

A Great Italian white wine family loses their leader, leaving his daughter to take the reins

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A storyteller who focuses on wine and the people who make it

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Big cast-iron buildings that housed grandiose loft spaces with huge casement windows surrounded by cobblestone streets took one to another world, as it was not that far from the hustle and bustle of a dizzying amount of activity. The New York City neighborhood of Tribeca has long been a calm haven for those lucky few able to live there and for many others who come to visit it. It was a cold February day yet the sunlight lit up the golden highlights of the young woman's long, silky brown stands of hair sitting in an upscale Italian restaurant. There, Ilaria Felluga was giving a tasting of her family's wines, a family known among Italian white wine connoisseurs as one of the best.



Ilaria hadn't been back to NYC since Covid and despite the city being just as crowded and electric as before, something was very different about this visit. Her father, Roberto Felluga, wasn't with her; unfortunately, he passed away from cancer in November of 2021 at 63.

Marco Felluga and Russiz Superiore

Ilaria's grandfather, Marco Felluga, founded the family's Marco Felluga Winery in the high-quality white wine area of Collio, a place in the northeast Italian wine region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (a.k.a. Friuli) and today, Grandpa is healthy at the age of 95. The Felluga family's wine roots go back six generations but it was Marco and his brother Livio who would become trailblazers by raising the bar for Friulian wines and winning the hearts of many serious Italian red wine drinkers around the world by getting them to drink Italian white wine as well. Livio established his winery in Rosazzo and then Marco, Ilaria's grandfather, opened his own cellar in the town of Gradisca d'Isonzo in the prestigious white wine area of Collio.

If a wine drinker has yet to have a Pinot Grigio from a top producer in Collio, then that drinker has no idea of the grape's true potential. Pinot Grigio is often just a quaffable wine when it is from most other places, as it is not taken that seriously. But Collio Pinot Grigio is a thing of beauty with good concentration balanced by crisp acidity and wrapped up in intense minerality. Marco Felluga, with his son Roberto, would not only be part of a handful of winemakers in the area bringing focus to terroir-driven Pinot Grigio wines but they would also bring focus to lesser-known local varieties such as Ribolla Gialla, a white grape that makes delicate white wines with enchanting aromas.



In the late 1960s, Marco Felluga bought the Russiz Superiore estate, a plot with a long history and high location and it became known as a fantastic Cru vineyard that always illustrated its superior nature with superb wines. The Russiz Superiore estate was already known for its elegant Cabernet Franc red wines and so instead of just placing the vineyard under the Marco Felluga Winery name, he put it under its own name, knowing that it was distinctively its own place with no other comparison.

Under Roberto's leadership, the purity of expression of the Cabernet Franc remained the same, even when battling a market that only wanted heavy, over-extracted red wines. Today, the wine is finally appreciated as there is a desire for cooler climate reds with finesse. Like his father, Roberto constantly pushed for more respect for Italian white wines. He placed his money behind their beliefs as Roberto would often not release reserve white wines until eight to 10 years later, considered madness by some considering how hard it is to sell such wines, and it tied up capital that as a small family winery they desperately needed. But Ilaria said that her father was firm in his belief that they made world-class wines from top vineyards, so they should never back down from presenting them any other way.

Relationships that Wine Binds



As Ilaria poured a 2017 vintage of the Marco Felluga Winery's signature white blend 'Molamatta,' she talked about how lucky her family has been to have long relationships with the same importers in various countries, such as 50 years with one, and in the U.S. they have been with Dalla Terra for at least 20 years; considering how often wine producers change importers in the very challenging U.S. wine market, it might as well be 100 years. The owner of Dalla Terra, Brian Larky, is well-known in the industry for caring for his wine producers and being respected by many restaurant and retail wine buyers—very few like him out there among the hundreds and hundreds of U.S. wine importers out there.



As Ilaria smelled the six-year-old white blend in her glass, a slight smile emerged on her face, and for a moment, it seemed like she was transported to another time and place. She was always by her father's side as far back as she could remember, learning everything about winemaking, viticulture and the wine business, although some might say her father allowed his passion to cloud his financial logic. And many of their wine importers have known her as a child, always by her father's side, looking up to him as her hero, knowing that his conviction would keep their family safe and secure even through the most challenging times.

But when her father became sick, it was her turn - to take care of the wineries, the business and her father - and now, she is making market visits to those same importers around the world who remember her from when she was a kid. Yet now they are in awe of the woman before them, as she has become the leader her father always knew she would become.



2021 Marco Felluga Winery 'Maralba' Ribolla Gialla: 100% Ribolla Gialla. Floral nose with tangy lemon zest and a good amount of weight on the body with a fierce minerality.



2021 Marco Felluga Winery 'Mongris' Pinot Grigio: 100% Pinot Grigio. Juicy white peach flavors with hints of Brazil nut and honeysuckle with wet stones on the finish.

Forbes



2021 Russiz Superiore Winery, Collio Sauvignon: 100% Sauvignon. Bright nose with citrus blossom, saline minerality with fresh sage, and a touch of richness on the mouthwatering palate.



2017 Marco Felluga Winery, Molamatta, Collio Bianco: Blend of Pinot Bianco, Ribolla Gialla and Friulano from the Molamatta plot. A complex nose of bay leaf, marzipan and white pepper with vibrant flavors like quince paste and a long, expressive finish with an enticing smoky minerality note.



2019 Russiz Superiore Winery, Collio Cabernet Franc: 100% Cabernet Franc. Right off the bat, a lovely purity of blueberry fruit with a touch of pie crust, forest floor and crushed rocks with a soft texture and a long, expressive finish with notes of violets.

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