

# Joško Gravner

## PART 2

**J**oško has always been against irrigation. In his opinion, vines must delve deep to find water on their own. He has had forests, fruit trees, cypresses and olive trees planted near and among the vines to encourage biodiversity and attract various animal species. I look up at the tree beside the pond and see a bluetit darting into a miniature house hanging in the branches. We walk among the vines and Joško tells me that the predominant training system is the fan-shaped alberello bush proposed by Simonit&Sirch (world-famous master vine pruners) during one of their consultations. This man never ceases to amaze me: he never misses a new idea if it is in line with his principles.

“Wine is thought, it is the soul of the person who makes it. It contains all those who came before me, all my experiences, its history. Making wine is, after all, the synthesis of a life. Making wine is instinct and it instinct also knows when not to make it and when to wait a bit longer. Wine has existed long before us and will last long beyond our existence. For us winemakers, it will never be a foregone conclusion. None of us will ever be at the top, because wine can trick you every year.”

In 2011 and 2012, he uprooted all his international white wine vines and exclusively planted Ribolla, the grape variety that belongs to his land. For the reds, he decided to focus on the autochthonous pignolo.

In 2015 he began with biodynamics, admitting that he was wrong not to have started earlier. “We have to make the soil healthy, that is the main task. The vines will then be balanced. That’s why I’m against using resistant vines, they could bring other diseases. It’s the land we need to focus on. Biodynamics helps a lot, and you cannot judge its effectiveness from the outside. You have to take the step and start, then you will understand the difference. It only took us two years of practice to see the soil change its appearance, become alive and able to breathe.”

In 2022, the amphora garden came to life: outside, under the ground, the kvevri have welcomed the first fermentation (stalks have been added for a few years, but not in all vintages). Skins and must gurgle to the moon and stars and catch a glimpse of sunlight. In the womb of the amphora, they breathe with the Universe.

I look at Joško standing next to Gregor. The same checked shirt: a farmer, as he likes to call himself, in his seventies with a melancholic and proud look, who speaks little but with great wisdom, and a young man in his thirties, full of life, with a ready smile and a willingness to get things done.

“I believe in young people,” says Joško, “because they realise how the land is being treated and they understand that there will be no future in it that way. They are working to make it healthier.”

Joško will never stop trying. He will never stop questioning the meaning of human action in



Joško and Alessandra

the immense natural cycle. He will continue to generate wines that are free of the superfluous, luminously beautiful in their substance and unconventional because they are the expression of an intimate, almost religious, agricultural gesture. For the future, he would like to use glass tanks for the final ageing. He has yet to find the right balance, but he won’t give up.

We get into the car and drive to the vineyard in Dedno, Slovenia. We arrive just as the bell tower strikes the hour. Gregor, Joško’s grandson, is working in the vineyard. “As a child, I used to have a lot of fun in the vineyard,” he says with that open and welcoming look, capable of arousing warmth and empathy. “I tried to help out. I remember the time when, exhausted, I fell asleep on the digger while grandpa got out to check something. I used to come to Joško to lend a hand, (he lived in Mezzolombardo, Trentino, ed) even as a teenager. Then I realised that I really liked working in the vineyard and I decided to stay. It was a personal and conscious choice, nobody pushed me into it, it happened naturally.” He has been working full-time at the company for five years now. The vineyard is on a steep slope, so that much of the work has to be done by hand.

Mateja looks at her son and smiles. Not outwardly emotive since she keeps her feeling to herself like everyone in the Gravner family, but her eyes brim with motherly pride. I met her when she was in charge of communication at Bertani Domains, a historic winery, known the world over for its Amarone della Valpolicella. Mateja made her way outside the family business, returning in 2014. A sweet and determined woman, she dedicated herself to wine communication in years when it did not yet exist. She was a pioneer. She realised that this would be her path in the 1990s in Burgundy

during an experience in French wine promotion in Dijon, where she was doing an internship following her studies at the Agricultural Institute of San Michele all’Adige. While studying Political Economy at the University of Trento, she began working in wine promotion at the Trento Chamber of Commerce. She then took charge of reception and marketing at the Mach Foundation winery in San Michele all’Adige and latter accepted a job offer from Bertani, where she stayed for about six and a half years before deciding to return home. In a family business, you need to be able to carve out your own space by organising your work, perhaps even starting from the basics. Nowadays, Mateja is the face and voice of the Gravner farm in the world. She spends 200 days a year travelling from continent to continent, where the company exports fifty per cent of its production. Mateja has an impeccable style: rigour, dialectical skills and vision.

I take my leave of Oslavia with a long embrace for Joško, a gesture that expresses everything we did not say but still felt. I enfold Mateja in a warm embrace with the promise to see each other again soon. Gregor’s handshake is vigorous and vital. Marija, Joško’s wife, who takes care of the guests from her realm in the kitchen, gives me some homemade jams.

Every time I meet Joško, I return home with the feeling of being closer to the earth and human wine.

*We deeply thank Joško Gravner for his time and passion.*

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