

2020 Ekološka kmetija Valentan Modra Frankinja

Štajerska, Slovenia

We ended up with a little extra time in our schedule in the Maribor region of northeastern Slovenia on our Spring 2022 trip. Pulling up Google maps, our cursor landed on “Ekološka kmetija - vinotoč Valentan,” about a 15 min drive from Maribor in the village of Vodole. Adventures on the virtual wine route. Eventually Basic due diligence ensued. EU certified organic – check. Working with PIWI grapes – check. Mixed ag farm – check. No incriminating news stories – check. Instagram: eight followers and zero posts – check. No hype, no expectations and no pressure. Metka and Simon Valentan have 20 hectares of land, but only 4 are committed to vines. The rest are wild forests, fruit and nut trees, vegetable gardens, grains and animals to name a few. Along with their two children, Aleks and Filip, and grandparents, the whole family works and subsists on the farm. As Metka put it, “We live from our farm.” They also sell their produce: milled grains (buckwheat, spelt, wheat, millet), jams, pumpkin seed oil, ciders, vinegar.

VINEYARDS

Certified organic since 2010, it wasn't about chasing the natural wine trend or seeking out exporters, but the health of their family and neighbors. No other agricultural crop in the EU receives more pesticides per capita than vineyards. They started planting PIWI (Moscaris and Sauvignier Gris) grapes in 2016 for the same exact reason - less spraying, less petrol, less soil compression, keeping labor costs down, and letting their children play and eat freely on their land. Making the top 10 in German words never to break through in the states, “Pilz widerstandsfähige Rebsorten” or PIWI basically translates to “fungus resistant grape varieties.” These are not to be confused with GMOs or Hybrids. These are bred *Vitis Vinifera* and have been an area of study since the 1890s when the goal was to defeat phylloxera. PIWIs are basically a sped up version of what happens in nature. We are also delving into old vine Renski Rizling (Rhine Riesling), Sauvignon Blanc, Laški Rizling (Welschriesling) and Modra Frankinja (Kékfrankos/Blaufränkisch). The soil is super rich in marl resulting in impossibly stony soils. It's difficult to imagine this being a vineyard before planting as the photo illustrates. However, once the high-density vines get established, the vines become remarkably tolerant. Surrounded by wild forest, other crops and animals, the biodiversity contributes to immunity as well. Metka and Simon have influenced a number of their neighbors to convert to organics. Under vine cultivation is key along with natural cover crops and little to no tilling. One thing worth noting is that they tend to pick late and are not afraid of botrytis. They want ripe developed flavors and their farming is a testament to being able to do so.

WINE MAKING

On the winemaking front, they keep things pretty simple. Oak and Acacia for wood and stainless steel for some of the primary fermentations and settling before bottling. They do not use temperature control, rack minimally, are careful to not overexpose to oxygen, but are by no means hyper reductive either. The only addition is SO₂ with total levels ranging from 15-35ppm. Skin macerations are in open vats and tend to be between 3-10 days for most wines. There's always a freshness even though it's backed up with some serious structure.

NOTES & PAIRINGS

Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay (known locally as Morillon) have been the region's traditional calling cards for the past few decades. While of course well deserving, they've taken the spotlight away from grapes like Modra Frankinja. As the climate has been changing and the grape has garnered increased attention in nearby Austria and Hungary, it's becoming something really special here. Grown in the Schlossberg vineyard not too far from the Riesling, it gets 20 days on the skins followed by 9 months aging on the lees in 500L oak barrels. It adheres to their later pick and ripe philosophy, but remains so elegant, fresh, spicy and effortless. It's one of those wines that can be a big crowd pleaser but also capture someone deeply vested in this part of the wine world.

ANALYTICS & PRONUNCIATION

APPELLATION: Štajerska

GRAPE COMPOSITION: 100% Modra Frankinja (Blaufränkisch)

CLIMATE: Cool Continental

SOILS: Marl

MACERATION & AGING: 20 days on the skins followed by 9 months aging on the lees in 500L oak barrels

ALCOHOL: 11.9%

RESIDUAL SUGAR: 1.3 g/l

ACIDITY: 5.76 g/l



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PO Box 1270 | Los Altos, California 94023 | USA

www.DanchAndGranger.com

info@DanchAndGranger.com