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A Charmer of Most Modest Device: An evening with Giorgio Rivetti



How does one say no to charm? Not an easy task.

The speckled glow of a widened eye; a long-paused hand shake, the polished gleam of white teeth, a wash of invitation, and lips cooing compliments. The attention surrounds you and brings you in closer, closer to forgetting whatever it was you were about to do. Trying to figure out why you're refusing such charm only adds to an already enticing circumstance.

This point of circumstance was my fate last night with one Giorgio Rivetti from La Spinetta. He was so charming that before I put down my first glass of NV Gaston Chiquet Brut, I knew that I was staying for dinner, and we were going to drink some serious business.

What I like so much about Rivetti is his love of all wines. It is easy enough to discuss his new Barbaresco Bordini (delicious if not a bit woody at the moment) as it is to converse over Burgundy, white Burgundy being a particular favourite for Giorgio, Champagne or Austrian wine.

The **2006 Ca' di Pian Barbera** was full, richly layered with an abundant of fruit. The wine handles itself with an eager-to-please grace, owing its charm to fleshy, almost jammy currents. His **2006 Langhe Nebbiolo** coming from declassified Starder fruit was fabulous. Such value in this tot Barbaresco-imposter.

The highlight of the evening was the absolutely phenomenal **2001 Pin**, a Nebbiolo-Barbera blend named after Rivetti's father. I had purchased two cases of this wine and quietly kept it in the cellar until about a year ago. What a star with graphite, ploughed black earth and black liquorice, its tannins softening and acids fattening...just perfect!

Not to sit idly with his own wine, Rivetti was keen to order Jean-Marc Pillot's **2005 Chassagne-Montrachet Les Vergers 1er Cru** from the touted plot of Clos St Marc, a lieux dit within the powerful premier cru. Monumental vintage conditions insisted this white was firmly textured, countervailed nicely by the magic of grazing of age, fattening up and soothing its raucous predisposition. A gauze of white laced minerals strewn along a kebab of fancy apples and spiced quince. Soothing now with an open decade of performance ahead of it.

This testament to Cistercian antiquity was carefully propositioned by Eban Sadie's **2007 Paladius**; a Chenin Blanc, Clairette, and Grenache Blanc blend from Swartland, South Africa. Absolute precision here between wood use and fruit concentration with each of the varietals pitched with a deft hand. Powerfully mineral and difficult to place; due to the accuracy of complexity, one may assume white Burgundy, or perhaps due to the power and wood use, one may guess modern southern Rhône.

A white comparison is begging for a duo of red playmates, and Armand Rousseau's **2005 Gevrey-Chambertin Clos St Jacques 1er Cru** emerged from a sleepy nap. Pouty red currents with slight flamboyance. Brilliance; with a need to be sequestered by a dark cold place. Juxtaposition came leaping over the table by a gallivanting horse named **2004 Clos du Vougeot** ridden by a talented jockey, Thibault Liger-Belair.

By comparison these two wines couldn't be farther apart. A luscious 2005 mirrored by a cold herbal 2004; the gaudy nature of Gevrey-Chamberbtin stymied by the stoicism of Clos du Vougeot. The Ligar-Belair delivered in full nature its breeding, yielding early to age with tousled forest floor and Cuban tobacco leaves. While not fully out of the gate, this beautiful 2004 will pasture well once the race is over for a cool decade of leisurely riding.

The night was closed with a glass of **2005 Château Rieussec**...the last of our glass pour stock at Divino. Succulent it flourishes on the tongue. Harmony. Rivetti, like his wines, is contagious. Why his wines have such jubilation and sincerity becomes clear when you meet him. He has a clear vision for his wines and it is bolstered by his appreciation of the world's wine areas. I managed to get very little work done after dinner, but what was lost in the wine was gained in the glow of charm...and a slight hangover.

Photo: **La Spinetta**