

## BODEGA CHACRA

PATAGONIA ~ RIO NEGRO

### *Wine - Mise en abyme*

October 5th, 2012

*Rising stars from historic estates:*

*Piero Incisa della Rochetta and Bodega Chacra*

On Monday of this week I attended a Winemaker's Dinner hosted by Italian Wine Merchants (IWM) and featuring the wines of Bodegas Chacra (Piero Incisa della Rochetta, winemaker) and Fiorano (Alessio Antinori, winemaker). The material on offer at the event was extensive so, in order to do them justice, I will treat the winemakers and their offerings in two separate posts beginning today with Bodega Chacra.

#### The Winemaker

Piero Incisa della Rochetta is the grandson of Mario Incisa della Rochetta, the creator and proprietor of Tenuta San Guido, the estate that is home to Sassicaia, the most iconic of the Super Tuscan wines. Piero's uncle, Niccolò Incisa della Rochetta, currently manages the family's wine business while Piero serves as US Brand Ambassador for the flagship product.

Piero has an undergraduate economics degree from Pepperdine University and a Masters from NYU. His winemaking skills were garnered and honed during the years spent growing up on the family's estate in Maremma as well as managing day-to-day operations of two of his mother's Umbrian properties, Titigano and Salviano.



According to an interview he did with Lesley Trites (reported in [Palatepress.com](http://Palatepress.com)), Piero became interested in Patagonia after tasting a Pinot from the region while in New York. The wine impressed him as very Burgundian and led to him taking a plane down to Patagonia to determine the region's potential. The rest, as they say, is history.

#### The Estate

The upshot of his trip to Patagonia was the 2004 purchase of the first of the Bodega Chacra vineyards, an existing, but abandoned, vineyard which had been planted in the Rio Negro Valley in 1932 by Italian immigrants (Piero describes this part of Patagonia as "essentially a desert with a river running through it"). The gnarled, head-trained Pinot vines were planted on their own rootstocks in an old riverbed of sand and clay soil peppered with high-limestone-content alluvial pebbles. Piero has grown the estate's potential by the subsequent acquisition of vineyards initially planted in 1955 and 1967 and planting of an additional 10 acres of vineyards on the original 1932 property.



Bodega Chacra is farmed organically and biodynamically (Demeter-certified). For example, a horse is used for motive power in order to prevent soil compaction and they create their own compost using grape skins. The vineyards are irrigated five times during the growing cycle and a single copper sulfate treatment is applied over that same period.

The estate's winemaking objective is to have the oak, fruit, and soil characteristics marry seamlessly such that the effects of the wood are not readily apparent and that the "vine and terroir are expressed to their fullest." The Bodega Chacra Pinot Noir winemaking process is illustrated below.

### The Event and the Wines

The wines were presented within the context of an IWM dinner. Upon stepping into the IWM facility, the attendee was welcomed and registered and then given a glass of Montenisa NV Brut Rose Franciacorta. A Full Monty of the wines to be tasted that night was on display at a sideboard.

The actual sit-down dinner was preceded by an "Antipasti hour" which featured house-cured Salumi, regional Italian cheeses, assorted Antipasti, and fresh bread. During the Antipasti hour, we were exposed to the 2009 Merlot Mainqué, the first of the Bodega Chacra wines. This "affable, rustic Merlot" is the third vintage of this label and is sourced from biodynamically farmed vines that are planted alongside the 1955 vineyard. Winemaking in the case of the Mainqué is more traditional with maceration ( 5 days), and "plunging down" all a part of the process. Malolactic fermentation and lees stirring occur in 50% new French oak barrels over a two-month period. The wines are matured in barrel for 23 months before being bottled unfinned and unfiltered. A total of 5000 bottles are produced.

This wine had good color intensity with blackberry, plum, vanilla, and chocolate on the nose. Great acidity on the palate to accompany a good body and a long, drying finish which softens up over time. I expressed my love for this wine by buying a case.

Upon completion of the Antipasti hour, we were directed to IWMs event area which has an excellent, fully furnished, fully staffed kitchen along the western

wall and two long dining tables located in sequence to the east of the kitchen. The dining tables were appropriately adorned for a high-end wine dinner and seating was arrayed on both sides of each table. Seating was pre-arranged with name cards informing each guest where he/she was located. I was pleased to see that I was sitting obliquely opposite Alessia Antinori, in good position to interact extensively with her over the course of the evening (Midway through the dinner, Alessia and Piero switched places so that I had excellent access to both of them.).



After everyone was seated, Chris Deas, VP at IWM, welcomed us and said a few words about the event and the winemakers. He happened to mention that (i) Piero was the Brand Ambassador for Tenuta San Guido's Sassicaia, (ii) that Fiorano was famous for its white wines, and (iii) that we would be tasting some of the newest Chacra vintages. Upon completion of his remarks, Chris turned the floor over to Piero who introduced his wines. And then on to the dinner.

The Bodega Chacra Pinot Noir Cincuenta y Cinco 2010 and 2011 were accompanied by Wild Salmon with

Pancetta and Leeks. The presentation on this meal was immaculate with the concentric circles on the plate working in towards a small bowl in the center which seemed just barely large enough to accommodate the fare. The dish was heavenly and paired extremely well with the wines.

levels (11.4% abv) while the 2011 exhibits riper fruit, the result of a warmer vintage. The alcohol in the 2011 vintage is 13%.

I found these wines to exhibit ripe red fruit on both the nose and the palate with great engagement on the attack and the mid-palate. The roundness of mouthfeel may become more evident as the wine is allowed to evolve in the glass.

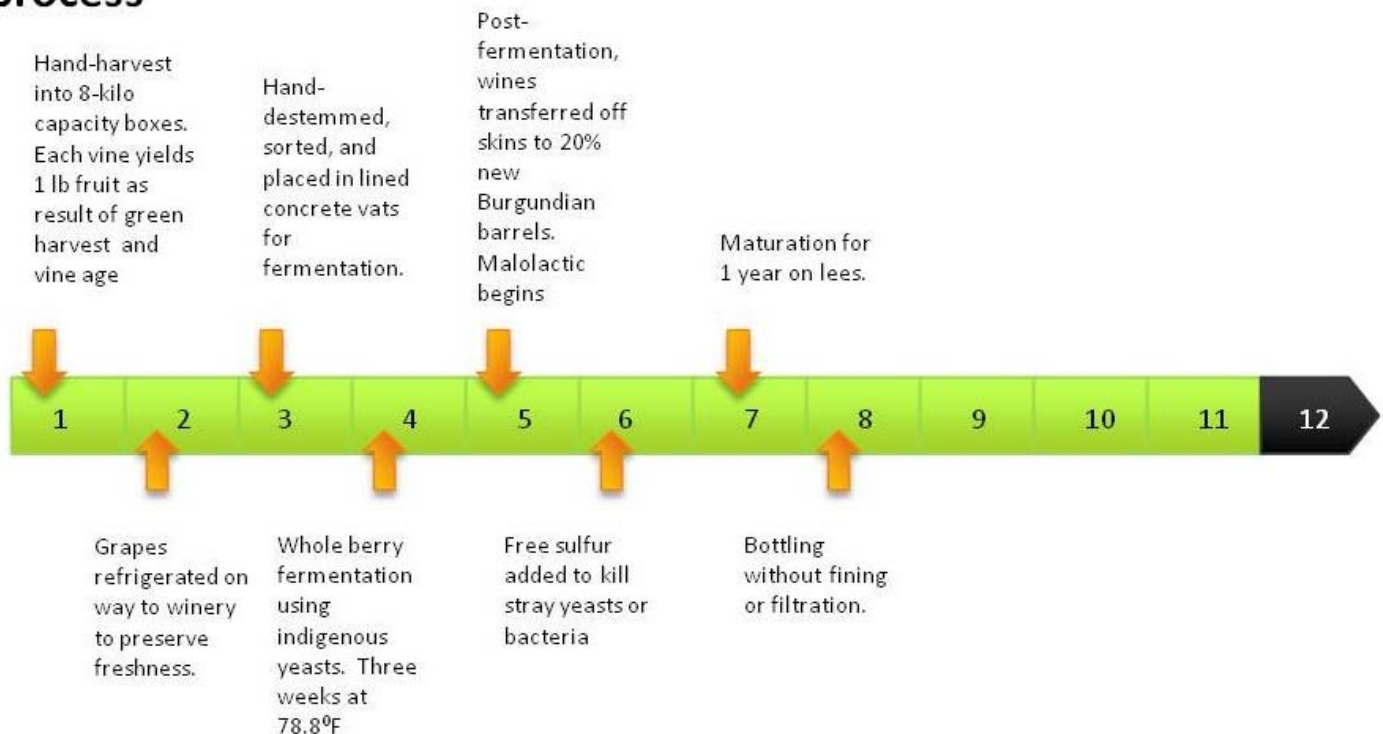
The final Bodega Chacra offerings of the evening were three vintages (2008, 2009, 2010) of the Treinta y Dos to accompany a Pan-Seared Duck in Duck Jus over Autumn Root Vegetables.

This was another immaculately prepared and presented dish and was shown off to good measure by the accompanying wines. This is the flagship wine of the Chacra stable and its "masculinity" and "angularity" will reward the patient drinker with classic Burgundian characteristics. I found these wines to be variations on a theme of ripe red fruits (strawberries, cherries) on the nose with red fruits, good acidity, and spiciness on the palate adding to an overall perception of complexity. Definitely more power than exhibited by the Cincuenta y Cinco.



The wines for this course were sourced from the estate's 1955 vineyard and represents the estate's attempt at a more "feminine" expression of Pinot Noir. The 2010 is seen by the estate as proof that concentration can be achieved without over-extraction and high alcohol

## Bodega Chacra winemaking process





Overall this was a great event. It presented the winemaker and his wines in a favorable environment populated with great food and enthusiastic, committed vinophiles. I enjoyed this event and will be following the fortunes of this estate closely as it continues to make great wines at the bottom of the world.

