

## BODEGA CHACRA

PATAGONIA ~ RIO NEGRO

# DEPARTURES

August 6th, 2012

*Vinting in the Veins:*

*Piero Incisa's Vineyard at the End of the World*

On a rainy summer New York afternoon, Piero Incisa della Rocchetta sits across from us at his kitchen table in his downtown loft. It's been four years since we visited him at Bodega Chacra, his vineyard in the Patagonian desert and a project of love on which he has lavished his care, resources and intellect.

Part owner and grandson of the founder of Tenuta San Guido, where legendary 'Super Tuscan' wine Sassicaia



is produced, Piero Incisa has vino in his DNA. In 2003, he ran across an ancient Pinot Noir vineyard in Argentina's Rio Negro district. The place inspired him. Patagonia shares its southern latitude with few other land masses and a sparse population. For this reason, the environment is extraordinarily pure; pristine air results in dazzling sunlight, and the arid soils are parasite-free. Glacier melt from the Andes provides irrigation water, and a dramatic temperature variation between hot days and nights chilled by mountain winds prolongs the growing season, allowing superlative development of complexity in the grapes.

Incisa's first vintage was 2004, made at his cousin Noemi Marone Cinzano's nearby estate, Bodega Noemia. In 2005, he began to build his own winery, an elegantly spare, flowing structure functionally independent of mechanisation. "It was entirely a matter of practicality," he says.

"If you're in the middle of nowhere



and there's a problem with electricity, you'll lose the vintage if you can't get it out of the vat. So we elevated the vats in order

to drain the wine by gravity," he explains. Incisa has applied this simple, thoughtful approach to everything at Chacra; it also happens that gravity is a much gentler treatment than pumping, and thus yields superior wines.

When Incisa speaks about Chacra, he is no longer in the room. His eyes shift to a place thousands of miles away, at the initially neglected property he found and spent long years rehabilitating. "When the soil is compressed by the weight of a tractor, it's deprived of oxygen and eventually of life," he notes. "This causes the vine to metabolise

nutrients differently.” He focused on revitalising the soil, first organically and now biodynamically. “At Chacra, vines are ungrafted and self-propagated, no pesticides are used, irrigation is closely controlled and agriculture follows the biodynamic calendar as closely as possible.” Another simple approach, but a difficult road that has achieved Demeter biodynamic certification in the most unlikely of places.

Most extraordinary are the vineyards: four diverse plots covering 75 acres. Treinta y Dos and Cinquenta y Cinco are small Pinot Noir vineyards planted in 1932 and 1955, respectively. Each yields distinctly different wines of intense, voluminously silky fruit and subtle, complex spice, cedar box and roast meat nuances. The 25 year-old Barda vineyard provides the base of a Pinot blended with fruit eliminated from the older vineyards, brighter in fruit yet of clear pedigree. Mainqué, from an old Merlot vineyard, is the epitome of seductive blackberry fruit and refined minerals.

As we taste, scribbling furiously, Incisa watches and says with a charming smile, “I don’t like tasting notes.”



| Wilma Dull