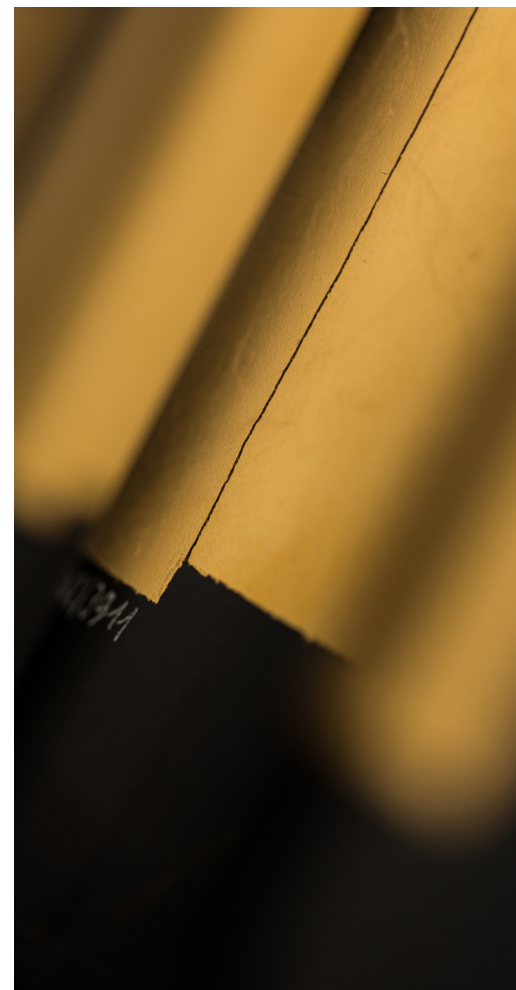


The GOLD standard

On the island of Mazzorbo in the Venetian lagoon, Venissa is the last producer of the dorana grape. Now 16 of their bottles with unique gold-leaf labels have gone on display at the Venice Biennale art show

Words: Antonia Windsor



Venissa's unique colour is one of its USPs

Most lovers of wine would consider a particularly fine vintage to be a work of art. And now the art world has endorsed this, with a display of Venissa wine at the 57th Venice Biennale running until 26 November. The Venetian wine, which stands out with its golden colour, gold leaf labels and use of rare, historic grapes, joins the Luxus exhibition at the Venice Pavilion. This is the first time that any winery has featured at the world-famous art exhibition and Matteo Bisol, general manager at Venissa, is suitably proud.

"We are really happy to be invited to be part of the Biennale because it is one of the most important art shows in the world," Matteo tells me when we meet at the Michelin-starred restaurant that overlooks his vineyard. "The Venice Pavilion decided to create an exhibition called Luxus, which brought together many of the hand-crafted luxury products of the area. So the exhibition includes textiles, perfumes, lamps and pottery and they selected our wine because even agriculture, especially when it is done in a certain way and in certain places can become something which is very close to art."

Venissa is situated on the island of Mazzorbo in the Venetian lagoon. They have only 0.8 hectares (two acres) of vines, which produce the historic dorana grape. The 4,000 vines have grown from just 80 samples of the ancient native variety that his father Gianluca found in the lagoon.

"Making wine here is really something very difficult," explains Matteo. On the picturesque terrace, we are treated to a starter of anchovies marinated in mezcal with rose powder and buckwheat ice cream – the choice a perfect match to this uniquely earthy wine.

"It is actually quite incredible because this vineyard is surrounded by water in three of the four sites and sometimes the water gets over the vineyard, when we experience what is known as 'aqua alta'. We get flooded with saltwater and the wine has this salt taste, which is really related to the soil and it makes it one of the most unique wines in the world."

The fermentation process of this white wine is also distinctive to its taste. Like in the treatment of red wines, the skin is left on during fermentation, which extracts the tannins and antioxidants to make what is known as an »



Venissa wine is already proving highly profitable for investors

“orange wine” or skin-macerated wine, giving it its unique golden colour. Venissa’s wine was also chosen for the Luxus exhibition in part because of the beauty of its bottles, which are decorated with gold leaf.

“The bottles are very unique because they were designed by Giovanni Moretti, a glass designer from Murano,” says Bisol. “He had the idea to put together two things related to Venice, the Battiloro gold leaf and our golden grape.” The Bisols are the only producers carrying on the tradition of making dorana wine and the Battiloro family is the last family to produce gold leaf in Venice, so Moretti had the idea to bake the gold leaf into the bottle. The shape of the gold leaf is different for each vintage and then on each bottle is written the name of the wine and the number of the bottle out of the total number of the bottles produced that year.

“Each year we make around 12 bottles that are created by artists and these are really pieces of art,” Bisol explains as we move on to the main course – an intensely flavoured dish of guinea fowl with a salad marinated with yuzu and sea artemisia oil. “At the centre of the Luxus exhibition is 16 bottles from this collection – all from the first vintage – worth around €8,000 a bottle.”

Even typical bottles of Venissa wine are proving a good investment. The first bottles were sold for €8 (£7) and they now sell for €800 (£700). The new vintage sells for €140 (£125) a bottle, while the

2016 vintage sells for €280 (£250) and the 2015 vintage now fetches €560 (£495) a bottle.

“Our production here is very small,” Bisol explains. “We produce between 3,000 to 4,000 bottles of wine and a small number of large formats – so magnums (1.5 litres), jeroboams (4.5 litres) and imperials (6-litres). Almost half the production is sold here through our restaurant and to people who come here, and we only have about 2,000 bottles more or less – just 300 cases of six – to sell to collectors and wine lovers.”

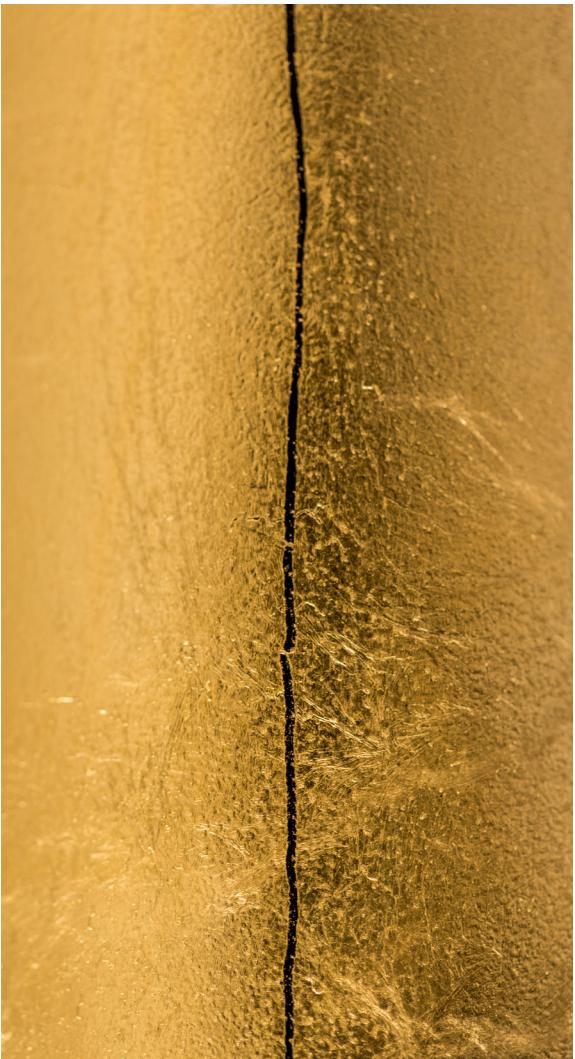
Because of its unique fermentation method, Matteo believes the wine could be laid down for as many as 40 years, particularly the larger bottles that age slowly.

They have a base of wine collectors that pre-order the wine each year. Half of the 300 cases go to collectors and the other half go to Michelin-starred restaurants all over the world.

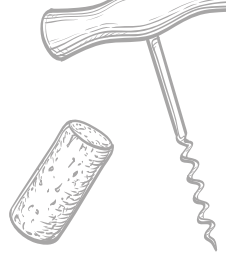
“If you come here you can buy, because we allocate half the production to this purpose,” explains Bisol.

It is definitely worth making the visit to buy the wine on site. They operate a boutique hotel within the walls of the vineyard where guests can experience a gourmet stay and find out more about the wine. As Bisol hurries off to attend to business, I order a dessert and enjoy the tranquility of my spot overlooking the vineyard. ①

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Giovanni Moretti



“HE HAD THE IDEA TO PUT TOGETHER TWO THINGS RELATED TO VENICE, THE BATTILORO GOLD LEAF AND OUR GOLDEN GRAPE”



Matteo Bisol

INDULGE

Venissa’s winery is home to a Michelin-star restaurant



Photo credits

*Francesco Galfi – Restaurant
Mattia Mionetto – Vineyard*