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Lazio starts to believe in wine again, with Cantina Sant'Eufemia

A sign like this would be welcome every month. That's right, because the creation of a new winery in a territory such as Lazio is a formidable challenge. Lazio is one of the regions that, in recent years, has seen the elimination of vineyards more than any other. And yet someone here still believes in wine. Cantina Sant'Eufemia is important for another reason; that is, a return to its origins for a company that built its success on kiwi fruit. We're in Cisterna di Latina, perhaps the most suitable territory in the world for kiwi cultivation. It's here, in fact, that for the last 20 years or so vineyards have been replaced with kiwi. All sorts, even Zespri's prized "Sungold" variety, which is one of Sant'Eufemia's claims to fame. Let's talk about the winery, because what we have here is the integration of an agricultural situation that already existed and was active in the production of kiwi (and even EVOO). The family of Domenico Capitani, whose daughter Alessandra manages the wine production sector, runs three large estates totaling 250 hectares divided between kiwi (150 hectares), olive groves, and new vineyards (34 hectares) on the Villa Abate estate. A "return to our origins", in Alessandra's words, as she retold the story on March 29 of her winemaking grandfather who had worked these same lands. A return to the vineyard has a pleasant ring to wine lovers familiar with the area. A highly symbolic and valid gesture for Lazio's winemaking sector.

Let's get to the specifics. For now, thirty-four hectares are dedicated to vineyards, which have all been planted, although production has been limited so far to a few parcels. The original schedule, in fact, did not call for the wine to be bottled this soon. Paolo Peira, the winemaker whom Alessandra Capitani has entrusted with the technical details, realized that the three wines currently in production could represent the beginning of the history of Sant'Eufemia. Consequently, "29" (Malvasia del Lazio grapes), "Ultimo colle" (Bellone) and "Fiammingo" (Merlot) were presented. Single-grape, organic wines that all have symbolic value for the company: 29 is the birth day of Alessandro Capitani's two daughters; *Ultimo colle* evokes the gentle slopes between the Castelli Romani and the Pontine Plain; and *Fiammingo* recalls the historical owners of the estate, where the new company is located in an area known as "17 Rubbie". Evocative names and no-frills packaging for a project that envisions the construction of a cellar for grape processing (currently this work is carried out in the nearby cellar, La Luna del Casale), whose design has been entrusted to the architects Giammatteo and Belardini. The winery will be comprised of three floors and a panoramic terrace, and will use natural building materials in its streamlined design.

Regarding the winemaking challenge, Peira presented his development project for the vineyards, motivating his choice to combine autochthonous varieties alongside international ones, given the vast potential of the territory. Planted white grape varieties include the local Bellone and Malvasia, but also Greco di Tufo, Vermentino, and Viognier; whereas the red grape varieties include (with Merlot) Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Syrah, Pinot Nero, and Tempranillo. "A family that knows how to take risks", according to Peira, "because to nourish new ideas one has to relinquish those of the past. We immediately saw eye to eye regarding the concept of quality, which in the vineyard requires a rigid policy of limiting yields. The Capitani family, with its experience in kiwi cultivation—

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which requires similar rules—was ready and willing to accept such a choice. It was easy to plan the wine production along the same lines.”

For 2016 Sant’Eufemia has produced just under 20,000 bottles, but at full production the prediction is for 400,000 per year. A significant reality that is just setting off on a difficult journey, but with the conviction of maintaining high levels of quality. This is precisely what is needed for Lazio. Here’s to the young Alessandra Capitani and her adventure with Cantina Sant’Eufemia!

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