantly. One of his greatest accomplishments is what he calls a "modern style of Amarone," involving a number of cellar practices that reduce Botrytis, maximizing fruit and minimizing oxidation.

Boscaini believes the illusion of sweetness in Amarone is something consumers like, so he promotes fruitiness as well as gentle tannins rather than the older style of Amarone with its rustic tannins and marked oxidation. He also favors maturing the wines in traditional large casks to highlight the fruit. "If we used barriques, it would give the wine too much wood and more tannins, which would disturb its character, the cherry jam flavors. There is no need to

insert a heavy barrique sensation in Amarone to make it similar to Cabernet Sauvignon.”

While the various examples of Masi Amarone – Boscaini notes that no other producer offers as many – are among his most important accomplishments, he believes that his work with Valpolicella has also been essential. While explaining that Valpolicella never has the weight or structure of wines from Tuscany or Bordeaux, he believes that its image as a “lighter” wine is a plus for many consumers today. “Look at the success of Pinot Nero. It’s lighter but people are appreciating it a lot,” he told me in a recent conversation. “It’s full of intensity, it’s very open. Lighter wines can show less alcohol, less body, less color. Nevertheless, they can reveal great complexity and finesse, and Valpolicella is one of those with its own cherry character.”

For Boscaini, the primary reason why many Valpolicellas have underperformed is that they are produced from grapes grown mainly on flatlands, because the hillside vineyards were reserved for grapes used for Amarone. But he points out that producers today can decide how to make Amarone and Valpolicella. For example, at the nearby Serego Alighieri estate managed by Masi, a vineyard called Montepiazzo was recently replanted. “This is a fantastic place for making a fantastic Valpolicella. Could you make Amarone there? Of course, it would produce a great Amarone. Nevertheless, we think that it is right and also very interesting to show that we have selected a specific vineyard to make an outstanding Valpolicella.”

It’s this constant rethinking of what can and should be done that is a mark of Boscaini’s inner character. “I think the point today is that Masi is truly representative of our area. Why? Because at Masi we are always intent on innovation.” As Claude Langlois wrote in *Le Journal de Montréal*: “Apart from fine-tuning new techniques and new wines, he has been a key protagonist in the creation of the modern Amarone.” Like Bruce Schoenfeld, Langlois believes that Sandro Boscaini has been for Amarone what Angelo Gaja has been for Barbaresco and Piero Antinori for Chianti.

I asked Boscaini about innovation and what it means to him. “To innovate does not mean to put aside the past, because innovation is an evolution of tradition, and the new tradition becomes an innovative factor. I have always worked in this direction, and we still continue. Innovation can be brought about by new technology, by new requests from the market, or by observing and resolving mistakes accumulated over the centuries. You always have to wonder – why did they do that? Is that the right way to do it, or is it better to change? Innovation is a central part of life.”

As you read Sandro Boscaini's words, written to celebrate 250 years of his family as vintners, enjoy a glass of Masi wine while you consider the remarkable story of a family, a winery and a man with a mission for making their wines just a little bit better. In the process they have become forever identified with one of the world's most iconic wines: Amarone.