

BRAZIL STUDY TRIP

It all started with an offer. An offer I couldn't refuse. My home university in Munich (TUM) enabled a study trip to Brazil for agricultural students. When I've received the schedule containing all the big companies we were going to visit I realized that we weren't going to visit any winery so I decided to stay there for another week.



You shouldn't visit Brazil without spending some time in one of the wine-growing regions where the amazing wines are getting produced and no one even knows about them. E.g. the percentage of the *Vitis vinifera* grapes in relation to all grapes in Brazil still is about a humble 10%. *Vitis labrusca* still takes first place in matter of quantity. Everything started in the 1875s when Italian settlers moved to south of Brazil. They were the first settlers who started to work with Brazilian people who had a totally different attitude and know-how in wine making. While in the past only American wild grape varieties have been cultivated, the influence of these settlers brought a new philosophy: granted grape varieties of *Vitis vinifera* grapes, special trellis and training systems, such as VSP... The problem has been that in former times there was no real qualitative viticulture as there haven't been any imported wines which could give a competitive basis.

In the 70's when the law allowed to import wine for the domestic market there have been few big wineries that were important. "This law that allowed importing wines from Argentina, Chile, France... gave an opportunity to restart work to survive", as Patricia Carraro mentioned. Flavio Pizzato states "the real quality wine making began in the 90s when the wine import already was legal. Until that time people rather drank sweetened wines that still can be found on the shelves in the stores under the name of *Suave*". But the contract at former times that facilitated international wines to come to Brazil with even lower taxes than are on Brazilian wines themselves is one of the main reasons why 50% of all wines in Brazil are import wines.

The first quality wine that was produced in whole Brazil has been out of the Merlot grape. All the vineries I have visited where kind of very proud on their first Merlot they have produced...And do you know what? Merlot is the grape variety I do not really like and not even the best Bordeaux could convince me...but these wines from Brazil

where just straight, with such a harmony that displays many of the same aromas and flavours, black cherry, currant, cedar, and green olive, with mint, tobacco and tea-leaf tones. The structure, simplicity of flavour, and more elegant style of Merlot wines I got the chance to taste there could really convince me. We got the chance to taste some of the best vintages in Brazil, such as 2005 and 2012. The grapes have been almost at the limit of drying, what could be tasted in those wines which were much fruitier with more body and higher concentration.

The Soil



The soils in Brazil are very diverse. While in the region of Rio Grande do Sul the soil originates from basalt, a dominance of Camisoles can also be found with a percentage of over 50%. Lithic Entisols, Clayey Soils and Nitisols are less common. Camisoles are soils in evolution, still in formation. They are well drained, medium to high depth and they are originally acidic.

While the red clay soils are richer and offer protection from the sun, there is no need for fertilizers while the yellow clay soils are rather dry and do also need nitrogen fertilizers application, (boron, sulphur, nitrogen). The aspect of “Terroir”, which was picked up in their philosophy by many upcoming producers such as Lidio Carraro, I want to discuss in detail later on.

The first point of destination was Miolo Wine Group in Vale dos Vinhedos, Bento Goncalves:



Juseppe Miolo started in 1890 to produce wine just for consumption. As Italian immigrant, in 1990 the first harvest of the Merlot grape was done and the first launch on the market has been 1994. This brought a big success. 1999 the people working for him started to handle with lower training systems that resulted in more concentrated wines. While barrels have been used until the 90s, 1999 also new tanks of 2500l have been one of those big investments. Nowadays Miolo has grown to one of Brazil's largest wine producing companies with vineyards as well in Vale do São Francisco (Vinícola Ouro Verde/ Terranova), where even two harvests are possible and the wines do have more alcohol and less acidity, Campos de Cima da Serra (RAR), Serra Gaúcha (Vinícola Lovara), Vale dos Vinhedos (Vinícola Miolo), the one where I have been and Campanha (Seival Estate, Vinícola Almadén) a region where the period from January to March is usually very dry.

Just in Vale dos Vinhedos there are 100 employees and 3 oenologists working with Michelle Roland as consultant with an eager aim to produce even higher qualities. Producing 80% white wines, 20% red ones, having over 100 labels on the market and exporting to over 32 countries,(some of them: New Zealand, Great Britain, China, Canada, Netherlands) clearly shows their influence in Brazilian wine trade. Working with 80% bought grapes and 20% own grapes and having 1 Mio l capacity for white wines, 3 Mio l capacity for red ones, 7 Mio l capacity for stocks, indicates their enormous size and interference in viticulture, supporting small wine producers, who gain from the technology and knowledge they are getting from Miolo Wine Group to which they are selling their grapes. One of the wines produced in Campanha region, a cuvee of Tempranillo, Gamay and Touriga Nacional was one of the wines at the Olympic Games this year in London. This is one product among many, they can be really proud of. Over 50 analyses are done before the perfect harvest date can be fixed and 20 woman are working at the separating table to guarantee the high quality standard.

I won't go to much into detail with the wine technology but I have to mention that Miolo Wine Group has 40 % of market share in Brazil in the category of fine wines. At the same time it is also South America's largest producer of sparkling wines, producing demi-sec and brut sparkling with traditional method from the Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Moscatel grape variety.

But now let's do the tasting!

- **Cuvee Giuseppe Chardonnay 2011**

Apricot, light ginger spice, noticeable toast combined with dried pineapple, a little caramel and vanilla. Together with a light body, mineral tones as well, smooth in the palate but showing little tannins deriving from the wood, the wine shows a long finish.

- **RAR Collezione Pinot Noir 2011**

This wine shows light ruby colour with violet tones, a typical colour of a young Pinot Noir. High aromatic intensity, with notes of fruit and wood (oak) of aging evolve beneath aromas of spices, cassis, vanilla and dried fruit. Medium bodied wine has delicate and elegant tannins.

- **Quinta do Seival Castas Portuguesas 2008**

This one shows a deep ruby colour. High intensity and aromatic complexity, appearing in the foreground of the typical floral Touriga Nacional, well mixed with fruit compote, black plum and fig notes of toasted wood. This wine is highly structured with good volume in the mouth and a refreshing acidity.

- **Miolo Merlot Terroir D.O. 2009**



The colour is quite intense with a gentle purple tone. On the nose it is very fruity with a combination of toasted coffee, fruit jam, blackcurrant and a little dried fruit as well. All in all this is a very harmonic wine, showing elegance and really surprising for a Merlot with its full bodied character, velvety tannins, medium alcohol and a pleasant acidic structure, offering a pleasant aftertaste.

- **Miolo Millésime 2009**

In appearance it has pale lemon colour with green reflection and fine, resistant bubbles. The aroma shows real complexity and a pleasant range of fruit and some aging bouquets similar to Champagne. In taste this sparkling wine shows nice acids combined with a fine body, leaving a pleasant taste in the mouth.

- **Terranova Moscatel**

It shows a light greenish yellow colour. On the intense nose it is fresh, floral and shows typical Muscat character. The taste is light and sweet, leaving a pleasant and fresh touch in the mouth.

21.08.2012^{02.00 a.m.} Casa Valduga



Casa Valduga was founded 1875 by Rovertto, an Italian immigrant as well as all the others. Nowadays the company has vineyards in Cruxilliado do Sul with about 120 ha, in Campanha Gaucha with 55 ha, 69 ha in Vale dos Vinhedos and 2 more areas 300km in the south where an inclination of 45% inclination compared to Campanha Gaucha that is rather flat, very windy with a semi desert environment, colder winters, and less rain causes the differences and variable style of wines that are being produced. Campanha Gaucha is still their best Terroir (300000 RS/ha) due to less humidity problems. 17 years ago there was a big investment to build the largest sparkling wine cellar in South America but we have to consider that they are still not the biggest producers, although focusing on expanding. Nowadays they buy 25% of the grapes offering technical support for wine growers as well.

An export to over 14 countries, among them Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Shanghai, Hong Kong... is not too bad I would say...

Grape varieties Casa Valduga is working with are for example Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Malbec, Chardonnay (DOC), Riesling Italic and Pinot Noir for the sparkling. It is just amazing to see that kind of development in Brazil of producing real high quality. Even in the category of sparkling wines they either use the traditional method as in Champagne with 30-60 days of remuge and one year for Basic Line on lies, two years for the Reserve and their Grand reserve even stays 60 month on the lies. Another category not only people in Brazil will appreciate is their Moscatel, produced from Prosecco grape in the Asti method. In Cruxiliado do Sul the Malbec is used for rosé sparkling wine making. The use of the traditional method guaranties the smooth soft and less bitter sensation. But we also have to consider the careful hand harvest, the low yield philosophy, they are keeping to (40t/ha, 5-7t/ha, 3t/ha for premium wine), the destemming of the grapes, the use of a heat exchanger

for the sparkling and many more oenological aspects in the cellar that a simple consumer sometimes is maybe not aware of.

All in all I would say, Casa Valduga is one of the smallest big players that is really worth to visit, as the wines are amazing and the view of their 7 year old oeno-touristic building is an eye catcher as well...

Let's taste!

- **Casa Raizes Sauvignon Blanc 2012**

This is a light white wine with vegetal tones, dominant acids and fruity aromas of lime that turns herbal with aeration. Very mineral finish, good length, has a touch of white creamy fruit on the mid palate and salty mineral notes then finishing with some fine grapefruit pith.

- **Identidade Gewurztraminer 2012**

Bright colour, light aromas of litchi, lemon, very pretty, very elegant floral, lovely fresh high acids, zesty, with this fine mineral cut running through the clear fruit, the finish is rather short with very fresh floral and grapefruit aromas in the mouth, finessed expression of Gewürztraminer, remarkably attractive wine.

- **Gran Reserva Chardonnay 2011**

This sparkling wine has golden colour with reflections of straw, a fine perlage and long mouth feel. It has a complex and delicate bouquet, reminiscent of fine spices, almonds, dried flowers, buttery and ripeness. Explosive acidity but balanced at the same time and exiting aftertaste. It spent 8 month in oak.

- **Arte Traditional Brut**

ARTE is in this sparkling composition harmonic range of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Pinot Noir. It has a fine and persistent perlage and an incomparable aroma of tropical fruit and toasted bread combined all together with a very flowery, vital character and fresh aromas of yeast. It had 12 month of maturation period.

- **Ancelotta 2007**

Ancelotta is an italian grape variety. The very deep colour of the wine goes into the bluish. Aromas of green paprika, ripe fruit together with only little tannins, slightly high acidity end in a long and smooth mouthfeel.



1988 started the Italian guy Lidio Carraro, ancestor of Patricia Carraro, the girl that has received us. Point zero of today's company that nowadays owns over 40 ha, 33ha of them in south east, was Bento Goncalves where we have been. Lidio Carraro started a really nice success story... cannot be called tall nor small the first launch was 2004. Now already in the 5th generation they do not fix on buying grapes such as in former times but they do have their own purist philosophy working with 100% of their own grapes. Their brand clearly symbolizes Brazil as country, it is contemporary at the same time and the red colour was chosen on purpose for the hotness and passion. The three elements as well state their purist concept of terroir: soil, grape and climate. "We do not agree with international typicities. We have our own purist concept, trying to rescue the presence of terroir and purity of the grapes," Patricia said. Working with Monica Rossetti, who is consultant in 7 projects, they have done much research with different plots and separate vinifications to find out the best fitting grape variety for each plot and each soil type. The main type of soil is the basaltic claim soil at the same time there is a huge diversity that should be expressed and secured in their wines. Working not only with the grape varieties Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Tannat, Lidio Carraro made out of these one of the best first blends in Vale dos Vinhedos. Their export market is in over 18 countries, very well choosing their importers as Patricia said. "We want to develop and grow together with our partners, step by step. If the importer does not succeed, he won't be the right one and the work together will find and end in short time." This for sure makes it a challenge to take the risk of waiting and searching always the best solutions, which means time and money. One single wine Lidio Carraro is very proud of is their first top premium Merlot. This one was the first Brazilian wine that could be found the international airports and even Steven Spurrier mentioned it with high praise. By doing 100% hand management and working with 2-3 kg/plant and 1.2-1.5 kg/plant to produce their best of the best category, Patricia Carraro said they stay strictly to their purist concept where sustainability is very important. Therefore they are 100% organic, using no herbicides at all. They do not even need to irrigate. The TPC: Thermo Pass Control Lazo system, they are pioneers in, make it possible to work without any agro toxicity as only hot air helps to stress the plants and make them producing phyto alexins that protect the plants. The philosophy is to not use wood at all to keep the typicity, the clearness and stay 100% pure which we now are going to taste in the wines:

- **DA'DIVAS Chardonnay 2011**

It has a pale almost transparent colour and has orange blossom and citrus on the nose with minerality, lightness and fresh vitalizing acidity. This is a well balanced wine with fine length and real elegance.

- **DA'DIVAS Rosé 2011 (M., Temp., Touriga N., P.N.)**

This one is a real serious clean, fresh, lighter bodied rosé in real Provence style, mineral, earthy and very taut tones but at the same time very well balanced. It has a fairly long and a little plum skin and spiciness on the finish.

- **AGNUS Merlot 2010**

This one is all about purity. Although the high acidity it is smooth and harmonious at the Same time. The pepperiness combined with aromas of fruits such as black currant and black mulberry combined lead to a smooth and elegant wine with mature tannins.

- **Elos Cuvee 2009 (Touriga N. 80%, Tannat 20%)**

Its vibrant dark colour and such an intensive floral aroma of violet, thyme, little spiciness and chocolate create a fantastic very complex wine that is very well balanced with integrated tannins.

- **Quorum Lidio Carraro Cuvee 2006 (Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Tannat, Cabernet Franc)**

The aromatic complexity and finesse is amazing. Aromas with a fruity and floral touch, turning into coffee, chocolate and spices appear. The ripe tannins and ripeness of the wine create a perfect wine for the Olympic Games 2007.



Surprise surprise...! Where did Flavio Pizzato's father and grandfather 1967 originate from? Italy! Correct! The building we could see was from 1940 but it was bought by Pizzato in the 1980s.

The starting point, working in a co-operative with Salton and Aurora to whom they sold grapes was maybe a fault and meant the loss of much money. After 1995 Pizzato resigned this co-operative. Nowadays they own 26ha in Vale dos Vinhedos and 16 ha (Tannat, Merlot, Alicante, Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Gris, Egiodola) and having different labels that are all put onto the bottles by manual work. *Fausto* and *Pizzato* are some of the existing brands. Unfortunately Flavio Pizzato was quite in a hurry, but it was amazing to see that even in his hurry he took the time to show us the building that is still put money into for expanding. He left us with a very nice girl who showed us some fantastic wines of his repertoire:

- **Chardonnay 2012**

Nice pale lemon, with aromas of yellow stone fruits, tropical fruits as mango, dominant acidity some residual sugar and medium alcohol. This is a well-balanced, elegant, refreshing and lingering wine.

Merlot Rosé 2011

Clear medium coloured rosé with hints of salmon, red fruits and fig on the nose and a lingering structure. High acidity combined with aromas of toast and a real long finish creates a real vivacious young dry wine.

- **Fausto Merlot 2010**

Intensive ruby colour with floral notes of geranium combined with liquorice, vanilla and black cherry marmalade. It has a nice velvety structure with balanced alcohol and tannin structure and a long, smooth finish.

Fausto Cabernet Sauvignon 2009

This dark ruby Cabernet Sauvignon shows sharp vegetal tones of celery, pepper and red fruits. The high acidity integrated in a medium bodied wine and a nice spiciness with well-rounded tannins makes this wine to a really exiting one.

- **Reserva Merlot 2009**

Ruby red with dense violet colour and aromas of black cherries create an overwhelming perfume of the wine with fresh acidity and medium body produce all in all a mouth feel with fine tannins that is very elegant, simple and straight.

- **Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2007**

A very deep coloured wine with nice animality and chocolate on the nose, light straight body with vegetal tones, menthol and tannins that are very well integrated. This is a very nicely balanced wine. It is just about the harmony.

- **Tannat 2007**

The colour is deep ruby with bluish hints. On the nose it has smoky notes, bacon, jellies. The extreme high acidity and those fine tannins are the basic for this powerful wine that has a high potential for aging.

- **Alicante Bouschet 2004**

The colour is a quite dark ruby with bluish hints. On the nose it has some aging tones, ripe dark fruits, leather and sour cherry. The high acidity and the well-structured lingering tannins in the aftertaste create a quite powerful wine.

- **Brut white**

In appearance it is pale lemon, with fine perlage. On the nose it has white flowers, citric fruits and a refreshing saltiness. In taste it has some steeliness white peach with balanced acidity and alcohol. All in all this is a well bodied dry sparkling, very refreshing and pleasant creaminess.



Some political issues

After Alain Ingles had heard about me visiting these wineries in Brazil, he invited me to the Ristorante Aprazivel, a nice idyllic little restaurant that started with all those excellent dishes Pedro Hermeto's mom always cooked in former times for his friends and family... It was so good that it attracted more and more people and today it is one of Rio de Janeiro's top restaurants with high quality food and wine.

About their philosophy: Everything is done with love to nature, the food as well as the wines on the list.

The actual aim why they invited me was to show me some wines of all those little producers, who make wine as a passion for nature and wine in a very little volume.

They talked a little of what they fear could happen in future: Fernando Collor de Mello opened the import 1974 and the increasing vineyards at that time enjoyed protectionism what also meant mechanisation was made possible and the prices of the bought grapes went down. Many of those small producers that produced grapes only for selling them to the big players had to close as they do not get any funds for transportation, taxes and the much higher quality small producers have to invest more.

Since more than one year the so called Fiscal stamp has to go onto bottles, right after bottling. Also keeping in mind that the tax legislation is much more favourable for import wines than for Brazilian wines the fiscal stamp is another sink of money also for small producers that have to pay.

As many of them are not even aware of all regulations or they did not have the money to pay taxes, because they had to be paid in advance, independently from the fact the bottle is going to be sold or not, more than 200 little wine producers had to close.

Nevertheless the fiscal stamp's objective is the avoidance of smuggling and the kicking some weak competitors out of the market. Considering this, in my opinion competition is healthy and secures a balance...

All in all, the wines that I got the chance to taste were from some of these small producers that fear their existence due to the political situation in Brazil...

But to help these little producers Paul Medder, Sommelier of Ristorante Aprazivel, has changed the whole wine list, offering exceptionally best quality wines from small producers, to show that even these not very well known wines are able to compete on the market and on the globe if we considered only the quality...

About the wines I have tasted:

▪ **Cave Geisse Nature 2010**

Fine perlage, yellow fruit, dominant yeasty tones, like a real champagne.



▪ **Vallontano Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2005**

Very fruity, integrated acids, black sour cherry

Alain and his crew could really convince me...

Wow it would be really a pity if all those little producers would disappear....

And to tell a little secret: Luiza Zanini and Pedro Hermeto are working on a little project together that has the respect of the plant in focus. Working with 85 year old plants of "Beverella" grape variety, which is almost at the edge of extinction, they want to produce a wine which shall be called *ERA DOS VENTOS*: "Age of the winds".

I am looking forward tasting it the next time I will be there...

And if you are going to Brazil to learn about wine...just keep in mind to be open for everyone small or tall, it does not matter, the high quality standard is guaranteed.

Go and convince yourself, for sure you will enjoy it!

Lotte Karolina Gabrovits